



# Poland – China

Art and Cultural Heritage

Edited by Joanna Wasilewska

Jagiellonian University Press



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Edited by



Polish Institute of World Art Studies

Centre for Chinese Language and Culture  
“The Confucius Institute in Krakow”

# Poland–China

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Edited by Joanna Wasilewska

Jagiellonian University Press

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## CONTENTS

<i>Jerzy Malinowski, Bogdan Zemanek</i> : Foreword .....	7
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### PART ONE

#### POLISH ART IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

<i>Robert Kunkel</i> : An Outline of the Medieval Architecture in Poland .....	13
<i>Marek Walczak</i> : Art in Krakow during the Reign of the Last Two Piast Kings (c. 1320–1370) .....	21
<i>Józef Grabski</i> : Polish Renaissance Art and the Art of the Renaissance in Poland .....	37
<i>Jacek Tylicki</i> : European Context of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting in Gdańsk and Royal Prussia in the Early Modern Period (Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries) .....	47
<i>Jan K. Ostrowski</i> : Forgotten Baroque Borderland .....	63
<i>Maria Poprzeczka</i> : Polish Painting between Historicism and Modernism .....	73
<i>Andrzej Szczerski</i> : Stanisław Witkiewicz and the Zakopane Style .....	79
<i>Małgorzata Geron</i> : Krakow Formist Group (1917–1923). Genesis of Polish Avant-Garde Art .....	85
<i>Iwona Luba</i> : Propaganda of Polish Art Abroad in 1918–1939 .....	95
<i>Weronika Liszewska</i> : Safeguarding of Asian and European Heritage in Regard to the Conservation Standards .....	107

### PART TWO

#### CHINESE ART AND ART RELATIONS BETWEEN POLAND / EUROPE AND CHINA

<i>Dobromiła Uhma-Miechowicz</i> : What Did It Mean To Be a Foreigner in Ancient China? ....	117
<i>Edward Kajdański</i> : Between Science and Art: Drawings of Michael Boym to His Works on China .....	125
<i>Danuta Zasławska</i> : <i>Chinoiserie</i> in Poland .....	131
<i>Izabela Kopania</i> : Far from Canton: the Chinese Vogue in Eighteenth-Century Poland and Its Long Journey There .....	139
<i>Katarzyna Zapolska</i> : Collection of the Chinese Textiles in the National Museum in Warsaw .....	149
<i>Chen Anying</i> : The End of Literati Painting? An Unfinished Controversy in Retrospect .....	157
<i>Fang Xiaofeng</i> : Aesthetic Attitude of Chinese Classical Gardens .....	165
<i>Łukasz M. Sadowski</i> : Harbin. The Center of Civilization in the Northern Part of Manchukuo .....	171
<i>Su-Hsing Lin</i> : Archaeology, National Identity and Book Design in Republican China .....	185
<i>Katarzyna Kulpińska</i> : International Language of Woodcut Art – Chinese and Polish Avant-Garde in the 1920s and 1930s .....	193

<i>Karolina Pawlik: Shanghai Poinsettia and Nostalgia Counterfeits</i> .....	205
<i>Hu Guang Hua: Investigation of Art Exchanges between China and Poland in the 1950s</i> .....	211
<i>Li Chao: Dissemination of Polish Fine Arts in China in the 1950s</i> .....	217
<i>Adina Zemanek: Chinese Aesthetics: An Anthology. A Book Presentation</i> .....	223

## PART THREE

## MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART IN POLAND AND CHINA

<i>Zhang Fuye: The Elements of Traditional Culture in Modern Chinese Art</i> .....	231
<i>Chen Chiyu: Construction and Painting in New China</i> .....	243
<i>Pan Yaochang: The Posters of Mao Era: A Perspective of Art and Society</i> .....	249
<i>Zbigniew Osiński: Jerzy Grotowski in China</i> .....	259
<i>Tomasz Gryglewicz: Chinese Inspiration in Jerzy Panek's Prints</i> .....	269
<i>Piotr Juszkiewicz: Utopias and Expressions. Polish Art Criticism of the 1950s and 1960s</i> .....	281
<i>Anna Markowska: Modernism in Krakow after the Post-Stalin Thaw. The Krakow Group</i> .....	289
<i>Maria Hussakowska: Nicely Painted, Perfectly Done, Well Sold</i> .....	299
<i>Zhang Gan: Beyond Western Criteria: The Establishment of Criteria of Contemporary Chinese Art</i> .....	309
<i>Małgorzata Jankowska: Alike but Different: Common Themes in Chinese and Polish Art in the New Millennium</i> .....	317
<i>Joanna Kucharzewska: Capsule or Apartment? Remarks on Housing Architecture of the Twenty-First Century</i> .....	325
<i>Magdalena Czechońska: Chinese Art Scene in 1979–2000 from the Perspective of Performance Art</i> .....	335
<i>Magdalena Furmanik-Kowalska: Threads between Past and Future: Lin Tianmiao's Installations</i> .....	341

## Foreword

The First Conference of Polish and Chinese Historians of Art “Poland – China. Art and Cultural Heritage” was organized by the former Polish Society of Oriental Art (now the Polish Institute of World Art Studies) in Warsaw and the Jagiellonian University Center of Chinese Language and Culture “Confucius Institute in Krakow”, in cooperation with the Faculties of Fine Arts of the Tsinghua University in Beijing and Shanghai University, and the Section of Oriental Art at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. It took place from September fourteenth to sixteenth 2009 in Collegium Maius – the oldest building of the Jagiellonian University, dating back to the fifteenth century. This old seat of the University, bought by the King of Poland for the academy, was a great place for the historians of art from the most important Chinese and Polish universities, as well as young Polish scholars, to exchange their knowledge about Polish and Chinese art history and about the artistic connections between the two countries.

The idea of the conference was different from the others organized by the Society Institute. Its main goal was to arrange a direct meeting between scholars of two nations, which have very different cultures, but share similar historical experiences, especially of nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The international agreement on cultural exchange, signed in 1949 between Poland and China, was the first such agreement ratified by the newly proclaimed People’s Republic of China. It granted a high rank to the contacts between the two countries, and its effect was an exchange of exhibitions, theatre performances, film shows, translations of literature, and also many study trips made by scientists and artists. They had a significant impact on the artistic life and on society as a whole, both in Poland and China.

The Polish Institute of World Art Studies, the Jagiellonian University’s “Confucius Institute in Krakow” and the Section of Oriental Art of the Nicolaus Copernicus University, pay great attention to studying the arts of China and Sino-Polish artistic relations. Many books and collections of articles, as well as the papers presented by historians and conservationists during the biennial Meetings of Polish Art Historians and Restorers of Oriental Works of Art in Toruń, are the best examples of this. The first conference devoted exclusively to China, which hosted many scientists from China, Germany, Italy and the Czech Republic, was entitled “Sztuka Chin – Art of China,” and was held in 2008 in Warsaw. The conference proceedings, in Polish and English, were published a year later, also in Warsaw (ISBN 978-83-7543-098-1).

The Jagiellonian University Center of Chinese Language and Culture “Confucius Institute in Krakow,” the first “Confucius Institute” in Poland, aims at promoting knowledge about China in Poland, both by teaching Chinese and organizing popular-

-scientific activities for the wide public, and by promoting scientific exchange and cooperation between Poland and China. This conference is a part of a series of scientific meetings on a variety of subjects, like the Confucian tradition in modern world (the proceedings were published in the volume *Confucian Tradition: Towards a New Century*, edited by Adam Jelonek and Bogdan Zemanek), the rise of China as a modern superpower, Chinese popular culture, problems and opportunities for teaching Chinese as foreign language in the countries of Eastern Europe and many others. There is much to be done in the field of Chinese studies in Poland, so the Center actively cooperates with many institutions and societies in organizing scientific and cultural activities. One of such cooperation agreements is the one signed in 2008 with the Society of Oriental Art.

The conference in Krakow was organized in such a way as to allow the participants to learn about both cultures, thanks to equal attention paid to problems pertaining to Polish and Chinese art; the papers were grouped into three broad sections, presented in three subsequent days. The first section, dealing with basic problems of Polish art since 1945, bore the title *Polish Art in the European Context*; the second section – *Chinese Art and Art Relations between Poland and China* – discussed main problems related to Chinese arts, as well to Chinese art collecting and existing collections, to Chinese gardens and *chinoiserie* in Poland; and also to Polish architecture in Harbin. The third section – *Modern and Contemporary Art in Poland and China* – dealt with Chinese inspirations in Polish art, Polish artists in China, as well as with the questions of occidentalization of the Chinese art and reception of Polish and Chinese art in each of these two countries. Chinese participants also had a chance to visit monuments of art in Cracow and in Warsaw during their stay.

The idea of the conference was first conceived during Professor Jerzy Malinowski and Dr. Joanna Wasilewska's (vice-president of the Polish Institute of World Art Studies) visit to China. They were invited by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing and the Academy of Social Sciences in Shanghai, and these two institutions helped to arrange meetings at Tsinghua University and Shanghai University, which brought about the concrete plans and programs of the conference and the visit of Chinese scholars in Poland. We are especially grateful to Professor Zhang Gan (Tsinghua University) for cooperating with us during the organizational stage.

The Jagiellonian University Center of Chinese Language and Culture "Confucius Institute in Krakow" arranged the venue for the meeting in Collegium Maius and covered the expenses related to hosting the Conference and to the Chinese guests' stay in Cracow.

We would especially like to thank the Ministry of International Affairs of the Republic of Poland for its grant which enabled us to invite the Chinese delegation to Poland. The grant was a part of Ministry's "Promotion of Knowledge on Poland" program.

The conference proceedings will also be published in Chinese. The organizers wish to thank Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw for financing the translation, done by the team headed by Dr. Marcin Jacoby.

We would also like to thank Dr. Joanna Wasilewska, who collected and edited the articles presented in this book; Ms Magdalena Furmanik-Kowalska, and Ms Dobromiła Uhma-Miechowicz, secretary of the conference, for their work.

*Prof. Dr. hab. Jerzy Malinowski*  
President of the Polish Institute  
of World Art Studies of  
(former Polish Society of Oriental Art)

*Dr. Bogdan Zemanek*  
former Director of the Jagiellonian University  
Center Chinese Language and Culture  
“Confucius Institute in Krakow”



# Art Critique of the Medical Profession

## Part one



## Polish Art in the European Context

The text in this section is extremely faint and largely illegible. It appears to be a long, multi-paragraph article or book chapter discussing the topic of Polish art within a European context. The text is arranged in a single column on the page.







## An Outline of the Medieval Architecture in Poland

In medieval Poland, the art of building, called architecture, was restricted mainly to Christian temples, sometimes with adjacent monasteries, princely dwellings, later also castles and fortified towns with their town halls and houses of rich merchants. From the very beginning Polish architecture was a part of the architectural landscape of Christian Western Europe that Poland joined after the establishment of the Polish state in 966 CE. Polish prince Mieszko married a Bohemian princess and accepted Christianity from Rome which involved also the adoption of Latin traditions of culture, skills of administration and economic management.

A few pre-Romanesque and – from the second half of the eleventh – Romanesque-style churches, first built of rough stone, later of stone ashlar blocks, were surrounded only by wooden houses and fortifications. In western part of the country founders followed the patterns of German emperors' cathedrals of Saxony and Rhineland, although reduced in scale and decoration. In southern Poland also some reciprocal influences between Czech and Polish architecture of that time may be noted. The twelfth century saw the full bloom of the Romanesque architecture in Poland. The big three-naved basilicas of bishops, canons' congregations or Benedictine monks were followed by smaller temples, sophisticated in structure and rich in stonework, and a number of simple, one-nave rectangular or round domed stone churches built in residential complexes and merchants' settlements. Of the big Romanesque cathedrals, rebuilt in the following centuries, only relics have survived, like St Leonard's Crypt on the Wawel Hill in Krakow, but some of big canons' collegiate churches retained their original shape and decoration, like the two-choir and four-tower collegiate church at Łęczyca, with galleries over aisles and western apse; or more traditional collegiats at Kruszwica and Opatów. Their three-naved basilical bodies built of square stone blocks were supplemented by towers, transepts and semicircular apses. In the first half of the thirteenth century Cistercian churches and monasteries were built in early Gothic skeleton structure, but still with Romanesque decoration. Three-naved stone ashlar blocks basilicas, with a transept and straight-ended chancel, were fully vaulted with rib-cross vaulting with pointed arches and rectangular bays. The richly decorated chapter house of the Cistercian monastery at Wąchock, is probably the best Romanesque hall in Poland still preserved in its original shape. Not many years later, mainly on Silesia, princely chapels and Cistercian churches adopted classic Gothic style with its doctrine of "temple made of light". Master builders of cathedrals, the biggest Gothic churches, also followed those ideas when constructing monumental basilicas flooded with light in Wrocław, Krakow and Gniezno, each with extended canons' choir, surrounded by ambulatory and a ring

of chapels. The division of the territory on the relatively small communities-parishes caused the erection of numerous parish churches, most of them wooden, but sooner or later changed into stone or brick buildings, of simple layout, still in fashion today, despite changing fashions. A growing number of the Mendicant Orders – Franciscans and Dominicans – monasteries followed rather simple and modest architecture, but their church in Sandomierz, late Romanesque brick basilica, represents the best ceramic technique of the time.

The most important buildings in Central European High Gothic built in the fourteenth century were cathedrals, big town parish churches and monasteries. In Krakow, the then capital of the Polish Kingdom, Wrocław, Poznań and other flourishing towns, a number of huge temples was founded or rebuilt. An outstanding group of those was founded by King Casimir the Great: hall churches with palm-shaped vaultings resting on pillars standing in the middle. The biggest of them, a Collegiate Church in Wiślica, clearly represents the High Gothic tendencies of the reduction of detail and the impression of unification of interior vaulting, bringing spatial integration in opposition to early Gothic, with its strict division of bays. In Pomerania (the northern Polish province), as well as on the lowlands of Greater Poland and Masovia provinces for the lack of good building stone a brick technique was used, characteristic of all Northern Sea and Baltic Sea countries. Monumental churches and town halls with simple ceramic decoration erected in rich merchants towns, were accompanied by brick burghers' houses standing in rows along the streets on the regular chequered layout of the town and surrounded by strong systems of fortifications with defensive walls, towers and gates. The hall church interiors with naves of equal height were popular there, rather than com-

<b>GENERAL CHRONOLOGY</b>						
900	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500 (AD)
			<b>China</b>			
10 Kingdoms		Song Dynasty		Yuan Dynasty		Ming Dynasty
			<b>Poland</b>			
tribal units	1st Monarchy		independent principalities			united Kingdom of Poland
<b>medieval architecture styles in Central Europe</b>						
<b>pre-Romanesque</b>		<b>Romanesque</b>			<b>Gothic</b>	
	<b>early</b>	<b>high</b>	<b>late</b>	<b>early</b>	<b>high</b>	<b>late</b>

plicated basilica structures, while uniform stellar rib-vaults and a single western tower may be regarded as typical for the region. The most important foundations sometimes repeated “cathedral” layout with ambulatory and radiating chapels, like the Cistercian Church at Oliwa near Gdańsk or parish church at Stargard. Here also emerged a specific type of regular brick fortified monastery of the Order of the Teutonic Knights – a high four-wings quadrangle surrounding a courtyard with arcaded galleries. Their main seat in Malbork, one of the most outstanding medieval residences, is considered to be the biggest brick castle in Europe of that time. The palace of the Grand Masters of the Order is a splendid structure with many magnificent halls. The biggest one, the Great Refectory of the castle with three slim granite pillars bearing palm-shape vaulting was built by the end of the fourteenth century.

The late Gothic of Poland features all the attributes characteristic of the decline of every style – hypertrophy of decoration and lack of new space solutions. About 1500 the main artistic centre was Gdańsk – a rich metropolis and harbor on the Baltic Sea. Spacious interiors of the city’s churches, full of light and filled with art treasures, with their simple exteriors built of big red brick blocks bristled with gables and turrets richly decorated with ceramic details and ornaments, much different from what was expected by the Gothic style. This type of architecture flourished circa 1500 in all northern and central part of the country, spreading east to Lithuania. At the same time, however, in Krakow, Italian masters working on the royal castle erected the first buildings in a new, Renaissance style. Yet, monumental temples in southern Poland built concurrently, such as the huge, three-naved hall church at Biecz, however generally in late Gothic, in its regular, symmetric plan and architectural detail also anticipated the coming classical styles.

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1. Inowłódz: small High Romanesque stone church c. 1100, situated in the vicinity of former market settlement



2. Kruszwica: a Romanesque basilican collegiate church; c. 1120 AD; note the “additive” manner of designing the building of simple cubes and half-cylinders



3. Gdańsk: Main Town parish church of St Mary; fifteenth century; white interior with huge pillars and no definite directions forms a "holy forest" of Late Gothic architecture



4. Krzcięcice: village parish church of c. 1530; declining Gothic loses its slenderness for more solid and massive forms



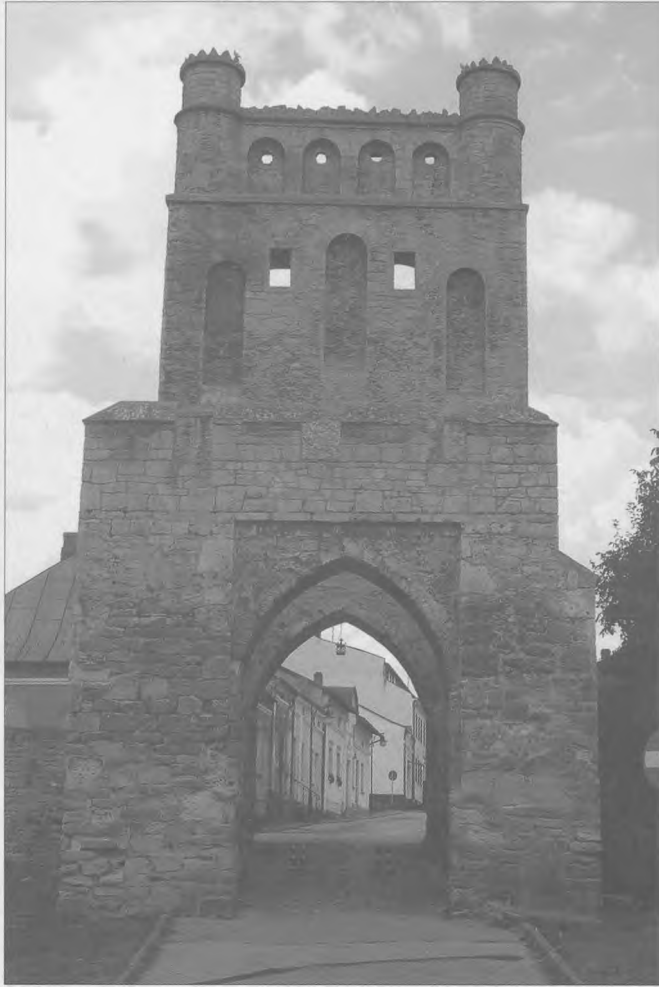
5. Dębno Podhalańskie: timber village church c. 1500; one of a few remained medieval wooden churches, formerly more numerous than stone or brick ones



6. Poznań: dwelling house for cathedral canons, 1512; living, eating and studying together; their main duty was taking care of proper cathedral liturgy



7. Kraków: a gold painted lintel from rich merchant's house; beginning of sixteenth century; now in the courtyard of Collegium Maius, the oldest University building



8. Szydłów: a fortified gate in town defensive walls; beginning of sixteenth century; town entrance more pompous than really defensive





9. Sulejów: monastery church of Cistercian Order, c. 1230; simple and severe, with no towers (the turret in the middle added later) symbolizes a modesty of monastic life



10. Koprzywnica: monastery church of Cistercian Order, c. 1220, interior; construction system with rib vaultings distinctly divided into bay canopies is typical for Early Gothic style



11. Poznań: main entrance to the town church of Dominican Order, c. 1240; however built of brick, with moulded ceramic decoration, the detail still shows the traces of Romanesque style



12. Wrocław: church of St Mary "on Sand Island", second half of fourteenth century; a hall system with three naves of equal height is common for High Gothic town churches



13. Stopnica: small town church of c. 1350 in Southern Poland; buttressed grey stone temple; two nave hall body, narrow choir with polygonal closure and adjacent sacristy



14. Wislica: interior of collegiate church of c. 1360; the complex "star" rib vaultings, resting on slim polygonal pillars take independent position to the interior walls, giving the impression of unified internal space



15. Reszel: interior of collegiate church in Northern Poland, c. 1475; northern Late Gothic red brick architecture; hall type church with rather heavy pillars and sophisticated “multi star” rib vaults



16. Gdańsk: Main Town parish church of St Mary; fifteenth century; the biggest red brick medieval temple in Europe; the construction of hall church with internal buttresses and flat outer walls, popularly named “chest Gothic”

All photos from the author’s archive

## Art in Krakow during the Reign of the Last Two Piast Kings (c. 1320–1370)\*

At the end of the thirteenth century the successive dukes of the Piast dynasty intensified their efforts to unite the lands of the former Kingdom of Poland. An important factor in these attempts was the cult of St Stanislaus, the bishop of Krakow, allegedly murdered by king Boleslaw II the Bold (Polish: *Bolesław Śmiały*) in 1079.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the twelfth century Wincenty Kadlubek in his *Chronicle of Poland* recounted the story of the murder. According to the chronicler, St Stanislaus chastised the sinful monarch and excommunicated him; the king, in turn, ordered to capture the bishop and finally killed him by his own hand. The bishop's body had been quartered, yet God sent four eagles to guard the precious remains which shortly afterwards miraculously grew together. Around 1253 the legend had been repeated in the *Vita Maior Sancti Stanislai*, written by a Dominican friar, Wincenty of Kielcza,<sup>2</sup> on the occasion of the bishop's canonization. The biographer of the newly-canonized saint presented the tragic events according to the "crime-and-punishment" pattern: the loss of the crown and the disintegration of the state were God's punishment for the murder of the bishop, but just as the quartered remains miraculously grew together again, this was to bode well for the future reunification of the partitioned kingdom. Wincenty of Kielcza also explained that God had saved from destruction the royal insignia kept in the treasury of the cathedral in Krakow, the capital and the seat of the monarchy, *till the one comes, who is called by God, just as Aaron was*.<sup>3</sup> This prophecy was fulfilled when Wladyslaw the Short (*Władysław Łokietek*), duke of Kuyavia (*Kujawy*), was crowned king of Poland in 1320. His son and heir, Casimir III the Great (*Kazimierz Wielki*; 1333–1370), is the only monarch in the history of Poland who, because of his numerous gifts, earned his appellation of "the Great." Due to a combination of circumstances (among which were, above all, the claims to the Polish crown by John of Luxembourg, the king of Bohemia) and contrary to a long-established custom, Wladyslaw's coronation took place in Krakow in the province of Little Poland (*Małopolska*), instead of Gniezno in Great Poland (*Wielkopolska*). This transfer of location in which the solemn celebration of the king's inauguration took place diametrically changed the status of Krakow Cathedral of Saints Wenceslas I and Stanislaus. Hence, the order of the day was propagandistic

\* For more references, see: Walczak (2009).

<sup>1</sup> Walczak (2006a: 159–172).

<sup>2</sup> Plezia (1962: 27–29); Labuda (1971: 118, 134–135).

<sup>3</sup> *Usque dum ille veniat, qui vocatus est a Deo tamquam Aaron...*; Kętrzyński (1884: 393).

activity which, in architectural forms, would proclaim the glory of the reborn kingdom and exalt the new coronation cathedral to the rank of the royal church, and Władysław's coronation was undoubtedly the most important impulse to rebuild the old, Romanesque church in new, Gothic forms. The desire to honor St Stanislaus, whose grave was located under the cathedral's crossing, and to emphasize his role in the re-birth of the state, must have been an equally important reason for the reconstruction.<sup>4</sup> Finished before 1346 was the construction of the eastern part of the church, consisting of a four-bay chancel with a straight end and a rectangular ambulatory, probably modeled on similar Cistercian solutions (e.g. in the abbey churches at Lilienfeld, Zbraslav and Lubiąż). Such a disposition was a conscious borrowing from the great architectural foundations of the Babenberg, Habsburg and *Přemyslid* dynasties. The easternmost bay of the chancel was covered with an impressive "tri-radial" vaulting which, illusionistically, suggested a polygonal ending of the chancel. The following years saw the erection of a compact basilican nave and a simple façade which shows on the axis of the entrance, in ascending order: the iron door with the monogram of king Casimir the Great (the letter "K" with a crown above it), the coat of arms of Krakow bishop Bodzanta, the White Eagle – a coat of arms of the Polish Kingdom, Little Poland and, at the same time, the ruler and finally, a sculpted figure of St Stanislaus, the patron saint of the state.<sup>5</sup> This decorative program, modest, yet full of political connotations, was finished on the eve of the so-called congress of monarchs in 1364. According to the author of the *Krakow Cathedral Chronicle*, contemporary with the congress, Casimir the Great had invited the rulers from all over Central Europe to Krakow, in order *to show off the glory of his kingdom*.<sup>6</sup>

The authority of Władysław the Short needed strong legitimization. The new king, descendant of the Kuyavian branch of the Piasts, was merely one of many *domini naturales*, that is, natural lords of the kingdom, who in theory were equal and had the same rights to the throne.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after 1320, a decision must have been made to create a royal necropolis in the cathedral, and in 1333, just after the king's death, a stone tomb was erected over the place of his burial.<sup>8</sup> It was located under the east arcade in the north arm of the ambulatory and was visible not only from there (where the congregation had access to it and where the tomb could be used as a station in processions and memorial celebrations), but also from the choir and the steps of the high altar. Therefore, it would have always stayed before the eyes of the praying canons. Casimir the Great (d. 370) was buried opposite to his father, under the east arcade of the south arm

<sup>4</sup> Walczak, Czyżewski (2000: 103–115).

<sup>5</sup> Crossley (1985: 50, 382); Piech (1996: 137–138); Walczak, Czyżewski (2000: 103); Walczak (2006b: 125–142).

<sup>6</sup> Wyrozumski (1982: 134); on the meeting of monarchs see e.g.: Grodecki (1939); Wyrozumski (1982, 133–141); Szczur (2002: 395). The above quotation calls up associations with a passage in the *Chronicle* of Beneš Krabice of Weitmile, according to which Charles IV of Luxembourg had the spires of two towers of the Prague castle gilded: *volens ostendere magnificentiam glorie regni sui Boemie* ('as he wanted to display the glorious splendour of his kingdom of Bohemia'); quoted after: Bláhová (2005: 20, n. 77).

<sup>7</sup> Kurtyka (2001).

<sup>8</sup> Walczak (2006b: 77–114, figs. 42–59); Walczak (2008a: 359–385).

of the ambulatory.<sup>9</sup> While trying to explain the reason for such a location of the monuments, one should recall some examples of French mausoleums located in churches, in which the custom of burying the dead in the chancel walls, in close proximity to the high altar appeared for the first time, and it was the northern side of the sanctuary that was regarded as the most respectful placement (e.g. the tomb of Archbishop Hugo d'Amiens in Rouen Cathedral, early thirteenth century).<sup>10</sup> The next step was to “take out” the monument from the wall and to put it within the space of the church, so that it would be accessible on either side. The first known example of such a placement was the tomb of Bishop Ulger (d. 1148) at Angers Cathedral, which was visible simultaneously from the cloister as well as from the side aisle of the church.<sup>11</sup> The conception of a memorial monument accessible from two various parts of the church was employed in the construction of the royal abbey at Royaumont. The tombs of Philip Dagobert (d. 1232, younger brother of the king of France, Louis IX) and of Louis (d. 1260, the eldest son of Louis IX) were placed under arcades between piers of the choir and ambulatory. The Cistercian abbey of Longpont with tombs of the members of the French royal family, and above all, Westminster Abbey with tombs of the Plantagenets, were the next stages in the development of this tradition. The original conception of the Krakow necropolis had been abandoned during the reign of Casimir the Great, when a decision had been made to divide the chancel from ambulatory by a walling-up of the space between piers. As a result the arcades had been transformed into a kind of chapel, the depth of which effectively separated the tombs from the space of the cathedral.

The location of Wladyslaw the Short's tomb closely corresponds with its iconographic program which involves the liturgy of the dead. The figurative “space” of the arcades articulating the tomb chest had been united with the space of the cathedral. Standing mourners, clerics (on the eastern and western sides) and lay people – men (to the south) and women (to the north) – are shown under the arcades. The depiction of a funeral procession (*cortège funèbre*; e.g. on the tomb of Louis, son of Louis IX from Royaumont Abbey) as well as the head, executed in filigree, wearing a foliate crown, carved under the bracket supporting the king's feet (e.g. the tomb of Joan of France, Countess of Évreux and Queen of Navarre, d. 1349, at the abbey of Saint-Denis), are of French origin.<sup>12</sup> The figures of weepers differ from one another, which may have been aimed to show the different estates they represent. Their gestures of despair are of ancient tradition which passed to Western art of the Middle Ages through the art of Byzantium.<sup>13</sup> On the tomb chest of the monument of Casimir the Great only male figures, conversing and turned towards one another, have been represented. They are most probably members of the royal council, modeled perhaps on the miniatures representing *Monarchy* in the manuscripts of Aristotle's *Politics*.<sup>14</sup> Yet, the depiction of debating wise men has numerous precedents, an interesting example of which is the

<sup>9</sup> Śnieżyńska-Stolotowa (1978: 1–115).

<sup>10</sup> McGee Morgenstern (2004: 81–82, figs. 3, 4).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* (81, fig. 1).

<sup>12</sup> Toma (1975: 180–191); Le Pogam (2007: 33–45, esp. 34).

<sup>13</sup> Maguire (1971: 125–174).

<sup>14</sup> Śnieżyńska-Stolotowa (1978: 74–77); Rożnowska-Sadraei (2007: 368–369).

seal of the French town Peyrusse-le-Roc (before 1243), showing on the obverse the debating councilors in pairs, turned towards one another, and the city walls symbolizing the commune on the reverse.<sup>15</sup> The loose cloak of Wladyslaw the Short is an example of a “timeless” (i.e. deprived of any historical connotations) costume, typical of sepulchral art of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, whereas the decoration of the monument of his son reveals an interest in the study of costume which had led to the creation of an “armed man” type in sepulchral sculpture in the Holy Roman Empire in the second quarter of the fourteenth century.<sup>16</sup> But the most spectacular device, adding splendor to the royal tombs, was the baldachin cover.<sup>17</sup> This idea must have been conceived in the intellectual circles connected to the royal court, and the decisive factor in its formulation was the studies of Polish scholars in Paris.<sup>18</sup>

The castle on the Wawel Hill had been thoroughly rebuilt probably at the beginning of the reign of Casimir the Great. At that time an irregular ensemble on a curvilinear plan was erected, whose parts were linked by means of a gallery running along the courtyard. The upper and lower castles were heavily fortified. The most conspicuous of the defenses was a massive tower with an elongated porch surmounted on high arcades, located at the east end of the hill.<sup>19</sup> The west wing of the upper castle housed a small chapel of St Mary of Egypt, inspired by French models. The reconstruction of its original form is a subject of debate, yet it appears quite probable that it was a two-storied structure, modeled on the Parisian Sainte-Chapelle.<sup>20</sup> Casimir the Great also rebuilt the collegiate church of St Michael on the Wawel Hill. According to some fifteenth-century sources, he had it decorated with “vaults and coats of arms,”<sup>21</sup> whereas the neighboring church of St George featured “many decorations and coats of arms.”<sup>22</sup> Both structures most probably were built on an almost square plan, with a pillar in the centre supporting “tri-radial” vaults, deriving from the type of vaulting over the east bay in the cathedral’s chancel.<sup>23</sup>

Wladyslaw and Casimir governed the country by an itinerant court, yet at the same time they tried to strengthen their authority by linking it to a single place: the capital in Krakow.<sup>24</sup> According to St Thomas Aquinas, the founding of cities, their fortification and embellishment were the duties of a monarch.<sup>25</sup> In 1312, shortly after the uprising of the Krakow burghers against the princely rule, large-scale building ac-

<sup>15</sup> Brückle (2005: 102, figs. 42, 43).

<sup>16</sup> Freiherr von Reitzenstein (1965: 73–91).

<sup>17</sup> Walczak (2008b: 359–385).

<sup>18</sup> See e.g.: Gieysztor (1962: 213–225).

<sup>19</sup> Kajzer, Kołodziejski, Salm (2001: 241).

<sup>20</sup> Pianowski (2002: 235–244).

<sup>21</sup> *Muris extruxit et testudinibus et clenodiis* [emphasis mine – M.W.] *adornavit*; Długosz (1863: 532).

<sup>22</sup> *Plerisque ornamentis et clenodiis* [emphasis mine – M.W.] *insignavit*; Długosz (1863: 592); most recently, see: Goras (2003: 94–98).

<sup>23</sup> Frazik (1968: 127–147).

<sup>24</sup> Gąsiorowski (1977: 150).

<sup>25</sup> See e.g.: Kalina (2004: 81).



tivities started in the city, which probably served a kind of repression of the rebels.<sup>26</sup> In this way, Wladyslaw broke his promise, recorded in a document of September 1306, that he would not reconstruct the walls connecting the castle to the city and that the two entities would remain separate. The short-lived but vigorous building campaign encompassed the laying out of a new regular grid of streets and a market square with a cloth hall, whereas at St Andrew's church the Poor Clares from Skafa were settled (c. 1316–1320). The founding of the New Town "in Okól" was a mere episode, since for unknown reasons it was abandoned and the area had been incorporated into Krakow. Casimir considered the capital as his residential city and did much to adorn and enrich it with new constructions, just like the Luxembourgs did in Prague and the Habsburgs in Vienna.<sup>27</sup> A document issued on behalf of the monarch mentions his efforts to make "our city of Krakow more famous by its name and more renowned by its fame, above other cities of the Kingdom."<sup>28</sup> A remarkable manifestation of the king's interest in the appearance of his capital is a great charter issued in 1358 in which the king ordered that the city "be not deformed by inordinate edifices erected in prominent places."<sup>29</sup> This brief statement, formulated by an unknown erudite working at the royal chancery juxtaposed two basic aesthetic terms, one from the Classical Vitruvian aesthetic (*ordinatio*) and another, from the scholastic theory of beauty, as formulated by St Thomas Aquinas (*turpitude*). The development of Krakow and its growth of importance were manifested, among others, in the increase in the number of city's inhabitants, which reached about 12–15 thousand. The most important municipal buildings (e.g. the cloth hall as well as other facilities used in trading) underwent a thorough reconstruction, whereas in the second half of the fourteenth century the number of masonry residential buildings tripled.<sup>30</sup> To the latter belonged a huge, stately palace in the Market Square (at No. 17) which probably served as Casimir's town palace (c. 1365–1370?). In its interior has been preserved an ensemble of coats of arms of the lands of the Polish Kingdom and the façade was decorated with sculpted portraits of kings.<sup>31</sup> This residence was modeled on similar urban dwellings of the Luxembourgs, especially their palace in the Old Town Square in Prague. The king may have used the palace during his sojourns in the city, yet, above all, it served to display his royal power, notably during various kinds of celebrations.<sup>32</sup> On an everyday basis it recalled the monarch's presence, being an important landmark in the city's topography and a counterweight to the most important municipal buildings, above all the Town Hall and the parish church of St Mary.

<sup>26</sup> Gawlas (1994: 101–110, especially 106–107); Gawlas (2000: 92–93); Gawlas (2005: 133–162, particularly 153, n. 136); Krasnowolski (2004: 108–109, 111–115, 120–122).

<sup>27</sup> Patze (1972: 27–43).

<sup>28</sup> *Civitas nostra Cracoviensis inter Urbes Regni nostri famosior sit nomine, celebrior fama*; Kaczmarczyk (1939, 20–21).

<sup>29</sup> *Ut per inordinata aedificia civitas non deturpetur*; Wyrozumski (1982, 161).

<sup>30</sup> Komorowski (2008, 171).

<sup>31</sup> Walczak (2005a: 72, figs. 21–23); Walczak (2006b: 254, figs. 236–238).

<sup>32</sup> On the importance of court celebrations and their connections to the monarch's residences on the example of Charles IV, see Bláhová (2005: especially 16, 18, 21, 23, 25).

The construction of the most important church in the city, dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin, took place in two stages during the second part of the fourteenth century. The chancel, dating from an earlier period, has the forms of a long, tall “chapel choir,” and was modeled on the multi-bayed chancel of the Dominican church, dating still from the thirteenth century. The later nave was intended to have three aisles of equal height, yet the plans had been changed during the construction and instead a basilican structure, probably modeled on the Wawel Cathedral, was built. A rich decoration carved in stone, located almost exclusively on the church’s exterior, in the upper register of choir walls, is a telling testimony to the ambitions of the local community.<sup>33</sup> In the keystones of eleven windows are almost forty figures of humans and animals, as well as fantastic representations carved in stone, accompanied by rich floral decoration. The compositions on the apse walls and on the southern side refer to Salvation and represent, among others: Virgin Mary surrounded by angels, the face of Christ impressed on Veronica’s veil and the saints, including St Christopher, believed to be the patron against sudden death. The sculptures in the windows on the northern side show hell. The cornice crowning the choir walls is surmounted on wall brackets supported by carved personifications of virtues and sins. It is not known, to what extent the king participated in the church’s construction but the presence of the coat of arms representing the White Eagle, boldly displayed on one of the apse buttresses, seems to testify to his contribution to the undertaking.<sup>34</sup> The coat of arms should be examined in the broad context of the buildings located on the Wawel Hill and the decoration of the house in No. 17 Market Square, as a part of the “iconosphere” of the residential city of Polish monarchs.

Krakow’s growth was so considerable that already in 1335 the king decided to found a New Town, which he called Kazimierz, and the year 1366 saw the foundation of yet another satellite town of Krakow called Florencja (Florence).<sup>35</sup> Since the times of Alexander the Great, rulers’ names had played an important propagandistic role and were used in toponymy, at which Emperor Charles IV of Luxembourg excelled. He was the founder of the following cities and castles (the names of which were derived from the Emperor’s own name: Karl/Karel): Monte Carlo (1333), Karlštejn (1348), Karlshaus (1356), Karlskrone, Karlsfried, or Kašperk.<sup>36</sup> The seal of the Kazimierz town councilors, as well as numerous other seals, coinage and bookbinding, but above all the iron door of Krakow Cathedral, all feature the king’s monogram. The letter “K,” not encountered in Latin epigraphy, played a similar role as the king’s coat of arms.<sup>37</sup> The bosses in the vaulting over the entrance hall in the Austin Friars cloister in Kazimierz had been carved with the syllables of the king’s name: KA-ZY-MI-R[VS].<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Walczak (2006b: 228–236).

<sup>34</sup> See, among others, Friedberg (1946: 215).

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g. Kuczyński (1993: 20).

<sup>36</sup> Menclová (1972, vol. 2: 48, 68, 72, 73); Crossley (1985: 256); Kavka (1998: 55, 138, 208, 210, 216); Tori (1998: 143–152).

<sup>37</sup> Trelińska (1991: 34, 43); Piech (1994: 125); Gawlas (1999a: 201); Gawlas (1999b: 21); Szczur (2002: 416); Jaworska (2003: 74).

<sup>38</sup> Walczak (2006b: 129–130, figs. 99a–d).

The new town had covered a considerable area enclosed by defense walls, its centre being a market square set within a regular grid of streets, with a town hall in the middle. Among churches, especially two distinguished themselves by their importance, dimensions, abundance of decoration, as well as their strict compliance with the original urban layout. The Corpus Christi parish church and the Austin Friars church of St Catherine and Margaret were erected in similar forms, modeled on Krakow's St Mary's church (long, multi-bayed chancels) and the Wawel Cathedral (compact, basilican naves). The similarity between the so-called great basilicas of Krakow (the group comprises also the Dominican church, rebuilt at the end of the fourteenth century) is often treated as proof that there had been a "royal workshop," i.e. a permanent group of builders who executed the ruler's commissions.<sup>39</sup> However, it is more probable that there existed numerous workshops (active also in other towns and villages of the kingdom) which consciously employed similar solutions. They did so for ideological reasons, imitating the most important churches in the country, the most characteristic features of that "courtly style" being: the integral combination of stone and brick as the main building materials, the division of internal elevations by means of a prominent string course, with the upper part of the wall slightly receding, as well as the optical trick of making short windows look taller by means of decorated panels. The most original feature was, however, the so-called pillar-buttress construction system. Unlike in France, in Krakow there are no external flying buttresses, and the weight of the vaulting is channeled by means of buttresses with off-sets, which descend along the nave wall and at the height of aisles merge together with piers, while the arcades linking the buttresses repeat the arcades between nave and aisle.

The royal artistic commissions were executed by trusted artists who, just like the *familiars* at other European courts, were privileged persons. In 1353 Casimir made "Cunad, son of Apoldric, his faithful sculptor"<sup>40</sup> alderman of Jodłowa Góra. The statutes of the salt mines in Wieliczka of 1368 include a list of members of the "council of king the lord," which consisted of many dignitaries, like the bishop and the castellan of Krakow, as well as Szczepanek, *magister murorum*, that is, the king's builder.<sup>41</sup> One of the most important tasks of the artists was the representation of the ruler, the display of royal power.<sup>42</sup> This task was achieved by means of erudite solutions known from the most eminent capitals of Europe. One of the most important ones was called the "sacred identification portrait," that is the portrait of the ruler modeled on Biblical characters.<sup>43</sup> Already at the beginning of Casimir's reign on his seals and on coinage struck

<sup>39</sup> Crossley (1985).

<sup>40</sup> *Cunado filio Alpodrici suo fidei scultori*; Ptaśnik (1917: 21' 5, no. 24); Walczak (2009).

<sup>41</sup> Krzyżanowski (1934: 221), raised some doubts as to Szczepanek's function (it is not known whether he was a municipal or royal clerk); he was identified as the king's builder among others by: Wyrobisz (1963: 112); Wyrozumski (1982: 174–175); Crossley (1985: 200); Grzybkowski (1986: 213), who quite rightly protested against calling the builder 'king's architect'; Antoniewicz (1998: 110).

<sup>42</sup> Bartlová (2005: 244), rightly postulates a distinction between court art and the representation of power.

<sup>43</sup> Polleross (1988).

in Krakow there appeared the king's head with horns.<sup>44</sup> The horns had been borrowed from the representations of Moses and served to equate the ruler with the Old Testament patriarch.<sup>45</sup> In the Vulgate they are the a sign of Moses' abiding in God's presence and talking to Him, and the most important fruit of that proximity is the law that Yahweh revealed to the chosen nation through the hands of Moses. Therefore the representation of the king's head with horns should be associated with the notion of king's authority as the source of law.<sup>46</sup> The Biblical meaning of those representations is further elucidated by preambles of certain royal documents, e.g. to a foundation charter of the church in Niepołomice near Krakow, in which Casimir was styled a righteous monarch, who follows the example of Salomon, the Old Testament king.<sup>47</sup> The author of the *Krakow Cathedral Chronicle* put it straightforwardly: "this king ruled the country in Poland better than other princes; as if second Salomon he elevated his deeds, erected cities, castles and built houses of stone."<sup>48</sup> The display of power happened also by means of sumptuous gifts made to the most important churches, the cult of Passion relics as well as the cult of royal saints. The chronicler Janko of Czarnków recorded "a gold cross of great value, worth more than ten thousand florins," being a gift bequeathed by Casimir to Krakow Cathedral. That gold cross contained a particle of the True Cross, acquired most probably in Lwow, during Casimir's conquest of Ruthenia in 1340, when the king "captured enormous spoils in silver, gold and precious stones, belonging to the treasury of ancient princes, among which, amid crosses, there was a special one in which a large piece of wood from the Lord's cross was enshrined."<sup>49</sup> Most probably to the same booty also belongs a Byzantine reliquary cross which, by an act of providence, has been preserved in the treasury of Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris to this day.<sup>50</sup>

In their foundations the last Piast kings often referred to the glorious traditions of the kingdom's past, reaching back to the first king of Poland, Boleslaw the Brave (Bolesław Chrobry; d. 1025).<sup>51</sup> The new royal insignia, prepared for the coronation of Wladyslaw the Short became the very objects which embodied the "heritage of the Boleslavs." That was the case especially of the crown, called the crown of Boleslaw the Brave, which, unfortunately, has not been preserved. Of equal importance was *Szczerbiec* (literally "jagged sword"), crafted probably in the thirteenth century, perhaps for

<sup>44</sup> In the middle of the fourteenth century, at the latest, it was used in the coat of arms of Ziemia Dobrzyńska (the land of Dobrzyń), which was one of Casimir's most important territorial acquisitions; Wyrozumski (1982: 65).

<sup>45</sup> Piech (1994: 131); Paszkiewicz (1994: 164); Mrozowski (2001: 7); Drelicharz, Piech (2004: 213).

<sup>46</sup> Kantorowicz (1957: 87–192) wrote about *Law-centered Kingship*.

<sup>47</sup> Ożóg (1995: 57).

<sup>48</sup> *Hic igitur rex ultra omnes principes Polonie rem publicam strenue gubernabat; nam velut alter Salomon magnificavit opera sua, civitates, castra, domos muravit*; quoted after Ożóg (1995: 58).

<sup>49</sup> *Ubi spolia multa in Argento, auro et gemmis, thesaurum ducum antioquorum tollens, inter quod erant aliquot cruces aurae [sic!] precipue unam, in qua magna quantitas de ligno crucis Domini fuit reperta*; all references in: Dąbrowska (1991: 67–87, especially 83).

<sup>50</sup> Dąbrowska (1991: 67–87).

<sup>51</sup> On the historical notion of the Polish Kingdom as the *heritage of the Boleslases*, see Wyrozumski (1982: 118, 127, 171); Rokosz (1994: especially 211, 219).

the Templar Knights.<sup>52</sup> It has a hilt of gold decorated in niello with depictions of the Lamb of God and symbols of the Evangelists. The pommel and cross-guard bear inscriptions in Latin and Hebrew, including the three Jewish names of God, used instead of the name Yahweh which was forbidden to be pronounced.<sup>53</sup> Wladyslaw the Short used the sword for the first time during his coronation and also probably then the scabbard had been made, the remnant of which is the enamel shield with the White Eagle attached at the base of the blade. A legend originated at that time, saying that the sword belonged to Boleslaw the Brave who jagged it while hitting at the Golden Gate of Kiev during his conquest of Ruthenia in 1018. This legend played an important propagandistic role in the program of reviving the Kingdom, as it served to emphasize the continuity of the Piast rule. The memory of the sword having been jagged in Kiev must have been an important factor in Casimirs the Great's eastern politics.

The rebuilding of cathedral on the Wawel Hill reaffirmed the respect in which places connected with the cult of St Stanislaus were held – that is, the very fact that they remained intact<sup>54</sup>. During the construction of the new cathedral, the three-aisled St Leonard crypt and substantial portions of the western towers, dating from the turn of the twelfth century, also had been spared.<sup>55</sup> The fact that such a considerable part of the Romanesque church was preserved cannot be explained merely by the reasons of economy; rather, ideological considerations must have played a decisive role here.<sup>56</sup> During Casimir's reconstruction of the Wawel castle, a Pre-Romanesque rotunda of the Virgin Mary was on purpose and ostentatiously incorporated in the new buildings as a remnant and relic of times immemorial. This is, at least, how Jan Długosz, Polish chronicler, interpreted that fact already in the middle of the fifteenth century, when he wrote about a round church, "built of stone in a primitive and ancient manner, which once, before the Poles converted to Christianity, was sacrificed to pagan deities. At the time when the castle was built from the very foundations, king Casimir wished to have the walls and memory of this temple preserved for posterity."<sup>57</sup> Such an idea could have easily been conceived among intellectuals in the service of the reborn kingdom. Many of them were connected to Krakow cathedral, where the local traditions had been maintained and developed, e.g. by continuing the historical works, started there already at the end of the tenth century.

The stability brought by Wladislaw's coronation and the beginning of Casimir the Great's reign relatively early enabled the art in Krakow to keep pace with the most important artistic developments in Western Europe. That was already the case of Wladyslaw's tomb and the sculptural decoration of the Wawel Cathedral's chancel (dated not later than around 1341–1346), executed by the artists influenced by the style of

<sup>52</sup> Wyrozumski (1982: 118, 127, 171); Rokosz (1988: 3–21); Rokosz (1994: 211–219).

<sup>53</sup> Żygulski (2008: 351).

<sup>54</sup> Crossley (1985: 48–50, 378).

<sup>55</sup> Wojciechowski (1900: 149–153), was the first to demonstrate that the irregularities in the cathedral's plan were caused by the need to bypass the chapel of Bishop Prandota, which had not been pulled down, and the desire to preserve the Romanesque crypt.

<sup>56</sup> Pietrusiński (1975: 265).

<sup>57</sup> Walczak (2005b: 93–115).

Hesse and Cologne, who were schooled on models dating from the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Krakow churches started to be decorated with pieces of high-quality free standing sculpture, an example of which may be the Virgin Mary at the convent of the Carmelite nuns at Wesola in Krakow (c. 1340). Its melancholic beauty and soft, “melodiously” folding drapery, as well as the perfect sense of tectonic balancing of the masses, have their source in aestheticizing stylistic tendencies, common in the French court sculpture around 1300.<sup>58</sup> The majority of the works of art executed in Krakow around the mid-fourteenth century depend on the court art of the Luxembourgians. The figures of the Virgin Mary and St Joseph preserved in the Poor Clares convent in Krakow,<sup>59</sup> executed in the circle of the Master of the Madonna of Michle,<sup>60</sup> active in Prague, testify to the direct assimilation of solutions from Bohemia.<sup>61</sup> Due to the presence of applications in the form of a tin letter “E” under a crown, the figures had been associated with Elisabeth, queen of Hungary, sister of Casimir the Great, and dated to the period of her regency in Krakow (1370–1375). Such letters, however, were mass-produced and sold as “prefabricate” elements to be later used for various purposes, e.g. as trimmings on fabrics, examples of which can be seen on the dress of Agnes, the wife of Andrew III (1290–1301), king of Hungary, or on an ornate mantle of the cult figure in Halberstadt Cathedral (fourteenth century). Such cult dresses were popular in the late Middle Ages, especially in monastic circles, as it is testified by further examples from Wienhausen (Germany) and Sarnen (Switzerland). As the Cracovian figures are still today dressed in Baroque garments it can be assumed that the metal letters are not the founder’s initials but rather a testimony to medieval devotional practices. For stylistic reasons the figures can be safely dated to the mid-fourteenth century. A slightly later statue of Mary and Child from Skalbierz closely repeats the constituent features of the stone figure of the Virgin in the Town Hall of the Old Town in Prague (c. 1356–1357). The currency of the Luxembourgian models was undoubtedly due to the prestige of the Imperial court.<sup>62</sup> Yet, already in the 1360s that model lost its popularity among the court circles in Poland. In 1361 Archduke of Austria Rudolph IV Habsburg and Hungarian King Louis the Great formed an anti-imperial coalition, joined also by Casimir the Great. In 1363 the king of Poland was chosen to act as an arbiter of that conflict whereas the trade treaties he entered into with the dukes of Austria were another legible sign of his engagement in the dispute.<sup>63</sup> Also, it was probably not by accident that at that very period there appeared in Krakow large ensembles of sculptures betraying Viennese influences: the sculptural decorations of the choir of St Mary’s church and of the palace in No. 17 Market Square.<sup>64</sup> Yet, the contemporary pa-

<sup>58</sup> Baron (1998: 52–136, especially 52–57).

<sup>59</sup> Walczak (2009).

<sup>60</sup> Recently, the uniformity of the group of works ascribed to that artist has been questioned by Fajt, Suckale (2006: 3–30).

<sup>61</sup> Walczak (2003: 192–210).

<sup>62</sup> Walczak (2009).

<sup>63</sup> Wyrozumski (1982: 130–133); Wyrozumski (1999: 371–372); Szczur (2002: 393–394).

<sup>64</sup> It is worth remembering that a similar interpretation, in relation to the art of Wrocław in the mid-fourteenth century, has been recently put forward by Kaczmarek (2005: 148).

trons of the arts, artists active in Krakow, as well as artists working for the most important individuals in the country had had much broader horizons. In the art of Krakow during the reign of the last Piasts inspirations both from close (Hungary), distant (Upper Rhineland) as well as from quite remote (southern France?) centers are present.

While comparing the situation of Poland in the fourteenth century with other Central European kingdoms, a concession must be made to the country's backwardness, being the result of almost two-hundred-years-long feudal disintegration.<sup>65</sup> No doubt, therefore, that the first activities of the rulers of the united kingdom were aimed at the modernization of the state. With great attention they followed developments in the neighboring countries and were quick learners. Hence, the artistic circles of Krakow must be regarded as a converging melting pot in which various influences amalgamated, the resulting alloy being often interesting, and sometimes even exceptional, on a European scale.

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## Polish Renaissance Art and the Art of the Renaissance in Poland

The problem of Renaissance art in Poland and of the art of the Polish Renaissance must be considered in a completely different way and perspective than the art of the Renaissance in its cradle – Italy. In Italy we can observe and analyze the first-hand rebirth of models and patterns of the Antique period. Renaissance art in Italy, with its origins at the beginning of the fifteenth century, was deeply inspired by the Greek and Roman architecture and sculpture that was in abundant supply and almost entirely dominated the field vision of the contemporaries.

The phenomenon of Renaissance art in Poland is, however, quite different from its counterpart in Italy. The term “Renaissance” as adapted to describe the artistic phenomenon of the period is, as a matter of fact, wrong and misleading in the Polish context. It should be distinguished between the notion of the “modern times” of humanism, and the “Renaissance” understood as the “revival.” The humanism of the modern times as expressed in the new approach to the human person and equally in the humanist conception towards nature, infiltrated Poland already by the fifteenth century, when the arts were still noticeably Gothic in style.

The newly imported artistic conception had nothing to do with the local Polish context, and initially it was neither generally accepted nor understood. At the beginning of the sixteenth century in Poland, the new import from the South found its small, yet enthusiastic, audience within pockets of the royal court and its entourage, still surrounded by and sunk into the world of Gothic art – a trend that would still continue well into the sixteenth century and experience its final revival at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Art in Poland in the fifteenth century was still strongly medieval in spirit and form, and it had no references to Antique revival, as did Italian art at the time. However, at times we find in Gothic art at the end of the fifteenth century in Poland new elements revealing the influence (or “touch”) of these new tendencies, like in the semicircular arch in the Veit Stoss altar in Krakow. Still, in this context Polish artists were considered merely artisans and worked in strictly organized guilds.

For the Renaissance or “Rebirth” to occur, “the birth” would have been necessary; i.e., the return to the notions and models presented by the visual world of the Antique. Such a return was evidently missing: there was neither Antique monument nor sculpture in ancient Poland to inspire changes in style, or artistic taste of art patrons and employers. The Renaissance, as that consciously classical aestheticism based on reference

to the Antique, was brought to Poland at the very beginning of the sixteenth century by a very small but distinguished and elite circle, composed of the royals, certain magnates and some bishops, literati and scholars, who had contacts with Italy.

Through these circuits, Renaissance art was first imported to Poland either directly from Italy, or by Italian artists via Hungary, as a collection of architectonic forms, assemblage of decorative patterns, sculptural models for tombs, and new concepts of spatial arrangement. Later on, the elements of Renaissance style were also introduced to Poland via Silesia, Bohemia, Germany and finally, in the late sixteenth century, via the Netherlands, especially in its Mannerist and Northern Mannerist variations.

We can, nevertheless, discern in Poland three different groups of Renaissance art:

- 1) "Imports:" works of art created abroad and imported to Poland from Italy, Germany, Bohemia, the Netherlands etc.
- 2) "The impact of foreigners:" works created in Poland by foreign artists in the new Renaissance style.
- 3) "Vernacular:" works created by foreign artists and local Polish artists, inspired by Italian and Northern Renaissance art. In time, this group was submitted to local trends and merged with domestic fashions. Works that could be described as "vernacular" reflected local needs, tendencies and exigencies. As a result, we can speak of a typical Polish vernacular Renaissance style, which is sometimes referred to as "deteriorated" Renaissance, transformed in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century into what could be called Polish Mannerism.

## 1. Works of art created abroad and imported to Poland from Italy, Germany, Bohemia, the Netherlands, etc.

Examples of foreign Renaissance art were brought to Poland during various periods, commissioned by Polish kings, priests, magnates, aristocrats and wealthy merchants, or bought by passionate collectors over the centuries. During the sixteenth century, the leading role in the import of works of art to Poland was played by the royal court of the Polish kings, among whom Sigismund I the Old (*Zygmunt Stary*) figured prominently. In his youth, long before becoming king, Sigismund was already well acquainted with Renaissance art during his long stays in Budapest at the court of his older brother, Vladislav II, King of Hungary and Bohemia, and successor to the Humanist king, Matthias I Corvinus, patron of Renaissance art which he had imported to Hungary, in greater part directly from Italy. This was surely a formative period for Sigismund's artistic taste, the taste which would later have an enormous impact on art in Poland during his reign.

The import of works of art in the new Renaissance style by King Sigismund I and his Queen, the Italian duchess, Bona Sforza, was a practice soon imitated by princes of the Church, humanists and high dignitaries of the State. As for the Queen, we know that Bona Sforza brought with her to Poland a large quantity of artistic items, including furniture, paintings or tapestries, some of which were purchased in Italy, Germany and Flanders. Unfortunately, none of these works have survived to the present day.

Early sixteenth century examples of imported Renaissance works include the six tomb slabs carved in Hungary in red marble by Joannes Fiorentinus, tombstones commissioned in 1515 by Cardinal Jan Łaski, four of which are still in his cathedral in Gniezno. Works of art imported from Germany included mostly crafts and decorative objects. Peter Vischer the Elder's workshop from Nuremberg delivered a significant quantity of bronze tomb slabs and reliefs, among them the bronze plaque for Piotr Kmita's tomb in Wawel Cathedral in Krakow (c. 1505); the Cardinal Fryderyk Jagellon's tomb (c. 1510), or later, the iron grill entrance gate to the Chapel (Hans Vischer's workshop, c. 1530–1532). A silver altar in Sigismund's Chapel was made by Melchior Baier and Peter Floetner (1531–1538) and it was also for this Chapel that the king commissioned Georg Pencz, a German Italianizing painter, to paint the paneled wings of Baier and Floetner's silver altarpiece. Pencz, like the two former craftsmen Baier and Floetner, was a well-known artist hailing from Nuremberg, educated at Albrecht Dürer's atelier. Like his master, he trained his artistic skills through sojourns to Italy, especially Venice. Near the end of his life, Sigismund I ordered the main altar in the Wawel Cathedral, which today is in the church of Bodzentyn; "The Crucifixion" scene appearing in the altar was painted by an artist, who signed the work "Petrus Venetus 1548".

The son of Sigismund I, his successor to the Polish throne, Sigismund II August was an amateur and patron of music, literature, but also goldsmithery, jewelry, decorative and fine arts as well. Both patron and collector, Sigismund II commissioned in 1553–1555 a series of miniature portraits depicting his Jagiellon family by Lucas Cranach the Younger, while also endowing his patronage on works by Titian and Paolo Veronese. What is today regarded as perhaps the most notable remnant of Sigismund's international patronage, came in the mid-sixteenth century when he commissioned in Brussels a series of Flemish tapestries, of which over 140 are still preserved at the Royal Wawel Castle.

In the following seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, certain affluent Polish magnates and aristocratic families, like the Lubomirskis, Zamoyskis, Radziwiłłs, Ossolińskis, Potockis, Tarnowskis, Lanckorońskis, Branickis and Czartoryskis among others, formed collections to which they added important works of Renaissance painting and sculpture. Still in Polish collections today we can find works by Leonardo da Vinci, Bernardino Luini, Paris Bordone, Cima da Conegliano, Garofalo, Lorenzo Lotto, Dosso Dossi, Tintoretto, Andrea della Robbia and many others. During the political turbulences over Poland's history, some of the Renaissance works imported into Poland disappeared, perhaps most notably among which is the *Portrait of a Young Man* attributed to Raphael; however, repatriated works can still be seen and admired in Polish museums and private collections, mainly in Warsaw, Poznan, and Krakow.

## 2. Works created in Poland by foreign artists in Renaissance style

Already during the Middle Ages in Poland, there had been a history of foreign artists coming to work for kings, church dignitaries or communities, town administrations,

nobility and merchants. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries some of them settled in Poland more or less permanently, as was the case with Veit Stoss. Nevertheless, it was only from the sixteenth century onwards, that the arrival of a greater number of artists can be documented. The royal court of King Sigismund I and the Queen Bona Sforza was an especially attractive place for artists looking for work and important commissions. Both of the above-mentioned royals invited a number of foreign artists, mostly from Italy, Hungary and Germany, to the courts in Krakow and Vilna.

Italian architects and sculptors were first to arrive at the Polish court in Krakow, often by way of Hungary. Already in about 1502–1507, architect Franciscus Florentinus was working on the west wing of the Wawel Castle. He was appointed by King Alexander (reigned between 1501 and 1506) to reconstruct in the new, Italian style residences for the Queen's mother Elizabeth, its Gothic precursors having been destroyed in a fire. Simultaneously with the building works at the Royal Castle, Franciscus Florentinus executed the tomb of King John I Albert (*Jan Olbracht*) in the Wawel Cathedral (1502–1505), which in its forms and ornamentation is a pure example of Florentine style transplanted to the North. When Sigismund became king in 1506, he decided to reconstruct the entire castle complex in Renaissance style. To this end, Franciscus Florentinus designed a project for a courtyard of three-leveled colonnades. After his death in 1516, the project was continued by the Master Benedict, and after 1520, finished by the most important newcomer from Italy to Krakow, the architect and sculptor educated in Florence and Rome – Bartolommeo Berrecci. He came to Poland invited to create the king's funeral chapel in the Wawel Cathedral.

The Sigismund Chapel, the most important purely Italian Renaissance structure in Northern Europe, called the “pearl of the Renaissance North of the Alps,” was built between 1517 and 1533 by a workshop which consisted of architects, stone carvers, sculptors and helpers, mostly Italians garnered to Poland from Italy and Hungary by Berrecci. With the tomb of Sigismund I he introduced in Krakow a type of funerary monument presenting effigies of the deceased represented as living, in sleep, with the body supported on the elbow, legs crossed, and symbol of his worldly position in hand. Such a type of funerary monument created by Andrea Sansovino and Andrea Bregno and known from churches in Rome, Florence and Venice became quite popular in Poland from the second quarter of the sixteenth century and lasted as the predominant mode for over a hundred years until the Mannerist and Baroque periods.

Renaissance tomb art was to develop in Poland profusely, combining the above mentioned Florentine, Roman and Venetian elements brought by Italian artists of successive generations. It influenced local sculptors and stone carvers, inspiring new solutions and leading up to its own, vernacular style.

Beside the King's Chapel, Berrecci himself was very active as a sculptor and architect in several other projects, such as the tomb of Bishop Piotr Tomicki in the Krakow Cathedral, or the tomb of Barbara Tarnowska in the Tarnów Cathedral. A group of collaborators – architects, sculptors and stone carvers – played a significant role in the realization of Bartolommeo Berrecci's projects. Included among them were namely Antonio and Filippo da Fiesole, Giovanni Cini and Bernardino Zanobi de Gianotis. After Berrecci's death in 1537, both Cini and de Gianotis were to play an important



role in the spread of the Renaissance style throughout Poland, a current that was especially manifested in the architectural structure and the sculpture of tombs.

In 1532, Giovanni Maria Mosca, called Padovano, arrived in Poland. Padovano began his artistic employment in Poland with a series of medals for the king's family, eventually becoming active as an architect and tomb sculptor. Padovano worked not only for the king in Krakow and Vilna, but also for powerful magnates, patrons like the Tęczyński, Kamieniecki and Tarnowski families, or for high priests, bishops and cardinals, as testified to in the tomb of Archbishop Piotr Gamrat in the Wawel Cathedral.

Yet another Italian artist who found himself under the patronage of the royal court in Krakow was Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio. An engraver, medalist and goldsmith, Caraglio, "Sigismundi Augusti Regis Poloniae gemmarum incisor principalis" was a pupil of Marcantonio Raimondi and quickly gained high esteem for the medal, copperplate and gem portraits of the royal family, especially those of Bona Sforza and her son, Sigismund II August.

It was not, however, only Italian artists who found employment at the royal court. During the first quarter of the sixteenth century the German artists Hans Suess of Kulmbach and Michael Lentz of Kitzingen worked for several years in Krakow. For the decoration of the Wawel Castle, King Sigismund I had appointed as court painter Hans Dürer, older brother of the famous Albrecht. His main works are the wall painting decoration in the Deputies' Room (or Audience Hall) of the Wawel Castle, representing the allegory of human life (1532), as well as a frieze in the Tournaments room, finished after Hans Dürer's death in 1534 by Antoni from Breslau (c. 1535). In the coffers of the ceiling in the Deputies' Room, a Silesian artist Sebastian Tauerbach meticulously sculpted 194 individualized wooden heads, each looking down at the king's visitors.

During the sixteenth century Krakow was a melting-pot of many artists from different countries. As the monarchical nexus, the city offered artists the chance to work, to obtain important commissions and hence to reach a respected position in career and society.

### 3. Polish Vernacular Renaissance Art: Toward Mannerism

Artists invited to Krakow from Italy, Germany or later on from the Netherlands, came to Poland to carry out specific commissions or to discover and present new stylistic possibilities. After having accomplished commissions for the royalty, magnates and high clergy, foreign artists quite often remained in Poland, integrating into the Polish community, even establishing families, funding local workshops and strongly contributing to the creation of a vernacular style in Polish art. Their artistic activity influenced Polish artists, who greatly benefited from apprenticing with highly specialized foreigners and their new artistic concepts. Such was the case with Bartolommeo Berrecci, who had become wealthy by way of royal commissions and even married twice in Krakow. His collaborator, Antonio da Fiesole, along with a slew of other foreign newcomer artists, followed in a similar manner. Having achieved high artistic fame and financial

profit, they preferred to increase their activities and follow their prospects in Poland, instead of returning home to face an uncertain future. The already mentioned Giovanni Cini and Bernardino Zanobi de Gianotis created together a kind of cooperative or company, working actively in different locations in Poland. They built churches (in Płock and Vilna) and executed tombs (Wojciech Gasztold's in Vilna, 1540, Krzysztof Szydłowiecki's in Opatów; 1532–1536).

But strangely enough, the Italian Berrecci collaborators in their tomb formula rarely referred back to the Berrecci Sansovino-like types, which utilized the reclining figure. They adopted rather something that was closer to the tastes of patrons from broader circles who generally accepted and opted for the post-Gothic type tomb slabs, like in the monument for the two brothers, Janusz and Stanisław, Dukes of Mazovia (1526–1528).

Giovanni Maria Padovano also managed to stabilize his presence in Poland by creating extensive workshops in Krakow and Vilna and consisting of both Italian and Polish artists alike; and so did some artist of the next generation, like Hieronim (Geronimo) Canavesi. Canavesi was a collaborator and helper of Padovano, but after a few years of practice in his workshop he became independent of Padovano: *circa* 1560 himself founded a large sculpture atelier with many assistants, among them, Poles. He created a large number of works through Poland. Similar to Padovano, these were mostly tombs of sleeping figures in a reclining Sansovino's position with crossed legs. He signed a tomb in Poznań for the Górka family (1574), created many tombs throughout Poland, in Łowicz for Jan Przerębski (after 1562), in Szamotuły for Jakub Rokossowski (after 1580) and in Czchów for Kasper Wielogłowski (c. 1580), where he created a new form of funerary monument, one that featured the standing figure of a knight placed inside a very simple, noble and classical architectural framework.

Surely, however, the most talented artist, sculptor and architect of the late Renaissance generation was the Polish artist Jan Michałowicz of Urzędów. Michałowicz probably trained with Padovano and Giovanni Cini. However, one can observe in his works a very individual and specific combination of Italian and North European elements in the architectonic structures and in the decorative conception.

He was the author of a signed tomb of Urszula Leżeńska in Brzeziny (c. 1563–1568) and of the tomb of the bishop Benedykt Izdbieński in Poznań (after 1553). However, his two most important works are the tombs of the bishops of Krakow in the Wawel Cathedral: the one for Andrzej Zebrzydowski (c. 1562–1563), and the other for Filip Padniewski (after 1572), in the chapel which Michałowski restructured as architect. In his works, the artist combines Italian architectonic elements, like the semicircular arch supported on columns, and the reclining pose of the figures, as seen in the Sigismund Chapel, with rich Netherlandish ornaments, like the decoration on the columns, and the already Mannerist strap- and fret-work.

The diffusion of Polish late Renaissance art together with the Mannerist vernacular style was strongly indebted to the artistic contributions of Florentine artist of the next generation, Santi Gucci, born c. 1538. Gucci was invited by Anna Jagiellon (*Anna Jagiellonka*), sister of Sigismund II August, to help Giovanni Maria Padovano introduce into the Sigismund Chapel the royal tomb of her deceased brother. Santi Gucci struc-

turned the king's tomb into a two levels funeral monument. The figure of the king's son by Santi Gucci harmonizes with the sleeping figure of the father, the work of Berrecci. For King Stefan Batory, husband of Anna Jagellon, Santi Gucci created a more kinetic, less classical, already Mannerist tomb monument in the same cathedral (1594–1595). The dynamic figure of the king refers to the former standards of the reclining figure resting with crossed legs, however the bend in the body and the unnaturally raised shape of the royal mantle already signal a new artistic epoch, the culmination of which can be seen in the Mannerist chapel of the Firlej family in Bejsce (c. 1600, workshop of Pińczów, followers of Santi Gucci) where the exuberant decorative elements, rich colors and forms, following the rule of the “horror vacui,” lead directly from Santi Gucci's influence toward the Baroque.

The second part of the sixteenth century is also a time of intense architectural activities and town planning. An important role in the Polish architecture and sculpture since the third quarter of the sixteenth century was played by artists from the Lakes Region in Northern Italy and South Switzerland. They were perhaps not as precise and skillful as their Roman, Venetians or Florentine compatriots and counterparts, but were nevertheless good and flexible artisans, obedient to their patrons, responding to the whims and recommendations of the clients. Together with local artists they contributed strongly to the creation of a local Polish vernacular art. From Lombardy or Lugano, the “Comaschi” came to Germany, Silesia, Bohemia, and then to central Poland, but also such places as Lwow (Polish: *Lwów*; Ukrainian: *Lviv*) in today Ukraine.

Giovanni Battista Quadro from Lugano transformed the Gothic town hall in Poznań into its present Renaissance form (1550–1560). At the same time (1556–1560) Giovanni Padovano and Santi Gucci partly restructured Krakow's Gothic Cloth Hall, by adding the attic storey, creating what is called the “Polish parapet”. Such kind of parapets, with their blind arcades, and alternating volutes, vases, sometimes pyramids, semicircular forms and vertical elements with spheres, are found in the architecture of city hall buildings, palaces, manors and town houses in various Polish cities. Such characteristics can also be found in other East European countries and territories like Bohemia, Slovakia, Silesia, or today Western Ukraine. This typically Polish vernacular architectonic element appears, among others, in the city hall in Tarnów (third quarter of the sixteenth century), Sandomierz, in the palace in Baranów by Santi Gucci and collaborators (1591–1606), at Krasiczyn (1597–1618), and finally in the vernacular Mannerist houses at Kazimierz Dolny – Przybyła houses (c. 1615), and Celejowski house (c. 1635), where both Italian and Netherlandish decorative elements are present.

The influence of the Northern Renaissance and Mannerist patterns are especially visible in Silesia and Gdańsk, where the Classical Italian elements undergo a “vernacularization:” there is a different sense of harmony and proportions, many decorative elements are living their own life, they are not subjected to the discipline of architectonic division. These decorative elements are added to the columns, friezes and entablature – wherever only there was a free space to fill. Examples illustrating this approach to Classical art can be seen in Silesia in the castle gate in Legnica (1533), the castle gatehouse in Brzeg (1551–1553) and the castle façade in Chojnów (German: *Haynau*;

1546–1557), where even the portraits of the Silesian Piast princes became an important decorative element of the architecture.

The Renaissance came to Gdańsk with the Netherlandish and German impact only in the second half of the sixteenth century in form of Northern Mannerism. The High Gate designed by the German architect Hans Kramer (1586–1588), but decorated by the Dutch sculptor Willem van den Blocke, and the Arsenal (1602–1605) by Anthonis van Opbergen, are among the best examples of the diverse artistic traditions which contributed to the melting pot. The same trends can be observed in the Eastern territories of the United Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, what is today the Ukraine. The best examples of such trends are the Chapel of the Boim family and the Black House in Lwów (Lviv).

Special mention must be made about the foundation of an “Ideal city:” a late Renaissance creation of the city of Zamość by the powerful Polish magnate, Chancellor of State Jan Zamoyski. He invited Venetian architect Bernardo Morando to construct the entire town on a regular, hexagonal plan (1587 and after), based on the ideal town plans of Giorgio Martini and Pietro di Giacomo Cataneo (1554). Bernardo Morando planned the castle, the collegiate church (1587–1600) and the city market place together with the city hall (sixteenth/seventeenth centuries).

At the start, Renaissance art in Poland was created almost exclusively by foreign artists, and was addressed and destined to a restricted group of enlightened and educated patrons around the royal court. Renaissance trends reached a larger public only in the second half of the sixteenth century. Still, the demand for Italianate forms was quite limited to only certain types of works: castles and residences, family chapels imitating the Royal Mausoleum Chapel in Krakow, the Sansovino-like tomb monuments and its derivatives, or set of decorative motifs covering free spaces going back to Roman and Florentine patterns. All of these elements were quite freely adapted into Polish vernacular art of the late Renaissance.

The deeply symbolical humanistic content present in many works – in allegories or mythologies – was not held in great esteem, nor was it well understood by the large public, as was the case in Italy. And this is perhaps the reason why Renaissance painting in Poland never achieved any special importance. Painting was still considered a part of the crafts. Painters did not obtain high social positions. They were considered merely artisans, working mostly in the frame of a guild, following traditional rules, directives and artistic regulations. There were no local, original landscape painters, no painters of mythological, and rarely of historical subjects. Painting, meaning mostly religious painting, followed the former, Gothic patterns, sometimes adapting particular Renaissance elements. Besides foreign imports, there were little Polish paintings referring stylistically to the Classical Renaissance. In most cases a mixture of Gothic and Renaissance forms predominates, like in the miniatures of the *Behem Codex* (1505) and the works by Stanisław Samostrzelnik as, for instance, *Saint Stanislas with the Bishop and King Sigismund* (*Codex The Life of the Bishops of Gniezno*, after 1530). We can observe the same trends in the portraits of the bishops of Krakow, Piotr Tomicki, Jan Latański, Jan Chojeński, Piotr Gamrat and others in the Franciscan Convent in Krakow (second quarter of the sixteenth Century). The painting of the *Christ of Sorrow with the*

*Saints* (c. 1515) from Szczyrzyc near Limanowa is a far, local echo of the Italian theme of the *Sacra Conversazione*, however, not without the addition of traditional hierarchical representations of the patrons. The *Madonna with Child* from the church at Gostyń (c. 1540) is a distant version of an Italian prototype. The humanistic interest in the representation of the human figure – the eternalization of the effigy – flourished in Poland with a series of portraits like that of the prominent scholar *Benedykt of Koźmin*, today in the Jagiellonian University Museum in Krakow (c. 1550–1560), or in the portraits of the Polish Royals, for example, *Portrait of King Sigismund I*, *Portrait of King Stefan Batory* (1583) and *The Queen Anna Jagiellon* (1586–1596) by Martin Kober. The art of the portrait was the only kind of specifically Renaissance painting in Poland, and it was one that later found its continuation in the *Homo Sarmaticus* portrait type of the next historical period.

In conclusion, the Renaissance art as introduced into Poland was disseminated throughout the country not because of its humanistic, symbolic and allegorical values, or its specific artistic valor, but rather thanks to the functional pragmatism of architecture and tomb sculpture in adapting suitable forms of the above mentioned Italianate elements. Moreover, the Renaissance art was introduced quite artificially to Poland by the highly educated elite. It did not, however, answer immediately and completely to the aesthetic and spiritual needs of most Polish art patrons and employers. Coming as it did from Italy, Germany and the Netherlands; the Renaissance in Polish art was a parallel phenomenon to its vernacular counterpart, being a combination of ancient, Gothic, local and the foreign elements.

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## European Context of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting in Gdańsk and Royal Prussia in the Early Modern Period (Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries)

Due to its geographical situation, ethnical composition and special political status, the province of Royal Prussia was probably the richest and economically most developed in the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: it was the northernmost land of the Kingdom of Poland and one which comprised all its coastline and all the wealthy seaports, Gdańsk (German: *Danzig*) being by far the most prominent one. In the late Middle Ages it had formed the core of the Teutonic Order State, founded on the territories of the Dukes of Pomerania and – in the south-eastern part – Dukes of Mazovia, and many of its merchant towns belonged to the Hanseatic League. Ultimately, in 1466 the territory passed to the Crown of Poland following a victorious war with the Teutonic Knights; the name of Royal Prussia has been in use since that time. In the modern times, the land enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy, and the privileges granted to its three greatest towns – already mentioned Gdańsk, but also Elbląg and Toruń (German: *Elbing* and *Thorn*) allowed almost for their self-government. These town republics, only formally subjected to the Polish king, were ruled by German patricians, and the province included a fairly high percentage of German population in general. After mid-sixteenth century, an influx of Netherlanders driven out from their homeland by economic conditions and religious wars begun; among them there were many skilled artists. This factor, combined with rapid amassment of wealth fuelled by blossoming grain trade, provided for what is generally called “the Golden Age” of Prussian art, beginning in the last quarter of the sixteenth century and continuing until mid-seventeenth century, i.e. until the disastrous Polish-Swedish war that started in 1655; this flourishing of the arts in the period is especially well visible in Gdańsk. Prevalent burgher and Protestant culture of the land with its friendly attitude towards the Low Countries was responsible for impregnating it in time with a distinctively Netherlandish character. This process, which can be best observed in building activity, reached its peak around 1600 and is parallel to the development observed in the whole Baltic region: for instance in Copenhagen, but also in Riga.

In accordance with these developments, the modern age architecture in the region, which began to show up around 1550, was mainly conceived by Netherlandish architects and executed by builders of the same nationality. It must be underlined, however, that already in the late Middle Ages the import of architectural ideas from that direction had begun. There was a duality in the land’s building activity: the overlords of

that time, the Teutonic Knights, relied more on diverse German patterns in castle and church buildings, but – in contrast – the increasingly wealthy burghers in the Prussian towns, in their patronage of civic and sacral architecture, looked more to their exemplary Flemish counterparts for standards. The flowering of architecture in the land that lasted until mid-fifteenth century provided for the fact that for many subsequent decades no new structures, be it ecclesiastical or secular, were needed. A pause in erecting new constructions occurred in the following period of wars and Reformation, but some need for modernization appeared in the mid-1500s.<sup>1</sup> The architects called in at first were, however, second-hand Netherlanders at best, like Hans Kramer from Dresden, who after 1560 constructed the Green Gate (German: *Grüner Tor*, Polish: *Zielona Brama*) palatium adjoining the Motława River in Gdańsk (Fig. 1) in what may be called the *brabantse manier* – Brabant style (brick/stone) with some Italianate decoration, according to earlier plans, true, of Regnier van Amsterdam. In his other famous construction, the “Angel House” (*Dom Anielski*) in Gdańsk from c. 1570, Kramer showed the Italianizing aspect of Saxon architecture of the day more distinctly.<sup>2</sup> It must be said that some vogue for Italian patterns in general was visible in those years; little has remained from this current, however. The single best preserved building displaying such forms in their purest shape is probably the town hall at Chełmno (*Culm*) (Fig. 2), its characteristic *attica* in the type seen more frequently in southern Poland bearing testimony to the skills of northern Italian artisans, generally known as *Comaschi*.<sup>3</sup>

The turning point, well documented by the sudden appearance of many Netherlandish-sounding names in local archives, came a little later, around 1575. This process was of course caused by the beginning of the Spanish wars that impoverished the Low Countries, but created economic opportunities for the lands on the southern Baltic, offering simultaneously instant work perspectives for religious émigrés.<sup>4</sup> Most important artistic personalities who have left their imprint on architecture in Royal Prussia at that period were members of the van den Blocke family from Mechlin (Dutch: *Mechelen*, French: *Malines*) in Brabant, and Hans Vredeman de Vries from Leeuwarden in Friesland, all of them associated with a prominent workshop of Cornelis Floris in Antwerp. A pupil of Floris, Willem van den Blocke, sculptor in stone previously working for fourteen years at the ducal court in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad in Russia) arrived in Gdańsk in 1584 and during the next few years decorated the most representational entrance, leading to the city from the west through the newly constructed massive ramparts. The High Gate (Polish: *Brama Wyzynna*, German: *Hohes Tor*) (Fig. 3), erected in cooperation with city architect Hans von Lindau is truly a testimony to artistic taste of the day, being nearly an exact copy of St George’s Gate (*St Jorispoort*) in Antwerp, non-existent today.<sup>5</sup> Towards the end of the sixteenth century, more new public construc-

<sup>1</sup> For these general developments, see Labuda (1969–2003).

<sup>2</sup> Compare Habela (1994: 494–495).

<sup>3</sup> On this edifice, being a reconstruction of a medieval town hall from the end of the thirteenth century, see now Chrzanowski, Kornecki (1991: 55–68).

<sup>4</sup> The manifold contacts between the two regions in that period, are discussed by Thijssen (2003).

<sup>5</sup> A pioneering monograph on this important sculptor is now being prepared in the form of a Ph.D. thesis by Franciszek Skibiński at the Toruń University, but, meanwhile, see Krzyżanowski (1958: 270–298);





1. Hans Kramer, Regnier van Amsterdam, *Green Gate*, 1564–1568, Gdańsk (Danzig). Author's archive



2. Unknown Northern Italian artist(s), *Town hall*, 1567–1572, altered 1584–1596, Culmno (Culm). Author's archive



3. Willem van den Blocke, *High Gate*, 1586–1588, Gdańsk (pre-1945 photograph)

tions appeared in Gdańsk, most of them erected in distinctly mannered Floris style, further distorted by direct modelling on the architectural pattern-books: *Architectura* by already mentioned Hans Vredeman de Vries, and later also *Perspectiva*. An impressive example of such a building is the Great Arsenal (Polish: *Wielki Arsenal*, German: *Großes Zeughaus*) of 1608–1612 (Fig. 4), the façades of which were supposedly decorated by architect and stone sculptor Abraham van den Block, Willem's son, and Willem van der Meer nicknamed Barth, a stonemason from Ghent in Flanders. The bulk of architectural work of those years in Royal Prussia was, however, constituted by remodelling of Gothic burgher house façades in the Vredeman de Vries-inspired fashion; their scrolled and strapwork gables in original form may still be seen in Toruń. Abraham van den Block also designed architecture in more Italianate early Flemish Baroque forms, a point in case being the Golden House (Polish: *Złota Kamienica*, German: *Steffensches Haus*) from circa 1610 on the Długa Street in Gdańsk.<sup>6</sup>

The period of most sumptuous architectural undertakings in Prussia came to an end with the first Swedish-Polish war of 1626–1629, which also undercut the foundations of the economic prosperity. Especially after the catastrophic second Swedish war (1655–1660), the building activity almost came to a standstill. Whatever existed, it is again mainly visible in Gdańsk. The most magnificent building from the second

Tylicki (2009b: 191–200), and Tylicki (2010b). The artistic pattern for the High Gate has been first pointed out by Lindner (1903: 34).

<sup>6</sup> On the Great Arsenal, its construction and decoration see Bartetzky (2000); on van der Meer: Tylicki (1997: 180–185). On Abraham v.d. Blocke, see note 11.



4. Abraham van den Blocke, *The Great Arsenal*, eastern facade, 1602–1608, Gdańsk (pre-1945 photograph)

half of the century in Prussia is by far the Royal Chapel in Gdańsk from *circa* 1680 (Fig. 5), commissioned by King John III Sobieski of Poland-Lithuania, believed to be designed by Tilman van Gameren, a Dutch architect living in Poland, and erected on the spot by local constructor Bartel Ranisch. Obviously, its rather simple but elegant forms prove the imitation of the Dutch Classicism in Jacob van Campen's manner. The chapel is also a clear evidence that in the less prosperous second half of the century the Netherlandish inspirations were still in vogue, although there were mainly exhibited in the works of local German artists.<sup>7</sup> Other inspirations started to filter in as well, though, as in that period the confessional strife became less pronounced and art from the Low Countries did not function any more as the only one appropriate for Protestant milieus. An extraordinary example is an endemic decoration of several burgher house façades limited to Toruń, popular for a few years around 1700. First employed in a private Catholic bishop's palace erected in this town (Fig. 6), it then found its way into houses of Lutheran patricians. The densely applied floral garlands apparently de-

<sup>7</sup> The attribution to Tilman and distinction of his design from the construction work by Ranisch has been first forwarded by Kondziela (1957: 304–323). The authorship of the building has been since questioned; nevertheless, it still seems plausible. See also note 15.



5. Tilman van Gameren, Bartel Ranisch (?), *The Royal Chapel*, 1678–1681, Gdańsk. Author's archive

rive from prints after drawings made by Pieter Paul Rubens from ornamentation of city palaces in Genoa, published as *Palazzi di Genova* in 1628 in Antwerp.<sup>8</sup>

The general overview of the architecture in the region, outlined here, does not, of course, include structures of lesser importance, like village churches of the time, both Catholic and Lutheran, which may be called vernacular, as they were erected by local craftsmen in a traditional shape (for instance, half-timber constructions) with no distinct stylistic features.<sup>9</sup> Also, during the seventeenth century, some religious orders, like the Reformed Franciscans, built in Royal Prussia constructions in simplified Italianizing style, adapted to local post-gothic forms, in the shape of those they used to erect throughout the vast Commonwealth.<sup>10</sup>

The development in monumental stone sculpture is approximately the same, such works of any mark being in fact introduced here by assistants of Cornelis Floris, especially abovementioned Willem van den Blokke and his descendants – son Abraham and a pupil of the latter, Wilhelm Richter. The fact that the latter was a German articulates a tendency similar to the one visible in architecture: after introducing of better-quality art by skilled Netherlanders in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, its tradition was

<sup>8</sup> Kluczajd, Tylicki (2009: 262–265). The authors were able to define this influence thanks to suggestions by Konrad A. Ottenheim and Barbara Uppenkamp.

<sup>9</sup> Much information on similar constructions is still provided by Zirkwitz (1940). A well preserved half-timber former Lutheran church, today a rare example of the type, exists in the village of Stegen (Stegen) to the east of Gdańsk; see Wołowicz (2009).

<sup>10</sup> A good example of such shrine is Sts Peter and Paul's Church, built for the Reformed Franciscans before 1659 in the village of Podgórz, then just across the border of Royal Prussia, and now a part of Toruń; see Domasłowski (2007).



6. Anonymous artist(s), *Town palace of Bishop Stanisław Dąbski*, 1693, Toruń (Thorn).  
Phot. Andrzej Skowroński

continued in the later part of next centennial by local masters. Willem van den Blocke was truly an international artist, exporting his high-quality sculptural works as far as Alba Iulia in today's Romania, or Uppsala in Sweden, but he also delivered funeral monuments to spots in Poland itself – for instance, to Barczewo (*Wartenburg*), where around 1608 a cenotaph for late King Stephen's cousins – Cardinal Andrzej Báthory and his brother Baltazar – was erected (Fig. 7). Abraham van den Blocke also indulged in sculpture and his probably most magnificent work is a huge stone main altar of St John's Church in Gdańsk of 1610–1611 (Fig. 9), now severely damaged, on which Willem probably also collaborated.<sup>11</sup> In turn, Wilhelm Richter is in all probability the

<sup>11</sup> On Willem, see note 5. On Abraham: Krzyżanowski (1971: 178–179).



7. Willem van den Blocke, *Tomb of Cardinal Andrzej Bátory and his brother Baltazar*, 1598, Barczewo (Wartenburg), St Andrew's Church. Author's archive

author of Princess Anna of Sweden's tomb in St Mary's Church at Toruń of *circa* 1635, supposedly the best Prussian sculptural work in stone from the second quarter of the century. The portal leading to mausoleum with the tomb is, on the contrary, probably a work by Giovanni Battista Gisleni, a rare example of direct influence of Italian art in early modern Prussia. Gisleni, however, was a court artist in Warsaw and the commission was a result of patronage of King Władysław IV Vasa;<sup>12</sup> all other few imports of Italian sculptures were also caused by the will of noble sponsors mostly, who looked for patterns in Southern Poland, where Italian artistic taste was much more dominant.

Apart from the *oeuvre* of the van den Blocke *atelier* in the broader sense, we know of some other works the execution of which by particular artists is documented, and the names of these artists are again Netherlandish, like the great chimneypiece in the representational Red Chamber of the Main City Town Hall in Gdańsk from 1594–1595, for which Willem van der Meer from Ghent, already mentioned, was paid. Van der Meer was, however, a stonecutter and stonemason, neither a sculptor nor architect, and the design of the grand chimneypiece may well be given to Hans Vredeman de Vries, working in Gdańsk at the time.<sup>13</sup> This authorship problem is similar to the one created by different sculpted works in stone, fairly numerous in the land especially until mid-seventeenth century: it seems that it was the journeymen who made the artistic decoration, but only the masters, who were mainly stonecutters, are mentioned in ex-

<sup>12</sup> Kluczajd, Tylicki (2009: 205–207). On Richter: Pałubicki (1988: 284–285).

<sup>13</sup> This idea, first forwarded by Iwanoyko (1963: 22), was then elaborated on by Pałubicki (2008: 236–237).



8. Matthias Neisser (sculpture), Fabian Neisser (paintings),  
*Neisser family epitaph*, 1594, Toruń, St Mary's Church.  
 Author's archive

pense books; therefore, the exact authorship of many works may never be established.<sup>14</sup> In any case, most of them, notably the predominant burgher house portals, display Netherlandish-style form and decoration again. As in the field of architecture, the stone sculpture in the land is less visible in the second half of the seventeenth century, but there exists at least the already mentioned jewel of the Royal Chapel in Gdańsk, whose ornamental and figural decoration, rather scant and reserved, but high-quality, is believed to have been executed by Andreas Schlüter – a local showpiece before he went on to work at the courts of Warsaw, Berlin and Saint Petersburg, everywhere disseminating his Dutch Classicist style.<sup>15</sup>

The stone sculpture in early modern Prussia has not been researched well enough, in spite of numerous extant works, especially epitaphs, but the gaps in our knowledge apply even more to the activity of woodcarvers, where still few masters' names are known. This does not mean that the local woodcarving is of poor quality; on the contrary, many well done works have survived, the majority of them being altars, so much needed in Catholic churches after the adoption of new rules laid down by the Council of Trent. The ravages of the Reformation began to be repaired by around 1580, and ever since the need for ecclesiastical art has been rising, with some pauses caused by devastations of the Swedish wars. From what we know today about artistic produc-

<sup>14</sup> This problem has been tackled by Franciszek Skibiński (2010); I would like to thank the Author for making his typescript available to me.

<sup>15</sup> The construction's sculptural decoration was first given to Schlüter by Cuny (1910: 113), and remains in fact unchallenged to this day, although more recent author of numerous publication on the sculptor and his artistic education, Kevin E. Kandt, remains reserved about the attribution – see, for instance, Kandt (2008: 117–143).

tion in wood, it seems that masters of the profession, organized in town guilds, did most of the work with their own hands, normally basing their ideas on pattern-books, profusely published in Augsburg and other German centres. This derives from the fact that contrary to architecture and stone sculpture and similarly to artistic handicrafts, these people were mostly Germans themselves. The development of this branch of artistic activity is therefore also less dependent on the rise, and later, decline of the Netherlandish community in the land. In the beginnings, i.e. until approximately first quarter of the seventeenth century, Gdańsk seems to have been the dominating centre, exporting its products throughout Prussia. From this phase an outstanding example of artistic discipline in question is constituted by an epitaph of the Neisser family in St Mary's Church at Toruń, dated 1594 (Fig. 8), made in Gdańsk by Matthias Neisser, probably an apprentice in the van den Blocke's workshop, and – appropriately – exhibiting its clear dependence on Netherlandish patterns, generally strongest in those years.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the later part of the 1600s, the output of woodcarvers was steadily rising in general, while local production centres in such smaller town as Toruń, Elbląg, or even Chełmno became firmly grounded. The quality of their work is often surprisingly high, even though – as said above – they looked for ideas to the German world rather than the Low Countries.<sup>17</sup>

If architecture and stone sculpture are the most visible landmarks of artistic filiations, the same influence can also be seen in paintings and drawings. The first modern paintings, created by local artists known by name, were made for the Arthur's Court (Polish: *Dwór Artusa*, German: *Artushof*) in Gdańsk in the first half of the sixteenth century. Worthy of special attention is the many-faceted art of Lorenz Lauenstein, who executed three pictures for the Arthur's Court in 1534–1535: his now lost composition *Jephthe is Greeted by his Daughter* (Fig. 9) reminds of works by Hans Holbein the Elder from Augsburg, although his courtly and decorative figures go back to paintings of Lucas Cranach the Elder.<sup>18</sup> The rather scanty painterly output of the earlier sixteenth century shows therefore formal dependence on leading German centres, but then again, after 1560 Netherlandish inspirations began to prevail. This development may be well observed in rather numerous anonymous epitaphs in churches of the province, as usual mostly concentrated in Gdańsk. To mention only some, of better quality: surely German in overall impression is the *Crucifixion* in Oehm epitaph from St Mary's Church (1559), but antique-like ruins in its background point to different, new sources: paintings of Marten van Heemskerck from Haarlem, probably disseminated through prints

<sup>16</sup> See Sulewska (2004: 56–61). Contrary to her opinion, Matthias Neisser would have been apprenticed not to the stonemason Willem, mentioned above in the text, but to his elder brother Gillis (Aegidius), who worked in wood. This logical supposition is corroborated by the fact that Matthias' brother, painter Fabian, was married to Susanna, daughter not of Willem, as previously thought, but of Gillis van den Blocke (archival information courtesy of Franciszek Skibiński).

<sup>17</sup> The Prussian woodcarving of the late seventeenth century is not widely discussed in literature, but, for Toruń, see Goławska (1968: 157–224), and Kluczward, Tylicki (2009: 207–214, 269–276, 317–330).

<sup>18</sup> The early paintings from the Arthur's Court in Gdańsk have not been very well researched upon. The most important historical information on them and illustrations of the lost works are still provided by Simson (1900: 167–176), and Drost (1938: 101–107). Some observations on their form are forwarded by Tylicki (2010).





9. Lorenz Lauenstein, Jephthe is greeted by his daughter, 1535, Gdańsk, The Artus Court / Artushof (pre-1945 photograph)



10. Anton Möller the Elder, The Reconstruction of the Temple by King Joas, 1602, Gdańsk, National Museum



11. Anton Möller the Elder, Masuhrsu, mein Landmann, 1599, Bautzen, Stadtmuseum, Sammlungen der Gersdorff-Weichaischen Stiftung



12. Hermann Han, Coronation of Our Lady, 1623–1624, Pelplin Cathedral, main altar retable. Author's archive



13. Vitus Heinrich, Massacre of the Innocents, c. 1640, Warsaw National Museum



14. Bartholomäus Strobel the Younger, Assumption of Virgin Mary with St John the Evangelist and St Bernard of Clairvaux, 1647, Koronowo, former Cistercian church, main altar retable.  
Phot. Andrzej Skowroński



15. Daniel Schultz, Portrait of the Bishop of Krakow, Andrzej Zawisza Trzebicki, 1664, Krakow, monastery of the Franciscans, ambulatory. Author's archive



16. Andreas Stech, St Philip Baptizing the Aethiopian Courtier, 1673, Pelplin Cathedral, altar of Sts Philip and Jacob the Younger, retable. Author's archive

by Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert. The epitaph of Michael Harnisch in Holy Trinity Church (after 1566) displays in its *Crucifixion* big, muscular human figures in the type of Italianizing Antwerp painting by Frans Floris. Portrait of Valentin von Karnitz in his wall tomb in St Mary's shown in a shrine interior in the predella, dated 1594, is in turn an example of considerable influence exerted on painting in Prussia by Hans Vredeman de Vries, who exercised the Appelean discipline in Gdańsk himself.<sup>19</sup>

Turning to painters known by name and the surviving works which began to appear in number around 1580, Gdańsk stands out again very clearly both by quantity and quality of the production. The artist who begins the line of the city's "golden age" masters is Anton Möller the Elder from Königsberg in Ducal Prussia, perhaps the best northern German painter and draughtsman of *circa* 1600, that showed up in Gdańsk around 1587 and died in 1611. The quarter of a century of his activity here, which produced over a hundred surviving drawings and around twenty paintings, demonstrates joining German and Netherlandish elements in an inventive and individual way. Möller looked to Dürer and German masters of the early sixteenth century for artistic ideas; on the other hand, there are very distinct affinities in his *oeuvre* with Netherlandish artists of around 1570–1580. His monumental and well-built figures with clearly defined contour disclose knowledge of works of such painters who absorbed the lesson of Florentine-Roman Renaissance, as Pieter Aertsen, Pieter Pieterszoon, or Anthonie Blocklandt, and lack the Venetian-inspired softness of later Gdańsk artists. This may be well seen, for instance, in *The Reconstruction of the Temple by King Joas* from 1602–1603 (Fig. 10) in the city's National Museum. Same synthesis of older German influences, and newer ones, coming from the Low Countries, is also characteristic of his predominantly pen drawings (Fig. 11): the precision and acute observation of Dürer's circle is linked here to the technique and iconography borrowed from Hendrick Goltzius or Jacques de Gheyn.<sup>20</sup> From among masters Netherlandish by birth, the already mentioned activity of Hans Vredeman de Vries should be recalled. This artist, who was originally called to Gdańsk in the capacity of fortificator, left behind very numerous pictures here, of which the ones still surviving in the Main Town City Hall provide the most extensive ensemble of works by the artist in their original setting, existing today.<sup>21</sup> One more excellent painter may be named in early seventeenth-century Gdańsk, who clearly employed Netherlandish forms in his artistic practice: Hermann Han, son of an immigrant from Holland, working in the city from around 1600 until death in 1627. Han at first painted small, allegorical cabinet pictures of considerably high quality, rich in intellectual and emblematic contents, in which small human figures, set against an extensive land- or cityscape, recall the *oeuvre* of Louis de Caullery, or David Vinckboons. After he converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism around

<sup>19</sup> Probably the best study on Gdańsk epitaphs – though artistic filiations of paintings therein are only discussed very summarily – is provided by Cieślak (1998). For the formal side of these works, see Tylicki (2010). See also note 21.

<sup>20</sup> There exists an old monograph on this artist: Gyssling (1917); for his drawings and some general evaluation of Möller's art, see now, however, Tylicki (2005b: 17–26, 37–56, 86, 177–212).

<sup>21</sup> Out of rather numerous publications on this artist, the most relevant are: Iwanoyko (1963), and Borggreffe (2002).

1615, he began to execute large counter-Reformation altar pictures (e.g. *Coronation of Our Lady*, Pelplin Cathedral, 1623–1624) (Fig. 12), which brought him much fame and strongly influenced painterly production in North-Western Poland at least until the mid-century. In such paintings, Han again looked for inspiration towards Flanders (Otto van Veen), but he also magnified the schemes of small, popular devotional prints produced by Flemish workshops like the ones of Wierix or Collaert families.<sup>22</sup>

The 1620s and 1630s saw the appearance on Prussian scene of several other interesting artists. One of them surfaced in Elbląg, a town heavily destroyed in World War II. Vitus Heinrich, who probably settled here in 1634 and worked on the spot until his death before 1656, described in sources as *celeberrimus pictor*, displayed much admired ability of inserting hundreds of minute figurines in the cabinet-format histories he mostly painted; good probe of his art is given by the *Massacre of the Innocents* (about 1640; the National Museum in Warsaw) (Fig. 13). Although soft in forms, Heinrich's paintings both in composition and in fantastic land- and cityscape settings still go back to the art of late sixteenth century, especially reminding of Flemings who worked in Veneto, or were inspired by Venetian art, like Lodewijk Toepet, Gillis and Frederick van Valckenborch, or Louis de Caullery.<sup>23</sup> For Toruń, where the class of painting was rather average, memorable is the activity of Bartholomäus Strobel the Younger, painter to two Holy Roman Emperors and a Polish king, who moved here from Wrocław (*Breslau*) in Silesia in 1634. Constantly travelling between the court and main Prussian centers, he is nevertheless supposed to have executed a good part of his works in Toruń. Befriended with Martin Opitz, one of the most important German Baroque poets, he allegedly wrote a lost treatise on painting. Strobel executed both intellectually complicated allegories, inspired mainly by the art of RudolFINE Prague, and – appropriately for him, as another Catholic convert after 1643 – rather stiff altar pictures (Fig. 14), partly based on Flemish devotional prints, like earlier in the case of Hermann Han. He also provided for good quality, Dutch-inspired portraits in which he reached towards the recipe of Jan van Ravesteyn and Nicolas Pickenoy.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the economic downfall of Prussia after the second Polish-Swedish war, two next individualities in painting appeared then on the local ground, yet again in Gdańsk, who dominated its scene almost till the end of the seventeenth century: Daniel Schultz and Andreas Stech. Schultz, as Strobel before, cannot be exactly classified as an artist from one centre, for since obtaining a servant's patent from King John II Casimir Vasa in 1650 until the end of his life in 1683, he spent time travelling between the Warsaw court and Gdańsk, where he was born and buried. The quality of his pictures is exceptional; officially a portraitist, he was also an expert in executing other subjects, especially animal depictions and hunting still-lives. All of his *oeuvre* definitively reveals Netherlandish inspirations in the general sense; his animal scenes

<sup>22</sup> Pasierb (1974); Tylicki (2008b: 55–73); Tylicki (2009a: 201–204).

<sup>23</sup> The most up-to-date publication on Heinrich is Tylicki (2005: 708–716). Another painter worth attention in this milieu and period was Adam Wolski (active in the 1620s), an immigrant from Moravia; his only surviving works are numerous drawings, mostly collected in an album kept in Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin; Tylicki (2005a: 698–704).

<sup>24</sup> See the monograph: Tylicki (2000); also Tylicki (2008a: 345–352).

show good knowledge of similar works, both Dutch (Jan Baptist Weenix, Cornelis Le-lienberg) and Flemish (Frans Snyders, Pieter Boel). With regard to portrait painting, of which the likeness to the *Tartar emissary Dedesh Aga with his family* from 1664 in The Hermitage is probably the most magnificent example, it may be said that the dominating orientation is Rembrandtesque, with the names of the artists such as Carel Fabritius, Ferdinand Bol, or Jan Victors most relevant, but Schultz was often more delicate in expression, which brings to mind Flemish artists around van Dyck (Fig. 15).<sup>25</sup> The second important name in Gdańsk and Prussian painting of the second half of seventeenth century is Andreas Stech from Słupsk (*Stolp*) in Pomerania, active between 1662 and 1697 – an artist better than average, and a very versatile one. He must have studied in the United Provinces in the 1650s, as his *oeuvre* is generally rooted in Dutch classicism with its dominance of fairly linear construction over temperate colours, static appearance and limited chiaroscuro. The forms of Stech's *St Philip Baptizing the Ethiopian Courtier* from 1673 (Pelplin Cathedral) (Fig. 16), for example, base on the art of Salomon de Braij from Utrecht, or Thomas de Keyser from Amsterdam. The background in this and many of his other histories show influence of Dutch Italianizing landscapists, like Cornelis van Poelenburgh; further, he made portraits displaying tempered elegance of the Franco-Dutch type, as represented, for instance, by Nicolaes Maes, or later Caspar Netscher, and still lives, inspired perhaps by Jan Davidszoon de Heem from Leiden and Antwerp.<sup>26</sup>

By the late 1600s, the hitherto dominating Netherlandish and German influence in Gdańsk art ultimately waned. This was caused both by generally advancing French cultural impulses and changing of trade routes, sealed by another devastating conflict – the Northern War (1700–1721). In the eighteenth century, Prussian artists looked almost exclusively to patterns and ideas radiating from Paris and Italy, sometimes also from London, and to some recurring Italianate Saxon patterns as well. The increasing French influences, universally accepted in Europe, were in Royal Prussia distributed mainly through Berlin – a telling circumstance, which foreshadowed the political fate of the land by the end of the centennial, when it was taken by the troops of Frederick the Great.

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<sup>25</sup> There exists a recent monograph on this painter: Steinborn (2004).

<sup>26</sup> Somewhat superficial monograph on this artist by Grzybkowska (1979), has not yet been replaced by a newer one, but some remarks on his *oeuvre*, forwarded here, are based on Tylicki (2010a).

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## Forgotten Baroque Borderland

Manuals on European modern art concentrate extensively on Italy, Flanders, Holland and France. Much less attention is paid to Spain, Germany, Austria, England and Russia. Poland receives at best one or two pages with a short and usually superficial description of arbitrarily chosen works from its largest centers, such as Krakow and Warsaw. The present article does not intend to question such a traditional artistic hierarchy. It is only an attempt to draw the attention of foreign art historians to certain artistic phenomena of high quality, or rather to a large artistic region about which one can find hardly any information in international literature on art.

First of all, I propose a few definitions and explanations. The notion of Poland of the sixteenth to the eighteenth century includes the present territories of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. Analogically, Lithuania embraced present tiny Lithuania, much greater Belarus and even some parts of Greater Russia. The Polish-Lithuanian union was dominated by a Polish-speaking and Roman Catholic population, while a large Eastern portion of the country preserved up to the end a majority which spoke Ruthenian (not Russian!) and belonged to the Eastern Church (not necessarily Orthodox). In a few words, the territory situated roughly between the present Eastern border of Poland and the Dneper–Dvina line presented in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries (and even later) an extremely complicated ethnic, religious and cultural picture. It was inhabited by Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Poles, whose number systematically grew, but also by Jews, Armenians and Tartars. Poles and Lithuanians were mostly Catholics and the minorities usually formed separate religious groups.

One more introductory remark. The art discussed in the present article is not only little known. Many of its important aspects simply do not exist any more. The process of the destruction began at the end of the eighteenth century, when most of the Eastern Polish territories fell under Russian rule. The Russian government was systematically closing Roman Catholic churches and monasteries. Later, the Soviet government acted in a way similar to the tsarist one, but did not differentiate between Catholics, Uniates and Orthodox. All churches (and of course, castles, palaces etc.), considered relics of non-proletarian culture, were literally decimated during the 1920s and 1930s.

The presented material is little known, even in Poland. Late Baroque came to the notice of art historians as late as in the 1930s. Polish scholars had only a few years to investigate the material of the territories which in 1939 were occupied by the Soviet Union. During the next fifty years Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine were in fact inaccessible to them, and local scholars have only recently begun to pay attention to phenomena long considered (except for Lithuania) foreign to their national culture.

In the last twenty years Polish art historians have undertaken an extensive effort aiming to fill the gap. The most important initiative has been a program of inventorying monuments of religious art in the territory of the former province of Lwow (17 volumes, 1993–2009). A similar program is being run in Warsaw (4 volumes concerning the present Belarus).

The main topics of the present article are two artistic phenomena: the so called Wilno school of late Baroque architecture and late Baroque and Rococo sculpture of the Lwow region.

Wilno (today Vilnius), the capital of Lithuania, is a relatively young city. Its history began in the fourteenth century. It has some amazing Late Gothic monuments and high quality seventeenth-century architecture. But the originality of its architectural physiognomy the city owes to its late Baroque churches. The quality and homogeneity of Wilno late Baroque architecture gave rise to the notion of a school which includes numerous edifices spread in a large territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which today paradoxically belongs to Belarus and even to Latvia rather than to Lithuania. Beside the relatively well known cities of Minsk, Polotsk, Vitebsk and Dynaburg (Daugavpils), we have to mention names that sound exotic even to the Polish ear: Berezwecz, Boruny, Dagda, Druja, Głębokie, Iłkuksza, Krasław, Miadzioł, Posiń, Rossienie, Słonim, Worniany, Zabiałły-Wołyńce, Zdzięcioł. All these places, some of them small villages, have or had late Baroque Roman Catholic and Uniate churches of a uniform style and in most cases of an amazingly high artistic quality. We are very far from knowing exactly the history of the construction of all of these edifices, but it is certain that the bulk of them date from three decades between 1735 and 1765.

We know several names of architects active in Wilno and in the region. Some of them were Poles, such as Antoni Osikiewicz, Ludwik Hryniewicz, Błażej Kosiński and Tomasz Żebrowski, other were Italians: Antonio Paracca and Abramo Antonio Genu, or Germans: Johann Christoph Glaubitz and Franz Hoffer. Only a few attributions are precisely documented by sources, partly due to the disastrous gaps in the archives, but partly also because of the Baroque practice of collective work. Many important works remain anonymous.

Antoni Osikiewicz was responsible for the Uniate church in Boruny (1747–1757). He is also said to have reconstructed the church at Zdzięcioł (1751) and the slim towers of the Uniate Holy Trinity Church in Wilno (about 1750).

The Dominican monk, Father Ludwik Hryniewicz (1717–1783) worked mostly for his own order. He constructed several churches and monasteries and is also considered one of the creators of the Missionaries' Church (1750–1753) and of the splendid interior decoration of the Dominican Holy Ghost Church, both in Wilno (about 1749–1760).

Antonio Paracca or Paracco, a Genoese (noted in sources from 1762 to 1777), was Hryniewicz's collaborator at Druja, Zabiałły-Wołyńce and probably at the Missionary Church in Wilno. He also erected the town hall and church at Krasław (1755–1767).

The leading personality among the architects of the Wilno school was without any doubt Johann Christoph Glaubitz. We know nothing about his origins or early career, except for a notice about his apprenticeship in Gdańsk (Danzig). He was probably



1. Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries



2. Wilno (now Vilnius), Lithuania. Missionaries church. Photo K. Czyżewski



3. Wilno (now Vilnius), Lithuania. St John church. Photo K. Czyżewski



4. Wilno (now Vilnius), Lithuania. Dominican church, interior. Photo K. Czyżewski





5. Cytowiany (Tituvenai), Lithuania. Parish church, interior. Photo K. Czyżewski



6. Hodowica, Ukraine. Parish church, high altar. Photo c. 1930



7. J.J. Pinsel, Samson with the Lion from the church in Hodowica. Lwow, Art Gallery. Photo J.K. Ostrowski



8. J.J. Pinsel, Mother of Sorrow from the church in Hodowica. Lwow, Art Gallery.  
Photo J.K. Ostrowski

invited to Wilno about 1738 to reconstruct the Protestant Church, destroyed in a fire of 1737, disastrous for the whole city. He settled in Wilno for good and died there in 1767. He was a Protestant, but he often worked for Roman Catholic, Uniate and Orthodox patrons. Among his most important works are the reconstruction of St John's Church (1738/1739–1748) and St Catherine's Church (1741–1746), the iconostasis of the Orthodox Church (1753) and the reconstruction of the Uniate Basilian Monastery (1761), all in Wilno. He is also considered the author of the jewel of the Wilno school – the Basilian Church at Berezwezc (1753–1756).

The architecture of the Wilno circle has some technical and stylistic features which contribute to its quality, but also to certain gaps in the integrity of its artistic expression. All Lithuanian churches were built of brick covered with plaster, with stucco decoration of the interiors. Stone, rare in the area, was hardly used. The frequent fires that damaged Wilno in 1737 and 1748 resulted in a tendency to do without wood in either construction or decoration. The decorative crowns to the towers, in most of the country constructed of wood covered with copper, here were built of bricks. Similarly, certain churches even have their roof construction of brickwork. Altar structures and sculptures were exclusively in stucco, once again in contrast to the practice prevailing in other regions.

Ground plans of most of the churches are simple – single naves or three-aisled basilicas predominate. Spatial experiments were rare; there are only a few churches with centralized ground plans and with dome vaulting. Many of the important examples of late Baroque Wilno architecture were in fact reconstructions of older, seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century edifices.

The weakness of spatial concept is compensated for by an extremely picturesque use of volume. A typical Wilno church has a façade with two high towers. Their upper parts are perforated with decoratively cut windows and topped with equally decorative crownings and high iron crosses. The whole has slender, almost Gothic proportions. Certain façades are undulated or, at least, their course of cornices suggests the undulation. Copulas have decorative, complicated forms, deriving from the ideas of Francesco Borromini and Guarino Guarini. Between the towers and over the walls closing the choirs are elaborate gables. Some of them follow the semicircular or polygonal line of the apses and assume three-dimensional form. White, high and tattered outlines of the churches are important accents in the rather flat Lithuanian and Belarussian landscape, often visible from a distance of several kilometers.

The interiors only exceptionally have more elaborate spatial effects. Rare also are fresco decorations. The strength of Wilno interiors lies in their stucco altars which in some cases create extremely dynamic, typically late Baroque effects out of a much older or uninteresting architecture. Thus, the late Gothic presbytery of St John's Church in Wilno, redecorated by Glaubitz, received a set of ten altars that allow an infinity of extremely picturesque views. The inner architecture of the seventeenth-century Dominican Church in Wilno was almost entirely covered with altars which fully masked its original simplicity.

The cultural background, history and style of Wilno architecture are epitomized by the church at Berezwezc. As it has been already mentioned, it was erected, probably by

Glaubitz, in the years 1753–1756, for the Uniate Order of Basilians. The church of Berezwezc had a centralized ground plan which reflected to a certain extent the Eastern Church tradition. The presbytery and transept were closed with semicircular apses. Its iconostasis was a compromise with the scheme of a Roman Catholic high altar. The façade and the whole volume of the church were probably the highest achievements of the Wilno school. Slender proportions, elegantly undulated lines and delicate detailing gave to the church an almost insubstantial character, so typical of the Rococo phase of late Baroque art. Nowadays, we can enjoy the beauty of Berezwezc architecture only thanks to prewar photographs. The fate of the monument in recent times was tragic. After 1939 it was used as a Soviet prison and in the early 1950s was blown up.

Wilno school of architecture belongs to the most interesting aspects of the Baroque art of Eastern Europe, but it also has clear limitations. Its most original features were picturesque façades and scenographic altar structures, but it brought no original solutions to the main architectural problem – the composition of space. Wilno late Baroque obviously belonged to the current of European architecture established by Francesco Borromini and later developed in Piedmont, South Germany, Austria and Bohemia. The church of Berezwezc could perfectly well have been built in Bavaria or Franconia. The origin of most of the architectural forms used in Wilno region is clear, but the details of the historical process of their adaptation are much less known. We do not know where Glaubitz studied before he appeared in Gdańsk, where he certainly could not have learned his ultra-Baroque style. We have no details concerning Paracca and Genu. We know very little about the studies and travels of the architects of Polish origin. There is little hope of filling these gaps in the future. The architecture of the Wilno circle deserves to be known more widely, but many of its aspects will probably remain enveloped in mystery for ever.

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The second part of the article moves us some five hundred kilometers to the south, to the present territory of Ukraine. This part of former Poland produced many fine late Baroque edifices, but the main object of our interest will now be the late Baroque sculpture of Lwow and the surrounding region.

The city of Lwow (Polish proper spelling: *Lwów*, Russian: *Lvov*, Ukrainian: *L'viv*, Latin: *Leopolis*, German: *Lemberg*) was founded about the mid-thirteenth century by the Ruthenian dukes of Halicz (Halych). A hundred years later, after the extinction of the local dynasty, the duchy of Halicz was incorporated into the kingdom of Poland and remained its part until 1772. The earlier part of the period (to c. 1650) was extremely prosperous for the city as a result of highly profitable trade with the East. These circumstances made Lwow a truly international metropolis, with its population composed of Poles, Germans, Ruthenians, Armenians, Jews, Italians, Greeks, as well as French, English and Scots.

The second half of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth century brought wars and an economic crisis, but also important cultural developments and artistic achieve-

ments of surprisingly high quality. Most of its Baroque monuments are stylistically related to Austrian and Bohemian architecture. High artistic merit places some of them among the most outstanding examples of the Central and East European late Baroque and Rococo. These numerous new churches became the main framework of a splendid development of sculpture.

The Lwow late Baroque and Rococo achieved their climax roughly between 1750 and 1775, and almost immediately afterwards a process of gradual destruction and oblivion began, as the new, neoclassical taste did not appreciate the monuments of the former epoch. The first notes on the eighteenth-century Lwow sculpture appeared in art history at the beginning of the twentieth century, and its full rediscovery took place in the 1930s. As mentioned above, Polish art historians had only few years to pursue their studies, before the whole region fell under Soviet rule. As a result, nearly seventy percent of the monuments were destroyed and their original context was almost totally dispersed. The remaining thirty percent of sculptures have survived almost exclusively thanks to the rescue action of museums, above all the Art Gallery of Lwow.

The distinctive Lwow school of sculpture did not appear until about 1750. In the second half of the 1730s Bernardine monks still had to employ Thomas Hutter from Jarosław, about hundred kilometers to the west, for the decoration of their church in Lwow. About ten or fifteen years later, however, Lwow appeared to be the main center of sculpture in the whole country and the only one to create a homogeneous stylistic idiom, while also producing a series of outstanding artists. At the same time we have to admit that we are unable to explain all the premises for this rapid and brilliant process. As it has already been mentioned, Lwow sculpture created its highest achievements in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, in the works of Sebastian Fesinger, Antoni Osiński, and, above all, of Johann Georg Pinsel. By the end of that period the independent activity of the second generation of artists began, represented at its best by Maciej Polejowski, Jan Obrocki and Franciszek Olędzki. They continued and developed the style of the Lwow school in the late 1770s, 1780s, and even in the 1790s. The geography of Lwow sculpture has been defined only in part. Its products were executed for churches scattered within a radius of about 200–300 kilometers around the city. To the east the Lwow masters have left their most important works at Beresteczko, Poczajów, Zbaraż, Buczacz, Horodenka and Monasterzyska. To the west, the Lwow sculptors explored a part of the present Polish territory and we may find their works, among other places, in Sandomierz, Opatów, Włodawa, Chełm, Leżajsk, Przemyśl and Dukla.

The social background of Lwow art in the eighteenth century is relatively well known. Sculptors, as well as master masons and painters, formed a populous and comparatively wealthy colony. They were interconnected through a dense network of professional, economic and family relations. They acquired their artistic skills through the traditional system of workshop and guild education, even if they often rebelled against the limitations imposed by the guild. They mastered perfectly the technical aspects of their art but obviously lacked the elements of academic education, such as a deep knowledge of arithmetical perspective, anatomy, the psychological science of the *affetti*, or of iconography. Etchings (mostly German) were an important source of inspiration for most of them.

Lwow sculpture of the eighteenth century belonged almost exclusively to the sphere of sacred art and concentrates particularly on decorating the façades and altars of churches with the figures of saints and angels. Wood was by far the most popular material, but we do find numerous works in sandstone and sometimes in stucco, too. In the main phase wooden figures were mostly painted and gilded; later they were covered with uniform white paint.

Thomas Hutter (1696–after 1743), a Bavarian, who spent several years in the Jesuit Order as a lay friar from 1718, and in the 1730s ran a workshop at Jarosław, is considered a forerunner of the Lwow school of sculpture. His main work is the decoration of the Bernardine Church in Lwow.

Sebastian Fesinger, a member of a local dynasty of sculptors and architects, was probably the oldest among the artists of the main phase of Lwow sculpture. His name was discovered relatively early and in the 1920s he was considered the leading master of the school. In fact, his personality is difficult to recognize, particularly because another sculptor bearing the same family name, Fabian Fesinger, was active at the same time. His surviving documented sculptures are exclusively in stone: two reliefs with St Andrew and St Ignatius Loyola, signed and dated 1747 (parish church at Boćki), three figures of saints in front of the façade of the Franciscan Church at Przemyśl (1758–1760), and another six figures (from 1762), on the top of the façade of the church at Podhorce. The only attempt to trace the origin of Fesinger (who wrote in German and was a member of a German religious confraternity) relates him to Moravia and particularly to Brno (Brünn).

Johann Georg Pinsel (died in 1761 or 1762), who was by far the most outstanding figure among the Lwow sculptors, is known only from rare documentary references. Pinsel was a regular collaborator of the architect Bernard Meretyn (Merettini, Merdner) in the service of Mikołaj Potocki, an extremely rich and capricious art patron. The artist ran a large workshop based at Buczacz, and never settled in Lwow for a long time. Whole sets of his sculptures decorate or decorated Meretyn's constructions: the city hall at Buczacz (1750–1751), the Uniate Cathedral in Lwow (about 1759–1761), churches at Horodenka (1752–1755?), Hodowica (about 1758) and Monasterzyska (1761). Pinsel worked wood and stone with the same extraordinary deftness. His figures are permeated with movement and spiritual power. He was almost certainly the teacher of Maciej Polejowski and maybe also of Obrocki, whose art reveals his strong influence. The discovery of Pinsel's place of origin would be of crucial importance for the definition of the stylistic provenance of Lwow sculpture.

Antoni Osiński (recorded 1754–1764) was considered by Hornung, the author of a monograph on him, as the leading Lwow master. His documented works are indeed limited to sculptures in the Bernardine churches at Leszniów (1754; destroyed), Leżajsk (1755–1758) and Zbaraż (1756–1759). Overestimation of Osiński's artistic value resulted from an illegitimate attribution to him of a series of Pinsel's masterpieces. He seems to have been the master of an extremely dynamic but sometimes mannered and almost abstract composition of volumes and draperies, with characteristic, sharply-cut folds. His ability to render the psychology of his heroes and to create the religious drama in which they take part lies, however, far behind Pinsel's expressive power.



Maciej Polejowski (recorded 1762–1794) belonged to a well known family of Lwow sculptors and master masons. He was a very mobile and prolific artist. In his letter of 1786, he names no less than thirteen localities in which he had worked. He certainly started under Pinsel. His extremely slender white painted figures, shown in sophisticated, dancing attitudes, are to be seen in the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Lwow (1766–1773) and in the churches in Nawaria, Sandomierz (1770–1773), Włodawa (1781–1783) and Opatów. His activity in the region of Sandomierz marked the western limit of the range of Lwow sculpture and gave birth to a local, rather provincial development that continued the Rococo tradition even after 1800.

The few documented works of Jan Obrocki (recorded 1764–1794), the only Lwow sculptor noticed by nineteenth-century lexicons, were executed for the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Lwow (1772–1775) and for the church at Busk (1779). Obrocki seems to have learned a lot from Pinsel. His works show a Rococo tendency to split volumes and draperies into tiny geometrical forms, and some of them contain elements of Neoclassicism.

Franciszek Olędzki (recorded from 1773, died 1792) filled the Trinitarian Church at Beresteczko with a crowd of wooden figures (after 1780), executed the splendid “dancing” Madonna from the Dominican Church at Tarnopol (now in Warsaw) and decorated the façades of at least two houses in the Lwow Market Square (1772, 1786). A lot of further attributions have been proposed, for example, for the sculptures in the parish churches at Dukla and Łopatyn. Olędzki, together with Polejowski, were the most prolific sculptors of the younger generation of the Lwow school, but his heritage is still far from being authoritatively defined.

The six artists presented here form the core of the Lwow school of sculpture, but the authorship and chronology of many outstanding monuments remain uncertain (for example, the splendid decoration of the Dominican Church in Lwow). In spite of a variety of individual traits, it is possible to recognize certain characteristic features common to the whole group. All Lwow sculptors of the eighteenth century conceive a statue as a strongly expressive, sometimes almost abstract, composition, realized mostly by means of an autonomous drapery. The drapery defines the volume of the sculpture and its expression. It seems to be stirred by an invisible wind, and often splits into geometric forms with sharply cut edges. The anatomy of the figure, reduced to a kind of internal framework, is sometimes hard to discern. The proportions are extremely elongated. The exposed parts of the body reveal the predominance of technical ability and of an expressive tendency over knowledge of anatomy. The heads (except for the dramatic physiognomies of Pinsel’s sculptures) are uniform and deprived of deeper expression. The exaggerated movement of figures, their dramatic gestures, and particularly their dancing attitudes, are only rarely justified by the iconographic context. Nevertheless, the expressive values of Lwow sculptures are highly diversified: from the mystical ardor of Pinsel, through the extremely mobile but to some extent superficial theater of Osiński, to the cool, secular elegance of Polejowski.

The Lwow school of sculpture has nothing to do with any kind of academism; the first and faint traits of Neoclassicism appear only in its later examples. It belongs to the great formation of the late Baroque and is usually referred to as Rococo. If we wanted

to use these stylistic terms more precisely, we should trace a line between the late Baroque of Pinsel and Osiński, full of irrepressible movement and religious zeal, and the Rococo of Fesinger, more reserved and delicate in the decorative concept of his figures and in their expression. The term Rococo also matches very well the generation of Polejowski, whose sophisticated art perfectly renders the decadent atmosphere of the ancient regime.

Many technical and formal features of Lwow sculpture find their close analogies in northern late Gothic and Mannerist art. It shares this tendency with a large portion of the eighteenth-century art of a considerable Central European region, whose central area coincides with the triangle: Vienna–Munich–Prague. The works by Fesinger, Pinsel, Osiński and other Lwow sculptors can at first glance be associated with those by the Prague masters, such as Ferdinand Maximilian Brokoff and Matthias Bernhard Braun, and even more with those by the Bavarians, above all of Ignaz Günther and Johann Baptist Straub. In Prague, Munich and Lwow we find a very similar approach to a majority of technical and stylistic problems, based on a common tradition, educational system and examples, reinforced by a universal use of graphic models.

All these similarities are partially due to direct contacts between Poland and other Central European countries. We have to remember the documented Bavarian origin of Hutter and the hypotheses concerning Fesinger and Pinsel as immigrants from the present territory of the Czech Republic. On the other hand, we must point out the limits of such affinities and emphasize the original achievements of Lwow sculptors. No direct imitations of any Bohemian, Austrian or Bavarian sculptures have hitherto been discovered among the works of the Lwow masters. The characteristic manner of the sharply-cut edges of metal-like draperies, common to the works of Fesinger, Osiński, Polejowski, Obrocki and Olędzki, seems to be a genuine local invention. South German Rococo, full of lightness and of a specific cheerful optimism, has never reached comparably acute degree of expression as the art of Pinsel. Similarly, superficiality in the treatment of sacral themes contrasts with religious zeal. Therefore it would be a mistake to see in Lwow sculpture only a peripheral reflection of South German and Bohemian art. The impulses brought by German immigrants gave birth to a local, original development of high quality. We have to remember that while Brokoff and Matthias Braun, the greatest Prague masters, were one generation older than Pinsel and Osiński, the highest period of Bavarian Rococo sculpture is exactly contemporary with the main phase of Lwow sculpture. The sculpture of the Polish borderland is not only a phenomenon chronologically parallel to the art of Günther, Straub and other Bavarian masters, but in many cases it matches the latter in quality. Had Pinsel not settled down in provincial Buczacz but worked in one of the Central European capitals instead, he would certainly have played a significant role there. It is probably not a great risk to assume that only lack of mechanisms for transmitting models and inspirations from the periphery towards the artistic centre deprived him of the glory of a great master of the European late Baroque.

Historical vicissitudes cruelly decimated the artistic heritage of the Polish Eastern territories, but even the existing remnants are important evidence that Western Eu-

ropean art and in consequence Europe itself reaches much farther to the east than is usually considered to be the case.

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## Polish Painting between Historicism and Modernism

In order to understand the specificity of the Polish art of the nineteenth century, it is worth recalling a few historical facts. Key among these is that throughout the nineteenth century Poland did not exist as an independent state. In the course of successive partitions in the late eighteenth century, the Polish lands had been divided among Russia, Prussia and Austria. The three partitioning powers then proceeded, with varying degrees of severity, to denationalize their newly-gained territories. It was this lack of statehood in the nineteenth century that gave Polish art the exalted status of an upholder of national consciousness with the mission to consolidate the nation divided between three hostile states. In the words of a poet, artists were to exercise a “reign of souls” over the enslaved nation. The great prestige enjoyed by the towering Romantic poets of the first half of the nineteenth century led to art being treated as a national religion and a path toward moral and national revival.

The great hopes that accompanied the emergence of national painting stemmed from the belief that the medium was uniquely qualified to rouse and promote patriotic sentiment. National art obviously needed to be based on subjects taken from history. Historical painting was conceived as a sort of visual Bible of national consciousness. The growing hopes for a “Polish epic” in painting were the most serious challenge with which the generation of artists coming of age around the mid-1800s had to contend. Sensational historical romances devoid of any moral dimension popular in Western European painting of the time were inappropriate for such a purpose.

The expectations for a national art were fulfilled only with the appearance of what would be the most remarkable chapter in the Polish painting of the nineteenth century: the works of Jan Matejko (1838–1893). Matejko gave an entirely new meaning to history painting: transforming it from an edifying reconstruction or a moving illustration of past events into a philosophical vision of Polish history in a suggestive, expressive and spectacular form. The phenomenon of Matejko can be understood only if one recognizes how much history mattered to Poles in the nineteenth century. Deprived of its independence, the nation turned its back on the present with all its failures, humiliation and perils. The romantic preoccupation with the past, and the sense of helplessness in the face of reality caused topical issues to be played out vicariously, in the costume of earlier periods. Before Matejko, history had been the domain of philosophers, poets and essayists. His paintings made history a constituent of a popular consciousness.

Matejko wanted not only to “tell stories” or illustrate events by following the facts, but to reveal higher truths. A painting was to be a lecture on the philosophical dimension of history, to bring out the moral and political lessons it contained. Wanting to

reveal the causes and effects of the fact he was depicting, the artist stretched historical truth to include all relevant people and events within one image, even at the expense of historical truth. Such a vision of history painting led to confusion among Matejko's contemporaries as well as later students of his works.

In keeping with the Polish historical thinking of the time, Matejko saw the past as a sweeping drama of antagonistic desires, judged by God whose verdicts shed light on the designs of Providence. Such a blend of the prophesy and settling scores with the past is found in Matejko's *Rejtan – The Fall of Poland* from 1866. The canvas apparently shows a particular historical fact: the protest of Deputy Tadeusz Rejtan at the parliamentary session of 1773 against the first partition of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria. Wanting to prevent the deputies from signing the document confirming the partition, Rejtan, rending his clothes, threw himself to the ground, and blocked the door to the *Sejm* chamber with his body. Matejko was invoking a fact deeply ingrained in national history and patriotic mythology (under Soviet domination the painting became a symbol of anti-Russian and anti-Communist resistance). In fact, however, the painting melds together various historical events. The painting does not show the “downfall of Poland” as such but the entire decade-long process leading up to the loss of statehood. To this end, the artist brought together persons who could not have witnessed Rejtan's protest, although their doings had served to erase Poland from the map of Europe.

Such a pessimistic, accusatory accounting with the past provoked outrage and heated criticism. No canvas in Polish history had ever met with such a violent response. The artist was accused of defaming the past. Let us remember that *Rejtan* had been painted at a particularly painful juncture in Polish history: during the harsh repressions following the fall of the anti-Russian uprising of 1863. Meanwhile, instead of an uplifting apology of the past, which the oppressed and defeated nation needed so badly, Matejko provided bitter truth about the root causes of enslavement – the corruption of political elites. One can say that there are clear parallels here with current attempts to reappraise Polish history, and the trouble Poles in 2009 have with accepting facts that call into question their heroic and apologetic vision of history.

In the wake of the scandal that *Rejtan* caused, Matejko, always sensitive to the social mood and his own position, modified the nature of his painting. In his later monumental canvases he sought to glorify great events from the nation's history. No longer controversial, the paintings met with increasing approval, earning their maker the status of a national prophet. Yet his basic creative tenets remained unchanged, as did his faith in Poland's historic mission. This can be seen in his most famous monumental work, *The Battle of Grunwald*, completed in 1878. Its subject is the victorious battle waged in July 1410 at Grunwald (Tannenberg) by the combined forces of Poland and Ruthenia-Lithuania under the command of Polish King Władysław II Jagiełło against the Order of Teutonic Knights. Following the description of the battle given by mediaeval chronicler Jan Długosz, the painter chose to concentrate on the decisive closing moments of the battle and highlight the mortally wounded Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, Ulrich von Jungingen, and the frenzied figure of Grand Duke of Lithuania Vytautas The Great (in Polish: *Witold*). The urge to pack the painting full

of historical-philosophic, political, and religious content prevailed over faithfulness to the historical account: above the battlefield, the patron of Poland, Saint Stanislaw, blesses the combatants, showing that it was the Poles who had Providence on their side. Even the “wind of history” ruffling the great white cloak of the Grand Master and blowing into enemy eyes seem to be favoring Poland.

Faith in Providence and the recognition of the sacred dimension of history went hand in hand with political topicality. *Grunwald* was painted during the intensification of the *Kulturkampf* – an anti-Polish and anti-Catholic campaign of Germanization on native Polish lands that were made part of Prussia. Its anti-German propaganda proved so enduring that, during the Nazi occupation of Poland, a ten million mark reward was offered for information on whereabouts of the painting which was hidden with other works by Matejko by the Polish museum staff at the risk of their lives. Even today, despite competition from the new, more attractive media, *The Battle of Grunwald* has lost none of its appeal and political significance. When the painting was put on display in Vilna in 1999, the exhibition became a national event and the work was seen by over 300,000 people (that is, half the city’s population).

The phenomenon of Matejko’s art is hard to pin down today. Was it a provincial, artistically outdated curiosity? An outcrop of national complexes and trauma fatally entwined with national megalomania? Yet, despite the Matejko’s intentions, his complex historical and philosophical message, and his vision of the nation’s mission and its lost opportunities, was never clearly read. Throughout the twentieth century his paintings were manipulated for current political and propaganda ends. Matejko was made out to be an exponent or precursor of various ideologies. The general reading of his work soon came to be dominated by a single motif – that of a consoling display of erstwhile power and glory. However one judges the impact this mythologized view of the past had on the Polish mind, one has to admit that Matejko created “representative stereotypes of an unparalleled power and endurance.” For the broad public, his paintings defined the canon of national mythology, becoming a component of the national identity.

The significance of Matejko’s art, however, is not only due to his vision which – thanks to its omnipresence in schoolbooks, on paper money and postage stamps – still shapes the way an average Pole sees history. Power over the national imagination was not the only thing that Matejko had taken over from the poets. Regardless of the criticism it had been subjected to in the last century, his work gave painting, formerly seen as a second-rate art, the status of a “national” and “prophetic” medium.

The turn of the nineteenth century – epoch around 1900 – constituted the “happy hour” of Polish painting. Art of the period described itself as “Young Poland”, and opposed the past, in particular historical painting which was nearing his end. On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that it was precisely to the visionary approach of Matejko that Polish painting owed its high rank in the hierarchy of national values and successive generations of artists benefited from the privileged position Matejko won for art. A second premise of this flourishing phase was the conviction about the autonomous existence and destiny of art. The fact, that Polish painting has attained independent existence was predominantly a unique condensation of artistic problems,

which poses difficulties in proposing a stylistic definition of an art oscillating between Symbolism, Expressionism, and Art Nouveau (called in Poland *Secesja*) decorativeness and stylization, and, as a rule, described as Modernism. Many artists saw an opportunity to be relieved of their duty to the nation and finally concentrate on purely artistic matters. Inclusion into current artistic problems and a confrontation with the idea of the unity of arts - painting, poetry, music - so essential for symbolist aesthetics, were possible not only due familiarity with fashionable programs and theories, but to the maturity attained by Polish painting, which for long time remained indifferent to aesthetics discussions conducted "somewhere in Europe."

All this became possible thanks to an unprecedented eruption of artistic talents. Above them towered the versatile individuality of Stanisław Wyspiański, a painter, poet, dramatist, reformer of the theatre, stage designer, typographer, one of the creators of the program and praxis of the applied arts in Poland and, finally co-author of a design for adapting the Wawel Hill into a Polish Acropolis. His greatest achievements in visual arts are stained-glass windows in the Franciscan Church in Krakow (*God the Father*) and designs for stained-glass windows in the Wawel Cathedral - shocking depiction of royal cadavers. Apart from these monumental visionary works, Wyspiański's legacy contains numerous pastel portraits. At the end of his life, immobilized by a grave illness, he executed the series of pastel landscapes *Views of Kościuszko Mound from the Artist's Study Window*, painted at different times of day and year, in an ever-changing weather. Regardless of the supposed symbolist meaning, the series shows the inspiration of Japanese prints, fascinating many Polish artists of the time. The modernism at the turn of the nineteenth century was the first moment in Polish art influenced by the Far Eastern culture.

Another gifted pupil of Matejko was Jacek Malczewski. The painter created his own unique symbolic vocabulary in which corporeal and robust figures of chimeras, fauns, angels and fairy-tale deities appear both in allegorical portraits, landscapes, genre and religious scenes. Strange, extravagant Malczewski's work is the most vivid example of a blend of folk motifs and anti-classical vision of antiquity, typical for Polish Modernism. The artist achieved a peculiar Polonization of ancient Greek mythology, not only by placing chimeras and fauns in Polish landscape but also within a historical and national context. Regardless from dramatically different artistic language, the work by Wyspiański and Malczewski - the most outstanding artists of the time - show how much Polish art remained dominated by the ideas of Polish historical fate, trauma and destiny. These happened because in Polish painting Historicism was not merely a question of subject-matter or costume, or stylistic convention which would have been easy to abandon in favor of "Modernity." It had reached down into the most profound foundations of creativity, defining the place occupied by art in the axiological hierarchy.

Modernism left behind a magnificent gallery of portraits. Never before did Polish painters penetrate the psyche of their models, and reach the inner life hidden behind the mask of the face, as was now accomplished by Olga Boznańska or Konrad Krzyżanowski. It was precisely these portraits - nervous, restless, melancholy - which most markedly disclosed decadent autumnal ambience, the waning of an epoch which



so readily accentuated its youth. An exception in the pessimistic tones was the radiant affirmation of life and its charms evoked by the paintings of Józef Mehoffer.

Wyspiański's *Views of Kościuszko Mound* confirms the importance of landscapes in Polish modernist painting. Just as for the previous generation the great theme was the History, so for the modernist Young Poland artists it was the Nature. Landscapes were executed by almost all painters of the period. Just as Matejko's art shaped the Polish vision of history, so Young Poland exerted an equally strong impact on the perception of nature. It granted permanence to places of collective national memory and nostalgia, the Polish land of reminiscences and feelings, and recalled with tenderness: the countryside old manors and cottages, the vast expanses of the sky, the tumultuous clouds over the horizon, the furrows of freshly plowed soil, the blooming orchards, typical Polish mallows, the sandy roads of Mazovian plains, the snow-white Tatra Mountains. These images still determine our expectations and dreams of nature, and enable us to see it "as it should be." Such a painting manages to come up with a language of social communication as successful as that of nineteenth century historical painting.

Seen in retrospect, Polish Modernist painting appears to be not so much innovative and turning-point, as equilibrant and mature. At the same time we discover a balance between national obligations and "pure art," native tradition and impulses produced by other art centers, between modernity and the possibility of its social acceptance. It was this equilibrium that made Polish painting of that period able to preserve its identity within the process of change – something that is has not always managed to do later.



## Stanisław Witkiewicz and the Zakopane Style

In February 1886 Stanisław Witkiewicz, a painter, draughtsman and art critic from Warsaw, came to Zakopane for the first time, a village in the region called “Podhale” at the foot of the Tatra Mountains, in southern Poland. The immediate pretext for Witkiewicz’s visit was to improve his bad health, as he had been suffering from tuberculosis for several years. The choice of the destination was not accidental. In the 1860s Zakopane became a well known spa and a meeting place of Polish elites from the non-existing country, divided between three partitioning powers: Russia, Prussia and Austria. But above all, his several-week-long stay allowed Witkiewicz to acquaint himself with the architecture and folk art of the Podhale region. This new knowledge was soon to be used in an original theory of a new, Polish national style he developed.

Stanisław Witkiewicz was born in 1851 to a Polish gentry family, who lived in Lithuania, then a part of the Russian Empire.<sup>1</sup> In 1864, as a result of their active support for the January Insurrection (1863), fomented by Poles against Russia, Witkiewicz’s estate was confiscated and the family was forced to leave their homeland and move to Siberia. In 1868, after the declaration of amnesty, Witkiewicz decided to take up studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sankt Petersburg, probably as an unenrolled student, and stayed in the city for a year. He continued his artistic training in Munich (1871–1873), to where many young Polish artists came to study, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1873 Witkiewicz returned to Warsaw and joined a group of artists, such as Józef Chełmoński and Antoni Piotrowski, who supported emerging Naturalism in painting. The artists shared not only their artistic credo but also interest in national and social questions. Apart from his artistic career, Witkiewicz became also an influential art critic, who promoted Naturalism and Impressionism, calling for the closer engagement between art and life. In 1884 the artist married Maria Pietrzkiwicz and their relationship turned out to be the foundation of Witkiewicz’s future activities, also because it was his wife who earned the living for the whole family in Zakopane. The artist used to say: “Prophets aren’t paid, and I am the prophet of the Zakopane Style.” All his efforts aimed at propagating the Zakopane Style were entirely unpaid.

The period of his most intense engagement with the Zakopane Style started in 1890. In that year because of Witkiewicz’s rapidly deteriorating health, a decision was taken that the artist and his family should move to Zakopane. Witkiewicz not only highly valued the importance of the folk art of the Podhale region but also underscored the

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<sup>1</sup> For biographical information on Witkiewicz, see: Olszaniecka (1996: 27–41); see also Moździerz (1997).

possibility of applying the forms of Highlander architecture in the development of national, Polish architecture. He said, among other things, that: “the Highlander hut is a more elevated type of timber architecture; it is independent and original in style, [...] and some of its internal parts represent a highly developed and finished form which may satisfy even the most sophisticated artistic tastes.”<sup>2</sup>

The emphasis on the national character of regional culture was the principal idea underlying the foundation of the Zakopane Style. Witkiewicz’s crucial objective was to create a Polish national style which would be able to resist foreign influences and bring about the renewal of art in Poland. This Polish style was to be based on original models which, according to Witkiewicz, had survived in the art of Highlanders of Podhale. This very region, thanks to the natural boundaries which prevented an easy access to it, was an enclave cut off from the world and hence free from foreign influences. Witkiewicz’s admiration for Highlanders’ culture made him think that over centuries it had preserved the primeval forms of architecture and ornamentation which in the past was widespread in all of Poland. For this reason the types of construction used in Highlander architecture, if appropriately adapted to modern needs, could become a model for architecture around the country. In this way, the distinct character of the Polish nation would be emphasised and the deplorable practice of repeating foreign patterns could be abandoned. Equally important was the social aspect of the theory. Witkiewicz believed that the idea of the rebirth of national Polish art, based on folk art, would eventually lead to national solidarity and remove social inequalities. He wrote that: “Over the heads of wealthy people as well as of poor folk there rises a roof of the same style; a church, a drawing room and the room of a poor Highlander’s hut shine with the brilliance of the same beauty. The ‘lower classes’ have thus provided the civilised elements embracing all social classes.” Thirdly and lastly, Witkiewicz supported the idea of removing the division between “inferior” and “superior” arts, design and fine arts respectively. Indeed, the Zakopane Style manifested itself mostly in architecture, interior design and artistic handicrafts. Additionally, the reference to authentic folk art of Highlanders was of purely artistic importance and was aimed at renewing art dominated then by historicism.

Although Witkiewicz emphasised the originality of his creation, numerous other theories comparable to the Zakopane Style existed at that time both in Poland and elsewhere in Europe. Firstly, the Zakopane Style was a part of a pan-European current of the search for national styles, which culminated around 1900.<sup>3</sup> The idea of national expression was of particular importance for nations deprived of their independent statehood and incorporated into multinational empires, such as Austria-Hungary and Russia. Artistic expression was the means of creating national community and of manifesting its distinct identity. The characteristic feature of the movement, as in the case of the Podhale region, was also the “discovery” of the intact areas where the pristine folk art flourished. The common source of inspiration for the search of the national style based on primitive folk art were the writings of British theorists and artists associated

<sup>2</sup> Quoted after: Witkiewicz (1970: 43).

<sup>3</sup> See: Gryglewicz (1992: *passim*).



1. Stanisław Witkiewicz, House under the Firs, Zakopane, 1897



2. Stanisław Witkiewicz, House under the Firs, Zakopane, 1897, interior of the drawing room



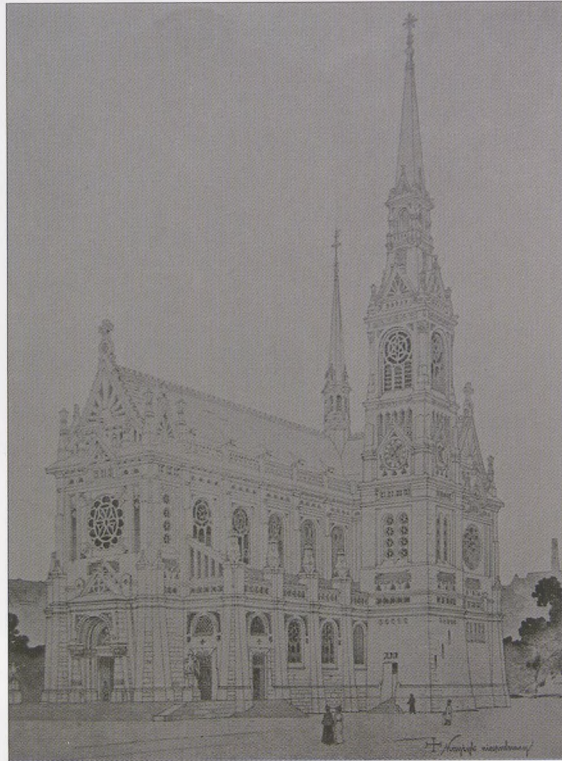
3. Stanisław Witkiewicz, House under the Firs, Zakopane, 1897, interior of the kitchen



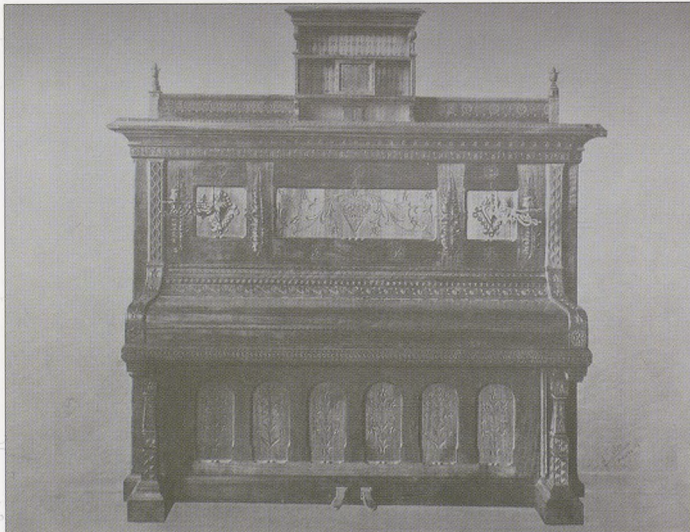
4. Stanisław Witkiewicz, Chapel of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,  
Zakopane-Jaszczurówka 1904–1906



5. Jarosław Wojciechowski, tenement house in Zakopane Style, Warsaw, Chmielna street,  
1905–1906



6. Jarosław Wojciechowski, competition design for St Elisabeth church in Lwów in Zakopane Style, 1903



7. J. Kerntopf and Son, Warsaw, piano in Zakopane Style, 1907

All photos from the author's archive



with The Arts and Crafts Movement. In Poland the ideas of renewal of art through folk artistic crafts were not Witkiewicz's exclusive domain, either. The idea recurred in Warsaw social and literary circles in the 1880s, and still earlier, in 1851, it appeared in *Promethidion*, a verse dialogue on aesthetics by Polish poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid. In his work, very popular at the end of the century, Norwid presented his ideas on developing national art and broadening of the concept of art by including applied arts into it. He also pointed to the folk crafts as a life-giving source of art. Around 1900 the interest in folk art was very common among the exponents of Polish Modernism and in Zakopane, before the arrival of Witkiewicz, the regional Tatra Museum actively researched folk art of Podhale.

Witkiewicz made extensive use of all those experiences and inspirations, yet, his theory of the Zakopane Style was undoubtedly not based on any immediate models; he was the only one who had put forward an idea of a national style that originated in folk art. The idea was exceptional also when compared with other conceptions of a Polish national style, which were usually based on the revival of historic styles.<sup>4</sup> The idea of the Zakopane Style quickly turned to be attractive enough for the Witkiewicz's vision to be put into practice, not only in Zakopane but also in other areas of the partitioned country. Witkiewicz, using private financial means of the Polish elites residing in Zakopane, managed to construct a few buildings which epitomized his dream of Polish national style.

The Koliba Villa, built in 1892–1893 for Zygmunt Gnatowski, a Polish landowner from Ukraine, was the first house built in the Zakopane Style.<sup>5</sup> Gnatowski himself was a great admirer of Podhale folk culture and founding member of the Tatra Museum Association, so not surprisingly he decided to support Witkiewicz endeavours. Koliba was to demonstrate that the adaptation of the forms and construction system of Highlander timber architecture to the function of high-standard residential architecture was possible. It was intended to resolve “any doubts concerning the possibility of reconciling folk architecture with the requirements of more complex and more refined needs for comfort and beauty.”<sup>6</sup> In order to achieve those goals Witkiewicz combined into one whole two distinct parts: a fragment of a Highlander peasant hut with a one-storey villa reminiscent of typical health resort architecture. The Zakopane-Style character of the whole was achieved mostly through the use of stylized ornamentation, modelled on typical Highlander patterns. Witkiewicz's inventiveness while transforming the indigenous Highlander motifs and changing their original functions was imposing: e.g. the skylights illuminating the room in the attic were inspired by a hinged trap-door in the roof of peasants' barns which was lifted to put hay inside. In the interior of the villa many elements repeated or alluded to their Highlander models, e.g. spoon-holders turned curtain rods or sleigh serving as model for chairs.

But the most accomplished of Witkiewicz's architectural creations in the Zakopane Style was a villa called “Under the Firs,” built in 1896–1897 for Jan Gwalbert Paw-

<sup>4</sup> Omilanowska (1993: 99–116).

<sup>5</sup> Jabłońska, Moździerz (1994).

<sup>6</sup> Witkiewicz (1970: 399).

likowski, also a member of the local patriotic elite. The villa was planned as a monumental piece of architecture, a momentous testimony to the potential of the Zakopane Style. Its architecture, though it tries to faithfully repeat a Highlander hut, is in fact a picturesque mass, a work more of a painter than of an architect. The constituent features of this impressive creation include a massive stone plinth, in places four metres high, an extremely skilful construction of roofs over veranda, as well as cascades of gables filled with ornaments. Witkiewicz thus described the villa: "It is the building which is so far the most developed, the richest in form and the fullest in its application of the elements of the Zakopane Style."<sup>7</sup>

Witkiewicz did not restrict his projects to residential buildings only. The chapel at Jaszczurówka near Zakopane, built in 1904–1906 for the Uznański family, is an example of the Zakopane Style applied to church architecture. Here Witkiewicz once again used the forms and proportions of Highlanders timber-built hut, but changed it into a single-aisled chapel with slightly narrower chancel and a sacristy. The church furnishings included an altarpiece composed almost exclusively of ornaments patterned after those used by Highlanders, as well as two stained-glass windows depicting two images of Our Lady from Częstochowa and Vilna, most venerated in Polish Catholicism. In this way the artist wanted to underscore the patriotic elements contained in the ideology of the Zakopane Style. Interior decoration of the parish church of the Holy Family in Zakopane is another important example of the Zakopane Style application to furnishing and decoration of a sacred space. Apart from the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary (1896) Witkiewicz furnished in full the chapel of St John the Baptist (mural paintings and furnishings; 1900). Since in the altar painting Witkiewicz portrayed himself as the chapel's patron saint, set against a background featuring the Tatra Mountains, it looks that the artist's self-identification with his work was total.

Soon appeared attempts at recreating the Zakopane Style in masonry – a condition *sine qua non* of the style's dissemination throughout the land and its adaptation to manifold utilitarian purposes. The best known examples of such attempts are: a tenement house in Chmielna Street in Warsaw, designed by Jarosław Wojciechowski in 1905 – a typical example of nineteenth-century tenement house which was adorned with "Tatra Mountains" decorative applications, e.g. the sun ornament and pegging. Another example is the Tatra Museum building in Zakopane, designed by Witkiewicz, but completed after his death. The building was designed in cooperation with Franciszek Mączyński and fairly faithfully repeated the external appearance of Witkiewicz wooden villas. Yet, the architects did not intend to imitate in masonry the wooden walls of villas, which gave the museum building a more functional look. Other worth mentioning masonry buildings in the Zakopane Style, designed by Witkiewicz outside of the Podhale region, are: a manor house in Przyborów near Dębica (1892) and a manor house in Łańcuchów, built for Jan Stecki (designed in 1901, constructed in 1903–1904).

Around 1900 the Zakopane Style was at the height of popularity and in 1900 the first scholarly monograph by Stanisław Eljasz Radzikowski *Styl zakopiański* (*The Za-*

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: 418–421.

*kopane Style*) was published. Nevertheless, already at that time certain contradictions present in Witkiewicz's concept were noticeable: above all, it was impossible to use the Podhale-style architecture in the Polish lowlands, where the climate was different, and second, the recreation of timber construction in other materials posed considerable difficulties. Yet, the Zakopane Style had many enthusiasts. Witkiewicz himself set example: apart from building the above-mentioned houses, one of his famed undertakings was to send a group of Highlander builders and carpenters to Lithuania, to build a narrow-gauge railway station in the Zakopane Style in family estate of his sister at Syłgudyszki (1899). Franciszek Mączyński, one of the most talented architects of the young generation, developed even a project of a whole city in the Zakopane Style (1899–1901).<sup>8</sup>

But above all, it was in the areas of interior design and artistic handicrafts that the Zakopane Style was most successful and long lasting. Podhale-region patterns were very quickly adopted by many craftsmen's workshops. Telling examples of the above statement may be the interior design of the villas built by Witkiewicz, including the manor house of Polish Nobel Prize winner in literature Henryk Sienkiewicz in Oblęgorek (1901). Some Zakopane-Style decorative elements appeared also sporadically in buildings constructed around 1900 in major Polish cities such as Krakow and Lwow. The Zakopane Style was developed also by many other architects active in Zakopane well into 1920s and 1930s, e.g. by Zygmunt Dobrowolski, Eugeniusz Wesołowski or Witkiewicz's nephew, Jan Koszczyc Witkiewicz. Worth mentioning is the fact that Witkiewicz managed to train a few Highlander builders, such as Wojciech Roj and Wojciech Brzega, who were able to build houses in the Zakopane Style on their own.

There is no doubt that Witkiewicz was as much fascinated by the craftsmanship of the Highlanders as by the people themselves. It was among people that he found the very virtues that were to help him to rejuvenate art, and it is not a coincidence that he hired Highlanders to build his villas. Thus he wrote about the builders of his Koliba Villa: "There were also workers at hand, eager to carry out this work: the Highlanders. They may not have been the creators of these forms, yet it was them who have preserved and perfected them over centuries, and thanks to this people's exceptional abilities they were able to follow the new requirements and respond quickly and effectively to them."<sup>9</sup>

Although the Zakopane Style claimed to have broken with the nineteenth-century tradition of historicism and eclecticism, it was still strongly connected to it. The designs of Witkiewicz, though they were inspired by the local construction system, are in fact another attempt at stylization, based on eclectic arrangement of regional, indigenous, and cosmopolitan elements. Therefore the works executed in this "Polish national style" are often reminiscent of vernacular architecture from other regions of Europe. On the other hand, the unfaltering efforts of Witkiewicz who had been propagating the Zakopane Style until his death in 1915 brought tangible effects in the local colour of the architecture of Zakopane and the importance of the vernacular inspira-

<sup>8</sup> Szczerski (2004: 208–212).

<sup>9</sup> Witkiewicz (1970: 399).

tions in Polish architecture between the wars.<sup>10</sup> In his book *O sztuce stosowanej* (*On Applied Art*) of 1904 Jerzy Warchałowski, designer and supporter of the national style idea wrote about Witkiewicz: “There he wants to create the best possible conditions for the development of Polish art applied to industry and construction, for autonomous art, free from imitation, from fleeting sways of world’s fashions; an own art, compliant with the nation’s soul, living and circulating at home and outside, everyday and on holiday. That is not only an artistic, but also an economic and national ideal.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> On subsequent inspirations by the art of the Podhale region, see: *Między Giewontem* (1997: *passim*).

<sup>11</sup> Quoted after: Aneks (1996).

## Krakow Formist Group (1917–1923). Genesis of Polish Avant-Garde Art

Formists were the first artistic circle of avant-garde character in Poland. The creation of the group in Krakow in 1917 coincided with the regaining of independence by Poland. That is why the main purpose of the artists forming this group was to create a new style that would successfully combine the achievements of Expressionism, Futurism, and Cubism with indigenous Polish tradition.

Regardless of these inspirations, the origins of the group should be looked for in Young Poland time, namely the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. During this immensely interesting period various currents flourished in Polish art, including Symbolism, rooted in Romanticism, which in turn gave rise to early Expressionism that influenced the artists creating Formist Group years later.<sup>1</sup>

Early Expressionism developed in Warsaw milieu, and was especially visible in the works by Władysław Podkowiński and Ludwik de Laveaux as well as graphic art by Feliks Jabłczyński. Apart from Warsaw, another important location was Krakow. In this very city the works of Jacek Malczewski and Stanisław Wyspiański were created.<sup>2</sup> Both artists studied at the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts under Jan Matejko, and later became professors of the academy.

Jacek Malczewski's works, deriving from Romanticism, connected the Realism of form with symbolic elements and elements of Expressionism. This became visible in his oil paintings, e.g. *Melancholy* (1890–1894); *In the Flurry* (1893–1894), or *The Portrait of Adam Asnyk with Muse* (1895–1897), all of which presented deformation of space, dynamics, and variety of emotional states.<sup>3</sup>

Similar components could also be observed in Stanisław Wyspiański's paintings: *Polonia* (1892–1894), *Casmir III the Great* (1900–1902, a cardboard pattern for the stained-glass window of the Wawel Cathedral), which are characterized by extremely expressive and contour figure and intensive hue.

Jacek Malczewski and Stanisław Wyspiański were playing an important part in Krakow artistic milieu and tutored many young artists, including Zbigniew Pronaszko, Leopold Gottlieb and Tymon Niesiołowski, who years later co-created the Formist Group.

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<sup>1</sup> Juszcak (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Łukaszewicz, Malinowski (1980).

<sup>3</sup> Ławniczakowa (1995: 12–13).

As early as in 1905 the Group of Five was formed in Krakow.<sup>4</sup> The initiator of the group was Leopold Gottlieb, who accused the older generation of artists of conservatism and disregard for young creators. This very rebellious statement influenced the formation of the group.<sup>5</sup> Apart from Gottlieb, the group included Witold Wojtkiewicz, Jan Rembowski, Vlastimil Hofman, Mieczysław Jakimowicz and Tymon Niesiołowski. Initially, young authors met with negative response. Their only defender was art critic Jan Piotrowski. In his article, which can be treated as the group's manifesto, Piotrowski stressed that the main goal of the artists creating the Group of Five was not to naturalistically reproduce forms but to convey a deeper meaning. That was why they purposefully used synthesis and deformation in order to present a better illustration of "psychological side of a character."<sup>6</sup> The Group of Five chose Cyprian Kamil Norwid as their spiritual patron and guide. Initially, they even called themselves "Norwid Artists' Group" as they took their inspiration from the texts of the poet, which emphasized the significance of feelings and emotions put above a mere presentation of the reality.<sup>7</sup>

The Group of Five remained active between 1905 and 1908. During that time they had exhibitions in Krakow, Vienna, Lwow, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Munich, and Warsaw. The exhibition summarizing the activity of the group took place in 1908 at the *Kunstsalon Pisko* gallery in Vienna. This very event was advertised in Viennese daily paper, *Neue Freie Presse*. The foreword was written by a renowned art critic and art historian, Arthur Roessler, who was also an author of a publication on Egon Schiele's *oeuvre*. In his introduction Roessler characterized particular members of the Group of Five and underscored Stanisław Przybyszewski's influence on their work, as in 1898 the artist moved from Berlin to Krakow.<sup>8</sup> Przybyszewski's statements that an artist should be totally autonomous and liberated from any functions imposed on them were accepted by the generation of young artists.

Apart from Norwid and Przybyszewski, the artists referred to their professors, Malczewski and Wyspiański, because of the symbolic-literary nature of their works; these incorporated expressionistic elements as well. It was this current that gave rise to early Expressionism marked with exceptional aura, exaggerated forms and theatricality of gestures helping to express "the state of a soul." It seems that that the members of the Group of Five tried to continue this style.

Psychologization of forms was visible in the portraits by Leopold Gottlieb and Mieczysław Jakimowicz. Witold Wojtkiewicz based his deeply pessimistic art on the aesthetics of ugliness and grotesque. As far as the themes were concerned, the recurring motifs were madness, circus, and marionettes; they served to visualize the existential attitude of the artist toward the world. The paintings permeated with figments of imaginations were created by Vlastimil Hofman and Jan Rembowski. Under the influence of Wyspiański was Tymon Niesiołowski, who also took inspiration from

<sup>4</sup> Geron (2006: 10–17).

<sup>5</sup> Gottlieb (1905: 472).

<sup>6</sup> Piotrowski (1906: 455–456).

<sup>7</sup> Melbechowska-Luty (2001: 86).

<sup>8</sup> Roessler (1908: 3–4).

Paul Gauguin's works; this was confirmed for instance by Roessler's words, who called Niesiołowski "Polish Gauguin."<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the creations of the artists comprising the Group of Five early Expressionism was also visible in the sculptures by Xawery Dunikowski, a friend of Leopold Gottlieb, as well as in the works of Fryderyk Pautsch and Wojciech Weiss. Close contacts between the latter and Przybyszewski, thanks to whom Weiss was able to get to know the works of Edvard Munch, made Weiss' works an interesting example of early Expressionism. The artist used deformation, color contrasts, and, just like Munch whom he often followed, Weiss permeated his works with a large load of emotions, and his vision of the world and human was characterized by gravity.<sup>10</sup>

Around the year 1908, which marked the end of the activity of the Group of Five, voices on new currents in art began to appear in Polish press.

An intermediary between the young generation of Krakow artists and Parisian milieu became Adolf Basler, an art critic and art dealer living in Paris, who frequently visited Krakow and published in Polish papers articles about new currents in international art. Thanks to those texts, future Formists were able to learn about Expressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism. His texts were unequaled since they dealt with a thorough analysis of latest art trends. Basler was a supporter of Cubism; he personally knew André Salmon, Max Jacob, Pablo Picasso and Guillaume Apollinaire; he was a secretary of the last one.<sup>11</sup> Another important contribution to the knowledge about new tendencies was a first presentation of modern art that took place in 1913 in Lwow, a city with close artistic bonds with Krakow. The exhibition was organized by a supporter of avant-garde art, in particular Herwarth Walden's Expressionism, and the founding father of a Berlin art gallery and *Der Sturm* magazine, and despite quite extensive title: *The Exhibition of Futurists, Cubists, and Expressionists*, presented mainly works by Expressionists, e.g. Jawlensky, Kandinsky, César Klein, Ludwig Meidner, Wilhelm Morgner, Hans Richter, Arthur Segal, and Bohumil Kubišta, a Czech Cubist, whose work was chosen for the poster advertising the whole event.<sup>12</sup>

Before the First World War, future Formists had a chance to experience new art tendencies first-hand during their travels; such artists as Tytus Czyżewski, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy), Tymon Niesiołowski, Leon Dołżycki, Jacek Mierzejewski or Leon Chwistek spent much of their time in Paris.

Between 1911 and 1913 in Krakow the first attempts to unite avant-garde endeavors were made, also in the form of the establishment of the Common Association of Polish Artists, inspired by Tytus Czyżewski together with Andrzej Pronaszko and Zbigniew Pronaszko; the association organized exhibitions of the Independents in Krakow. At the same time, the first avant-garde works were created. A piece of special importance was a sculpture by Zbigniew Pronaszko *The Adoration of Angels*, designed for an altar at the Missionary Church in Krakow (1912); it encompassed numerous features

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Kossowski (1995: 65–87).

<sup>11</sup> Wierzbicka (2009: 215–229).

<sup>12</sup> Clegg (1993: 249–277).

characteristic of Formists' works. Its synthetic form of the bas-relief; busy with forms with simplified shapes, created with geometrical sharply-cut planes were particularly interesting and worthy of special attention. The bas-relief marked a turn in the actions of Pronaszko himself. The artist, initially inspired by Jacek Malczewski's works, created paintings brimming with symbolic meanings; can be illustrated by *The Spring* (c. 1910). The same stylistic mode was visible in the works of his brother Andrzej Pronaszko, for instance in his *Adam and Eve* (1912) and *The Allegoric Scene* (1913). Nevertheless, at the same time *An Insane Pilgrimage / Below the Cross* (1913) was painted; by its synthetic color-spot engulfed by a dark contour it referred to Gauguin's work. The works of the third artist mentioned above, Tytus Czyżewski, began to develop new forms of artistic expression; it can be observed in his drawings *Madonna* (1913) and *The Head* (1915) illustrating the fascination with Cubism and Futurism.

The time of the First World War weakened the development of avant-garde tendencies, but as early as in 1917 the Formist Group was created in Krakow. Initially, the group used the name of "Polish Expressionists," and a year later "Bunt" (The Rebellion) Group in Poznań, and "Jung Idysz" Group in Łódź were formed.<sup>13</sup>

The Formist Group was active between 1917 and 1923. During that period the artists presented their works at various exhibitions in Krakow, Warsaw, Lwow, and Poznań. In 1922 several members of the Formist Group took part in the *Jeune Pologne* exhibition in Paris. Apart from Krakow artists, the group included avant-garde artists from Warsaw, and Poznań. The first exhibition of the group presented the works by Tytus Czyżewski, Andrzej Pronaszko, Zbigniew Pronaszko, Leon Chwistek, Jan Hrynkowski, Jacek Mierzejewski, Tymon Niesiołowski, and Eugeniusz Zak. Some time later, they were joined by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy), Konrad Winkler, and August Zamoyski. There were also artists associated with the movement at one time or another, such as Romuald Kamil Witkowski, Henryk Gotlib, Ludwik Lille or Jerzy Zaruba, to name but a few.

The exhibitions organized by the Formists were also attended by the Polish artists connected with *École de Paris*.<sup>14</sup> Some of the members of this group were: Gustaw Gwozdecki,<sup>15</sup> Eugeniusz Zak,<sup>16</sup> Roman Kramszytk,<sup>17</sup> Leopold Gottlieb, and Moïse Kisling.<sup>18</sup> These artists, creating the Parisian branch of Formists, had vast contacts in that artistic milieu. Gwozdecki, who was influenced by German Expressionists and Fauvists, knew personally Henri Matisse and Émile-Antoine Bourdelle. Gwozdecki's works were initially promoted by Basler, mentioned above, and later also by Apollinaire and Salmon. It was Salmon who served as a model for Leopold Gottlieb's portrait entitled, accordingly, *The Portrait of André Salmon* (1908 and 1913–1914). Moïse Kisling, called "the Prince of Montparnasse," worked together with Picasso and Gris (*The Landscape of Provence*, 1913; *The Still-Life with Fruit*, 1914). A portrait of Kisling

<sup>13</sup> Pollakówna (1972), Jakimowicz (1989).

<sup>14</sup> Wierzbicka (2004), Malinowski, Brus-Malinowska (2007).

<sup>15</sup> Lipa (2003).

<sup>16</sup> Brus-Malinowska (2004).

<sup>17</sup> Piątkowska (2004).

<sup>18</sup> Brus-Malinowska, Malinowski (1996).



painted by Roman Kramsztyk (*The Portrait of Kisling*, c. 1913) who at that time was influenced by Cézanne's works (*The Still-Life*, 1912; *The Town on the Bay*, *The Landscape from Provence*, c. 1914). The strongest ties with the Cubist movement, however, were visible in the works of Ludwik Markus (Louis Marcoussis), whose texts about modern art were printed in the *Formists* magazine published by the artistic group. Initially, Markus studied at The Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow; he continued his studies in Paris, where he met Apollinaire, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, became permanently associated with the Cubist milieu, and grew to be one of its most distinguished representatives. He rooted his works in analytical and synthetic Cubism, thus managing to develop a personal style characterized by expressive emotionality and lyricism.<sup>19</sup>

In general, the artists making the Formist Group opposed an exact reflection of nature and wanted to create their own artistic reality, with a form in central position. In their quests they were frequently inspired by Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, as well as the folklore of the Podhale (sort of the Polish Highlands). Their fascinations were mirrored in the group's Exhibition Catalogue I, in which the artists published a collection of quotations. Among the cited authors one could find renown representatives of avant-garde: Cézanne, Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger as well as Matisse. The selected fragments were by no means accidental, since they all pointed to the direction of the search by the artists associated with the group.

Regardless of those inspirations, the Formists' *oeuvre* was characterized by its immense variety. The author who went furthest on in his avant-garde quest was Tytus Czyżewski. The outcome of his search was multi-plane paintings.<sup>20</sup> They are the boldest example of experimentation in Polish art of that time. The artist resigned from modes of expression and tools typically employed by painters in favor of materials like wood, cardboard or metal plates, thus creating truly exceptional works. None of these multi-plane paintings has been preserved today; they can be analyzed only on the basis of their photographs.

One of the greatest individuals in the group remained Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy), the author of the theory of pure form that shared numerous similarities with the theories voiced by European avant-garde. In accordance with his own theory Witkacy rejected realistic imitation and used extravagant, flatly modeled forms, creating sophisticated compositional arrangements.<sup>21</sup>

On the opposite pole there were the artists forming a neo-classical branch of the Formist movement, such as Eugeniusz Zak, Jacek Mierzejewski and Tymon Niesiołowski, all the works of whom were characterized by decorativeness and idealization.<sup>22</sup> These features contrasted with *The Formist Nude* (1917) by Zbigniew Pronaszko, in which the body of the model was dismembered into many pieces.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Lafranchis (1961).

<sup>20</sup> Pollakówna (1971: 10–14).

<sup>21</sup> Jakimowicz (1987: 37–62).

<sup>22</sup> Brus-Malinowska (2004), Geron (2004).

<sup>23</sup> Lenartowicz (2008: 28).

The motif of nude is connected with the theme of dance and the concept of presenting the movement on a plane. The issue was started by Formists thanks to the performances of Rita Sacchetto, a dancer and first wife of August Zamoyski, who became internationally famous because of “dance pictures.” This was a name given to a performance presented to the musical pieces; it consisted of dance routines and pantomime, and which had special stage designs and costumes inspired by famous paintings.<sup>24</sup> There are numerous photos of those performances, with Sacchetto in various costumes, e.g. as Madame Récamier from the painting by Jacques-Louis David or The Duchess of Devonshire from Thomas Gainsborough’s canvases; in the costume of Eugénie de Montijo, the Empress Consort of the French from a portrait painted by Franz Xaver Winterhalter (*Eugénie in Crinoline à la Marie Antoinette*). During several years she spent in Poland, Sacchetto cooperated with Formists creating the choreography of Formist Dance.<sup>25</sup> The core of this avant-garde performance constituted blending of color, body movement, and sound so that a viewer perceived dance as intertwined lines, tangled masses with no pictorial part. An illustration of such Formist performance was *The Mummy*, as well as a sketch *Cocaine*, which have been documented by a number of photographs.

Sacchetto’s original performances inspired several artists from the *Bunt* Group, with which Formists cooperated at the time. Artur Swinarski created a wood engraving entitled *Rita Sacchetto’s Dance*, and the unforgettable dance of the mummy became the theme of Jerzy Hulewicz’s wood engraving.<sup>26</sup>

Sacchetto’s performances contributed to the introduction of dance to the works by Formists. The dancing artist has been perpetuated by Andrzej Pronaszko in his water color *Rita Sacchetto* (c. 1918).

An extremely dynamic vision of dance was presented by Zbigniew Pronaszko in his drawings. One of them depicts a whole procession of draught dancing figures, or just one figure, in different stages of movement. The same style was used by the artist in his works depicting the impressions of movement presented by the breaking of a figure structure and its reassembling with the use of a multiplication of some of its fragments, an endeavor similar to those of Futurists. Jan Żywnowski also presented a dancing woman as an immensely expressive nude (*A Female Dancer*, c. 1920); he drew her figure with soft dark lines. The willingness to capture movement and translate it onto a flat surface was visible in a graphic work by Jan Hrynkowski, his *A Female Dancer*. The basic element shaping the whole figure are arches, frequently overlapping and giving the impression of a tangle of limbs. It is only an illusion; the intention of the artist was to present the stages of a dancing routine. The smoothness of form and movement presented in this particular way was bringing Hrynkowski’s graphic art close to the art by Futurists, with their main representative Gino Severini, who in his own works, also dealing with the theme of dance, offered simultaneous presentation of the stages of movement. The same can be observed in another work by Hrynkowski, *A Female Dancer II*, although

<sup>24</sup> Ochaim (1991: 22–25).

<sup>25</sup> Kossakowska-Szanajca (1993: 23–24).

<sup>26</sup> Malinowski (1991: 98).

when compared to his earlier work this one was much more naïve. Naturally, the main motif of the painting is the title dancer, with no individual features, depicted in three different views that are to symbolize her rotation around her own axis.

Formists dealt with certain elements of Christian iconography; an example here can be a drawing by Zbigniew Pronaszko, *Christ under the Cross* (1918), with its form resembling the works depicting the dancers, discussed above. Religious themes were also mirrored in the sculptures by this artist, e.g. *Christ* (1918) or *Pietà* (1918). Folk art influenced the works of Tytus Czyżewski (*Madonna*) and Konrad Winkler (*St George*) as well. In Leopold Gottlieb's works, from the period when he was associated with Formists, one can find similar inspirations: an oil painting *Christ in a Boat* (1919) catches the attention with its dynamics and flattened composition as well as intensive coloring. In 1919 Tymon Niesiołowski created *The Baptism of Christ*, which is distinguished by lengthening of the silhouettes depicted against the background of expressively shaped hillock. *Pietà* by Jan Żyznowski (c. 1920) is also characterized by its dynamics, contrasting colors of the figures the form of whom resembles that of Gothic ones. Geometrization of forms, known from the works by Picasso or Braque, was employed by Andrzej Pronaszko, in the painting *Mary's Flight into Egypt* (1918–1921).

The portrait became another interesting theme; Formists attempted to create a new convention for this artistic form. Frequently a single work, combined a clear image of a person with geometrical background, depicted from a different perspective (Zbigniew Pronaszko's *Portrait of the Artist's Wife*, 1922) or utterly deformed (Tytus Czyżewski's *Portrait of Stanisław Mroz*, 1918; *Portrait of Brunon Jasiński*, 1920; Konrad Winkler's *Portrait of the Artist's Wife*, 1920). Another interesting version of Formist portrait was added by August Zamoyski. In his works the artist started from a realistic image which was to undergo a Formistic transposition by synthesizing and geometrizing the shape of the head as well as the features, narrowing them to the play of the forms; the examples here are: *The Portrait of Leon Chwistek*, *The Formist Portrait of Leon Chwistek* (c. 1923); *The Formist Portrait of Antoni Słonimski* (1923); *The Formist Portrait of Louis Marcousiss* (c. 1923).

The landscape theme was also taken up by Formists. In the case of Zbigniew Pronaszko and Tymon Niesiołowski, the most recurring landscapes depicted the mountainous neighborhood of Zakopane, the place which Formists either dwelled or which they frequented. In general, the works are characterized by simplified composition, geometrical forms and frequent accumulation of planes (Zbigniew Pronaszko, *The Landscape*, 1921; Tymon Niesiołowski, *The Zakopane Landscape*, 1916–1917); this rule was also applied by Jacek Mierzejewski in his painting *Wawel* (1917). A totally different formula of landscape, close to the activities of Formists, was proposed by Leon Chwistek. When he was associated with the movement, he created several works depicting his vision of a modern metropolis. Among the examples here are such works as *The City* (1919) and *The Industrial City* (c. 1920). The same theme was taken up by Chwistek in his literary activities and theoretical texts. Around 1920 the artist wrote *The City of Formists* describing the city of the future, "New Krakow," the inhabitants of which move in cars driving on enormous freeways or escalators and moving pavements lead-

ing to skyscrapers.<sup>27</sup> Their form, however, differed from typical high-risers, since their vertical lines were replaced with curves. The visualization of this architectural concept constituted the design of a hotel in Zakopane, created by Chwistek. A comparison of these two architectural forms can be found in a watercolor entitled *The Composition. Zakopane in New York* (1917–1922), depicting a skyscraper constructed from cubic blocks, contrasting with futuristic edifice resting on curves. Architectural concepts presented by Chwistek were not unique at that time, as testified by Hermann Finsterlin's "dream architecture" and a design by Virgilio Marchi *The Futuristic City*.

Discussing the works exemplifying the fascination with modernity, one cannot omit the two "airplane" landscapes with the same titles: *The View from the Airplane* (1922 or 1923 and 1922–1927) by Tytus Czyżewski, inspired by a flight the artist took to Paris. Unfortunately, only their black-and-white reproductions have survived. The former one resembled a fragment of an air chart of a village or small town, and the latter one combined different perspective projections which resulted in a totally fresh concept of a landscape, breaking with the tradition to date.<sup>28</sup>

The works of other artists were also inspired by technological achievements, which can be illustrated by a painting *The Drunken Chauffeur* by Romuald Kamil Witkowski, revealing the artist's fascination with Futurism, symbolized by an automobile. A life in a modern city was, in turn, depicted by Władysław Rogulski's *Dancing* (c. 1923). Apart from the theme of the picture, one should also appreciate the composition broken into several intertwining planes, expressing the rhythm of dancing. The influence of Futurism as well as analytical Cubism can be spotted in two works by Jan Hrynkowski: *The Elevator* (1917), and *The Elevator and Me* (1918). In both cases the theme is the motif of figure "imprinted" into the mechanism of the elevator, and at the same time turned into a mannequin or a mechanical person.

The analysis of the Formists' works presented above proves that the group was characterized by its great diversity. The artists forming it were inspired by avant-garde currents in art, but also folk art, and wanted to create a Polish formula of modern art. In spite of the fact that the group remained active for six years only, it played an important part in the further development of Polish modern art, and triggered the entrance of Polish art into the circle of avant-garde art. Formist activities influenced the later artistic activities in Poland. The next generation of avant-garde: Polish Constructivism, the *Artes* Group, and Krakow Group, developed their innovative solutions, building on the Formists' achievements.

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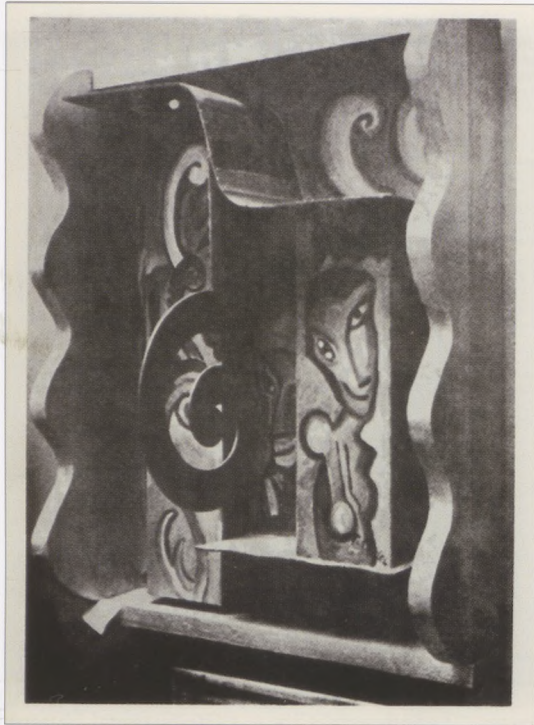
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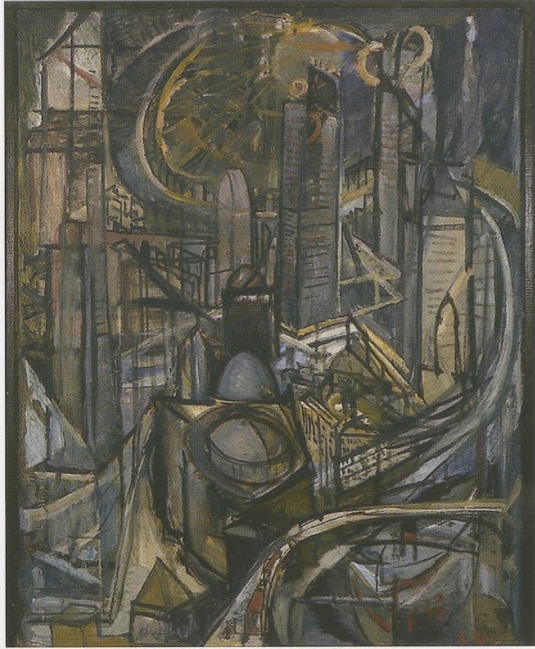
1. Zbigniew Pronaszko, The Formist Nude, 1917; National Museum in Krakow



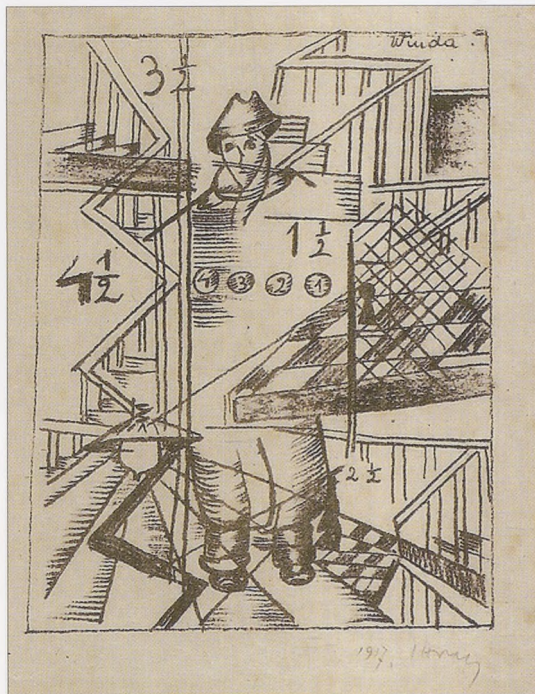
2. Tytus Czyżewski, Multiplane Painting, c. 1921; work lost (reproduced in "Nowości Ilustrowane" 1921, No. 12)



3. Jerzy Hulewicz, Mummy's Dance, 1920 (reproduced in "Zdrój", vol. 10, 1920)



4. Leon Chwistek, *The Industrial City*, c. 1920; National Museum in Warsaw



5. Jan Hrynkowski, *The Elevator*, 1917; National Museum in Warsaw



## Propaganda of Polish Art Abroad in 1918–1939\*

In the interwar period Polish art was presented abroad many a time. A few spectacular successes were noted. From the regaining of independence by Poland in 1918, a great significance was attached to art in creating the image of the Polish Republic both home and abroad. Obviously, all the shows of Polish art abroad were aimed at promoting Polish culture and the young Polish state. In the face of damages after the partition period and World War I art was considered the most noble, attractive and also the inexpensive propaganda tool. Art was meant to unify the territories of all the three former partitions and strengthen the sense of national identity among Polish citizens. On the other hand, it was supposed to create the image of a powerful state, emphasize its long presence in the European family of nations.

The first international presentation of Polish art at the Biennale of Venice in 1920 and in Paris in 1921 could not be called successful<sup>1</sup>. The failure was the result of political and economic situation of the young state, differentiation of its territory after the partition period and the damages of the war. At that time Poland desperately lacked both funds and institutional protection of art. The state collections of art were nonexistent.

After the unsuccessful start, however, Poland's participation in the prestigious International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and Modern Industry in Paris in 1925 is considered to have been one of the major events manifesting Poland's presence in the international area. For political reasons Polish pavilion in Paris was addressed both to French politicians and mass audience. Folk elements, which dominated the Polish exhibition, accentuated national distinctiveness of Polish art. The bright palette of colors as well as the variety of forms manifested its links with the originating movement of *art déco*. Along with its subject matter, they allured the spectator with their exoticism. High-class neoclassical sculptures and paintings stressed the belonging of Polish art to the Latin cultural heritage.

With 169 awards in total, Poland achieved a spectacular artistic success. The propaganda goals of the exhibition were fulfilled, which was reported in the Polish press: "contrary to all the logical suppositions [...] the Polish pavilion is undoubtedly the most beautiful, stylish and the most significant in the whole area of the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts. It is evaluated that way not only by Polish visitors, but also, and most importantly, by the artistic elite of France."<sup>2</sup> What was emphasized was

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\* The project was researched with the financial support of the Ministry of Science, the title of this project is "The State Art of the II Polish Republic."

<sup>1</sup> Treter (1933: 128-130).

<sup>2</sup> Zrębowski (1925: 7).

“an exquisite harmony and unity of ideas in all the sections of Polish exhibition, in spite of a wide range of artists and their works. It is the evidence of far-reaching spiritual, cultural and artistic commonwealth of all regions of Poland despite a long history of partitions and dependence.”<sup>3</sup> “We appeared as a great power with its distinctive national artistic culture [...], but also contributing with new creative elements.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite short preparation time and a very low budget, Polish presence in Paris in 1925 was a matter of primary importance in a very single detail. Its most vital, if not the only, role was to guarantee the spectacular success, and such was the aim of all the activities. Władysław Skoczylas, before the official opening, made the explicit statement:

Poland will be among those few countries, whose presentations will have been completely arranged by the opening date. Not only will our exhibition be complete in all its sections, but also the catalogue will have been printed. It will be of unquestionable importance in the first days after the opening when the attention of the press will be focused. It will be of disadvantage for those countries that will not be ready on time. [...]

It is hard to foresee which position in this contest will be occupied by Poland. It is certain, though, that this position will be closer to head than tail. Polish participation in this exhibition will be of purely propaganda significance [...]. We are not exhibiting to sell, but to show that our culture is of high level and originality.<sup>5</sup>

The success of the Polish pavilion in the 1925 Paris Exhibition made the authorities appreciate the significance of such events for the promotion of Polish culture and the state itself. It also prompted the government to create the Society for the Promotion of Polish Art Abroad (*Towarzystwo Szerzenia Sztuki Polskiej Wśród Obcych*) a year later. Next successful foreign exhibitions took place which resulted in an international recognition of Polish art.

The exhibitions organised by the Society for the Promotion of Polish Art Abroad had propaganda objective; they were controlled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which financed them from the general propaganda fund. At the same time, Ministry of Denominations and Enlightenment was in charge of the condition of art at home. Foreign exhibitions were meant to foster the interest and sympathy of host countries for Poland. Art historian and critic, Mieczysław Treter, the author of the article *Foreign Exhibitions versus Propaganda and the Issues of the National Art* from 1933 emphasised that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Society for the Promotion of Polish Art Abroad

cannot be limited by the care for equal treatment of all particular sections of fine arts [...]. Foreign exhibitions, commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose aim is not so much the benefit of the state. Therefore, they must be organised in a different way than all the others, as they need to respond to propaganda in the first place [...]. The political, economic and sport propaganda is not sufficient. Our art can be an equally effective weapon, only skillfully used. [...] Propaganda, recruitment and making alliances form a separate branch of sociological ap-

<sup>3</sup> W-cki (1925: 8).

<sup>4</sup> Zrębowski (1925: 7).

<sup>5</sup> Skoczylas (1925).



1. The opening ceremony of the Polish contemporary art exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, 1933. Archive press photo, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences, Władysław Jaroński archive

plied knowledge. The public opinion forms the spiritual construction of both a single human being and a crowd and affects international relations between states and nations.<sup>6</sup>

This awareness was put into practice in the very same year by resuming diplomatic relations with Russia.

The exhibition of Polish art at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow was solemnly opened on November 12, 1933. Among numerous officials who attended this ceremony were high-rank representatives of the Soviet authorities, along with the Diplomatic Corps of almost all countries represented in Moscow, Polish representatives *in corpore*, high-rank officers of the Red Army and delegates of the Polish Air Force on a formal visit to the Soviet Union at that moment. The event was observed by Russian and international journalists. All Polish press headlines were informing that the exhibition “was called to being by the idea of peace and close bilateral relations.”<sup>7</sup> A majority of Polish daily newspapers widely commented on the statement of a Polish legate in Moscow. He emphasized the idea of strengthening the friendly relations between the neighboring

<sup>6</sup> Treter (1933: 127)

<sup>7</sup> Zrodzona (1933); comp. Wystawa (1933).



2. Polish contemporary art exhibition at the Tretiakov Gallery in Moscow, 1933. Author's archive

states by means of mutual recognition of artistic and cultural output, born immediately after the signature of political agreements between Poland and the Soviet Union aiming to secure peace in our part of Europe<sup>8</sup>. The Polish paper *Gazeta Polska* summed up the Moscow event in such significant words: “The ‘Chinese Wall’ existing between the two nations until recently has been seriously damaged. These breaks open already two-sided way to the most valuable representatives of these nations, soldiers and artists – agents of Power and Beauty.”<sup>9</sup>

The exhibition showed wide spectrum of Polish art, with focus on its classical and colorist trends. Received with warm interest of both critics and artists, the exhibition also proved to be a success as a cultural undertaking. Ten out of 165 exhibited works were purchased by the Soviet Museum of Western Art which housed an extraordinary collection of modern European art.<sup>10</sup>

An exhibition of Polish art in Berlin was the largest of the presentations organized abroad in the interwar period. More than 700 works of last fifty years and by hundred or so artists illustrated its different trends. Polish art was received very enthusiastically by German press, regardless its purely political purpose: “Although the organization of

<sup>8</sup> Zrodzona (1933).

<sup>9</sup> OTMAR (1933).

<sup>10</sup> Most of them were presented that summer at the permanent exhibition at the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, together with the presentation of Polish painting ‘Symbol and Form.’



3. Adolf Hitler at the Polish art exhibition in Berlin, 1935. On the right Józef Lipski, ambassador of Poland. Archive press photo, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences, Władysław Jarocki archive

this vast exhibition of Polish art belongs actually to the political activity of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its artistic success is true and authentically significant.”<sup>11</sup> The exhibition seemed to be also a diplomatic success, as Adolf Hitler, the *Führer* himself, participated in a ceremony of its opening.

Both presentations turned out to be the last events in the diplomatic relations between Poland and its totalitarian neighbors when art played a role of mediator, while maintaining its artistic autonomy. Soon art began to express ideological content, as could be evidenced by the reception of a Polish pavilion in 1937.

The next Polish presentation in Paris at the International Exhibition of Art and Technology in Modern Life was also very highly evaluated. The Polish exhibitors were awarded a record number of 469 prizes, which placed us on the eighth position among the participants. The names of awarded architects, painters, sculptors and musicians have gone down in the history of Polish culture. The awards gained during the 1937 Paris International Exhibition confirmed the excellent condition of Polish art, despite sharp criticism of the Polish pavilion at home.

In Poland, however, the Polish exhibition in Paris in 1925 was considered a great international success, whereas the one of 1937 was commonly criticized and even dis-

<sup>11</sup> Klein (1935).



4. International Exhibition of Art and Technology in Modern Life, Paris 1937, Polish pavilion in the centre, on the left – pavilion of Soviet Union, on the right – pavilion of 3rd Reich. Author's archive

credited.<sup>12</sup> Both right and left-wing papers, as well as Jewish nationalist press, were very critical of the 1937 exhibition. Yet, the whole debate had political, not artistic grounds. Even though the artistic value of the Polish exhibition of 1937 was appreciated, it was accused of “the lack of the awareness of atmosphere and of foreign psychology – which was the basic mistake.”<sup>13</sup>

This last accusation was repeated most often in the reviews of the 1937 exhibition. The Polish pavilion was valued not in artistic terms, but in terms of propaganda efficiency, or rather inefficiency in this case.<sup>14</sup> Positive opinions were rare exceptions:

The Polish pavilion does not attack us with photomontages presenting the power of the Polish empire. It is in principle an artistic presentation; there is not a single object in the Polish pavilion which does not meet the requirements of genuine art. What the Polish artists did [...] accords with the regime which neither despises the masses nor pleases them.<sup>15</sup>

A similar opinion was given by a journalist of *Gazeta Polska*: “The Polish Pavilion has no propaganda value and probably was not designed to provoke such effects. Its

<sup>12</sup> Lityński (1937: 2).

<sup>13</sup> B.L. (1937: 10).

<sup>14</sup> Norblin-Chrzanowska (1937: 9–11); comp. K.S. (1937: 4).

<sup>15</sup> Słonimski (1937: 2).

designers assumed that the most important propaganda is art itself – not the number and insistence of forms and colors.”<sup>16</sup>

The 1937 Exhibition in Paris was acclaimed as a place of ideological demonstrations and competing political interests and military powers.<sup>17</sup> Pavilions of a major part of the exhibitors – not only totalitarian countries – were thought of in terms of ideological suggestiveness and manifestation of power. Pure art was defeated by ideology; art was interpreted only through the propaganda lenses.

A general curator of the 1937 Polish pavilion was architect Lech Niemojewski. He got this position thanks to his previous successful mission; he was in charge of designing and decorating the interiors of two Polish transatlantic liners. The Polish authorities considered the ships to be symbolic Polish ambassadors<sup>18</sup>: “The flag of Poland is the best means of economical, political and cultural propaganda in the world. The flag of Poland is the best direct connection between the homeland and millions of Polish emigrants. For them, the Polish liner is part of their home country.”<sup>19</sup>

The main investor appointed a special commission responsible for the interior design of both transatlantic liners. The commission consisted of the Minister of Education and professors of the Academy of Fine Arts and Warsaw Polytechnic University. The project received financial support from the Ministries of Industry and Trade, Foreign Affairs, and Education, as well as from Polish banks which bought art works for decorating the interiors of the ships.

Niemojewski promoted this project in the media because “art is the noblest symbol of economic development” of the state. Ships should become “the source of promoting culture and art of the nation.”<sup>20</sup>

The transatlantic liners were given politically significant names: “Piłsudski” and “Batory.” Marshal Józef Piłsudski embodied the strong and independent Polish state. King Stefan Batory defended Polish access to the Baltic sea in the second half of the sixteenth century. He was also responsible for Polish political success in the East. A copy of celebrated Jan Matejko’s painting *Batory at Pskov* (1872) decorated the reading room of the M/S Batory. Openly nationalistic iconography was avoided in the interiors of the ships. For Polish citizens and emigrants the names of both liners were suggestive enough.

Many outstanding artists representing different generations and artistic circles were invited to participate in the project. A traveller, freed from everyday concerns, was to relax among paintings and sculptures: “unlike in museums, he contemplates them with no rush.”<sup>21</sup>

Already the first trip of the M/S Piłsudski turned to be a great media success. Its arrival to New York harbor was awaited by thousands of people, photographed, filmed and commented upon by many radio stations. One of the participants of this memo-

<sup>16</sup> Piechal (1937: 5).

<sup>17</sup> Kretschmer (1999: 197–204); Ades (1995: 58–62).

<sup>18</sup> See Pertek (1975).

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous (1935: 1).

<sup>20</sup> Niemojewski (1935: 17).

<sup>21</sup> Niemojewski (1935: 15).

rable trip noted: “nothing has ever been such a propaganda success in America as the arrival of this first modern Polish liner.”<sup>22</sup>

The last presentation of Polish art of the period took place in the United States, on the occasion of the International Exhibition in New York in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. A highly tense political situation in Europe made the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs strive after the exclusion of these exhibits which symbolic meaning could be interpreted as ideological provocation against neighboring countries, Germany in particular. Apparently it did not, however, avert a German aggression against Poland on September 1, 1939.<sup>23</sup> Besides the international public, citizens of the United States, with the exceptionally numerous Polish emigrants, were considered the principal audience of the Polish pavilion. Amidst the works of art ordered for the Polish pavilion in New York, a series of monumental paintings for the Chamber of Honor should be singularly mentioned. The paintings were jointly made by eleven Warsaw painters of the group called St Lucas Brotherhood (*Bractwo Świętego Łukasza*), while their historic subject was introduced by a team of experts especially gathered for this assignment. They chose seven events important for the Polish history, focusing on those which directly contributed to the formation and development of democratic ideas in the Polish Republic: *Boleslaw I the Brave greeting Emperor Otto III, who goes on pilgrimage to St Adalbert's grave in Gniezno* (the year 1000); *Christening of Lithuania* (1386); *Granting the privilege called 'neminem captivabimus'* (1430); *Union of Lublin* (1569); *Warsaw Confederacy. Law on religious tolerance* (1573); *Battle of Vienna* (1683); *The Constitution of May 3* (1791). The cycle of paintings was arranged to prove that origins of Polish democracy, like the privilege of *Neminem Captivabimus* (Latin, short for: “We shall not arrest anyone without a court verdict,” one of the basic right of the Polish, then Polish-Lithuanian nobility) could be traced back to as early a time as before the discovery of North America. Commemorated events, like *Boleslaw the Brave greeting Emperor Otton III*, *Christening of Lithuania* and *Battle of Vienna* stressed the age-long legitimate participation of Poland in the formation of Christian Europe, together with its politics and civilization, and protecting its security. The wall painting by Boleslaw Cybis, *Military deeds of Poles in history of the United States of America*, included in the work *Poles in America*, reminded of Polish participation in the establishment and protection of the democratic American state.

The ideological program of the Polish pavilion in the 1939 New York Exhibition was created one year before the planned exhibition, in a different historic moment, in a more peaceful political situation both in Poland and in the world. At the celebration of the opening of the Polish presentation, on the anniversary of the Constitution of May 3, this ideological program conveyed a particularly powerful message, both pro-democratic and independence-oriented.

An invasion of the Zaolzie region by the Polish Army in October 1938 was very badly received by the international public, particularly in the United States. Until the spring of 1939 Poland was perceived as a country with totalitarian inclinations. It was not until May of 1939 that the attitude of American citizens to Poland dramatically

<sup>22</sup> Tetzlaff (1935: 28); comp. Korolkiewicz (1936: 33).

<sup>23</sup> Faryna-Paszkiwicz (1993: 390).





5. Tourist salon at the m/s Batory, on the background painting by Zofia Stryjeńska, *Plastyka* 1936, nr 4, p. 278

changed. Hitler, followed by Nazi media, attacked in the same speech the government of the Second Polish Republic and the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The renouncing of the Third Reich's territorial claims by Polish Foreign Minister Józef Beck, supported by a manifestation organized in Warsaw, changed Poland's image in the United States. After the annexation of Czechoslovakia by Hitler, the Czech consulate in Warsaw still manifested its existence, displaying its national flag.

American politicians emphasized their sympathy for the Polish state during the opening ceremony of the Polish pavilion, in which about 5000 people participated. The atmosphere around Poland was very favorable in New York, therefore the improvement of the commercial relations between both countries was expected and there was a hope for increasing Polish export to the United States and for the possibility of negotiating the loan for Poland.

A prolongation of the exhibition after the outbreak of the World War II enabled Polish art to be promoted in New York in 1940, when the Polish State had already ceased to exist on the map of Europe due to the German and Soviet aggressions of 1939.

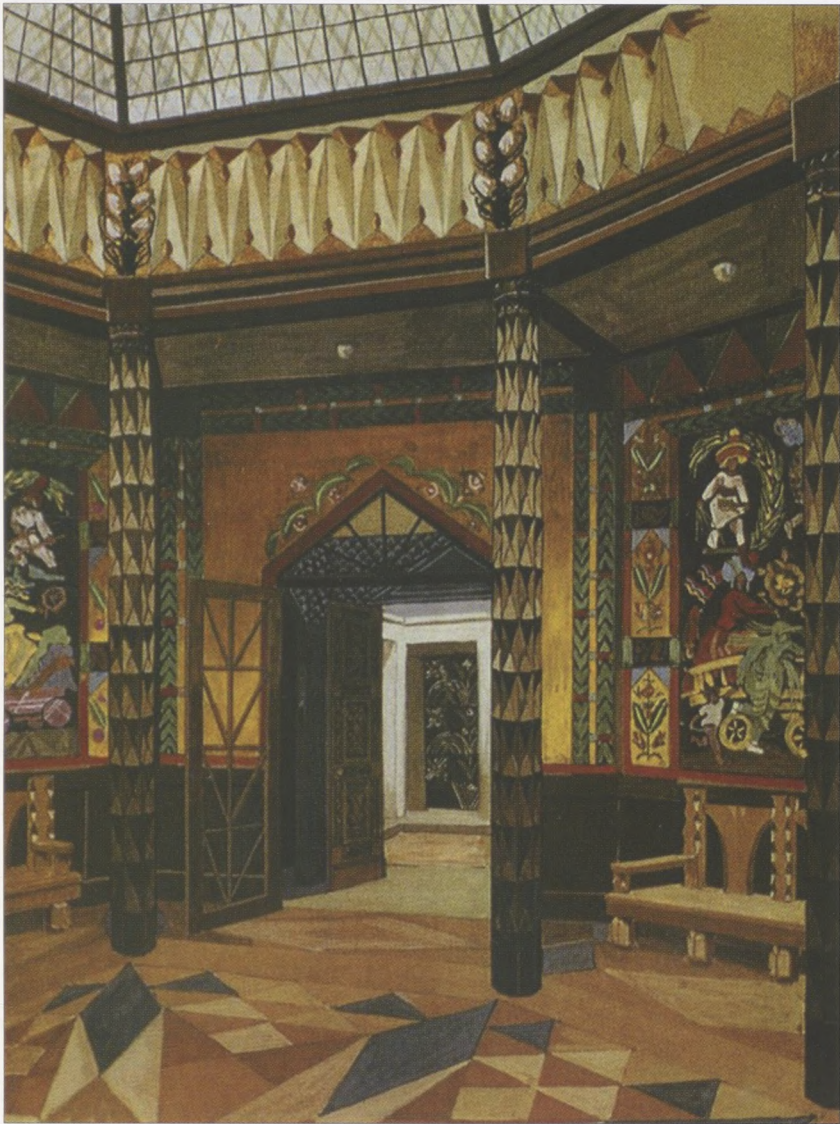
The promotion of Polish art abroad changed significantly in the interwar period. It began as the spontaneous improvised actions, not always successful, initiated by artists themselves, with no interest or financial support on the part of the government.

The last Polish show in New York in 1939 not only promoted Polish art, but also the ideas of freedom. It was also the only case in the history of the Second Polish Republic's participation in international exhibitions when the artistic presentation of Poland was supposed to bring measurable economic benefits, partly gained.<sup>24</sup> The pavilion glorified Poland and strengthened the national identity of Polish communities in America, when the Second Republic of Poland once more had disappeared from the map of Europe, as a result of the German and Soviet aggressions.

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<sup>24</sup> Winiewicz (1939a: 1; 1939b: 1).



6. Four Seasons by Zofia Stryjeńska inside the Polish pavilion at the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and Modern Industry in Paris, 1925. Archive photo, Institute of Art History, University of Warsaw



7. St. Lucas Brotherhood, Boleslaw I the Brave greeting Emperor Otto III, who goes on pilgrimage to St Adalbert's grave in Gniezno. The year 1000, 1938, one of the seven monumental paintings for the Polish pavilion at the International Exhibition in New York, 1939. Archive press photo, Institute of Art History, University of Warsaw

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## Safeguarding of Asian and European Heritage in Regard to the Conservation Standards

The care of the cultural heritage and the conservation of its whole diversity is an important task of the global community in the twenty-first century. In this context, the strengthening sense of co-responsibility is accompanied by the awareness of the existence of many specific problems of the conservation, restoration and documentation of the global heritage as well as difficulties related to the cultural diversity and various definitions of the cultural heritage. These problems can be different in different cultures.

The end of the twentieth century has brought about a valuable development in understanding of the role of the safeguarding of the world heritage and fundamentally revised some previous conceptions, for example the conception of fully universal values within the cultures in the field of the conservation of their heritage. In addition, the practice and theory of ethnographic conservation has brought the common awareness that we must face the complex conceptions of reconstruction, different understanding of time within the cultures and many other philosophical and aesthetical issues, that may significantly influence the conservation standards in different regions and obviously practical conservation treatments of the monuments and artworks.

The world heritage consists of both culture and nature, that are often closely intertwined. One can also divide the cultural heritage into tangible and intangible parts, but the dividing line is also not clear, because tangible works of art are often full of intangible meanings and intangible heritage exists with the use of tangible artifacts. The intangible cultural heritage is defined in the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage as:

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity.<sup>1</sup>

The current understanding of heritage leads to the safeguarding of the traditional craft techniques, including traditional conservation techniques. The model approach to the popularization of the local traditions of conservation has been provided by the

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<sup>1</sup> Convention (2003).

Japanese government. For example, some individuals are considered there to be “The National Treasures” as they possess the unique knowledge on the craft techniques. For many years the international courses in Japanese traditional craft techniques have been organized in Japan. The aim of these courses is to spread the knowledge and expertise in the conservation of Japanese artworks all over the world. Western conservators started to use traditional Japanese techniques in the conservation of Western art, for example in paper conservation. It is a perfect example of the exchange of the elements of local cultures within the world heritage conservation.

Our work on the protection of the tangible cultural heritage is supported by the different thematic and regional documents concerning its safeguarding, but first of all, by the basic international documents, such as: International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The 1964 Venice Charter),<sup>2</sup> The UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972),<sup>3</sup> The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994),<sup>4</sup> The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), The Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage (2004),<sup>5</sup> and others. Some of them, as The UNESCO Universal Declaration on the Cultural Diversity (2001),<sup>6</sup> concerns the safeguarding of the heritage indirectly, emphasizing mainly the respect for cultural heritage diversity and for all aspects of the belief systems of different cultures. In this matter also The Universal Declaration includes the ideas of the Nara Document and prepares the basis for the forthcoming documents.

In Europe The Venice Charter is considered to be one of the first and the most important documents in the field of the world heritage conservation and is still regarded as a basis for the next ones.<sup>7</sup> The frames of the Venice Charter, which was formulated in 1964, were more exclusively focused on Western, or even specifically Latin, values.<sup>8</sup> The Venice Charter considers the authenticity to be the essential qualifying factor concerning values attributed to the heritage. But it is mostly understood in this context as the authenticity of the substance.<sup>9</sup> In Europe, research in the field of conservation traditionally have approached their objective from the materials-based perspective that examines the physical structure of the object in question. The values and aesthetics of Western civilization have been traditionally used.

In 1972 the World Heritage Convention of UNESCO recognized that the universal values of some natural and cultural sites are so important that the whole international community should take the responsibility of their preservation. Such sites have been inscribed on the World Heritage List and receive closer interest and support from international organizations. Cultural properties have been included in the World Herit-

<sup>2</sup> See: [www.international.icomos.org/venicecharter2004/index.html](http://www.international.icomos.org/venicecharter2004/index.html).

<sup>3</sup> Convention for the Protection.

<sup>4</sup> Document de Nara (1994).

<sup>5</sup> Yamato Declaration (2004).

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Erder (1981); Charte de Venise (1995).

<sup>8</sup> Silva (1983: 10–13).

<sup>9</sup> Petzet (1994: 85–99).



age List only if they met the test of authenticity.<sup>10</sup> But soon it turned out that this term has a different meaning in different cultures. For example in many other areas of the world mostly the “idea” of the work of art is being preserved.<sup>11</sup> In Western conservation recognition of the artistic character of cultural heritage was usually achieved by the reference to Western art and not to the traditions from which the objects originated. Professionals have found that the conservation of objects might include additional complex issues. In 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity was signed.<sup>12</sup> And it is now considered to be one of the most important international documents in the field of the safeguarding of the heritage, even revolutionary, as it emphasizes the complexity of the term “authenticity” and its different meanings in different cultures.

The Nara Document was formulated in the relation to the World Heritage Convention, to make it more relevant to the diversity of the world culture and to elaborate a conservation concept better adapted to increased insight into cultures of other parts of the world and to conservation needs of the present and the future. From this point of view, authenticity has to be seen as an open, flexible concept which has to be applied on a case-by-case basis, with full understanding of the social, ecological, cultural, spiritual and historical contexts.<sup>13</sup> The Nara Document states that “It is thus not possible to base judgments of values and authenticity within fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong.”<sup>14</sup> On the basis of the statements of the Nara Document on the Authenticity such properties were included on the World Heritage List as, for example, the Buddhist Monuments in the Horyū-ji Area in Japan, the Hanseatic city of Bergen in Norway and even the Ashanti Traditional Buildings in Ghana. That was possible with the respect to the cultural differences in understanding the idea of the authenticity and reconstruction.

The good example in this matter is also the Historic Centre of Warsaw in Poland. More than 85 percent of the city of Warsaw was destroyed in August 1944 and the reconstruction work was carried out from 1945 to 1949. The Warsaw’s eighteenth-century historic centre has been in fact reproduced. How could it fulfill the criterion of the authenticity? Its inclusion on the World Heritage List is not only the exception, recognizing the unique effort of its post-war restoration. This is the architectural evidence of the will to preserve the nation’s culture. The safeguarding of the intangible values was considered here to be more important than the substance itself. The Polish concept of art conservation is unique due to the experience of difficult political conditions – its dependence on three conquerors in the nineteenth century and the cataclysm of the Second World War. An apogee of the so-called “Polish conservation school” is dated to the 1970s and 1980s, when a lot of our national heritage was completely reconstructed and even restored from the ruins. This concept of the reconstruction is in fact much

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<sup>10</sup> Cleere (1994: 57–66); Stovel (2004: 1–8).

<sup>11</sup> Kurin (2003: 66–77).

<sup>12</sup> Nara Conference (1994).

<sup>13</sup> Droste, Bertilsson (1994).

<sup>14</sup> See: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/nara94.htm>.

closer to Asian standards of conservation, where the preservation of the historic substance is less important than the preservation of the “idea” itself.

The world heritage organizations, such as the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), International Council of Museums (ICOM), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Heritage Organization itself, fundamentally revised the conception of universal values in conservation.<sup>15</sup> The Nara Document has encouraged the creation of the regional and even national conservation standards, considering the matter of “the highest importance and urgency that, within each culture, recognition be accorded to the specific nature of its heritage values.”<sup>16</sup> The good example of the regional document on conservation standards is the Burra Charter (1988–1999),<sup>17</sup> which was prepared by the Australian ICOMOS Committee, and although it is not an Asian charter, it is worth mentioning because in fact it serves as the international standard and the specific reference point for the countries of mixed cultures.<sup>18</sup>

The recent Chinese charters are, formulated in 2000: Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China,<sup>19</sup> and formulated in 2005 Xi’an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas.<sup>20</sup> The first one, “The China Principles” are called “The Chinese Burra Charter,”<sup>21</sup> because it adopted some Western conservation ideas, especially as articulated in the Burra Charter. This is demonstrated by the insistence on following a planning methodology and a rigorous assessment procedure. The China Principles make a strong stand for material authenticity, advocating a minimum of intervention in the conservation process – a concept aligned with the Venice Charter, the Burra Charter, but also Liang’s idea of “repair the old as it is.” Although based on the modern Western philosophy, “Principles” are not so modern themselves.<sup>22</sup> In addition, focusing more on individual sites, the document leaves out historic landscape. Fortunately, this subject is successfully developed in the next document, namely in the Xi’an Declaration, which emphasizes the complexity and integrated character of the setting of heritage structures, sites and areas.

Many parts of Asia has already formulated the local conservation standards, as for example the Hoi An Protocols (2001)<sup>23</sup> or the Indonesia Charter for Heritage Conservation (2003).<sup>24</sup> Each one tries to summarize the specific needs of the regions of the mixed cultures, gathering the richness of the cultural values of numerous, different ethnic groups.<sup>25</sup> In 2004 the Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safe-

<sup>15</sup> Chung (2005: 55–70); Hucklesby (2005: 1022–1027).

<sup>16</sup> See note 14 above.

<sup>17</sup> Burra Charter (1999).

<sup>18</sup> Taylor (2004: 46–58).

<sup>19</sup> Principles (2002).

<sup>20</sup> Xi’an Declaration (2005).

<sup>21</sup> Taylor (2004a: 46–58); Qian (2007: 255–264).

<sup>22</sup> Taylor (2004b: 417–433).

<sup>23</sup> Hoi An Protocols.

<sup>24</sup> Indonesia Charter.

<sup>25</sup> In Indonesia over 500 groups.

guarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage was formulated by the experts of Japan and the UNESCO forum. The document calls upon national authorities, international, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and individuals actively engaged in safeguarding of cultural heritage to explore and support investigations of strategies and procedures to integrate the safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage, and to always do so in a close collaboration and agreement with the communities and groups concerned.

The conservation of the world's cultural heritage in all its forms and historical periods is rooted in the values attributed to the heritage.<sup>26</sup> In our world these values are complex, perhaps more complex now than they used to be in the past. Our ability to understand these values depends, in part, on the degree to which information sources about these values may be understood as credible or truthful. The process of the conservation of the cultural heritage includes nowadays several steps, starting from the examination, description and understanding of the values. The documentation precedes the conservation project and the conservation treatment. According to the modern conservation standards, we define these values, in regard to past, present and future generations, dividing them into the categories of historic, scientific, social, aesthetic and spiritual values. No value attributed to the particular parts of the heritage can be lost in the process of conservation.

In the modern concept of conservation we are interested in both traditional and new techniques and technologies and we in particular study the way they affect the philosophy and practice of preservation in the four specific areas: documentation, authenticity, interpretation and sustainability of the art structures, buildings and sites. These four topics are in fact closely bound together. In regard to the conservation standards, we still have to answer many questions. It is quite easy to understand how important role is played by documentation of the historic heritage, but there are still many technological and philosophical issues to be discussed in this matter. How does electronic technology influence the documentation? Can virtual technology provide the substitute for the reconstruction or even restoration itself? What are specific needs of the documentation of the heritage in different cultures? How do new technologies correspond with their cultural background?

There are also many problems related to the authenticity of the artworks in the course of their conservation treatment. An increasing range of synthetic materials are used in the restoration today. How can they change the appearance of the original material and how can it still retain authenticity? What is the philosophical base for using new technologies versus traditional technologies? In many cultures the authenticity of the process is very important and there is even more emphasis on preserving the process that creates historic substance than on the substance itself. So, when the authenticity of the process is as important as the product, how do new technologies affect the process?

There are growing conflicts between various preservation goals with the reference to the area of interpretation. When should new technologies or, on the contrary, re-

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<sup>26</sup> Nanda *et al.* (2001: 61–80).

introduced craft traditions be used and how could they affect the interpretation and understanding of cultures? How can we change the cultural background of the exposition of the artwork?

In these times of greater awareness of cultural diversity, we find that the safeguarding and conservation of the heritage may include additional complex issues. An increasing interest in the conservation of the art of different cultures has been observed in Europe and North America. More and more often international conferences are organized, discussing not only technological and historical problems, but also philosophical issues, problems of storage and exposition in different climatic conditions and the way in which the art-work exists in the environment that is not of its origin. In Poland the research and professional conservation of Asian and Middle East art is being conducted in two institutions: the Faculty of Conservation and Restoration of Works of Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and at the Conservation Department of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Poland is a country whose experiences in the field of the cultural heritage safeguarding are of specific nature. The country's difficult history – the struggle for maintaining its national identity and then a necessity to reconstruct its vast war destructions – has influenced not only Polish rich experiences in rescuing the heritage but also the development of the “Polish school of conservation” which was related to specific cultural conditionings. Polish conservators work in many countries all over the world. In 2007 the Polish Society of Oriental Art<sup>27</sup> was established with the aim to create and coordinate the network of specialists and institutions, also interested in the conservation of Oriental art, and to conduct the scientific projects in this field. This is the scope in which cooperation between European and Asian countries may be very productive. At the Third Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the ASEM ministers of culture expressed willingness to make more specific declarations in this regard.<sup>28</sup>

The conservation, as its now understood, is an evolving interdisciplinary effort. The difference in historical and cultural background within a country or a region requires a very flexible attitude, often quite incompatible with globalization tendencies. All judgments about values attributed to heritage may differ from culture to culture, and even sometimes within the same culture. It is a matter of great concern to work on an increasingly professional level, creating new conservation standards, and should be led by the process of consultation, to survey the ways of the management which could make possible to elaborate on the diversity of values in their complexity and their relation to societal interests on all levels, both local and global, and both Asian and European.

<sup>27</sup> [www.sztukaorientu.pl](http://www.sztukaorientu.pl)

<sup>28</sup> Summary of the discussions, workshop 4: Conservation and promotion of the cultural heritage, Third ASEM Culture Minister Meeting, ‘Cultural Diversity: Realizing the Action Plan’, Kuala Lumpur 21–24 April 2008.

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## Part two



# Chinese Art and Art Relations between Poland/Europe and China





## What Did It Mean To Be a Foreigner in Ancient China?

It is impossible to determine when a first foreigner came to China. But if anybody wants to find an approximate date, they have to go more and more to the distant past. Why? Because in the ancient, and I really mean “ancient,” times there was a lot of people arriving from the West and East in order to sell their goods, find better place to live and new soil to cultivate. There have been artefacts found in China from ancient Rome,<sup>1</sup> and we know about some villages where people from the Roman Empire used to live.<sup>2</sup> There have been also a lot of things from the Middle East and Central Asia, as people who used to inhabit the territories of today’s Iran, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, served as merchants, selling goods from every known country at the time. Many of them came to China, some decided to settle there, as they found a good place to live and work. That is why inhabitants of some towns on the road were mostly immigrants from Central Asia. Professor Jang Boqin and Rong Xinjiang have been gathering facts about their settlement in China, and the most important documents are manuscripts from Dunhuang, from Turfan, and epitaphs dated on Sui and Tang dynasty.<sup>3</sup> There is also some information about those cities written by the Chinese who wanted to put down their impressions on strange and mysterious customs of foreign people. We have the facts about newly established or rebuild settlements, like Qiemo, Shanshan (restored by the ex-king of Samarkand who had to run away together with his companions), Tuncheng (or small Shanshan), Xincheng, or Putaocheng.<sup>4</sup> All these towns had their own Zoroastrian temple but, unfortunately, we do not know what type of fire was worshipped there, since three types of the sacred fire are known to be venerated there: the *Bahram*, *Adaran* and *Dadgah Fires*. The first one was the highest grade of fire and was supposed to blaze all the time, the Adaran fire was of second grade, and was flamed only on special occasions. The Dadgah, the third grade of fire, could have been tended by a lay person in the home.<sup>5</sup> Probably fire that was worshipped in Chinese cities, at least at the beginning of Central Asians presence there, was one of those less important since, as we can suppose, back then there were not many – if any at all – priests. We have much information about the city of Chang’an from the documents. Since the Northern Dynasties there was a Sogdian settlement in Lantian district.<sup>6</sup> A second city

<sup>1</sup> Lin (2003); Naymark (p. 99–125); Bao (1987: 77–79).

<sup>2</sup> Rong (2000: 117–163).

<sup>3</sup> Jiang (2000b); Rong (2000: 117–163).

<sup>4</sup> Rong (2000: 117–163).

<sup>5</sup> Boyce (1970: 513–539); Boyce (1988); on the construction of temples, see: Kaim (2004: 323–337).

<sup>6</sup> Rong (2000: 117–163).

with a strong population of Central Asians was Luoyang, where we know of three Zoroastrian temples.<sup>7</sup> There were also temples of some other foreign religions, originating from the West ones, such as Manichaeism and Nestorianism.

It would be interesting to see what the settlement map looked like, as the settlement was spreading along the Silk Road, from Samarkand to Xi'an and Luoyang. Many of those settlers worked in their own shops, selling foreign merchandises, but some were holding official posts. There were also others, such as infamous An Lushan and his comrade Shi Simin – both acting as commanders in chief. There were also many envoys of Central Asian origins, to name only An Tugen or An Nuopanluo – probably thanks to their language skills and knowledge about traditions of other people.<sup>8</sup>

There are many pieces of work depicting foreigners. The most numerous are the terracotta figurines found in graves and tombs of the Chinese. From the times of the Qin Dynasty it was one of the traditional funeral offerings, but it was during the Tang times when figurines of foreign merchants and servants became most popular. A main part of them represents people from Central Asia but there are also those who had come from Africa. Most of them are characterized by typical Central Asia clothes (open collar, belted robe in red, gold, white and black, and high black boots), often by big beard and luxuriant hair, big eyes and a big nose. Some of them are presented on a camel (for example, a camel leader from Xianyang, today exposed in the History Museum of Xi'an) – being a typical animal for merchants coming from the West – some are leading the animal with reins (as, for instance, a man on a camel from the Shanghai Museum), while others are just standing alone.<sup>9</sup>

There are also some other examples of funeral art with representations of foreign people. These are bas-reliefs carved in stone slabs which decorated the walls of burial chambers. I would like to present two examples of these. First of them was found in Qingzhou, the Shandong Province. It presents a Chinese accompanied by a Central Asian man wearing his traditional costume. It is easy to see that faces of the two men are totally different – both have their characteristic facial features. The Central Asia man has a big nose, big eyes and fluffy hair. On the first slab we can see them talk, on the second the merchant – let us suppose he was a merchant – heads the caravan of men leading or riding camels and horses and one oxcart.<sup>10</sup> The second example represents a man leading a camel in the middle of a caravan. His features are quite similar to the previous one.<sup>11</sup>

An image a bit similar to those described above presents a foreign envoy being granted the emperor's audience. He is depicted in a red, open-collar robe with a belt, and black boots. Around him there are Chinese officials in different costumes and with totally different facial features.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Luo (2000: 165–192).

<sup>9</sup> For example: Wang, Sun (2002, catalog 12, 13), or Sofukawa, Degawa (p. 207, fig. 175).

<sup>10</sup> Sofukawa, Degawa (p. 152, fig. 134, 135).

<sup>11</sup> Zhang, Li (2006: 270–272).

<sup>12</sup> Yin, Jiao (2008: 51).

There are also other very interesting representations of foreigners, and we can cite here an example made of glazed pottery, as the one unearthed from the Duan Boyang's grave near the Xi'an, kept in the Shaanxi Province History Museum, or another one from the Cernuschi Museum in Paris.<sup>13</sup>

So, what did it mean to be a foreigner in ancient China? Regardless of their place of origin, newcomers to China were referred to as *hu* (barbarian), *lu* (caitiff), or *yung* (barbarian).<sup>14</sup> The question is: when did the Chinese stop thinking of the non-Chinese in these terms? If one had lived long enough within the Chinese society, would they have been treated as equal? Those appellations are to be found in many sources, even in as late as the Tang or Song ones, when the Chinese empire was weak and occasionally had to rely on other barbarian countries, like after the defeat at the Talas River and the rebellion of An Lushan, the Tang dynasty had to ask for the assistance of foreign troops to maintain its rule. After its fall, many of the governors – mostly foreign – dominated their regions and did not allow any interference from the central government. That is where the kings of the Five Dynasties came from. But even during the Song dynasty Chinese officials would refer to their northern neighbours – Khitans, Korio or Liao – as inferior people. We can find it in the *History of Five Dynasties*, where the emperor of Kithans is called *luzhu* (chief of the caitiffs) and where the references to *choulu* (ugly caitiffs) are.<sup>15</sup> That kind of foreign relations was developed in early times. Chinese towns, unlike Western ones, were first of all the seats of the administration and as such were the centers from which civilization was spreading around. Civilization was understood as the state control and, since even in today's China there are some almost inaccessible places, it is easy to imagine that in ancient China cities looked like islands in the sea of barbarian, uninhabited territories.

What did mean to be a native Chinese, to be a Han, then? Clearly, it was not enough to be born on the Chinese soil. More important were one's deeds and language, one's traditions and rituals, one's clothes and even one's usual food. All those factors contributed to the Chinese culture, and a man was a creature of culture.

Already in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* it is written that China and its neighbors were divided into two worlds: that of civilization and that of barbarism. It was believed that if an emperor was full of righteousness, he would, just by his sole being, have enlightened barbarians and pull them to his side. Then they, after they started acting like Chinese, could be considered people.<sup>16</sup> Probably it was the case with the people who came from the West and stayed to work in their own workshops and shops selling imported or made-like-imported goods. At the beginning they were considered barbarians, but after many years spent within the Chinese society they could have been incorporated into it. If it did not happen during the first generation of newcomers, it eventually would. From historic sources we know that many of those incomers had houses in the trade centers of the city, as for instance, in Luoyang Xi'an. There was es-

<sup>13</sup> Martinez (2001: 104).

<sup>14</sup> Rossabi (1983: 48–49, 77).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* (72).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* (2).

tablished a second market place, since the number of merchants was growing steadily. One of them was named 西市 (xīshì) and the other 東市 (dōngshì). As 西 (xī) means “west” and 東 (dōng) means “east” both characters put together may have a meaning of “west and east”, but thanks to existence of two ancient markets, so the places where stuff was being sold, 東西 (dōngxi) is commonly used as a name for “thing” in general.

On the map of these two cities in the Tang dynasty times created by Prof. Rong Xinjiang who also marked immigrants’ houses on it, we can see the location of their mansions.<sup>17</sup> On the basis of known images, like those on Central Asians sarcophaguses and couches,<sup>18</sup> we can deduce that their houses were similar to conventional Chinese ones. These representations show a large number of people, some of them wearing Western-style clothing, some Eastern ones. The first group consists mostly of men, second one – of women. We do not know if it is due to the fact that immigrants had only Chinese servants and Chinese wives or that women liked to wear fashionable clothes. As to their traditions and rituals, we do know from many sources that they preserved them. The most difficult worship in everyday life was probably Zoroastrian cult, as it demanded cleaning the flesh off the bones before they could be buried.<sup>19</sup> Some of them could still take the bodies of their fellows up to the mountains, some would use dogs, but some would just burry them like the Chinese and was it not for the epitaph we would never know they had come from the West.<sup>20</sup> We know also about some mixed burials of high officials. I have dealt with this problem in my other paper, so here I will say just a few words. There was a post in the empire’s bureaucracy named *sabao*, held mostly by one of the newcomers’ heirs. His duty was to observe immigrants and prevent any problem that could emerge.<sup>21</sup> We know of the three tombs of these *sabaos* – each one made to look like a Chinese one, with a long corridor and chamber with sarcophagus or couch.<sup>22</sup> There are also funeral offerings. The only difference are reliefs which decorate the couches. They are pretty similar to the traditional ones in their theme, but not in their costumes or landscapes. Those are just like transported from Central Asia images, with feast, hunting and merchant or envoy missions. All this was kind of another attempt to earn trust in the closed society.

What is most confusing is the fact that the Chinese culture appeared to have some foreign customs, like *saixian* rite or dance *hu*. There are many paintings showing the Chinese sitting at the feast and watching a one man dancing this traditional Central Asia dance. There are also some Chinese historic sources referring to some most fa-

<sup>17</sup> Rong (2000: 117–163).

<sup>18</sup> I wrote about them in my previous papers. There were seven of those relics: sarcophaguses of Yu Hong from Taiyuan (Shanxi Institute of Archaeology 2001: 27–52), Shi Jun from Xi’an (Lerner 2001: 151–162; The Institute of Archaeology of Xi’an 2005: 4–33; Yang 2004: 17–26; Yang 2005), and couches from Anyang (Jiang 2000a: 35–71; Shi 2004: 91; Scaglia 1958: 9–28), Miho (Juliano 1999; Juliano, Lerner 1997: 247–257, 72–78), An Jia’s from Xi’an (Shanxi Institute of Archaeology 2003: 112; Grenet, Riboud, Yang 2004: 273–284; Shi, 2004: 111; Yin, Li, Xing 2000: 15–35), Guimet (Delacour 2005; Riboud 2004), and Tianshui (Shi 2004: 111–112; Tianshui Museum 1992: 45–68; Boqin 2000: 35–71).

<sup>19</sup> Grenet (1984: 33–41); Wendidad (1880: 6, 44–46).

<sup>20</sup> Rong, Zhang (2004: 90–190).

<sup>21</sup> Dein (1982: 335–346); Rong (1993: 34–56); Rong (2000: 193–206); Luo (2000: 165–192).

<sup>22</sup> Those are: Yu Hong’s, Shi Jun’s and An Jia’s.

mous dancers' skill. While comparing the representations of Chinese and Central Asians dancing, we can see that they are almost the same.

We should not forget about an abundance of imported goods found in Chinese tombs and other sites. A main group form silver and golden dishes, such as plates, bowls, pitchers etc. There is a well-known collection from the Li Jingxun tomb and from Hejiacun. If we are to judge by a great number of that type of archaeological findings, we can reach the conclusion that they were used by many Chinese families. We can find this type of artifacts also in paintings and funeral bas-reliefs, with their shape so characteristic that we have no problem determining their origins. Of course, some of those dishes were probably made in China, but this is a subject of another study. The decorations on plates and bowls were very attractive to the Chinese, as testified by their influence on the ornaments shown in Chinese crafts.<sup>23</sup> But this subject also goes beyond the scope of the present article.

There is also a problem of "barbaric" costume, considered to be very fashionable at the analyzed time. We can find some representations of the Chinese – if we are to judge by their facial features – wearing clothes characteristic of the Central Asians. One of these is a painting on a wall of the Princess Fangling's tomb unearthed in Fuping County, Shaanxi Province.<sup>24</sup> It shows a maidservant, with hair and costume typical of Central Asia, holding a petal-shaped plate in her left hand and a jar in her right hand. The second one is a silk painting portraying horsemen hunting. It was found in the Prince Zhanghuai's tomb in Shaanxi Province.<sup>25</sup> There are more than forty hunters, some of them wearing Chinese costume, and some Western ones. We are unable to determine from their facial traits whether they are Han or not, but it is more than possible that all of them are the native Chinese. The character of the painting is typical Chinese as well as its style.

Let us try to summarize what has been already said above. What did it mean to be a foreigner in ancient China? Those who lived outside of the Chinese society and without Chinese culture – were called "barbarians" or "caitiffs." Even in official documents they were referred to as "inferior people" or "animals." Any foreign policy could be followed only on the basis of tributary system, so every foreign country was considered to be the subject of the Empire. The system endured even well until the Song Dynasty, when the Empire was in fact paying tribute to northern "barbaric" countries. It was called "the gift exchange," and the number of those "gifts" was ordered beforehand.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, Western culture had a great impact on the Chinese one, which is evidenced not only in arts but also in historic sources, traditions, social life and customs. Undoubtedly, some of newcomers took Chinese wives or concubines, maybe also some of their daughters married Han men. They were living in the Chinese society, selling many beautiful merchandises, governing and leading armies. Probably many of them, due to the time they and their families spent in China, Sinisized and

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<sup>23</sup> Qi (1999).

<sup>24</sup> Feng (83).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. (88–89).

<sup>26</sup> Rossabi (1983: 34).

became true part of the Chinese society. It is justified to say, in my opinion, that there was some confusion even among the Chinese. Strange foreigners, those from distant territories, were considered to be “barbarians” – the uncivilized, stupid inferior people. Those who were living in Chinese towns, familiar with Chinese culture, possibly Han-language speakers, were regarded as part of the society. We know that some of them were introduced to hundreds of Chinese families (*baixing*). It means that they were offered Han surname – one of seven at choice, according to the place of their origin, so Bucharrians, Kushanicans, Sogdians etc. wear the same names.

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## Between Science and Art: Drawings of Michael Boym to His Works on China

Michael Boym (1612–1659) was a forgotten Polish traveler and connoisseur of China and South-East Asia, one of the pioneers of European sinology, an author of numerous works on history, geography, medicine, pharmacy, language and natural sciences of China and the adjacent regions. He was also the earliest European translator of the *Book of Marco Polo*. Besides his works written in Latin, mostly unpublished and not translated into any live language, he left over a hundred watercolors and black-and-white sketches illustrating his botanical, zoological, ethnographical, medicine and other works.

The reason I titled my article, as well as my exhibition of the reconstructions of Boym's works, "Between Science and Art," is that Boym did not make his drawings for esthetic purposes only, his main aim was to illustrate his scientific works, to present to his European readers some miracles of Asia (and of Africa as well), exotic Eastern plants, animals, birds, and people, and to explain some theoretical and practical questions pertaining to Chinese science and medicine in the first place.

The earliest Boym's drawings known are those made in 1643 on the east coast of Africa and in Indian Goa. One of these drawings, probably the first drawn during his voyage from Lisbon to Macao, was made in Mozambique and it was an image of hippopotamus. Boym was invited by a Portuguese judge to take part in hippopotamus hunting on the sea, near the shores of Africa, and Boym not only was allowed to make a sketch of the dead animal, but its head was cut off and sent to Boym's residence to enable him to draw details. The drawing shows that before the arrival to China Boym was not too skillful a painter, as he became later, but he captured the details most important to him, that is animal's teeth which were broadly used in Africa and in India as medicine and amulets protecting people from illness and death. It was believed that on battlefields hippo's teeth staunch bleeding. This drawing by Boym was published in his *Flora Sinensis* and then in other books by European authors, including Athanasius Kircher.

Among the plants shown in Boym's drawings we have the African lily (later this flower was included in the *Centuria* by Gdańsk [Danzig] botanist Jacob Breyne under the name of *Lilium asphodelos*) and the pineapple fruit. The latter is shown on two drawings: one presents the whole fruit and another one – its section. Other drawings from the same collection sent to the headquarters of the Jesuit Order in Rome present the fruit of Indian cashew tree (*Anacardium occidentale*) with their seeds known as

“Indian nuts” or “cashew nuts.” It seems to have been much easier for Boym to draw plants, flowers or fruit, as these dominate in his future paintings.

The best known work of Boym is his *Flora Sinensis* printed in Vienna in 1656. He illustrated it with the drawings of plants and animals mostly unknown in Europe at his times. The original drawings have not survived and we can examine them only in the form of illustrations printed from the copperplates. Most of the preserved copies have black-and-white illustrations, but some libraries have the copies intended probably for some important people – kings, princes, etc. – with these illustrations colored by hand with watercolors. Such colored copy, possibly belonging to Polish King John III Sobieski, a great patron of the Jesuits (Jesuit Adam Adamanty Kochański was his librarian, for instance) is now kept in the National Library in Warsaw. We do not know whether these drawings of plants (most of them are from Hainan Island where Boym had spent early years of his stay in China) were made from the originals on spot or were copied from some Chinese, presumably pharmaceutical, books. Both possibilities are taken into account, but I suppose that at least some of them Boym drew from nature. In Chinese medical books there are usually only parts of a tree, mostly a branch covered with flowers or fruits, while the part used in medicine is usually shown separately. Boym frequently presented the whole tree, sometimes with roots clearly visible, though sometimes he also showed separately its leaves, flowers or fruit, and even seeds or parts of fruit used in Chinese medicine.

It is necessary to remark that the *Flora Sinensis* is in fact devoted not only to botany (because it has also several descriptions of Chinese animals), but there is inserted also, information on the medical use of the whole plants or their parts as well as on the methods of preparation of medicines, sometimes quite exhaustive. Such detailed descriptions have been provided, for example, for rhubarb and its root, imported in great quantities to Europe to treat indigestion and other gastric problems, or for musk much valued as a medicine and cosmetic.

The title of the book suggests that only Chinese plants are discussed on its pages, but in fact there are also some he had seen in South-East Asia (particularly in Malacca), in Ceylon or the India, like the mangosteen (*Garcinia mangostana*) or the durian (*Durio zibethinus*). In the *Flora Sinensis* Boym described a coconut palm which he had seen for the first time in his life when he visited the Maldives in 1644, but noticed that it was not necessary to insert its drawing since the fruit was well known in Europe at that time and could be seen in Jansson’s atlas. A drawing of the black pepper was supposedly made by Boym in Hainan Island, and that of the cinnamon – in Yunnan province, but he had seen these plants in India as well (when traveling by land through the “Pepper Kingdom” or Malabar) and in Ceylon, where the best cinnamon bark was produced. Generally, Boym presented drawings of the Chinese plants unknown in Europe at that time, but unfortunately for him, these plants were not described in Linnaeus’ *Species plantarum* and due to this, his name remained unknown to later botanists. He was the first to describe and make the drawings of a lychee tree (*Litchi chinensis*), the loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*), persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*), dwarf banana (*Musa basjoo*) and bread-tree (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*). When composing the drawing, Boym usually added the part of the plant used in Chinese medicine and some other individualized

parts, like the seed of the lychee tree or a persimmon receptacle. The fruit of the bread-tree is presented separately in a cross section to show its characteristic parenchyma and seeds. Athanasius Kircher, who extensively used Boym's works in his famous compilation *China Illustrata*, enriched Boym's drawings, usually by adding some Chinese people, as we can see in the drawing of the bread-tree. Kircher's book was published in 1667, when the Manchu people already occupied Southern China, forcing all men to wear plaits, and we see such pigtailed men sitting around a huge breadfruit (*artocarpus altilis*) and chatting. In Boym's *Flora*, we can see also some animals, which started a hot discussion among geographers and natural historians after the book was published in 1656. There was illustrated a type of tortoise, which Boym called *lomaogueti* ("green-haired tortoise" or "green-feathered tortoise") which according to Kircher was able to fly. Another controversial animal was "a mouse that eats snakes" called *sumxu* which according to Boym was so highly valued in China that it was taken out for a walk with a silver collar around the neck. The *Sumxu* (*song shu*) was simply a name for a squirrel in China ("a pine rat"), but this animal does not correspond to Boym's description and illustrations.

Much more interesting and diversified are Boym's drawings included in the maps of his *Atlas of China*. We can only guess at what has happened to the atlas. Most probably, when he was ordered to depart Rome and stay patiently in Loreto, Boym had to leave the atlas as it was being used by other Jesuit authors (Riccioli, Martini, Kircher); then the atlas disappeared for a long time. It reappeared at the auction in France in 1729, and was bought by Riamonteger who presented it to the Vatican Library, but without its extensive descriptive part. The eighteen maps of the *Atlas* were found there in 1920 by the well-known French sinologist Paul Pelliot. From the list of nine chapters of the descriptive part, which has survived, we can conclude that it contained some more drawings that in my opinion were included into Kircher's *China Illustrata*. These drawings represented the Ming emperor and his wife, military and civilian persons, as well as inhabitants of the Southern provinces of China and, as I believe, Michael Boym's own portrait.

Let us discuss the watercolor drawings of plants, animals and the scenes from the Chinese court and ordinary life on the maps of the *Atlas of China*. There are different opinions about when and where Boym drew these maps: in China, on his way to Europe or in Loreto, where he had to stay idle for four years, waiting for being sent back to China. Some of the drawings were made directly on the paper on which maps had been drawn and described, and some are drawn on a thin delicate Chinese paper (called *xuanzhi* in China) which was next pasted onto the map. The use of a thick, possibly European paper for the maps themselves does not necessary mean that they were drawn in Europe, as Jesuits had such paper in their storehouses in Macau (they had a college there which used a lot of paper in its work). I share Dr. Joanna Wasilewska's opinion that in order to determine the provenience of the paper (and of ink and pigments as well) chemical analysis is needed, but this will not provide us with an explicit answer as to where Boym drew his maps and their illustrations. I have also some doubts about the origin of the water stains on the paper, some of them more intensive, but all in the upper parts of the maps. I am of the opinion that these could have been

made on Boym's way from Macau to Rome, and to be more precise, during his travel by land from Goa to Surat in India or from Ormuz to Smyrna (Izmir in Turkey), as he mentioned in his travel report bad weather conditions and floods on his way. There is one particular drawing on the general map of China and on that of Xensy (Shanxi) province, which could not have been drawn in China – a picture of a musk deer (*Moschus moshiferus*). It was a time of vigorous polemics in Europe, concerning the appearance and size of the musk animal and its similarity to a deer or cat. It was simply due to the errors in different manuscripts of Marco Polo's memoirs. In some texts it was called *capri magnitudine*, in others *catti magnitudine*. Boym was the first European who brought to Europe the drawing of this animal. In his travel report (*Referitur iter...*) Boym said that he had received an image of the musk deer from a Persian merchant, whom he accompanied on a voyage through the Persian Empire in 1652. According to what he said, the merchant brought the animal from Samarkand to Ispahan but it died there. He included this drawing in his *Flora Sinensis*, too, but – surprisingly – we can find it also in Martini's atlas published in 1655. This confirms my view that the authorities of the Jesuit Order in Rome, who were much interested in the publication of the earliest atlas of China simply permitted Martini to use Boym's work. (No book written by Jesuits could be published without the written permission of the General of the Order which had to be printed on its title-page.)

In Boym's *Atlas* we find several drawings of plants which were later printed in the *Flora Sinensis*, but there are many other shown on the maps only, like the hibiscus flower (*Hibiscus mutabilis*), the Chinese rose (*Rosa sinica*), the lotus plant (*Nelumbo nucifera*) or the jade magnolia (*Magnolia denudata*). Among animals presented on the maps there are leopard (*Panthera tigris*), the *sumxu* animal and *lomaoguei* tortoise. The *Sumxu* is shown walking down the trunk of the tree on the map of Yunnan province. And we know that in Yunnan province there lived an animal called by the Chinese *shisheshu*, a 'rat eating snakes.' It is identified in the books on Chinese medicine as a kind of mongoose (*Herpestes Sp.*), though on Boym's drawing it more resembles Siberian weasel (*Mustella sibirica*).

Kircher showed it in the *China Illustrata* on a walk with its Chinese owners or doctors with a silver collar and lead. The tortoise on the map of Henan province is shown differently than in the *Flora*: the "wings" on front legs and back legs are clearly visible and are of green color. And in Kircher's vivid imagination the drawing became even more ridiculous, as the whole family of these tortoises is shown, with some of them flying high in the sky. The *lumaogui* tortoise was identified as *Geoclemys reevesii* only in the twentieth century. According to some sources, the strange feathers or "wings" were a kind of seaweeds which grown on the tortoise's carapace. On some maps we can see the Chinese emperor shown either in the informal or formal dress (map of Nanjing province). Undoubtedly, these two drawings were more extensively described in the descriptive part of the atlas, as we can read in its table of contents. Chapter six was devoted, among others things, to everyday and ceremonial Chinese costumes. The lower drawing shows the emperor receiving a courier, sitting on the throne with the jade scepter in the shape of a coned bar, clad in a ceremonial dress with twelve imperial emblems of power. On the map of the capital or Peking province there are three draw-

ings of Chinese emperors differently dressed, and on Guizhou province – Chinese high officials or mandarins with their attendants during the reception or tea party. Another map, of Kiamsy (Jiangxi) province, shows a judge sitting on a chair, with his armed attendants standing and three accused persons on their knees. The map of Shandong province is the only one with a village scene: a Chinese peasant is pulling a water buffalo by a bronze bull ring between its nostrils. The peasant is simply dressed, in a white shirt and the blue trousers, probably on his knees. He wears a big bamboo hat and a kind of a rainproof cape made of rice straw, common in old China.

Another source of Boym's drawings were his works on Chinese medicine. It is worth to remind here that he had finished his *Medicus Sinicus* in 1658 on his way back to China after ten years of hard work. In Indian Goa he received a message that due to the political and military situation in China he was forbidden to travel to Macau and had to find another route to reach Guangxi province, where the court of the Yongli Emperor and his army had their headquarters. He handed over his manuscript to his travel companion Philip Couplet, asking him to take it to Macau and send to Europe for publication. But instead of doing this, Couplet gave Boym's work to the Dutch factor in Siam, who sent it to Batavia. As the conflict between the Portuguese and the Dutch in East India was inflamed, the governor of the Dutch India ordered to capture Boym's medical work and to leave it in Batavia for Dutch doctors. It was dispersed there and partly lost, but several years after Boym's death, one of these doctors, Andreas Cleyer, gathered the dispersed work and published it in Germany in 1682 as the *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae* under his own name as its editor. Four years later the remaining parts of the work were brought by Couplet to Europe and published again in Germany in 1686 under the title of *Clavis Medica* and under Boym's name.

Both books contain about one hundred black-and-white drawings, sketches and symbolical drawings (models) illustrating the philosophy and the practice of Chinese medicine. Among Boym's drawings there are for example twelve internal organs of the body, fourteen drawings of human figures with particular meridians of the organs, the drawings showing the measurement of the pulse on the hands of the patient, etc. These are not original drawings by Boym, but copies of some old Chinese illustrations which can be traced back to the classical Chinese medical work *Huangdi Neijing* (*Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*) written more than two millennia ago. Boym translated the Chinese inscriptions to the drawings into Latin, sometimes adding a few words of his own commentary. Even if these are copies, it is easy to detect that they were drawn not by a Chinese, but by a European hand. As to the sketches and models, when investigating them, we can discover that Boym was quite skillful in geometry; he frequently used drawing compasses to draw circles, knew how to use radius to divide circle into six equal parts and how to build equilateral triangles or equal-armed stars and even such figures as oval or elongated orbits.

Boym knew that his drawings were not always perfect and he sometimes apologized in his prefaces or in the text of his works for his limited skills, but was convinced that these drawings were sufficient to understand the problems and ideas brought up in his book. In some cases, as when describing the Chinese illustrations of human internal organs, he remarked that drawings he copied were rough and inaccurate and probably

were drawn occasionally by doctors on the battlefield, since in ancient China it was not allowed to dissect dead bodies because this could cause the loss of their souls.

Some more Boym's drawings can be found in the works by other Jesuits, particularly in the works by Athanasius Kircher. Some researchers, including Prof. Szczesniak and myself, are of the opinion that Boym got acquainted with Kircher before his first voyage to China as otherwise it would be difficult to explain how some of his essays and drawings found their way to Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, which was published in 1652. (Boym arrived in Rome after leaving China in January 1653, so his works should be received by Kircher earlier to enable him to insert them into the book.) In any case, in his *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* Kircher published Boym's essay on the Chinese language with several illustrations. One of them showed two Chinese characters written in the old style and in the modern form and with the hand carrying the brush to show how the Chinese characters were written. In the *China Illustrata* of 1667 Kircher again inserted the drawing in the essay, but added some more objects: we have there a Chinese official in Manchu dress with the pigtail at the back of his head, standing before the table with a brush in his hand. Some writing accessories, as paper, ink-stone and brush holder can also be seen.

In his *China Illustrata* Kircher published Boym's translation of the *Monument of Singanfu*, an inscription carved on a stone monument describing the introduction of Christianity in China together with his drawing of this monument. It was not the only Boym's illustration showing his interest in the question of the spread of Christianity in China (and in India as well). We have the evidence of his interest in this subject in his *Atlas of China*. He presented on his maps several Christian monuments in China: three seventh-century Christian tombstones in Quanzhou in Fujian province and the iron cross weighting 1200 pounds, excavated in Jiangxi province.

Finally, there is a drawing of the St Thomas' cross which Boym drew in Indian Sao Thome or Meliapore (today's Madras), which Kircher published in his *China Illustrata*. Boleslaw Szczesniak had attributed this drawing to Boym and we have confirmed this attribution in his own report to his authorities in Rome. In 1657, on his way to China, Boym visited Meliapore and as he said himself, he made a drawing of the cross at St Thomas Church there. Probably, original Boym's drawing was very simple and Kircher added some elements to make it more complex and representative, as he usually did.

## *Chinoiserie* in Poland

The second half of the seventeenth century in Poland witnessed the début of the Chinese mode. In essence, Polish reception of *chinoiserie* motifs did not differ from that in Western Europe. The Polish court did not lag behind the *chinoiserie* fashion which, initially, made its entrance with diplomatic gifts and donations offered by Dutch and French visitors. Indeed, it was the French model of collecting that was directly adopted in Poland for the Chinese vogue which became a favorite amusement of aristocratic circles gathered at the royal court setting the example. *Chinoiserie* manifested itself mainly in the decoration and design of rooms, and whole Chinese closets. European residences began to accommodate lacquer paneled closets and interiors were soon filled with all kinds of lacquer furniture and objects, Chinese and Japanese screens, silks and porcelain of Eastern origin. Insofar as these were imported wares, already in the eighteenth century Europe was producing finer and finer imitations of exotic objects which could successfully compete with original Chinese artifacts. In consequence, the assimilation of Far East design was an original and creative process which gave rise to autonomous artistic categories.

Setting the framework of this subject, we must keep in mind that in the term *chinoiserie* referred to the reception of both Chinese and Japanese artistic tradition alike; in fact, it viewed the Far East at its full extent and without any differentiation whatsoever. Accordingly, all craftwork of East and South Asian origin was regarded as Chinese. Such highly desirable Oriental rarities were gradually introduced in Baroque and Rococo palaces and residences where their charm of novelty and aesthetic features provided a light relief to the otherwise too solemn and formal appearance of these interiors. The lack of precision in terminology characteristic of this exotic fashion gave rise to such phrasing in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century inventories as “in Indian way,” or “Indian flair,” which were treated interchangeably with “the Chinese genre.” The word “Indian” used to denote an object’s exotic provenance applied indiscriminately to China and also to such faraway countries as India, Hindustan, Malaysia and Brazil. Also, the naming often referred even to European artistic craftwork of a *chinoiserie* type stressing, at the same time, their exotic character.

In Poland, the earliest examples of *chinoiserie* to be found include two, regrettably unpreserved, seventeenth-century closets: the royal silk-lined cabinet in Wilanów Palace from the early 1680s and the lacquer cabinet in the Rydzyna Palace owned by the Leszczyński family. The latter was created before 1695, perhaps by the majordomo of Queen Maria Kazimiera Sobieska Rafał Leszczyński who, for many years, was closely associated with the royal couple. It is described in sources as an “octagonal cabinet of Chinese make, very beautiful.”<sup>1</sup> The Wilanów Palace, erected and improved by King

<sup>1</sup> Sienicki (1962: 310); Zastawska (2008: 121).

John III Sobieski between 1677 and 1696, is by far a unique example on the European stage of a residence where the continuous interest of its dwellers in “chinoiserie” persisted for over 200 years regardless of fashion or owner. The history of the Oriental collection of John III Sobieski represents a substantial contribution to the study of modern collecting in Poland. The decoration of the king’s Chinese Cabinet at Wilanów has been reconstructed and its significance and function interpreted by the author in the monograph of the Wilanów *chinoiseries*.<sup>2</sup> Other fashionable interiors in the Sobieski palaces, namely, at Jaworów and Żółkiew, featured oriental decoration and housed a considerable amount of porcelain, lacquer and other precious objects.

In King John III Sobieski’s collection, Chinese art appears time and again, although very often its only trace are enigmatic records found in written sources from the period, such as inventories, lists and correspondence. No specimens that could be linked to the king with absolute certainty have survived. In this article, it is essential to raise the importance of John III Sobieski’s factual knowledge of China and related problems of particular significance as well as his great feel for the exotic. The king, who held in high esteem Oriental crafts and surrounded himself with truly barbarian luxury, not only treasured a wide variety of Chinese objects but also kept authentic reports from China which he always requested from Jesuits travelling through Poland. He was also in the possession of a map of China with marked land routes leading to the Celestial Empire and envisaged establishing official relations with the imperial court of Kangxi Emperor. As a sophisticated collector of Oriental crafts and illuminated representative of the early European “culture of curiosity,” Sobieski comes to light on the backdrop of the still existing contemporary *kunstkamera* fashion for the Orient. Regretfully, the very interesting Polish attempt to establish direct diplomatic relations with the Peking court through the intermediary of Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest failed.

A detailed analysis of the best preserved source, which is the posthumous Wilanów inventory dated 1696,<sup>3</sup> entitles us to regard the King’s Chinese Cabinet from the 1680s as one of the earliest interiors of the kind in Europe, the design of which, it must be stressed, was inspired by Sobieski’s genuine passion for learning. Without doubt, the cabinet cannot be assumed to be one of the numerous popular European productions; on the contrary, it constitutes an integral expression of the very precise, almost scientific interest of the king-amateur geographer in the distant Middle Kingdom and in its political, religious and philosophical system. A few decades following the king’s death, the large legacy of art and collections from the Sobieski family was divided and scattered; in the mid-eighteenth century it existed only in much-fragmented pieces in the collections of aristocratic families related to the Sobieskis.

A superb and one of the most original “Chinese cabinets” by European standards is the fully-preserved Chinese Cabinet of Augustus II the Strong, dating from the years 1731–1732, at the Wilanów Palace. Insofar as Sobieski’s Chinese Cabinet belongs to the

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<sup>2</sup> Zaslawska (2008: 122–170). The study draws on analogies known from iconographic sources or preserved in material substance while its core is founded on a detailed interpretation of sources without restricting itself to the furnishings of the closet.

<sup>3</sup> Czolowski (1937).



first stage of the developing *chinoiserie* vogue characterized by the faithful imitation of originals, the successive Wilanów Chinese Cabinet from the Saxon period sets the second stage for the fashion in Poland – a period of fantasy and unrestrained imagination. The cabinet's rich decorative program which takes shape in the regency form of wall panneaux made of an imitation of Japanese *nashiji* lacquer and the original artistic decoration in the form of magot heads, dragons and birds executed by the Saxon court cabinet maker, Martin Schnell, was enhanced by an extraordinary painting on the ceiling. It presents central characters of the four principal philosophical and religious trends in the Far East in all its breadth (including the Indian subcontinent, in the imagination of Europeans at that time): Buddha, Confucius, a symbolic sage – perhaps one of the Taoist immortals or the deified Laozi, and the Hindu goddess Saraswati, the patroness of learning, knowledge, speech and music.

A thoroughly Polish phenomenon is a large number of *chinoiserie* motifs which appear in sacred art and as such make an extraordinary yet still scarcely investigated contribution to the Chinese vogue in Europe. Their presence is considerable and absolutely exceptional against the backdrop of this decorative fashion in art on the European continent. To give an example of a very early work and, at the same time, the most intriguing and artistically outstanding, let us quote the decoration of St Augustine's altar from the second half of the seventeenth century in the Frombork Cathedral. Essential to our study is the fact that both columns and the plinth are a later addition and feature a richly decorated imitation of Far East lacquer. The columns expose flowers in vases on a black background painted in a flat manner. Great precision can be seen in every detail and surely the rich gilt decoration is to be praised for craftsmanship. On the other hand, the plinth has extremely ornamental reliefs which reveal on a light background a bouquet of big exotic flowers in vases reminiscent of traditional Chinese bronzeware. Here, typical Chinese symbolic objects known from traditional iconography have been intentionally reproduced with particular fastidiousness and assiduity. The colors used in these decorations are extremely bright, ranging from green and vivid blue, through vermilion, plum brown, shades of pink and red to a profusion of gold. Naturalistic leaves accompany stylized motifs of small plants and exotic flowers. On some of these representations appear verses in Latin from psalms (the verse from Psalm 63 [64]: *Ad te de luce vigilo*). The fact that these verses were incorporated in the lacquer decoration proves that the setting was intended for religious purposes and could not possibly have been derived from other fittings. It may also testify to local execution of the Frombork decorations, although such a hypothesis still requires further specific research. So far, we cannot show any analogy for the lacquer imitation of such refined craftsmanship.

The next interesting realization from the cycle of Polish religious *chinoiseries* is the baroque decoration of the post-Jesuit St Francis Xavier's Church at Grudziądz. Its construction began in the late seventeenth century and was completed in 1723. Many pleasant surprises await the visitor approaching the unassuming external façade of this one-nave church. Inside, great appreciation must be expressed for the uniform Regency furnishings of the church, dated between the years 1715 and 1740 and attributed to Joseph Anthony Krause, as well as for the numerous decorative lacquer imitations cred-

ited to the Jesuit Ignatius Steiner (1691–1752). In the centre rises the monumental altar, a donation of John Ansgary Czapski, the voivode of Chełm. It must be stressed that this is one of the most beautiful churches of Grudziądz, where the bases and four columns of the central altar, the lateral altars, pulpit, wooden music choir, four confessionals and benches bear richly ornamented lacquer imitations of the *chinoiserie* type. Small floral and landscape motifs representing simplified scenery with figures which are spread out on a dark, neutral background make up the gilded relief decoration. From the formal point of view, these motifs evoke Chinese lacquerware decoration. In terms of style, however, they differ from the Frombork decorations. Churches in other towns, such as Studzianna, Toruń and Zamarte, also bear ornaments of the *chinoiserie* type.

The analysis of *chinoiserie* motifs in Polish fabrics made for the Church yields amazing results and reveals their unusual beauty. Rich and valuable vestments, liturgical robes and canopies were decorated with fragments of original Chinese textiles, among which we can recognize costly embroidered mandarin badges. We are surprised by the quintessential Chinese motif of a dragon head on the hood of the cope used in the Catholic rite, sewn from dark blue silk, interwoven with gold and silver threads and with a decoration outlining the yellow imperial dragons running after pearls in clouds. Here, a valuable Chinese wall hanging from the years 1730–1733 was adapted to suit the attire. The cope, which is presently kept in the treasury of the Kielce Cathedral in Little Poland region (dedicated to the Assumption of the Holiest Virgin Mary and Saint Augustine) is a donation of the local canon Casimir Weiss, and as such is mentioned in the inventory of 1743.

Further in-depth research is required for the study of *chinoiserie* reflected in the art of the northern provinces of the Republic, namely, Royal Prussia, and Gdańsk.<sup>4</sup> This city-state, civic *res publica*, a Protestant enclave of the Republic of Two Nations, was an intermediary in trade. In its heyday, to this great emporium arrived luxurious goods from Amsterdam, London, Venice, and even the Middle East, among others. The testament of the city mayor, John Speymann, dated 1625 makes a reference to the fact that in his residence in Long Street called *Domus Aureus* there was a table made of Indian stone and also a gilded bed from India. Similarly, an Indian writing table, an Indian gilded bed with green curtains and an Indian occasional table were to be found in his suburban home. In reality, these so-called “Indian” objects could have as well been Chinese on account of the aforesaid confusion about terminology. In addition, Speymann mentions four white porcelain jugs and four white porcelain plates of open-work design. It is absolutely certain that these objects were Far East imports. Worthy of note is the huge amount of fabrics covering walls, drapes and canopies as well as silk bedspreads.<sup>5</sup> Despite the fact that already in the seventeenth century Chinese porcelain had reached Gdańsk, only in the eighteenth century, in general, was recorded in inventories. Evidence of this is provided by a pair of Chinese vases set in silver by the

<sup>4</sup> This point, as well as the problem of Polish sacred *chinoiseries*, calls for detailed comment, which cannot be provided by the present article but will be looked into by the author in successive thematic papers.

<sup>5</sup> The Gdańsk collections of the bourgeoisie of the first half of the seventeenth century are discussed in detail by Maria Bogucka, see Bogucka (1999: 245–250).

Gdańsk goldsmith Solomon von der Rennen (second half of the seventeenth century), now in the collection of the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. The posthumous inventory of the aforementioned voivoda from Chełm, John Ansgary Czapski, from 1742 contains a list of his large collection of *porcellina* (or porcelain) valued at 400 Polish zlotys at that time, without making any distinction between European and Far East provenance. In eighteenth-century Gdańsk, the majority of houses had wardrobes situated in the entrance hall which were decorated with a set of white-blue faience vases, so-called “Delft.”<sup>6</sup> Among these were vessels with decorative elements derived from Chinese motifs, made in the workshop of Gerrit Kam; such pottery enjoyed great popularity indeed. In the inventory of the property of the wealthy Gdańsk resident, Magdalena Schumann, dated 1706, we come across the characteristic expression: “porcelain and Dutch vessels,” which rightfully proves the fact that porcelain was set apart from faience. Of course, the case in question here is Far East porcelain, since in Europe it had not been produced yet. Among many rarities, the same inventory makes a reference to a valuable “Chinese fan”<sup>7</sup>. In the houses of the affluent in Gdańsk, Toruń and Elbląg, lacquer furniture decorated with Chinese motifs and executed by local lacquer makers was to be seen. A few pieces remain, such as a chair from the pre-war collection of the Stadtmuseum in Gdańsk, or a long case clock dated 1788 from the museum at Elbląg. Inventories are full of entries such as *Lacquirter tische*, *lacquirte tee tische* and so on, as well as entries describing Chinese porcelain (*braune chinesische brauen tassen*, *chinesische tee service*). There are even Chinese imports, suffice it to mention the inventory of Catharina Hoppin’s legacy dated 1752 where a note is made of *Ostindisch schilderey*, an East Indian painting which could have been brought over to her by her husband who served as a steersman on ocean ship. In St John’s Church, in the mid-eighteenth century, the patrician families of the Soermans and Schopenhauers (*Schopenhauergestuhrel*), and the Engelckes had their own galleries; these were made of wood and glass and had wallpaper (most likely woven or painted) bearing flower and *rocaille* decoration. The west gallery was adorned with lavish *chinoiserie* motifs.<sup>8</sup> Johann Carl Schulz, a painter and from 1823 professor of the Gdańsk School of Fine Arts, recalled the fairy tale appearance of the opulent interiors of Gdańsk residences replete with exotic *objets d’art*. “Small Johann Carl was fascinated by painted tea boxes. He remembered years later the smiling yellow Chinese figures on a black background and imagined them to be inhabitants of the moon.”<sup>9</sup> Illustration five shows the entrance hall of the artist’s family home with overseas goods spread out in the foreground, among others tea caddies with Chinese figures.

The interior of the so-called “Chinese tea room” in the house of the wealthy merchant and patrician Jan Uphagen in Gdańsk is unique on the European scale. The

<sup>6</sup> This is elaborated in Elżbieta Kilarska’s catalogue of the Gdańsk exhibition of faience, see Kilarska (2003: 28–34).

<sup>7</sup> Chodyński, Dwilewicz (1984).

<sup>8</sup> Drost (1957). The two galleries were built in 1751: the east gallery was reserved for Heinrich Soermann (where Arthur Schopenhauer’s grandmother had bought a place; hence this gallery was named after the family of the renown philosopher born in Gdańsk), the west gallery for the Engelcke family.

<sup>9</sup> Kilarska (2003: 31).

rooms situated in the entresol had painted wood paneling (damaged in 1945, now reconstructed) with scenes copied from the illustrations to Johann Nieuhoff's fundamental work which set the standards of scientific knowledge of China in the seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup> Whereas desired Chinese, Japanese and Indian motifs were a current decorative mode in the fashionable homes of the aristocracy and nobility, their appearance in the houses of the bourgeoisie came as an absolute revelation.

As compared to the European market of luxurious goods, what is interesting to note in eighteenth-century Poland, are the sustained efforts to produce articles of outstanding quality. In the period of intensive development of porcelain production, it was the desire of last Polish King Stanislaw August Poniatowski, a dedicated aficionado of *chinoiserie*, to open a national porcelain manufacture which not only would meet the expectations of the court and aristocracy, but would fill up with its revenues the coffers of the State which were always empty. The project, however, failed but the royal manufacture in Belvedere in Warsaw began to produce excellent faience pieces featuring decoration frequently inspired by prime Far East models. Its products were primarily intended for the personal use of King Stanislaw August to decorate the interiors of his royal residences and also for ceremonial gifts. Today, Belvedere faience of original design and quality superior to that of European production at that time is the pride of many museum collections in the world. Equally successful in the production of faience was the manufacture of Bernardi and Karol Wolff, erected at a later date at Bielino in Warsaw. The *objets d'art* it created won fame for the wealth of their colorful stylized flowers, their vigorously painted paradise birds and pheasants, dragons, scenes with Chinese men and women, mountains and Oriental landscapes and Chinese architectural motifs, all creatively transmuted in the spirit of late Rococo. Particularly well-known were the vessels with dark brown and blue glazing and gilt decoration in the Chinese taste, imitating vessels from China (for example, vases of the *Tsun* type), and early Meissen porcelain. One of the most celebrated pieces of the Belvedere manufacture is the Sultan service offered to Turkish Sultan Abdul Hamid I by King Stanislaw August Poniatowski in 1772. Initially, it consisted of 280 pieces of which many have survived and are now on display in the Topkapi Sarai Museum in Istanbul. To this day, parts of this magnificent fairy-tale set appear at world auctions, fetching high prices. It owed its inspiration to the Japanese *imari* pattern, which the king himself mindfully recorded in his correspondence. Separate pieces carried Turkish inscriptions in gold, which is a striking example of the exotic *chinoiserie* trend which could draw on very different sources. King Poniatowski, a passionate patron of the arts, poetry and literature, whose rule nearly coincides with that of Emperor Qianlong, indulged his taste for the fashion even when it began to fade in Western Europe, and continued to decorate his dwellings with Chinese paintings, pseudo-Chinese architecture, porcelain, silks and screens; he even invited to his court in Warsaw Jean-Baptiste Pillement, the foremost specialist in *chinoiseries*, to assist him in these undertakings.

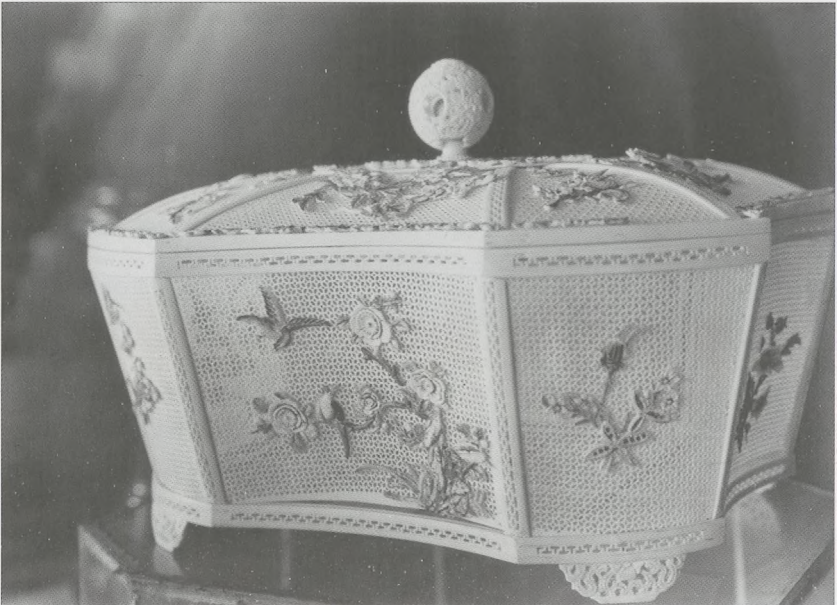
<sup>10</sup> These illustrations were drawn from the German edition of *Die Gesandtschaft der Ost-Indische Gesellschaft an den Tartarischen Chan 1655-1667* (Amsterdam, 1669), which was in John Uphagen's own library.



1. A New Year Woodcut, decoration of the Chinese Room in the Łańcut Castle, installed 1798–1802; photo by the Author (Courtesy of the Łańcut Castle Museum)



2. Chinese Export Watercolors, decoration of the Chinese Room in the Łańcut Castle, installed 1798–1802; photo by the Author (Courtesy of the Łańcut Castle Museum)



3. Ivory casket, Chinese Export Ware, formerly in the Łańcut Castle; photo by Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences (Courtesy of the Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences)



4. Genre scenes, a detail of the Chinese export paperhanging in the drawing room in the White House, the Łazienki Królewskie Garden in Warsaw, installed after 1775; photo by Piotr Jamski (Courtesy of the Museum Łazienki Królewskie in Warsaw)



5. European Factories in Canton, a detail of the Chinese export paperhanging in the drawing room in the White House, the Łazienki Królewskie Garden in Warsaw, installed after 1775; photo by Piotr Jamski (Courtesy of the Museum Łazienki Królewskie in Warsaw)



By the eighteenth century, the Chinese mode was manifesting itself in almost every field of life, from textiles and fashionable clothing, porcelain vessels and lacquer furniture imitating more or less successfully Far East prototypes, to architecture and the custom of drinking tea (black tea, in reality fermented, not to the taste of the Chinese) introduced in the second half of the seventeenth century. In particular, it established itself permanently in eighteenth and nineteenth-century parks with a rich repertoire of kiosks, pavilions, bridges and latticed houses in Far East style. This period witnessed exotic, Chinese “small” architecture in Polish landscape parks; the subject is a recurrent motif borrowed from extremely popular pattern books of Chinese and pseudo-Chinese garden architecture.<sup>11</sup> The elegant parks and gardens of late eighteenth-century Poland developed from the style of English gardens which in turn evolved from the knowledge and experience gained by the young architect, William Chambers, on his visit to China. Sculptures of Chinese couples of natural size welcomed guests stepping on the Chinese Bridge with a garden house in the park in Alexandria, the historical residence of the Branicki family in Ukraine, in Biała Cerkiew. This masterpiece of garden architecture (1793–1797, transformed up to 1850) came into being through the efforts of commissioned architects and gardeners from France, Italy, Germany and England. Splendid garden realizations grace the park surrounding the Abbots’ Palace in Oliwa (now a district of Gdańsk) in its English-Chinese part designed by Johann George Salzmann, a son of the creator of the Prussian Rococo gardens at Sanssouci. Existent iconographical records mention a variety of Chinese pavilions of the Chambers type built in the palace grounds (a plan of the residence dated 1792 was illustrated with miniatures), among others, a “Chinese cabinet,” a “Chinese temple,” two Chinese latticed garden houses with one on a “Chinese mountain” (in German: *Chinesische Cabinet, Chinesische Tempel, Chinesische Berg*). Johanna Schopenhauer, the philosopher’s mother who knew the Chinese pavilions at Sanssouci, recalls the exotic garden *chinoiseries* in the Oliwa park where “terrible Chinese and Hindu gods surging from rose bowers grimace at passers-by.”<sup>12</sup>

The early eighteenth-century latticed garden houses in Warsaw, namely those of Princess Isabella Lubomirska in the Mokotów district from 1776 and of the king’s brother, Prince Kazimierz Poniatowski in the Książęcy district, as well as the garden house in the grounds of the palace at Jabłonna in suburban Warsaw, deserve our attention. A multitude of variant forms appear; among others, the most impressive by far Chinese kiosk at Białystok designed by John Henry Klemm in 1765, and picturesque latticed garden houses on water erected in artificial islets in spacious eighteenth-century landscape parks of Anglo-Chinese style. Specimens of the genre include a lake island with a Chinese pavilion in the palace grounds of the Lubomirskis in Rzeszów, skillfully immortalized in the panorama of Rzeszów painted by K.H. Wiedemann in 1762 and also, the well-preserved Chinese Small House at Żywiec in Silesia region of Poland. It is interesting to note that even up till the First World War small bridges,

<sup>11</sup> See *Cudowna kraina Cathay*, catalogue of exhibition, Poznań, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Schopenhauer (1959: 249). These *chinoiseries* owe their inspiration to the Warmia Prince Bishop Karl von Hohenzollern-Hechingen who was related to Prussian King Frederic II.

latted garden houses and Chinese kiosks of more or less orthodox shapes were scattered in parks, constituting an inherent element of a romantic landscape. Inevitably, these fragile constructions fell prey to the ravages of time and taste and were eventually abandoned; however, they are coming back to life today and are remade with great care. Such an example of fortunate restoration is the Chinese latticed garden house from the former park of Karol Scheibler, a factory owner in nineteenth-century Łódź. This neo-Gothic structure made of yew wood embodied the specific English *mélange* of the *Chinese Gothic*. Its reconstruction in 1996 was modeled on the original which stood in the same site in the last nineteenth century.

The present article, designed by the author to be an introduction to the problem of the reception of the Chinese fashion in Poland and not a presentation of this artistic phenomenon, makes no claim to exhaust the subject. The author has decided to discuss only selected local manifestations of the vogue, both the most notable ones on the world scale and those which merit comprehensive research, not by virtue of their artistic value, but because of the original and specific Polish contribution they have made to European art. The question of the presence and scope of *chinoiserie* in Poland requires extensive studies, including archival investigation. Nonetheless, today we may already affirm that the participation of Poland in this mode was significant and original to such a degree as to position itself firmly in the literature on the subject and in the history of European exoticism.

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## Far from Canton: the Chinese Vogue in Eighteenth-Century Poland and Its Long Journey There

From the geographical point of view, Canton was a faraway place for every eighteenth-century European country. Departures and arrivals of the East India Company ships to and from China were quite significant events. Information about returning ships, together with detailed lists of their cargo, was circulated in newspapers.<sup>1</sup> Such announcements were not only useful clues for merchants as to where exotic luxury wares could be purchased, but they also built the colonial and expansionist identity of maritime empires. To modern readers, however, they are a source of information about one of the driving forces behind the Chinese vogue: the overseas trade. Commerce and Jesuit endeavor in Asia are unquestionable well-recognized roots of the “Chinese fever” that gripped the Old Continent in the early modern period.

The Chinese vogue was a complex phenomenon that left its mark on all fields of culture, from literature, philosophy and political thought to handicraft, garden design and everyday life of eighteenth-century European upper classes. It was one of the trends that contributed to cosmopolitan character of the court and aristocratic culture of the time. It is still not uncommon to find the same “Chinese style” decorations and objects in palace collections in different parts of the continent, for instance the identical Chinese New Year woodcuts adorning one of the rooms in the Badenburg Pavilion in the Nymphenburg Park near Munich, and the Chinese Room at the Łańcut Castle in Poland (Fig. 1), installed before 1751 and in the late 1790s respectively.<sup>2</sup> Enlightened Europe bought mass-produced Chinese export wares and read the same Jesuit firsthand accounts of the Middle Kingdom and reports of diplomatic embassies to the Court of Heaven. A set of written sources that practically amounted to a canon, as well as the circulation of popular architectural pattern-books, such as the *Designs of Chinese Buildings* by William Chambers (London, 1757) or series of prints representing *chinoiserie* decorations designed by e.g. Antoine Watteau, François Boucher and Jean-Antoine Fraise, made the Chinese vogue a global phenomenon. Artistic activity of Jean Pillement (1728–1808), a prolific artist famous for a great number of *chinoiserie* designs published in a few dozen series,<sup>3</sup> also significantly contributed to this process.

<sup>1</sup> Such news was not uncommon in the Polish *Gazeta Warszawska* (*The Warsaw Journal*). Only in 1780 this was mentioned in several issues, i.e.: no. 9 (29 January), no. 43 (27 March), no. 56 (12 July), no. 75 (16 September), no. 80 (4 October).

<sup>2</sup> For an illustration of the woodcut in the Badenburg Pavilion, see: Wappenschmidt (1983: 109, pl. 5).

<sup>3</sup> For Pillement's life and activity, see: Gordon-Smith (2006).

Pillement travelled across Europe, working for royal and aristocratic clients in London, Vienna, Warsaw, Versailles and Sintra near Lisbon. His recognisable style was undoubtedly one of the factors unifying the pan-European *gout chinois*.

The Chinese vogue spread over the whole continent, from Portugal and Spain to tsarist Russia, and was often expressed in a similar language of ornamental forms, iconography and literary threads. However, when considered in both all its complexity and in the particular context of conditions under which it developed in various countries and societies, the seemingly cosmopolitan fashion reveals its peculiarities. Comparative and “nation-oriented” studies are unfortunately rare.<sup>4</sup> Europe is usually taken as a homogenous entity and the Chinese vogue is discussed in a wide context, while the local situation is left out of account. Amidst eighteenth-century European countries, Poland was no exception. It was, just as its neighbours, affected by the “Chinese fever” that was both peculiar and cosmopolitan. Yet, whereas it is quite easy to describe the European context of the Chinese vogue in Poland, it seems to be more difficult to indicate its specifics and factors that determined it.

In the present article, my reflections focus on the Polish culture of the eighteenth century. The selected period corresponds to the reign of Stanislas August Poniatowski, the last king of Poland between 1764 and 1795. By then, the Chinese fashion was a well-established tendency. Its beginnings in Poland date back to the times of King John III Sobieski (1674–1696), and are connected with the impact of French culture. The fashion spread and flourished in the period when Poland was ruled by the Wettin electors of Saxony (1697–1763, with some intervals), which is when it reached its peak. During the reign of King Stanislas August, it was still an important component of the elite culture, even though it started to fade slightly and Chinese artifacts were no longer the objects of such desire as they used to be before. Yet, at this time, the second increase in Polish publications on China is noticeable, as well as the practice of employing an idealized vision of the Middle Kingdom in social and political writings of both the opponents and the adherents of royal reforms. Significant to the present considerations is also the position of the court, especially in terms of the patterns of collecting. The new-crowned king was obliged to create his own network of diplomatic and artistic agents, merchants and negotiators whose task was to obtain paintings, sculptures and other luxury goods that built the prestige of the court.<sup>5</sup> But what seems to be more important is the fact that during the entire early modern period Poland had no direct relationship with China. Missionary work of some Polish Jesuits had scant impact on Polish knowledge of the Heavenly Empire.<sup>6</sup> None of those missionaries ever came back to their native land or carried on regular correspondence with families and friends or brothers in their home provinces. The work and writings of Michał Boym, who was the most active in the field of examining and describing the Middle Kingdom, should be considered in

<sup>4</sup> For example, Belevitch-Stankevitch (1910); Demel (1995); Pagani (1998); Porter (2000); Porter (2002).

<sup>5</sup> When Stanislas August came to the throne, he had no such background at his disposal. Former structures were closely tied to the Dresden court of the House of Wettin that ruled Poland previously. For further reading, see: Manikowska (2007: 133–212).

<sup>6</sup> On Polish Jesuits’ activity in the Far East, see: Nguyen (2006).

a wide European context of the nascent field of sinology. Moreover, Poland never had its own East India Company or a trade factory in Canton. Information about alleged Polish representatives, like a certain Dickerson mentioned in the records of the British East India Company, is based only on rumors that allowed British merchants to operate independently from the Company's structures.<sup>7</sup> Among royal documents, there is a record of a project for the establishment of trade with both East and West India. Such a proposal was put forward to the Polish court by a Prussian court official, Count Sigismund Ehrenreich von Redern, but it was never brought into effect.<sup>8</sup> It seems that it is precisely that lack of direct relations with the Middle Kingdom that distinguishes Poland from a number of European maritime countries of that period. It is, therefore, interesting to investigate whether Polish absence from China trade had any impact on the nature of the Chinese vogue in late eighteenth-century Poland.

At first glimpse, the Polish fashion seems to copy the phenomenon known from other European countries. Almost every palace of consequence, or a *maison de plaisance* worthy of its name, had its own Chinese Room, and fashionable English gardens boasted Chinese bowers next to Turkish tents, Indian lodges and Roman ruins.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, it would be difficult to find a palace library register that would not list works on China, or a universal history and geography handbook that would not include a chapter on the Middle Kingdom. Only a close insight into all the aspects of the Chinese vogue, combined with an in-depth comparative analysis, permits to notice the repercussions of Polish absence from the Pearl River Delta and the imperial court.<sup>10</sup> Two aspects of the complex phenomenon of the *vogue chinoise* seem to have been particularly determined by trade and Europe's presence in China: the generally-held ideas about China and the Chinese, and decorations and furnishings at late eighteenth-century palaces.

## Encounters and Images

Diplomatic embassies, inherent in direct political and economic relations, always used to arouse an interest in the legate's country and its culture. Exchange of gifts, an indispensable part of royal audiences, often contributed to subsequent waves of enchantment with rare, unknown and splendid objects, and constituted an important pattern in the mechanisms of collecting. This was very true in case of the more "exotic" legations; suffice it to mention the Siamese embassy to the court of King Louis XIV of France, that both intensified the already-existing *vogue chinoise* and enriched the royal

<sup>7</sup> Dermigny (1964: 1241–1242).

<sup>8</sup> The Main Archive of Ancient Records in Warsaw (henceforth: MAAR), Popiels' Collection, ms. 232.

<sup>9</sup> For an outline history of the *chinoiserie* in Poland, see Danuta N. Zasławska's article in the present volume.

<sup>10</sup> It will be therefore necessary to refer to examples of such countries as England, Sweden, Netherlands and France, where trade relations with the Middle Kingdom and – in the case of France – Jesuit missionary work stimulated the demand for Oriental luxury wares and, symbolically, brought the courts in Europe and Peking closer to each other.

collections of Oriental things.<sup>11</sup> Not only were such embassies crucial to the development of markets of exotic luxury wares, but also opened a route to personal encounters. Chinese guests were objects of curiosity in eighteenth-century Europe; yet some royal and aristocratic courts that supported commerce and missionary work could boast such foreign visitors. The Parisian years of Arcadio Huang, who came to France in 1702 with Artus de Lionne, the archbishop of Sichuan in China, and until his death in 1716 held the post of librarian at the Court of Versailles,<sup>12</sup> are well documented, as is the history of a Chinese named Afock who came to Stockholm in 1786 as a guest of Olof Lindahl, the supercargo of Swedish East India Company, and spent six months there.<sup>13</sup> Throughout March 1780, *The Warsaw Journal* reported the visit in Vienna of two Cantonese, who were even presented to the imperial couple.<sup>14</sup> Such encounters or visitors were rare in Poland. So far, records are known of only two Chinese staying in Poland in the period under discussion. One was a certain Hieronimo Palacio, *un Chinois de Manille*, who visited Gdańsk (Danzig) and probably Warsaw in 1785 and was entertained by Jean-Dominique Gaillard, an entrepreneur responsible for the organization of fêtes at the court of King Stanislas August.<sup>15</sup> The other was claimed to have been a forester working for Duchess Barbara Sanguszkowa at Szymanów near Warsaw.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the lives of both those men remain cloaked in mystery.

Well-established direct relations were crucial to the vision of the distant empire and its inhabitants, but the question to what extent they influenced the deep-rooted stereotypes, is obviously controversial. The rare encounters of Poles and Chinese had no impact on the general view of the Middle Kingdom. Almost all texts on China published in Poland in the period of Enlightenment were inspired by popular Jesuit writings, e.g. *Description de l'Empire de la Chine* by Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (vols. 1–4, Paris 1735), the content and essence of which were determined by the Order's propaganda. Their authors and interpreters adopted the vision of the Empire as susceptible to the light of Christian faith and well-governed by the emperor, who was described as the father of his people. Political writings of the period disseminated the vision of well-organized Chinese administration and images such as the emperor plowing the soil at the beginning of agricultural season. The publicists of the Enlightenment were especially diligent in praising the practice of conferring nobility according to merits and not to birth. Even when they quoted some negative facts from Chinese history, this obviously resulted from the interpretation of Jesuits' writings and not from first-hand experience. Altogether, the Polish vision of China was close to the one propagated by Voltaire, the greatest Sinophile among French *philosophes*. In theory, the Middle Kingdom was indeed considered a model for Poland, but in practice it did not occupy

<sup>11</sup> Belevitch-Stankevitch (1910: 10–48).

<sup>12</sup> Spence (1992: 11–24).

<sup>13</sup> Wirgin (1998: 210–219).

<sup>14</sup> *Gazeta Warszawska*, no. 24 (22 March), no. 30 (12 April). Their copperplate portraits are housed in Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst in Vienna (*Ajavnv*, inventory no. KI 2569 F-90 S-4 Z-4; *Athah*, inventory no. KI 2569 F-90 S-2 Z-2).

<sup>15</sup> Karpiński (1898: 100–101).

<sup>16</sup> MAAR, Poniatowski Family Archive, ms. 419.

much of Polish elite's attention. The recognized stereotype of the Chinese was based on superficial qualities related to physiognomy, arts and handicraft.<sup>17</sup>

An analysis of the writings on China published in Poland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demonstrates that the image of the Empire and its inhabitants did not change much over a span of nearly a century. Interrelation between its stability and the lack of common political, historical and economical ground becomes clear when that image is compared to the way the Poles used to speak and write about their close neighbors. Such relations are evident in case of the Poles' attitudes towards the Turks. The perception of the Turks changed after the Karlovci Treaties had been signed in 1699 and the war with the Ottoman Empire finished.<sup>18</sup> In Polish eyes, Turkey changed from a barbarous enemy into a peaceful and domesticated neighbor. It has also been demonstrated how the breakthroughs in commercial and political relations between China and England influenced the way the English perceived the Chinese.<sup>19</sup> There, the Voltairean, idealized vision was short-lived. Its scant success resulted from both skepticism towards Jesuit writings, which were Voltaire's main source of information, and first-hand experience and accounts brought directly from Canton. The negative image of the Empire was shaped and confirmed by such accounts as George Anson's *Voyage around the World* (London, 1748). Unpleasant treatment he experienced from the Cantonese authorities, resulting partly from his haughty attitude and disrespect for Chinese regulations, made him discredit everything Chinese, from military force to fine arts. Outraged with a Chinese merchant's dishonesty in commerce, Anson even made a whole list of sly practices (like cramming poultry with stones to add weight) that was often repeated by European Sinophobes. Such vision, as Daniel Defoe's *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London, 1720) testifies, was common among the English elites and was further reinforced by the failure of Lord Macartney's embassy in the 1790s.

## Decorations and Furnishings

The negative perception of China had little influence on the spread of the fashion, and London was naturally one of the most important centers of trade in Chinese commodities. It was probably in London that Princess Izabela Lubomirska acquired her Chinese export watercolors to adorn the Chinese Room in the newly decorated part of her palace at Łańcut (Fig. 2).<sup>20</sup> Direct relationship between the absence of Polish merchants in Canton and the decorations and furnishings found in the palaces of the contemporary elites escapes a clear definition, however. Cosmopolitan aristocracy, thanks to their own journeys and the service of merchants acquiring furniture, paintings and other commodities on their commission, undoubtedly bought Oriental goods in Paris, London and Amsterdam, although archival records related to such purchases are scant.

<sup>17</sup> Niewiara (2000: 73–74).

<sup>18</sup> Kurek (2003: 173–181).

<sup>19</sup> Demel (1995: 116–125); Pagani (1998); Porter (2000).

<sup>20</sup> On the Łańcut Chinese Room, see: Majewska-Maszkowska (1976: 270–277).

The stores in Gdańsk and Warsaw, especially the famous one of Franciszek Hampl von Hampeln, also had Chinese ivories, papers and ceramics on offer.

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that inventories of Polish eighteenth-century palaces list numerous objects described as “Chinese.” Unfortunately, it is difficult to distinguish true export wares from European *chinoiserie* products as both were usually labeled as “Chinese” in the inventories. It is most true especially in the case of porcelain, lacquerware and textiles, the European imitations of which were available from the beginning of the seventeenth century or even earlier. Despite the lack of clear definition of a given object’s provenance, which is indeed frequent in the inventory entries, close reading of those registers allows to set apart some groups of objects that could be related to Chinese market. First of all, they detail a lot of wallpapers and export watercolors. Together with paintings on glass, they were perceived in Europe as the most representative examples of Chinese painting. The series of watercolors in the Łańcut palace has already been mentioned earlier, and the inventories of the Royal Castle in Warsaw list several similar *papiers de la Chine*, of which only two survive today. The wallpaper representing genre scenes (Fig. 3) and a view of European factories in Canton (Fig. 4) still decorate the walls of the drawing room in the White House, King Stanisław II August’s *maison de plaisance* in Łazienki Royal Garden in Warsaw. Royal collection boasted also a book of porcelain described as “Two Chinese books of Chinese paper representing the methods for producing porcelain.”<sup>21</sup> From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, such sets were very popular in European collections and the commonly-held belief that they could be helpful in discovering the secrets of china clay made them real objects of desire. It can only be supposed that such a book was expected to be useful also in the activity of the Royal Manufacture of Porcelain, established by Stanisław August at Belweder in the late 1760s.

Another numerous group includes the ivories. Inventories demonstrate clearly that they were in great demand in aristocratic circles. Unlike lacquer- and chinaware, works of carved ivory, which were believed to have been done with a truly demonic dexterity, were perceived as Chinese art of high value. Ivory caskets, like the one listed in inventory of the Łańcut palace (Fig. 5), were readily bought curiosities, easily available on the Warsaw market of luxury goods. Both palace inventories and accounts of travelers visiting Polish palaces mention a number of such knick-knacks. They were usually meticulously described, both guests and inventory-making palace officials paying particular attention to objects decorated with obscene images. Bas-reliefs with lascivious imagery were not an uncommon decoration of garden structures, especially spurious cottages, as was the case of the cottage built for the king’s brother Kazimierz Poniatowski in his garden at Solec in Warsaw.<sup>22</sup> In the context of travel accounts, obscene ivory wares seem to confirm the perception, well-established in European discourse, of the exotic as the erotic.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> MAAR, Archive of Prince Józef Poniatowski and Maria Teresa Tyszkiewiczowa née Poniatowska, ms. 183, p. 106.

<sup>22</sup> On Solec, see: Kwiatkowski (1971: 49).

<sup>23</sup> See: Beth Kowaleski-Wallace’s observations related to chinaware: Kowaleski-Wallace (1995–1996).



Other Chinese export commodities were registered in inventories as well, like clay figures of the Chinese, magots, fans and umbrellas. An attempt to discover their European background could be made, but it is more important to notice that in examining inventories of Polish and European palaces for Chinese commodities, numerous objects of the same type are found. Polish elites bought the same commodities as their foreign counterparts, only, as it may be surmised, in smaller quantities.<sup>24</sup> The main difference did not lie in the objects themselves, but in their cultural meanings. Those meanings were determined by the mechanism of acquisition, best illustrated by a brief comparison of two collectors. Dutch jurist Jean Theodore Royer and Polish connoisseur of arts Count Stanisław Kostka Potocki created outstanding collections of genuine Chinese objects that served as a *sui generis* auxiliary material in their studies. They both wrote scientific, according to the current opinion of the time, essays on various aspects of Chinese culture: Stanisław Kostka Potocki's essay *On the Art among the Chinese* was published in Warsaw in 1815, while Royer's numerous articles – e.g. on ginseng, lacquer and art – still remain in manuscript.<sup>25</sup> The crucial point of difference is that Royer often acquired objects and collected information with the help of officials working in Dutch factory in Canton, whereas Potocki used available accounts and bought Chinese commodities in Paris and Bayonne.

European market, saturated with Oriental commodities, provided Polish elites with goods from China, but it could not replace the profits they could have reaped from direct trade relations and their own East India Company service, which they did not have. In the process of my research, I have uncovered no information that would suggest that Poles ordered luxury wares in Canton, whereas this practice was widespread among English, Swedish and Dutch elites. Suffice it to mention armorial porcelain imported from China in quantities: David Sanctuary Howard estimated that between the years 1695 and 1820 roughly four thousand services were produced only for the English market.<sup>26</sup> Registers of gifts given by and received by King Stanisław II August do not record any Chinese object that would have been presented to or by him. This fact is not insignificant, considering that goods ordered in Canton were popular presents; this is the case of the Gripsholm Service, given to King Gustav III by the Swedish East India Company in 1776, and the Linnaeus service, ordered in China and brought by the famous botanist's pupil Per Osbeck.<sup>27</sup> Its elements were decorated with *Linnea borealis*, the plant discovered by Linnaeus. The botanist had numerous Chinese objects in his collection, many of which he had received directly from China, to mention the four pictures representing a thousand antiquities, which were given to him by Magnus Lagerström, the principal of the Swedish East India Company.

<sup>24</sup> For this reason it can be carefully concluded that this field still awaits an in-depth analysis.

<sup>25</sup> Potocki's article "On the Art among the Chinese" was reprinted in Potocki (1992); on Potocki's opinions: Wasilewska-Dobkowska (2002). On Royer, his writings, collection and interest in China: Campen (2000).

<sup>26</sup> Howard (1974: 67).

<sup>27</sup> On the Gripsholm Service and Linnaeus' collection of Oriental objects, see: Wirgin (1998: 158–159, 220–225).

The fact that the journey of Chinese objects to Polish palaces started in the West – chiefly in Paris, Amsterdam and later in the century in London – was not without its influence on the way those objects were perceived, and the way they functioned in the discourse of culture. In eighteenth-century Polish literature, the “things Chinese” – magots, pottery and lacquerware – were usually mentioned in the same breath as Italian pictures, Persian carpets and Saxonian porcelain. They were, just as their European and especially French equivalents, accused of sucking out money from the country. David Porter noticed that in popular English didactic writings warning against foreign fashions, France and China were represented as suppliers of the worst-possible luxury wares, the ones most dangerous for social morale.<sup>28</sup> In Poland, Chinese objects were rarely mentioned in debates on conspicuous consumption and more often appeared in satires on the followers of foreign fashions.<sup>29</sup> Yet, even there they were closely associated with French luxury goods. They did not confirm the maritime power of a developing empire, but rather the European background and cosmopolitan nature of the contemporary Polish aristocracy. Thus, it is obvious that their cultural background was more Western than Eastern.

## Conclusion

It seems that to Polish elites, Canton must have been even more distant place than to, for instance, their English counterparts. The journey of the Chinese vogue to Polish palaces was obviously longer in the intellectual than in geographical sense. It is, of course, not only the question of its mere material aspect, or the Polish perception of the Middle Kingdom, but also the question of the genuine knowledge of China. Missionary work and overseas trade stimulated the study of Chinese languages, the work on dictionaries and grammars, to mention just the works of eighteenth-century French academicians and the role that both the Jesuits and above-mentioned Arcadio Huang played in their achievements.<sup>30</sup> This was the basis for the development of Sinology, the history of which begins in Poland definitely later than elsewhere.

*I am indebted to Mrs. Klaudyna Michałowicz who patiently corrected the English version of my article.*

<sup>28</sup> Porter (2002: 398).

<sup>29</sup> I analyze this issue in “*Lampa francuska o czterech knotach z chińskim daszkiem. Rzeczy ‘francuskie’ w wybranych inwentarzach pałaców elit w Rzeczypospolitej XVIII wieku*” (‘A French Lamp with Four Wicks and a Chinese Roof. French Objects in Some Inventories of Polish Palaces in the Eighteenth Century’), a paper delivered at the conference “French and Polish Artistic Relations in the Early Modern Period,” Warsaw University, March 2009.

<sup>30</sup> On the subject, see: Leung (2002: 129–155, 237–250).

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## Collection of the Chinese Textiles in the National Museum in Warsaw

The beginnings of the Chinese textiles collection in the National Museum in Warsaw date back to the first decades of the twentieth century. The present state of the collection is a result of the long-term consolidation process of the collections from the Middle and the Far East, previously scattered in various other departments, mainly in the Collection of the Decorative Art and the Collection of the Foreign Modern Art.<sup>1</sup>

The collection of the Oriental Art in the National Museum in Warsaw takes pride in the most numerous works of Chinese art in Poland, including five thousand objects.<sup>2</sup> Apart from textiles, it contains pottery products, stoneware, clay sculptures, bronze and stone products, works made of ivory, lacquer, and glass, as well as scroll paintings, wood engravings and stamps. Thanks to the generosity of many donors, the collection includes valuable and unique masterpieces. Some of the textiles date from the Ming dynasty, but most of them date from the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). The donations offered to the Museum in the form of textiles were not very impressive; they were mostly single items, and only occasionally they included several items.

The textile collection began with the donation by the inheritors of Stanisław Glezmer, an engineer and industry man who during his stay in the Far East collected a lot of interesting Chinese handicraft products, among them also various types of tapestries.<sup>3</sup> Another interesting group of textiles found its place in the collection thanks to Mieczysław Geniusz (1853–1920), an engineer working on the construction of the Suez Canal, but also a bibliophile and a collector, interested in Orientalism. In his will he bequeathed his collection of artworks and objects of everyday use of the Middle and Far East origin to the National Museum, including ten textiles of different types, among them tapestries, clothes or shoes.<sup>4</sup>

In 1930 the Museum received the collection of Magdalena and Władysław Jagniątkowskis. As an officer of the French army, in the 1890s Colonel Jagniątkowski served in North Vietnam and later in China. Probably at that time he started his interest in Asian culture and art, which resulted in an impressive collection of the Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> Sprawozdanie [Decorative Art Gallery Activities Report for 1969–1982] (1982); Maleszko, Redlak (1990: 3).

<sup>2</sup> Folga-Januszewska (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Księga Inwentarzowa (Inventory Book the Artistic Exhibits, the National Museum in Warsaw); Folga-Januszewska (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Księga Inwentarzowa.

artworks, mostly colorful porcelain items and valuable objects of everyday use, including several textiles.<sup>5</sup>

The Second World War interrupted the activity of the Museum. From the beginning of the German occupation the collections were systematically plundered and destroyed. On the other hand, some of the collection enlarged with the items left as deposits or simply donated by panicked owners, artists, societies and disappearing institutions. The liberation in 1945 and nationalization of the collections (including the private collections deposited in the Museum) which followed the change of a political system seriously complicated the situation of the Museum property. Many donors and collectors emigrated or lost their lives but, at the same time, the Museum received numerous state and administration transfers of works of art confiscated from their private owners or coming from recovering actions. Thus, the collection of the Chinese textiles in the Warsaw Museum enlarged with the objects from various estates of the Rzewuski, Zamoyski or Lubomirski families (as, for instance, the Lubomirski family palace at Mała Wieś). It took over ten years for the Museum to regain its friends' confidence after the war and it finally became "a national shelter" for numerous great masterpieces.<sup>6</sup>

A valuable donation, including over 300 objects from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, with a rich collection of the Far East art (mainly Chinese), formerly belonging to Ignacy Jan Paderewski, was received by the Museum in 1951, eleven years after the composer's death.<sup>7</sup> Apart from various Chinese works of art, such as monochrome and multicolor porcelain, bronze, jadeite, carved lacquer, the collection also included three textiles deserving our special consideration.<sup>8</sup>

Another generous donation was made by the Dembiński family, General Stefan Dembiński and his son Maciej, who bequeathed to the Museum numerous objects in 1971, including works of Chinese handicraft. The donated textiles formed a part of the collection gathered by the General's brother, Stanisław Dembiński, an Orientalist who worked at diplomatic posts in China and Japan before the war.<sup>9</sup>

Although the donations were often impressive, textiles constituted relatively small, or even the smallest, part of them, only occasionally numbering more than one item. What all these collectors had in common was passion for the arts of the Far East and the desire to leave a part of themselves in the form of donations. Thanks to their generosity the collection of textiles in the Oriental Art Department of the National Museum may be considered as a good example presenting the splendor and artistic skills of craftsmen from China or Japan.

At present, the collection of Chinese textiles includes almost a hundred items, mainly various clothing, both men's and women's, mandarin squares, accessories, and decorative textiles.

<sup>5</sup> Księga Inwentarzowa; Folga-Januszewska (2003).

<sup>6</sup> Folga-Januszewska (2003).

<sup>7</sup> Karłowicz (1995); Folga-Januszewska (2003), Folga-Januszewska, Jacoby, Lipska, Popkowska (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Księga Inwentarzowa; Folga-Januszewska (2003).

<sup>9</sup> Folga-Januszewska (2003).

The clothes date mainly from the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. They are court robes with decorative typical patterns. The patterns are embroidered and woven, with the image of a dragon with pearl, good-omen motifs, symbols of power or Buddhist and Taoist emblems, or with other symbols such as phoenixes, clouds, waves, etc.

Thus, the Warsaw Museum takes pride in having three dragon robes.<sup>10</sup> The first one, made with the use of the *kesi* technique and dating to the times of Emperor Qianlong (1736–1796), is decorated with the images of five-clawed dragons<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 1). The dragons in the center of the garment are presented *en face*, the others in profile. The dragons are presented against the blue background with clouds and eight most common Buddhist symbols.<sup>12</sup> The rest of the composition is completed with bats and imperial peonies.<sup>13</sup> Another garment decorated with dragon motifs is a short caftan dating from the times of Emperor Jiaqing (1796–1820).<sup>14</sup> It is a cloth embroidered in the light tones of blue and green changing into cream, claret, and yellow, with deep blue accents on the originally red silk textile with the plain weave. It is decorated with four-clawed dragons. The composition is completed with cloud, flower and bat motifs in various positions. Above a mountain are two of the eight Buddhist symbols – a couple of fish and a baldachin.<sup>15</sup> The Museum's collection also includes a dragon robe designed in a Yongzheng style (1722–1735).<sup>16</sup> The quality of work and the materials used indicate, however, that it was made much later, probably at the beginning of the twentieth century. The robe is made of golden bronze satin interwoven with the weft yarns in the tones of beige, bronze and yellow, and with a five-clawed dragon as the main motif.

Chinese textiles brought to Europe fulfilled often different functions to those performed in their original country, which may be proved by the two objects from the Museum's collection. The first is a tapestry made with the use of *kesi* technique (Fig. 2).<sup>17</sup> It was made of the textile designed for a dragon robe, dating to the second half of the eighteenth century (the times of Emperor Qianlong), decorated with the images of three five-clawed dragons. The textile is trimmed with a polyester tape decorated with butterflies and flowers. Another object from this group is a part of a textile designed for a dragon robe, made of red satin interwoven with multicolored silk yarn and strips of silver-plated paper, also changed into a tapestry.<sup>18</sup>

The women's clothes from the Warsaw collection comprise overcoats, skirts, aprons, waistcoats – multicolored and beautifully embroidered, with the motif of plants and animals, dating to the nineteenth century (Fig. 3). Botanical motifs included peonies,

<sup>10</sup> Biedrońska-Słota (in preparation).

<sup>11</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 2594 [SZTUKA KRAJÓW AZJI Sztuka zdobnicza] (ASIAN ART Decorative arts); Simmons (1929: 125); Mailey (1978: 15); Watson, Ho (2007: 204); Cammann (1962: 129); Cammann (1956: 94–102).

<sup>12</sup> Simmons (1929: 136); Dusenbury (2004: 125).

<sup>13</sup> Cammann (1944: 100–101); Farnworth (1986: 49).

<sup>14</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 2610.

<sup>15</sup> Simmons (1929: 136); Dusenbury (2004: 173).

<sup>16</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 2606; Watson, Ho (2007: 201); Garrett (2007: 17).

<sup>17</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 481.

<sup>18</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 3504.

lotuses, lilies, peach blossoms, chrysanthemums, lingzhi mushrooms, camellia tea flowers, gourds and other plants.<sup>19</sup> Several items from this group deserve our special attention. One of them is a caftan decorated with butterflies and flowers, dating from the end of the nineteenth century, made of navy blue satin decorated with knot, couched and satin stitches. Another interesting object is a caftan decorated with embroidered flower motifs with an appliquéd collar decorated with the images of women against the park background.<sup>20</sup> The same motif is used in the border around the bottom edge of the robe. The robe is made of yellow silk of a sophisticated weave. The next object from this group is a nineteenth-century caftan made of white satin, decorated only in the cuffs area, trimmed with a tape at the bottom, around the neck and along the fastening on one side. Each of the cuffs is decorated with three medallions with an image of a phoenix, a dragon and a lion, made of metalized thread with the use of couching thread. The ornaments are most diverse in the border around the bottom of the robe and around the neck. Various birds and butterflies are presented against the navy blue background, together with flowers and the pomegranate fruit. This group of items also includes a nineteenth-century long overcoat made of white satin. The garment is decorated with embroidered flowers in pastel colors, made with the satin and back stitches.

The Museum collection also includes two objects presently recognized as tablecloths, most probably made of collars decorating ladies' robes<sup>21</sup>. The first one, with images of the four seasons, is decorated with a variety of embroidery stitches, high quality multicolored silk yarn, metalized thread and thread made of peacock feathers.<sup>22</sup> This is the only object in the Museum in which this type of thread was used. The appliquéd in the shape of four connected ju-i scepters, made of cream satin, was appliquéd onto the oval silk satin yarn in green color. The edge is trimmed with a tape of violet satin fabric, decorated with flower motifs, and images of birds and bats. The oval-shaped centre is filled with the yellow fabric of the satin weave with the images of butterflies. The appliquéd dates back to the eighteenth century and the textile onto which it was appliquéd – to the end of the nineteenth century. The other item from this group is a “tablecloth” with the images of women in a park (Fig. 4).<sup>23</sup> This item is dated to the nineteenth century.

Another group of specimens consists of skirts. The Museum took the possession of them after a recovery action at Mała Wieś in the late 1940s. The skirts date to the nineteenth century, and are decorated with flower motifs, images of birds, butterflies and bats.

Very interesting are also various accessories, also made of embroidered silk: shoes, cases for fans or for chopsticks (sometimes only parts of them), pouches for snuffboxes or other personal belongings.

Worthy of special note are also mandarin squares, insignia worn by both civil and army officials from the times of the Ming dynasty on (from 1393 on overcoats – *bufu*).

<sup>19</sup> Watson, Ho (2007: 196).

<sup>20</sup> Brix (2003: 86); Vollmer (2008: 119).

<sup>21</sup> Cammann (1951: 1–9).

<sup>22</sup> Register no 3701 Tc/73.

<sup>23</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 3506.





1. A dragon robe, kesi technique the 18<sup>th</sup> century; register no SKAZ sz 2594



2. A tapestry made of the textile designed for a dragon robe, kesi technique, second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; register no SKAZ sz 481



3. A skirt, embroidered silk, the 19<sup>th</sup> century; register no SKAZ sz 2611



4. A tablecloth, probably changed from the collars decorating ladies' robes, satin embroidered and appliquéed, the 19<sup>th</sup> century; register no SKAZ sz 3506



5. A mandarin square of the 1<sup>st</sup> grade civil official with the image of crane, satin embroidered and appliquéed, the 19<sup>th</sup> century; register no SKAZ sz 2625



6. A tapestry made of a Taoist priest's robe, embroidered satin, the 18<sup>th</sup> century;  
register no SKAZ sz 184



7. A tapestry with the image of four lions, embroidered satin, the 18<sup>th</sup> century;  
register no SKAZ sz 1206

Since the end of the fourteenth century there was a nine-grade ranking system in China, with assigned pictorial badges. The civil ranks were presented as birds images and the ranks of the army officials had the form of a wild animal image.<sup>24</sup> The Warsaw Museum houses ten objects of this type – all of them date back to the times of the Qing dynasty.<sup>25</sup> They were made with the use of *kesi* technique or are embroidered. One of the most interesting items is a woman's semi-formal waistcoat with a badge of second-rank civil official and the image of a golden pheasant, dated back to the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>26</sup> The robe is made of black textile with a plain weave, decorated with flat embroidery stitches of multicolored silk yarn and metalized thread. It presents the images of four-clawed dragons and phoenixes. The other items of this group are single squares, such as two squares of second-rank army official, made with the use of the *kesi* technique, presenting the image of a lion, dating to the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

Among the embroidered squares there is one that deserves special attention. It is the square of third-rank army official with the image of a leopard, from the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> The leopard sitting on a rock emerging from water is surrounded by Buddhist symbols, hanging on thin ribbons. The embroidery is made with the use of knot and couched stitches of silk yarn and metalized thread. It is dated back to the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup>

During the last years of the Qing dynasty rule officials sometimes used embroidered appliqués with animals or birds on their robes, which could have been changed conveniently in case of promotion. The Warsaw Museum is in the possession of two squares of such type. The first one is an emblem of the fourth-rank civilian embroidery, i.e. that of a wild goose.<sup>30</sup> The bird is appliquéd and embroidered with metalized thread, similarly to the whole square composition. The appliqué of the second square in question consists of two different pieces of satin, one in the brown and the other in the black color, which made it possible to exchange only one part of the bird in case of promotion (Fig. 5).<sup>31</sup> The collection includes also another interesting nineteenth-century square, with the image of the eight Buddhist symbols, made with the use of half-cross (semi-cross) stitch on the silk cloth.<sup>32</sup>

Another important part of the collection is a group of different types of embroidered decorative textiles. Far East embroideries were an important element of the interior decoration both in Europe and Poland for a long time. They were frequently used to decorate walls or furniture in the so-called “Eastern” or “Chinese” rooms and they

<sup>24</sup> Cammann (1944: 110); Dusenbury (2004: 126); Priest (1936: 130); Priest, Simmons (1934: 62).

<sup>25</sup> Zapolska (in preparation).

<sup>26</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 2595.

<sup>27</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 2623/1,2.

<sup>28</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 2624.

<sup>29</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 825.

<sup>30</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 2626.

<sup>31</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 2625.

<sup>32</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 2622.

were often designed for specific interiors.<sup>33</sup> Some of these textiles were meant to be paired together, such as richly decorated cuffs of female robes, which have been sewn together to make a tapestry. Embroideries often present the themes used in Chinese paintings: figurative scenes, landscapes, flower and bird motifs (*huaniao*). An interesting exhibit of this type is a unit of two textiles with the image of women in the park,<sup>34</sup> made of white satin embroidered with the use of knot, satin and couched stitches.

Interesting group of objects is formed by textiles for various uses which have been transformed into tapestries. Among these there is a tapestry made of a Taoist priest's robe, dating back to the eighteenth century<sup>35</sup> (Fig. 6). Almost the whole surface of this textile is covered with the couched stitch embroidery. The central part of the image is occupied by a medallion with the image of pagoda surrounded by two flying birds.<sup>36</sup> The medallion is enclosed in the two rows of golden circles with stars on both sides. Three smaller medallions presenting the gates of paradise are placed above, and two other bigger medallions are placed symmetrically on both sides – one of them symbolizing the Sun with the image of a three-legged raven and the other depicting the Moon with the image of a hare preparing a longevity mixture. Below are four oval forms with the images of gates similar to each other, symbolizing four main points of compass – the four sides of the world.<sup>37</sup> The motifs of clouds represent the image of the sky. Among the clouds and the curved lines covering the surface there are the Buddhist emblems of happy augury and the emblems of the “Eight Precious Things.”<sup>38</sup> The background is enriched with the images of phoenix. At the bottom, the piece is decorated by the border with the images of real and imaginary animals. The fantastic creatures include a *qilin*, a dragon carp and a dragon, whereas the real animals include a horse, a tortoise and a snake. The rest of the border surrounding the tapestry is decorated with phoenixes among clouds.

Another item belonging to this group is a little tapestry decorated with four lions playing with balls, peony flowers and bats<sup>39</sup> (Fig. 7). It is made of two pieces of cloth sewn together in the middle, ornamented with a composition being a mirror reflection of itself. The composition is completed with a border of re-used cloth, decorated with various species of birds, among which a quail and a peacock may be identified. The fact that the cloth was re-used has no adverse impact on the high quality of the embroidery, which was made mainly with the use of the knot and couched stitches of silk yarn in the shades of beige, blue, indigo and of metalized thread. In some parts the metalized thread was wrapped in silk yarn which, when looked at from a further distance, reminds of the knot embroidery stitch.

Double-faced decorative *kesi* tapestries (*kesi* meaning “cut silk”) from the Museum collection often present the themes from Chinese literature. They are characterized by

<sup>33</sup> Zapolska (2008: 138).

<sup>34</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 12,13.

<sup>35</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 184; Masłowska (2006: 232); Wasilewska (2009: 231–239).

<sup>36</sup> Priest, Simmons (1934: 88–90).

<sup>37</sup> Vollmer (2004: 118).

<sup>38</sup> Priest, Simmons (1934: 70–71); Kastens (1983).

<sup>39</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 1206; Malinowski (2008).

the unique precision of workmanship and high quality of the silk thread, occasionally metalized. Most probably, relatively small *kesi* were used in Europe for interior decorations, such as, for instance, decorative covers for the furniture. The textile was also used for sewing clothes and mandarin squares, examples of which may be also found in the Warsaw collection. One of them is a *kesi* tapestry flanked by either side by a vertical scroll with the image of the Taoist goddess Xi Wang Mu with magic mushrooms, dating back to the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>40</sup>

The textiles arriving to Europe from the Far East along with other works of handicraft met the European needs. At the beginning of the eighteenth century Chinese textile artists began to adapt the patterns different from the traditional ones in order to encourage European customers. Textiles which once reflected the Far East religion, customs and philosophy became souvenirs only, losing their intended use, replaced by the desire to please European enthusiasts of Far East art. Thus, a Taoist priest's robe has become a tapestry, a mandarin square has turned into a wall decoration and a collar is now a tablecloth. An overwhelming majority of Far East handicraft works donated to the Museum, other than textiles, may prove that embroidered cloth were interesting for connoisseurs only, as they make up only a few percent of the entire collection. Yet, despite their little number, they form an amazing and extremely interesting collection.

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<sup>40</sup> Register no SKAZ sz 1127.

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## The End of Literati Painting? An Unfinished Controversy in Retrospect

Literati painting, the once dominant form of art in the tradition of Chinese culture, had a continuous development for over one thousand and five hundred years. During the last century's revolution and modernization, however, this very tradition has been harshly condemned and marginalized.

The total rejection of the tradition of literati painting burst periodically during the whole twentieth century, almost every decade witnessed voices announcing the death of it. The most violent attacks against literati painting, however, concentrated in three periods, as below:

### 1. The second decade of the twentieth century

During this time, which could also be called the "New Culture Movement period," the criticism targeted a certain tradition of the literati painting. Literati painting in a narrow sense, the so-called "South Painting" according to a definition by Dong Qichang (1555–1636) of the later period of the Ming dynasty, refers not only to a genre of art participated in by literati, i.e. scholar-painters, but also to a genre with certain form and style determined by the taste of literati. The literati taste acquired its definition by differentiating itself from the craftsmanlike taste, which indulged in representative likeness and details. The styles of the royal academy of painting from the Five Dynasties period were also recognized as craftsmanlike. Dong Qichang divided the history of Chinese painting participated in by literati into two schools: "Northern" and "Southern." Whereas the Northern School reflected the craftsmanlike taste, the Southern School embodied the taste of literati. The former fell and the latter rose, in this way Dong narrated a story of how literati painting arrived at the stage of its maturity. Four masters of the early Qing dynasty, who began their career by copying and studying old masters, mainly from the Southern School, continued this tradition and had a great impact until the late Qing period.

Kang Youwei (1858–1927), Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) and other radical reformists violently attacked literati painting as understood in its narrow sense, and viewed the four masters of the early Qing period as a dead end of this "bad" tradition, for they and their descendants knew only exact representation of surface beauty and had no innovation. Kang and Chen believed that such a tradition of Chinese painting should be reformed by the so-called "realist spirit" of Western painting.

The comparison between Chinese and Western painting began in the Ming and Qing Dynasty. Most of the intellectuals of the day despised Western painting introduced in China by missionaries for its emphasis on representative likeness, put above “craftsmanship.” Kang and Chen reversed traditional values by more valuing a detailed and realistic depiction, which was similar to European academic painting.

## 2. The years between 1950 and the 1960s

From the beginning of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the ideological remolding of the Chinese painting tradition was on the agenda. Thus, in the sphere of subject matter, ink and wash painting should clear away the old taste of literati and focus on depictions of daily life of working people or the reality of socialism. As to the form, ink and wash painting should abandon the independent value of calligraphic brushstroke, and reshape its language through European drawing trainings, such as perspective, chiaroscuro, anatomy and sketch from nature. Xu Beihong (1895–1953), who studied painting in Paris once and later became the first president of the China Central Academy of Fine Arts, held the tradition of French academic painting in great esteem and believed that drawing is the foundation of all visual art. When Xu died in 1953, he was replaced by Jiang Feng (1910–1982), a communist painter from Yan’an, who consolidated the dominant rule of European (or Soviet) academic training in the Chinese pedagogic system of fine arts even further. The name of “Chinese Painting Department” had disappeared from Chinese academies for a long time, replaced by “Ink Color Painting Department” which had obviously originated in the branch of water color painting. Although advocates of traditional Chinese painting won a temporary success in the Anti-Rightist Struggle around 1957, the dominant status of Western academic training was not shaken.

The movement to reform Chinese painting had developed along two parallel lines, a semi-academic one that was the controversy over whether or not the basic training of traditional Chinese painting, such as copy, line drawing and calligraphy, should be replaced by Western drawing training; and a political one that aimed at the elimination of literati taste from the brushstrokes of Chinese art. A good example of the latter was the paintings and writings of Fu Baoshi (1904–1965).

## 3. The years between 1980 and the 1990s

During this time, which is also called the “Open and Reform” period, Socialist Realism was being widely challenged and the so called avant-garde art became the highlight of the age. An essay entitled “Chinese Painting Has Arrived at Its End,” by Li Xiaoshan published in the *Jiang Su Journal of Painting* in 1985, once again announced the death of traditional Chinese painting. It repeated arguments of the New Culture Movement period, though in a much more radical way. And the background had also been changed. While the forerunners, such as Kang Youwei and Chen Duxiu, modeled

Chinese painting after the Western classical painting, the generation who grew up during the Cultural Revolution, like Li Xiaoshan, would rather choose Western modern or postmodern art as a new paradigm in. By announcing the death of traditional Chinese painting, Li Xiaoshan's text paved the way for the so-called experimental ink and wash movement.

Experimental ink and wash painters did not want to get involved in any relationship with the literati painting tradition, and intentionally used ink and wash as a pure medium of their artistic expression. Its first type is represented by Zhang Yu, Liu Zijian and other painters, who are influenced by Western modernism and create abstract ink and wash paintings. The second type is represented by Gu Wenda, Wang Nanming and other artists, who are influenced by Western postmodernism and produce conceptual paintings or give performances with ink and brush.

There is a group of painters who since the late 1980s have been identifying their works as the "New Literati Painting." They proclaimed that their destiny was to revive the tradition of literati painting. It is well known that one of the most important characteristics of literati painting lies in the comprehensive humanist knowledge and sophisticated tastes for various arts. Many of "new literati" painters, however, are in fact unworthy of the name of literati. Thus, many critics thought that the New Literati Painting movement was a gesture rather than a down-to-earth practice. Yet, when various avant-garde arts, which were anachronously and chaotically borrowed from the West, became very popular in the 1980s and 1990s, such a gesture appeared to be respectable, for it at least started to understand the once dominant form of Chinese art.

In the eyes of old or new radical reformists, literati painting was a lifeless art form which should be remodeled the lines of Western art, either of Classical representative painting or of modern or postmodern art. The reformists took for granted that the Western painting (since the Renaissance period) is modern, while Chinese painting, such as literati painting, is traditional and pre-modern. They have neglected, however, a basic fact that Chinese literati painting was at the same time a form of fine art which could stand comparison with European ones. Both Chinese literati painting and European classical painting definitely would fall into the same category of *Beaux Arts* in this sense that the final products have been separated from the labor-craft system and transformed into aesthetic objects.

Experimental ink and wash painters rejected not only the tradition of literati painting but also the concept of fine arts as such. Inasmuch as Socialist Realist painting was obviously not "modern" enough for them, Western modernism or postmodernism introduced to China became the only choice to "modernize" Chinese ink and wash painting. Many experimental painters tried to revive Chinese painting in line with American abstract Expressionism or action painting. The logic, however, was twisted. We can guess how the representative painting "developed" into abstract painting in the history of European art. We could, perhaps, like Clement Greenberg, find a reasonable link between European abstract painting and American abstract Expressionism. We could even find, like Arthur Danto, an understandable explanation of how Marcel Duchamp and his followers put an end to the traditional concept of fine arts. We could

not, however, find any such logic explanation for the evolvement of Chinese experimental ink and wash painting. Since the logic of such evolvement is more exponential than linear, the contemporary narrative of Chinese art seems to yield the illusive consistency.

For the Chinese avant-garde artists of the 1980s and the 1990s “modern” was only modernism or postmodernism. Only a few noticed the potential modernity embedded in the tradition of literati painting. The defenders of literati painting in the 1920s and the 1930s seemed to have touched the core when they declared the similarity between literati painting and European modern painting, such as Post-Impressionism and Fauvism, but they obviously forgot that both European classical painting and Chinese literati painting had already been modern genre of art and aesthetics. They also ignored the fact that literati painting was a sum total of historical development rather than an individual phenomenon which could only be compared with a certain period in the history of Western art.

Since the Renaissance period European painting has formed the history of constant progress. Contrary to the beliefs of avant-garde artists of the 1980s, the progress mode could also be applied to the history of Chinese painting. In ancient China, for example, in *A Chronicle of Famous Paintings from Past Dynasties (Late Tang Dynasty)* by Zhang Yanyuan or in *Notes from the Zenist Painting Studio (Late Ming Dynasty)* by Dong Qichang, a self-consciousness of art history was extremely strong. The history of Chinese painting has a division between “modern” and “pre-modern” in its own right, embodied respectively by scroll paintings in fine arts and murals in the craft field; its “modern” period emphasized competitions among various schools as well as reforms and innovations in skill and idea which, judging from its dynamics and variety, stands comparison with any occurrence in the history of Western painting between the fifteenth century and the early twentieth century.

The term of “literati painting” has a long history. Scholar-bureaucrats began to emphasize the differences between them and craftsmen as soon as they started participating in painting practice. Xie He (*circa* sixth century AD), a famous art theorist active in South Qi, criticized a literati painter’s works as “too craftsmanlike and lacking of scholar mentality.” Su Shi (1037–1101), a great poet from North Song, clearly defined the concept of scholars’ painting in contrast to the craftsmen’s painting. Dong Qichang, a great painter of the Ming dynasty, discussed the tradition of literati painting and demonstrated that the Southern School represented the proper orientation of literati painting.

Literati painting emerged as mode of expression of the so-called *wenren* (literati), *shi* or *shi da fu* (scholar-bureaucrats). *Shi* as a concept dates back to West Zhou (1027–770 BC). It originally denoted a noble class in the feudal hierarchy who did services for the *da fu*, i.e. the younger sons of princes. When the feudalism declined in the period of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770–256 BC), a *shi* class dissociated from the feudal hierarchy. From the Qin and Han Dynasties on, *shi* as a class played an increasingly important role in the so called four-class society of China. The concept of *wenren* came much later than *shi*. It began to be widely used since the Han Dynasty. Originally, the

denotation of *wenren* differed slightly from Shi, later on, however, it has acquired almost the same meaning.

Generally, all three abovementioned concepts could be paraphrased as intellectual or, as Prof. Yu Yingshi suggested in his *Shi and Chinese Culture*, they are better translated as an intellectual stratum, different from the modern intellectuals. Among ancient civilizations, the intellectual stratum of China (especially since the Tang Dynasty) most resembled a modern intellectual class. However, unlike the modern ones, Chinese literates were educated to become candidates of a selective system of bureaucracy. That explains why *shi da fu* is translated into English as a scholar-bureaucrat. In principle, scholar-bureaucrats had to absolutely obey the authority of an emperor; as a class, however, they have never lost their dignity and independence. Compared with the clergy in medieval Europe, scholar-bureaucrats in China did not believe in transcendental personality, but they believed in *Tao*. *Tao* is a transcendent concept to be found both in Confucianism and in Taoism. A scholar pursuing *Tao* has a transcendent view of all worldly things, no matter is he a Confucian or Taoist, no matter is he a plebian or governor. When the *Tao* concept entered painting, it lent a detached and disinterested attitude to the creation and appreciation, which used to be called *shi qi* (scholar-characteristic) or *yi qi* (hermit-characteristic).

In conclusion, the transcendent pursuing of *Tao* by scholar-bureaucrats had a decisive impact on the core values and tastes of literati painting. Since the period of the Sui and the Tang, as the imperial examination gradually opened to the whole society, the influence of literati taste began to transgress the boundaries of the social class. As a result, the scroll painting favored by the scholar-bureaucrat class eventually took over the place of murals and in the times of the Song dynasty became the dominant painting form, being the aesthetical highpoint of the cultural history of China.

Scholar-bureaucrats began to practice painting frequently in the times of the Wei-Jin Dynasty. Already in the Han Dynasty, literature and calligraphy had separated from their strict utilitarian functions and become liberal arts to express personal thoughts and feelings. It is difficult to date the successive order of the two arts, however, we know for sure that painting became an independent fine art genre later than literature and calligraphy. Whereas writing and composing texts was the duty of literati, painting by its nature belonged to the crafts. Only after being practiced by literati and being immersed in the consciousness of literati for a long time, could that painting be gradually departed from craftsmanship and become an independent form of fine arts.

The birth of literati painting as one of the fine arts and its connection with the scholar-bureaucrat class is presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. The Making of Chinese Fine Arts on the Base of the Class of *Shi*

Period	Social Condition	Art and Creation
The Spring and Autumn period (770–480 BC) and the Warring States period (480–222 BC)	The class of <i>shi</i> formation	Flourishing philosophy and rhetoric
The Han Dynasty period (206 BC – 220 AD)	Class-consciousness of the <i>shi</i>	Flourishing literature and art of calligraphy
The Wei-Jin Dynasty period (265–317 AD)	Individual self-consciousness of the <i>shi</i>	Independence of literati painting from craft painting

In European history, art began to be “modern” when medieval craftsmen became artists and their works became artworks. From this time forth, art became a vehicle for self-expression and artworks became aesthetic objects, in short, they left churches and went to galleries. The birth and development of literati painting went through a parallel process.

It is not difficult to gather enough evidence to establish comparability between literati painting and European fine arts. As far as the exterior evidence is concerned, one of the most direct indications is the mounting mode of literati painting. The literati painting on silk or paper used to be mounted in certain forms, mainly as hand scroll and hanging scroll. The hand scroll came into being in the early South Dynasty period and flourished in the Sui and the Tang. It satisfied the need of literati to appreciate painting on the desk. The hanging scroll fitted the demand of displaying painting on the wall. The hanging scroll painting sprouted in the Tang, matured in the Song and eventually defeated the murals outside temples and palaces.

In the European art history, when paintings began to be mounted in frames, it became an aesthetic object of independent visual value. The scroll mounting has a similar aesthetic sense as a picture frame in Europe. The scroll painting is deeply rooted in the creation and appreciation of painting by the literati class. However, it is also closely connected with art collections. The large royal painting collection appeared in the Six Dynasties period. The private art collection gradually increased from the mid-Tang on. In the Ming and Qing, many collectors were coming from the merchant class. Although in ancient China there were no art museums opened to the public, like in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, the *scopic regime* established and cultivated by royal and private collections were no essentially different from *the way of seeing* in European art museums.

As to the interior evidence, we could easily find a similarity between the core value of Chinese painting theories and that of Western aesthetics. If the aesthetics from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century could be considered as the superstructure of fine arts, the literati painting as one of the Chinese fine arts also had its own superstructure, i.e. the painting theories derived from various art history writings. The theories for literati painting have come from three main sources: 1) the painting theories written by painters; 2) painting appreciation written by critics or collectors; and

3) painting history written by art historians. If we are to make a statistical survey of aesthetic predicates used in these texts, we will find that most of them are describing a detached literati taste which is very close to the pure aesthetic judgment defined by Kant or aesthetic experience described by Clive Bell and other aestheticians.

Table 2. The Superstructures of Chinese and Western Fine Arts

Chinese Painting Theories	European Aesthetics
Gu Kaizhi (c. 345–406)	Shaftesbury (1671–1713)
Zong Bing (375–443)	Joseph Addison (1672–1719)
Wang Wei (415–453)	David Hume (1711–1776)
Xie He (active in the 6 <sup>th</sup> century)	Charles Batteux (1713–1780)
Zhang Yanyuan (c. 618–907)	Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)
Jin Hao (Five Dynasties, 907–960)	Benedetto Croce (1866–1952)
Su Shi (1037–1101)	Edward Bullough (1880–1934)
Guo Xi (active in the 11 <sup>th</sup> century)	Clive Bell (1881–1964)
Dong Qichang (1555–1636)	R.G. Collingwood (1889–1943)

It is understandable, however, that the skill and language of literati painting would grow much slower than its theories. Although the painting theorists of the Six Dynasties had already prepared the core taste and criteria for literati painting, the half-maturity of its skill and language fell on the period no earlier than the mid- and late-Tang, when ink and wash landscape painting began to challenge the status of colored landscape painting. And only after the calligraphic brushstroke achieved its independent appreciation value, not just in the painting theories (Tang) but also in the actual paintings (Song), could it finally say that the literati painting became fully mature. Matured literati painting celebrated its heyday in the Song and Yuan and flourished further in the Ming and Qing. In its late development, literati painting became a dominant art form for the whole society and had an overall influence on court painting, religion painting, folk print and even ceramics and gardening.

The similarity between literati painting and European fine arts has been established as above. It does not mean that the purpose of the text is to justify the value of literati painting, like Chen Shizeng (1876–1923), Pan Tianshou (1897–1971) or other conservatives did in the past. For it is a well-known fact that fine arts as a category have been outdated for a long time in the West, either in practice or in theory. In the contemporary studies of art history, such as social history of art or visual culture, fine arts are regarded as a dubious concept which needs to be deconstructed. There is no denying, however, that the birth of fine arts in Italian Renaissance initiated the process

of art “modernization,” and the further development of fine arts became the basis of various art innovations that have started in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, although literati painting as a Chinese fine art has already contained modernity in its very heart, it has never been an actual or logical moment in the evolvement of Chinese modernist art. The 1500-years continuous progress of Chinese painting met a sudden interruption. The history of art ends. However, the Chinese version of “the end of art history” has only an ostensible resemblance with those in the West. To realize the big difference between them will be to set a new starting point to rethink the fate and future of our own tradition.

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## Aesthetic Attitude of Chinese Classical Gardens

Born in a vast land with diverse ecosystems, classical Chinese gardens have been constantly evolving and changing, their cultural connotations growing deeper and richer over the centuries. In fact, traditional Chinese garden art has left its marks on China's neighboring countries, including Japan and South Korea. Notably, it inspired enthusiasm in the visiting European traders and missionaries who, after returning home, helped Europeans know more about China and its gardens. As a major cultural heritage, Chinese gardens have attracted increasing interest from garden art lovers both in China and beyond. Enriched by Chinese cultural traditions, they have had such a significant impact on the aesthetic ideals of the Chinese people that their influence is still strongly felt today.

The Chinese garden developed as a synthesis of the ever-recurring opposites in Taoist philosophy, *Tao* and *Qi*, or the intangible (metaphysics) and the tangible. An essential pair of concepts that define heaven-human relations, *Qi* refers to all the things in nature that can be perceived by the senses, while *Tao* is the origin from which things are generated, hence the principle and law governing *Qi*. Unlike an ordinary building whose architectural style is not to be appreciated aesthetically because it falls under the *Qi* category, a garden is created as an art form as much as an important means and medium for the literati to express their ideas and feelings. This ideational function, over the years, has developed a system of logic and its own language. Gardens, accordingly, are more than simple combinations of flowers, trees and miniature landscapes; they are places that create poetic and painterly concepts. The literati would regard their gardens as markers of elite status. No man, therefore, was considered a true intellectual without a garden of his own, be it large or small. By the same token, no room would be perfect as a study if one looked out of the window but could not see his own exquisite garden of strangely shaped rocks and fantastic looking plants. Since classical Chinese gardens closely resemble paintings produced by the classically educated literati, they are sometimes regarded as a type of three-dimensional landscape painting or solid poetry.

European cities, according to early European missionaries, look different from each other, featuring square and spacious gardens; Chinese cities, by contrast, tend to be identical, characteristic of peaceful and secluded gardens filled with winding paths. Interesting as it is, this comparison echoes the belief that forms are the external manifestations of internal mechanisms. European cities were generally not planned, but developed over time. That is why they look different and historical. Their gardens are often geometrically designed to highlight the supremacy and power of monarchs or garden owners. For most of its history as a nation, China has been a great unified

empire. In ancient China, cities functioned as the political centers of their local areas, so planned and constructed as to signify their relative importance. Consequently, they looked identical despite the size difference. Chinese gardens always looked fresh and lively since they were where officials, intellectuals, or even emperors could retreat from their daily routines and pressures, where their desire for freedom could be fulfilled. In both China and beyond, most of the gardens were designed to complement their surrounding architecture, functioning as transitions between architecture and landscape. The relationship between architecture and nature, therefore, reflects that between man and nature, as exemplified, respectively, by various gardens in the world.

The garden, in a sense, is as much an imitation of the ideal world as a reflection of people's world views and the relationship between man and nature. Classical Chinese gardens are inherently related to the worship of nature in the traditional Chinese culture. Rocks, lakes, flowers and trees are all personified or embodied with spirits. Landscape design and plant selection have, over the years, become symbols and terminologies that define the character and taste of garden owners. Numerous well-known essays by early Chinese scholars were devoted to gardens, hence a garden is sometimes likened to an essay. The Yonghe Lamasery, a residence of Emperor Yongzhen (reigned 1723–1735) of the Qing Dynasty (1616–1911), houses an attraction called “Huge Essay,” so named to highlight the imperial power and majesty.

Viewed straight on, Chinese gardens seem to have too much architecture. Such layouts began to lose popularity centuries ago, somewhat disliked when it came to the Qing Dynasty. Western gardens, by contrast, tend to have fewer buildings, usually centrally located and clustered together to become the focal point, both locally and spatially. Traditional Chinese gardens emphasize the harmony between architecture and environment, focusing more on the integration of natural beauty and craftsmanship than individual elements. Bai Juyi (772–846), a Tang dynasty poet, was probably the first to define the composition of garden elements. Though not necessarily the golden rule, the proportion of these elements has been established by generation after generation of garden designers. Individual cases may differ, but the underlying patterns stay roughly the same.

Architecturally, however, Chinese gardens feature highly diversified forms. To enhance garden views, architectural elements are blended in such a way as to create unique visual effects, completely different from those ordinary buildings that identify with the hierarchy of the social status of their inhabitants. In both imperial and private gardens, the buildings display a wide variety of appearances, styles, and sizes, either horizontally or vertically. Their mass compositions seem to correspond with the principles of European Modernism. In essence, they “play the same tune on different musical instruments.”

Garden styles, surprisingly, have found their way into public buildings. The Fragrant Hill Hotel and Suzhou Museum, two major projects in China led by Ieoh Ming Pei (b. 1917), an American-educated Chinese master architect, were both modeled after classical Chinese gardens. Those with knowledge of the relevant historical and cultural background will probably characterize them as the offspring of necessity rather than of inspiration, for the Pei family once owned the famous Shizi Lin (Lion Grove),

one of the finest classical gardens in Suzhou of the East China's Jiangsu province. The spirit of freedom inherent in traditional Chinese gardens is identified, in one way or another, with the pursuits of Modernism to break free from the monotonous symmetry in architectural designs. While studying at Harvard, Ieoh Ming Pei submitted a proposal to construct (unsuccessfully) a China Art Museum in Shanghai. That, again, was a garden-style plan, since he argued that was the only way to guarantee a perfect atmosphere to view ancient Chinese artifacts. Chinese paintings and calligraphies do not usually require an exceptionally large space for collection and display, but they do need a comfortably elegant setting to create the right mood.

The purpose of art is to delight and inspire, not something before which to prostrate ourselves. In most cases, the works of art reflect the personal tastes and aspirations of their owners. Equally they coexist with human beings as our friends, as a part of life, and sometimes of course, as something to show off. Gardens themselves, naturally enough, are no exceptions. Even in ancient times, they were as much public as private, where the owners met, entertained, and socialized with their friends. It is for this reason that the garden buildings are expected to maximize their artistic expressiveness, compete against each other for attention, and hence become a vital element of classical Chinese gardens. The literati would, as a rule, punctuate their gardens with flower halls, boat halls, fan-shaped pavilions, or even buildings of complex mass.

For the intellectuals of ancient China, forested hills were the best places to build gardens. As a perfect starting point for gardens, real mountains and rivers, unfortunately, were more costly and less available. Most gardens acquired the nickname of "City Forests," since they were located within the limits of a city, even right in the downtown area. Gardens, then, became a resource that the literati could turn to. Unlike monks who spend their lives in complete isolation from the world, educated people would use garden rockeries and ponds for show, or an expression of their view of life. There is an old Chinese saying that goes: "Lower-class hermits live in mountains; middle-class in towns; upper-class in government offices." In his poem "Middle-Class Hermit," a Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi preaches the doctrine of the Middle Way, a prime example closely followed by later intellectuals. Chinese gardens place special emphasis on "getting the big picture from small details." As a hard and fast rule for telling the difference between good and bad gardens, it requires garden designer to create the effect of more space and better view. In other words, the scenery changes with each step you take, as the seer becomes the seen. To help inspire the viewers' imagination, garden architects pay close attention to space effects, knowing that rigid boundaries would result in reduced space and would kill imagination. That explains why most Chinese gardens straddle a hazy line between places to live, visit and view. Indeed, a fine balance between larger spaces to visit and smaller ones to view gives tourists the illusion of strolling through natural woodland.

Chinese gardens are "literary" in that they serve as expressions of the intellectuals' feelings and ideas. To truly enjoy a garden, one must have a taste for passions instilled in rockeries and pools. Rocks, for example, are symbolic of both mountains and human feelings. A fine rock must be slender, porous, see-through, and wrinkled. Generally, such evaluation criteria have been developed from the yardstick to measure one's

character and personality. The Chinese world view features the oneness of man and heaven, a doctrine open to multiple interpretations. Simply put, man must stand in awe, not fear, of heaven. Closely related to each other in one-to-one manner, heaven usually gets angry when man becomes resentful, and most seasonable weather conditions coincide with the harmony between heaven and man. Heaven in itself is both abstract and specific, somewhat identified with man, hence the doctrine of oneness of man and heaven. On the one hand, they form a contrastive pair; on the other, the doctrine clearly states that priority should first be given to man. In practice, however, Chinese people strive to respect and comply with nature, always ready to adjust their goals according to circumstances. This flexible and somewhat metaphysical world view places great stress on the interaction between man's will and heaven's: man must fully experience heaven's will in order to finally realize it.

In traditional China, Confucianism and Taoism were culturally complementary to each other. Although the Confucians respected heaven's will, they placed more emphasis on establishing the human order so that everything would move along in an orderly way. To the rulers of a great empire, such doctrine undoubtedly contributed to the stability of their nation. The Taoists, by contrast, treasured the freedom of life, knowing that man could neither control heaven's will, nor easily understand it. In their view, since everything occurred naturally, rulers should govern by not governing, and act by not acting. Paradoxically, although they seem contradictory to each other, these two cultures had their respective impact on all aspects of Chinese society, while maintaining a subtle balance between them. As a rule, Confucian theories, particularly the established principle of order and rank, tended to find fuller expression in both official offices and their homes. Garden owners of various titles were all eager to seek individual freedom, and as such, the Taoist theory and allusion recurring in classical Chinese gardens evolved into symbolic objects characteristic of the garden owners' character and taste. Interestingly, the emperors – supreme powers of the world – would make believe that they were indeed above the worldly worries and troubles in their royal gardens. In similar fashion, almost all of the best known private scholar gardens had their own unique way to articulate their owners' desire for freedom from hierarchical constraints: rockeries, choice of plants, layout and style of architecture, stone inscriptions, couplets and name plaques. Indeed, the spirit of freedom instilled in Chinese gardens helped realize the Taoist ideals while the influence of Confucianism was also present.

Gardens in the world, particularly those in China, are essentially man-made, although the relationship and difference between artificial and natural elements vary from country to country. Most Italian terrace gardens, for example, take advantage of topographical and environmental features to enhance the visual impact, known for their remarkable geometrized forms. French-style gardens are even more geometrized, with plants trimmed into various geometric shapes, hence looking more artificial than real. To avoid looking artificial, British architects fashion the landscape gardens in such a way as to closely resemble nature. The Japanese believe that properly processed natural elements are more compatible with human beings, and refined artificial objects are aesthetically appealing in themselves. The Chinese, instead, follow their unique principle of garden design: "Workers are human; workmanship – divine." Everything within

a Chinese garden is man-made, although less intentional than within their Japanese counterparts. Traditional Chinese culture has it that something completely natural is somehow not perfect, since it often happens that there are only very few, if any, truly beautiful natural objects. As a result, Chinese gardens are usually exquisitely designed to enhance – not re-create – natural effects. Such an aesthetical orientation fits in well with the Chinese standards for fine *penjing* (miniature landscapes). Twisted tree trunks, in fact, are man-made. Since in most cases they look completely natural, the viewers cannot help marveling at the perfect combination of different elements even if they have already realized that the landscapes are in fact artificial.



## Harbin. The Center of Civilization in the Northern Part of Manchukuo

The title of the article, presenting Harbin as “the center of civilization” was taken from a prewar postcard. In the 1930s, after the Japanese forces entered Manchuria, a series of postcards showing Harbin as a modern “metropolitan” and “civilized” town was published, with such captions in Japanese and English.<sup>1</sup> Despite its obvious propaganda meaning, the local status of the city at that time was really important.

The history of modern Harbin began in the late nineteenth century with the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), a branch-line of the Trans-Siberian Railway, by the Imperial Russian government. This, in fact, substantially shortcut the distance to Northern China, Korea, and the Pacific Ocean, as well as to the port of Dalny (Dalian) and the Russian naval base of Port Arthur (Lüshunkou). These three cities: Dalny, Port Arthur and Harbin, were established at the same time as important points of the Tsarist Russia political and military expansion in the Far East. The railroad was militarized and protected by Russian forces.

In 1898 the group of engineers in Russian service found the place for the location of a town on the southern, higher bank of the Sungari River.<sup>2</sup> The site was a vast and uninhabited plain, neighbored only by small Chinese or Manchurian fishermen’s villages which were almost every year being flooded or destroyed.<sup>3</sup> This was the place chosen to site an important railway bridge, railway junction and a modern settlement.<sup>4</sup>

In the next twenty or so years, the following parts of the town were constructed:<sup>5</sup>

- The Old Town (*Stari Gorod*), the first location of the town located south-east of the railway station. It was the core of the city, yet, a few years later it lost its importance, replaced by other districts.

<sup>1</sup> Some of the postcards were recently published in: Kitai (2006: 301, 302, 305, 306, 309, 310, 315, 316).

<sup>2</sup> The first two, technical expeditions were sent from Vladivostok into Manchuria in 1897. On 11 April, 1898, another expedition sent by engineer Kierbedz landed on the bank of the Sungari River; Kajdanski (1982: 179–181).

<sup>3</sup> Floods were dangerous for the development and the very existence of Harbin; the most disastrous one took place in the summer of 1932.

<sup>4</sup> Another positive factor was that the Sungari River was navigable (except for the winter months) and was a tributary of the Heilong (Amur) River. For this reason the Chinese Eastern Railway Company had its own fleet of steamboats and ferry-boats, uniformed and with military-like sailor uniforms, with the Russian Cyrillic initials for the Company: KVZhD (*Kitaysko-Vostochnaya Zheleznaya Doroga*).

<sup>5</sup> The author would like to thank Professor Li Shu Xiao, Professor Fu Ming Jing and Mister Hao Zhi-hong from the Harbin Jews Research Center of the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences for the information about different parts of the town, as well as their Chinese names. We would also like to thank all of the professors and staff from the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences in Harbin for their help and information they provided him with while he was working on the present text.

- The New Town (*Novi Gorod*), called the “railroad town,” a part of the city located south of the railway station. There were buildings constructed especially for the CER’s infrastructure: warehouses, offices, hotels, clubs, better-class residences as well as the houses for employees. Later on, its eastern part has also become a business area.
- The Wharf (*Pristan*) District, located near the Sungari River, south of its banks. The main axe of the district was Kitayska (Chinese) Street. The area was build up with numerous banks, hotels, cafes, business and entertainment enterprises. On the river banks there were docks for steamboats, and barges with railway side-tracks.

Those were three basic districts that formed the town, which could be verified by the look at first maps of the Harbin.<sup>6</sup> In my opinion, however, there is every reason to include also another important, although constructed later, part of the town. The part was *Fujiadian*, the “native” Chinese town, located on the banks of the river, east of the Wharf district, the railroad and railway bridge. At the beginning, this part of the town belonged to the fishermen’s village. After 1908 brick buildings began to replace older wooden structures. The area was inhabited mainly by Chinese population.<sup>7</sup>

On the Sungari’s northern bank, outside the town, another district was built, most probably in the 1920s. It did not belong to the town itself but was a suburban “leisure” area. Small villas, restaurants, pensions and hotels were wooden constructions, made in the typical Russian *dacha* style. Most of them have not survived. The district was called “Sun Island” (*Solnechnyi Ostrov* or *Tai Yang Dao*).<sup>8</sup>

As it has been already mentioned above, Harbin owes its existence to the railroad. One of the first and the most important constructions was the railway bridge (Fig. 1). For many years it was the only way over the river other than by boat. It was (and still is) used also by pedestrians and occasionally by vehicles.

The bridge was designed by Polish engineer in Russian service – Stanislaw Kierbedz.<sup>9</sup> The construction took more than a year, from May 1900 to October 1901.<sup>10</sup> Because of its strategic importance, the building site was patrolled and protected by

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<sup>6</sup> For example: The Master Plan of Harbin and Suburbs, 1906 (a drawing version of the 1902 Master Plan of Harbin and Suburbs), compiled by the Management Bureau of the Chinese Eastern Railway; and The Plan of Harbin Suburbs and Subsidiary Areas in 1910, compiled by the Management Bureau of the Chinese Eastern Railway.

<sup>7</sup> Historical maps, showing the development of the town from its beginnings, have been also published in: *Glance Back the Old City’s Charm of Harbin (1897–1949)*, vol. 1, Urban Planning Bureau of Harbin Municipality, Urban Planning Society of Harbin Municipality, China Architecture and Building Press, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Most of the wooden structures have disappeared. The photos from the 1990s show some of the wooden *dachas* in poor conditions, but still existing; see: Johnston, Erh (1996: 36–37). Nowadays, the part of the island is changed into ‘Russian Village’ theme park, but except of a few buildings no original structures seem to have survived.

<sup>9</sup> Stanislaw Kierbedz (1845–1910) was president of the Vladicaucasian Railway, vice-president of the Chinese Eastern Railway, and high rank official in the Ministry of Communications. His more famous paternal uncle was another Stanislav Kierbedz (1810–1899), general-major of the Engineers Corps in the Russian Imperial Army. The latter was a constructor of the first non-temporary bridge on the Neva River in St Petersburg (1850) and the first non-temporary bridge on the Vistula River in Warsaw (1864); see: Bazyłow (1984: 158, 328–330).

<sup>10</sup> Shuxiao (2000: 21).





1. Harbin, the railway bridge, 1900–1901

military security Russian forces. The bridge's entrances are flanked by the medieval-like towers, looking like small neo-Gothic castles or forts.

After the East Chinese Railway was opened to traffic on July 14, 1903, Harbin became the most important town in the deep interior of Manchuria. At the same time a main railway station was being built (1903–1904), designed in pure Art Nouveau style. A part of the “New Town” with the railway buildings was constructed simultaneously. In the meantime, the oldest part of the town lost its importance and became an almost suburban area.

It is surprising that the architecture of the railway station and other buildings featured the newest trends in European art. Constructed in the early 1900s, the towns' residences, school etc., were designed by Russian architects who, by looking at their designs, must have been educated in France or at least in Western Europe. The fine examples of (still existing) residences are the residence of the deputy director of the CER Bureau (1904) and the office residence of Afanasyev, a deputy director of the CER Management Bureau – also built at the beginning of the twentieth century (Fig. 2). Both of these edifices are brick and wooden structures with Art Nouveau forms and details. The same forms dominate in some other, greater buildings: the former Harbin Technical School (1906) and a slightly older, more classical structure designed for the Central Library of the CER (1902), as well as other public buildings. The most



2. Harbin, New Town, office residence of Afanasyev, c. 1900

important was, of course, the main railway station, also designed in the same style. Unfortunately, the building was pulled down after the Second World War and has been replaced with a modern structure.<sup>11</sup>

It is very interesting that the construction of this part of the town, as well as the style of buildings, are a more avant-garde style than many others constructed at the same time in Europe. The fast appearance of the modern tendencies proves that the CER Management must have employed high quality designers and architects.

At the same time, the biggest part of the town was covered with buildings and structures. The town – as to be seen in the archival photographs – looked somewhat like settlements in the American Wild West, with their muddy streets and wooden huts. The atmosphere of those years (1903–1904) was described by one of Polish writers and voyagers: “Engineers and cabmen, lawyers and beggars, journalists and musicians-vagabonds, Chinese coolies and American merchants, booksellers and prostitutes, handicraftsmen and professional billiards players, lackeys and bankrupted landowners; eve-

<sup>11</sup> Luckily, many photographs showing the old building were published. Apart from that, the fine, small scale models of the railway station are displayed at the Harbin’s Museums architectural exhibitions, in the former Synagoge building and in the building of former St Sophia Orthodox Church.

ryone who wanted gold and easy wages, everyone who was brave and courageous [...] hurried to Manchuria and its capital – Harbin.”<sup>12</sup>

The railroad and the town as the site of the railway headquarters played an important part during the Russo-Japanese War. In 1904–1905 the town became a Russian military base with a quarter million soldiers stationed there.<sup>13</sup>

After the war and the Portsmouth Treaty (1905), defeated Russia had lost Dalny and Port Arthur, together with the southern part of the railway. The northern part (from Harbin to the Russian border) was still administrated by the CER. “By the 1920s the China Eastern Railway zone, which included Harbin and land fifteen kilometers wide on both sides of the railway tracks, had 175,000 foreigners, most of them Russians.”<sup>14</sup> However, as a consequence of the war and political changes, the Qing authorities decided to open sixteen cities – including Harbin – to foreign trade. Those so-called “treaty ports” created the conditions for economic boom. The opportunities of all of the countries were declared to be equal.

The opening of the city caused the inflow of increasingly numerous foreigners from over thirty countries, installing their businesses, factories, enterprises, etc. In 1907 Russia, the USA, Japan, and France opened their consulates in Harbin. Following in their footsteps were other countries, like Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden or Italy.<sup>15</sup> The city became also an important place for diplomatic missions and trade interests of foreign powers.

In the first two decades after 1905, two parts of the town were being developed at fast pace as the main business districts: the *Pristan* (Kitayska Street) and the new parts of the *Novi Gorod*. The big “construction site” was transformed into a fashionable and modern architectonic area. In Kitayskaya Street, the temporary structures were replaced by brick buildings. The style of the houses was usually Art Nouveau. One of the finest examples is the Modern Hotel, at that time owned and run by the Russian Jewish merchant Josef Kaspe. The construction was completed in 1913 (Fig. 3).<sup>16</sup>

In around 1908, a part of the New Town was developed into another business and residential area. Despite numerous department stores (Moscow, Tschurin), new villas, residences and tenement houses were constructed here. The area of Bolshoy Prospect became one of the most important in the town.

What is worthy of notice, however, in Harbin architecture from the period between *circa* 1910 and the 1930s is the coexistence of different architectural trends. Some of the buildings were constructed in modern Art Nouveau or later Art Deco style, but a majority of the town’s constructions have traditional, eclectic or historical forms. They were really various: Classical, neo-Gothic, neo-Renaissance, neo-Baroque, Romanesque, Byzantine etc. Some fine examples of these different styles include the Modern Hotel (mentioned above) and the Japanese Matsuura Company building (1916–1918)

<sup>12</sup> Kajdanski (1982: 181–182).

<sup>13</sup> Johnston, Erh (1996: 13).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Shuxiao (2000: 34).

<sup>16</sup> The Modern Hotel was designed by architect C.A. Vensan. The building began in 1906 and ended in 1913.



3. Harbin, The Wharf – Kitayskaya street, Hotel Modern, 1913

on the same street. The four-storey Japanese building (designed by a Russian architect) with its dome dominating the neighborhood, represents a neo-Baroque form typical for the architecture of Western cities. That form had been popular at least thirty years earlier.<sup>17</sup> In the New Town many eclectic edifices stand next to the modern structures. The two most beautiful villas have traditional form of European mansions. One of them is a famous Kovalsky Residence (1909) which belonged to the Polish timber merchant and millionaire V.F. Kovalsky (Fig. 4). Its elegant architecture reminds one of mansard chateaux in a French style, surrounded by a garden with a fountain. Its magnificent interiors, with rosewood paneled walls and splendid decoration, have been very well preserved and could still be admired.<sup>18</sup> Nearby Skidelsky's villa is smaller and

<sup>17</sup> The building was designed by Russian architect A.A. Miaskovsky for the Japanese merchant Toshihiza Mizue. It seems that for Japanese investors as well as architects, the eclectic Western style was preferable to the early 1930s, then the style was replaced by modern, simple and monumental 'Imperial' design. It could be seen in Harbin and especially in Dalny which was under Japanese rules already from 1905 on.

<sup>18</sup> A Pole Vladislav Kovalsky (Władysław Kowalski) arrived in Vladivostok in 1892, and then he moved to Harbin, where he rented five large lumber concessions from the Chinese government and provided lumber for the construction of the Chinese part of the CER. The size of his concession was comparable with the size of Belgium. Kovalsky's villa was designed by Italian architect Bernadet Dati who died shortly afterwards. The author would like to thank Mrs. Julie Sormark, the granddaughter of Mr. Kovalsky,



4. Harbin, Kovalsky's residence, 1909

more conservative in its style, although it was constructed a few years later, in 1914 (Fig. 5).<sup>19</sup>

After the Bolshevik revolution a number of Russians in the city increased. A lot of “White Russian refugees, former officers, noblemen, merchants etc. could not return back, so they settled down in Harbin. In 1925 the population was 320,000, including about 100,000 foreigners.<sup>20</sup> The city was dominated by Russian influence. Harry A. Franck, an American traveler and journalist, wrote in his book entitled *Wandering in Northern China*: “At Harbin, though still well inside China, the traveler finds himself back in Europe [...] he might easily believe he had crossed the line into Russia and brought up into one of its most typical cities. Streets, architecture, customs, inhabitants

for the information. The house has been transformed by the Chinese authorities into a kind of the Memorial Museum of the Glorious Achievements of Revolutionary Leaders.

<sup>19</sup> L.S. Skidelsky, a co-owner of The Muling Coalmine Corporation, was one of the wealthiest Harbiners at that time. He also held shares in a management of five lumber enterprises along the CER. He was a Jew, and his family probably came from the Polish territories. His great grandson Lord Robert Skidelsky is a British economist and politician. After 1949 the house served as a guesthouse for dignitaries (Mao Zedong once stayed there). Today it is the Cultural Centre for the Retired Personnel of the Heilongjiang Province; Wei, Shuxiao (2006: 186, 208, 209); see also: Wei, Recent visits by Jews and their Friendship for Harbin, Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences, PRC, Harbin. Jewish Research Centre.

<sup>20</sup> Shuxiao (2000: 34).



5. Harbin, Skidelsky's villa, 1914

are all on the Russian model. Instead of rickshaws there are horse-drawn *droszke*.<sup>21</sup> On the old photographs we can see the town's streets with Russians advertisements and billboards. The majority of pedestrians in central areas were Westerners. The Chinese were concentrating in *Fujiadian*.

Aside from the Russians, there were many other foreigners who came to Harbin during those turbulent times. Among them were both former soldiers or prisoners of war and wealthy merchants and businessmen. Some of them came in search of fortune and succeeded, while others, unable to return to Europe, became beggars or "white coolies." In the meantime, the number of foreign consulates increased to twenty, including five general consulates,<sup>22</sup> and diplomatic agencies of newly established states (Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania).<sup>23</sup> A large number of their citizens (mostly

<sup>21</sup> This Harry Franck's quotation comes from: Johnston, Erh (1996: 13).

<sup>22</sup> Shuxiao (2000: 34). Johnston mentioned that at the same time: 'Harbin had twelve consulates [...] as many [...] as in the international business city far to the south, cosmopolitan Shanghai;' Johnston, Erh (1996: 19).

<sup>23</sup> The Polish consulate was in Fengzhu Street; destroyed after 1949; Glimpse back at the Old Cities, vol. 1 (*Glance* 2004: 191, fig. 74).

former Russian citizens) were living there. It is estimated that around 9,000 Poles were living in Harbin, and many others lived and worked in Manchuria in the 1920s.<sup>24</sup>

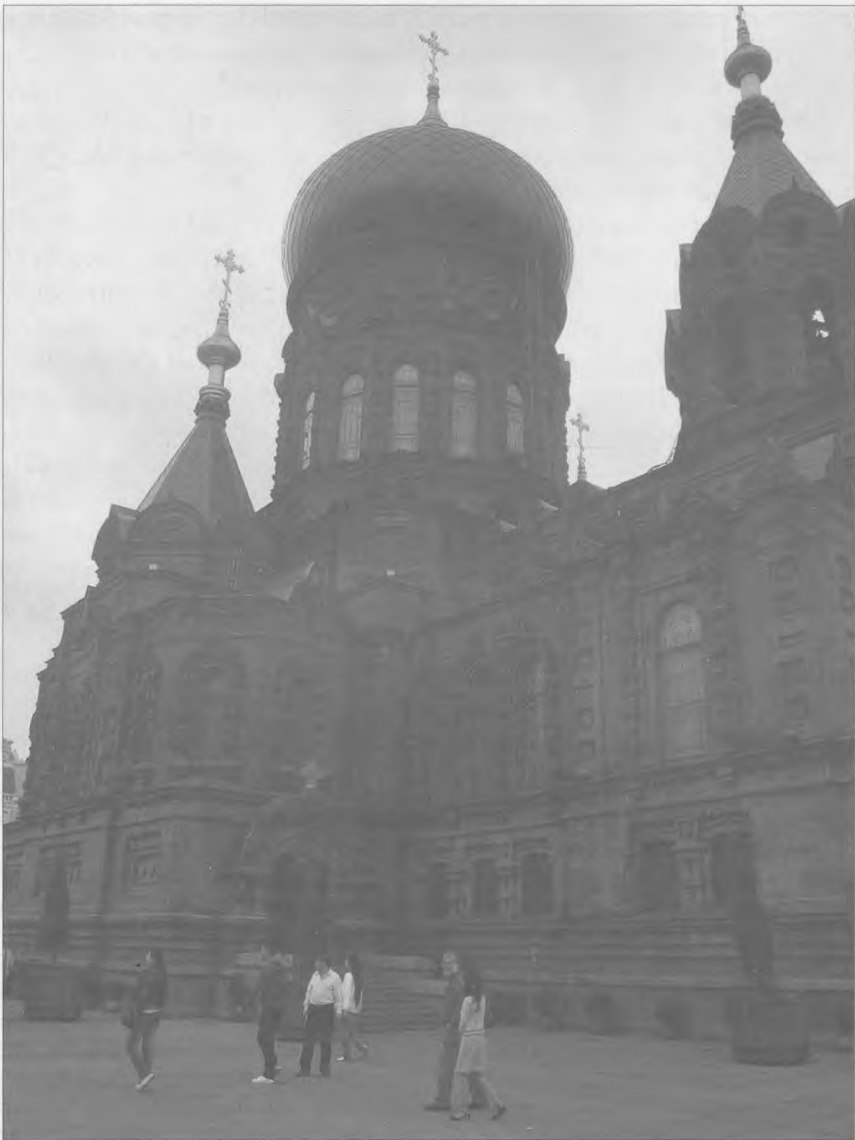
The presence and activity of Jewish community were also very important. There were two synagogues in the town, Jewish high school, Jewish hospital, hotels, restaurants, banks and other enterprises. Jewish social activities were also very important, with various Jewish organizations and Jewish periodicals.<sup>25</sup>

The diversity of architecture styles was also a result of local preferences in style. It is to be seen especially in the sacral architecture of the town where various religions of different communities mixed, for Harbin in the 1920s was a multi-religious city. Most frequent were, of course, Orthodox Church temples (Fig. 6), scattered all over the town, of various sizes and diverse decorations, sophisticated and simple, made of bricks and of wood. They were dominating the city landscape with their high belfries and onion-like domes. Most of them were constructed with the support of the Tsarist government, but some were founded by private individuals, even in the 1930s.<sup>26</sup> Of many only a few have survived. Aside from Orthodox churches, there were also two Catholic ones and one Lutheran church. Other religions were represented by two synagogues, two mosques, and Chinese temple. There was even a Shinto shrine. All of the buildings were constructed in the style most adequate for such buildings, such as, for example neo-Gothic for Catholic churches, or Oriental Moorish for synagogues and mosques. A local Jewish community preferred the last type of architecture also in public buildings that belonged to their community at that time, such as the Jewish Middle School. Most of these religious structures, however, have disappeared, in particular

<sup>24</sup> The presence of Poles in Harbin and the importance of their activity are still not well known outside Poland. There were Polish engineers in Russian service who had found the site of further town (engineer Adam Szydłowski and two technicians: Rawenski and Wysocki). Engineer Stanisław Kierbedz designed the bridge, engineer Seweryn Wachowski constructed the big part of the railroad. The urban plan of the town was designed by engineer Jotisz. In fact, the town was created by Poles. Due to political reasons, many Poles (Russian citizens at that time) were not allowed to work in the part of Poland under the Russian occupation, and they worked in Siberian and Manchurian garrisons, railway infrastructure etc. Many of them settled down in Harbin. In the beginning of the twentieth century several Polish societies and charity organizations were founded. The Polish community also built two Catholic churches. After World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution the number of Poles who could not return to Poland through the territory of Russia increased. The Polish consulate was opened in 1920. There was also a Polish secondary school and Polish periodicals. For many years, most of Polish Harbiners were considered by many authors and publishers as Russians. Fortunately, nowadays, local researches (for example, Prof. Li Shuxiao) emphasize Polish presence and the role of Poles in the history of the city of Harbin. The information about Polish community in Harbin: Kajdanski (1982: 180–182, 185, 187–195).

<sup>25</sup> The history and activity of the Jewish community in Harbin is – contrary to the Polish one – very well known. The Harbin Jews Research Center organized the museum in one of the synagogues and published many periodicals and books on Jews in Harbin. It is also very important to mention that both Jews from abroad and the Israeli government support the researches of Harbin's scholars. The activity of Jews in pre-war Harbin was really impressive. As a curious detail we want to mention that the father of one of the Israeli's prime ministers, Ehud Olmert, was born in Harbin and he was an activist of the Zionist Youth Organization Betar; Wei, Shuxiao (2006).

<sup>26</sup> The fine example is the St Sophia Orthodox Church – one of the biggest and most important constructions in Harbin. It was founded before WWI, but was rebuild and enlarged in the 1930s. In the 1990s, after years of deterioration, it has been restored and transferred into an architectural museum.



6. Harbin, St Sophia Orthodox church, completed in 1930's

Orthodox and Catholic churches, since sacral buildings were favorite target of attacks by communist activists during the Cultural Revolution.

*Fujiadian*, the native part of the city, was separated from the other parts of the town by a railway tracks and industrial areas. This former fishermen's village began to develop in 1908. It flourished in the 1910s and the boom lasted until the 1930s. Inhabited by thousands of Chinese arriving from different parts of the country, it became the only part of the town with a Chinese majority. It was an industrial, commercial and residential area. Despite the fact that *Fujiadian* was generally a poorer district than the





7. Harbin, Fujiadian, Chinese tenant houses, 1920's

others, it was also a place with interesting buildings. The main difference between this community and “Chinatowns” in other Treaty Ports was its regular urban plan. Nowadays we can still walk along the long lines of parallel or radial streets. Another interesting feature is its unusual kind of architectural design. The multi-storey buildings are European in their form, with courtyards, annexes etc. The facades, with columns and symmetrically placed windows, also demonstrate their Western provenance (Fig. 7). The primary distinction is their detailed decoration. Most of the elevations are covered with plaster or stucco ornaments. The façades are decorated with either Chinese characters and motifs or floral motifs. The common feature is that the façades are all covered with decorations, with almost no empty space (*horror vacui*). This style seems to be similar to the achievements of Jesuit architecture at the court of the early Qing Dynasty. The buildings at *Fujiadian* were officially classified as the Chinese Baroque Style.<sup>27</sup> Most of these structures were built in the 1920s. It would be interesting to know whether they were designed by Chinese or Western architect and to see how their

<sup>27</sup> From the information on the numerous boards made by the Harbin Municipal Government and supervised by the Harbin Urban Planning Bureau. In my opinion, the term ‘Chinese Baroque’ can be confusing and should be used for the seventeenth and eighteenth century structures (for example, the ruins of The Old Summer Palace in Beijing) rather than for the twentieth century ones for which the term ‘neo-Baroque’ is more adequate.

style was associated with the new tendencies of the Republican period and a search for vernacular architectural style. A good place to start to find the answer to these questions would be to compare the activity of Chinese architects in different cities of that period.<sup>28</sup>

The 1920s and the early 1930s were the last prosperous years before the Second World War. Due to its railway and garrison, Harbin was a cosmopolitan city of special strategic importance. Due to its numerous banks and commercial enterprises it was an economic and cultural heart of the region. Despite its social and racial contrasts, low salaries, and high rate of unemployment, the accessibility of goods was comparable to that of some other world's metropolis. In the Tschurin shops, for example, one could buy many luxurious and modern goods: "Swiss gold watches; highest quality European china, crystal and silverware; haberdashery and millinery; furs; and some 'ready made' clothes. The basement housed a wine cellar and delicatessen with sausages [...] The hardware department carried components for crystal radios – the latest telecom technology of the times. There was even a showroom for Plymouth cars and Caterpillar tractors."<sup>29</sup> The standard of life for rich foreigners was the same as in other places, even as in Europe or America. Certainly, it is difficult to compare Harbin with the most important Treaty Ports like Shanghai or Tianjin. These cities were older, bigger, more important and located at the seashore, with worldwide commercial importance, while Harbin's significance was regional.

The new geopolitical realities and Japanese expansion dramatically changed the situation of the region. If some of the foreigners had had any hopes of their future role in the newly created puppet state of Manchukuo, they were proved unjustified and were soon dashed. This was the beginning of the end for the Harbin's foreign communities. The first to leave Harbin were Jews, moving to Tianjin and then to Shanghai. The other Westerners were forced to stop their business and hand their properties over to the Japanese.<sup>30</sup> During World War II they were treated as the citizens of inferior category. Yet, many foreigners stayed in Harbin until the end of the war and the victory of the Communists. In the 1950s, however, they had to leave the People's Republic of China. This was the end of multicultural, cosmopolitan Harbin.

Nowadays, the city is a Chinese town, a capital of Heilongjiang province. The traces of the past and foreign presence are still visible and determine the present townscape. A big amount of the old architectural structures is under protection. For the last few years also less important parts of the town have been appreciated by scholars and conservators, since they also witnessed the history of the town and the times when Harbin was the "center of civilization" in this part of Asia.

<sup>28</sup> There were a few Chinese architects, educated in America and active in Shanghai in the same period. They were using Art Deco style, but with numerous Chinese details; see: Denison, Ren (2006: 185–186).

<sup>29</sup> Johnston, Erh (1996: 18).

<sup>30</sup> For example Mr Vladislav Kovalski was expelled without any compensation from his villa by Japanese Army. Information from his granddaughter Mrs. Julie Sormark.

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## Archaeology, National Identity and Book Design in Republican China\*

### Introduction

The development of book design at the beginning of the Republican Era in China was linked with Chinese policy, society, ideology, and technological progress. The new cultural movement after the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and the writings by Lu Xun (1881–1936) injected some variety into book designs. Lu Xun was an art lover with a creative streak, and even created his own book-cover designs. There were many talented Chinese designing book covers in the early twentieth-century China, including Chen Zhifo (1896–1962), Feng Zikai (1898–1975), Qian Juntao (1907–1998), Tao Yuanqing (1893–1929) and numerous other well-known artists. During this period, however, many exceptional book covers were designed by anonymous artists.

There were no professional book designers in the early twentieth-century China, and those involved in the process were mostly fine art graduates, with no special training in graphic design. Yet, despite some printing shortcomings, the book covers from the early twentieth century surpass their contemporary counterparts as regards artistic innovation and experimental possibilities, lacking the rigid carpentry of the latter. The book covers from the early Republican Era are numerous, but they usually feature only the names of their authors and publisher, with little or no information on the book designer. In addition, many book-covers have been torn off or deliberately cut off by librarians to get rebound in a standard format. All this makes the information-seeking tasks very difficult. The research into the book-cover design used to be regarded as a commercial one in the past, and its significance was being depreciated. Yet, with books playing an increasingly significant role in the life of Chinese people, book design was more and more important in inspiring and promoting national awareness and art itself among the Chinese.

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## 1. Ethnicity and Modernity

Artists of the early Republican Era did never forget the ethnic orientation in book designs, although they were consistently assimilating and applying various different ideas from the West, such as The Arts and Crafts Movement, Art Deco or Cubism.

In his article on “Ethnicity and Spirits of the Time,” Qian Juntao wrote:

Book-cover design [...] has to be ethnical while being modern at the same time. Being modern without being ethnical makes it impossible to identify the country where it was designed. Sole ethnicity confines innovation within the rigid structure of an ancient framework, and as a result there is no prospect. Designing with ethnicity in mind cannot stagnate in copying and lifting, while modernity should break free from the stereotype of commercial designs, putting in place a certain degree of differentiation between them.<sup>1</sup>

Feng Zikai said: “There is yet another requirement to our book design. That is the features of a Chinese book must be preserved. We can of course adopt the positive qualities of Western book design, but it is necessary to preserve the Chinese character of the book from which one can tell it is a Chinese book at first sight.”<sup>2</sup>

What are the features of Chinese culture then? How and why the artists in the early twentieth-century China applied them to their designs? In this article, I will analyze the artworks by Chen Zhifo, Qian Juntao and others to explore the characteristics and importance of book design in the modern Chinese art history.

### 1.1. Archaeology discovery in the nineteenth-century China

During the years between Emperor Qianlong and Emperor Jiaqing (1736–1820), bronze ritual vessels of the Shang (1500–1050 BC) and Zhou Dynasties (1050–221 BC), as well as the steles from Han (206 BC–221 AD) and Six Dynasties (221–589 AD) began to surface in China. At the same time there was a growing interest in the studies of inscriptions on bronze ritual vessels (*chin wen*) and epigraphy. Both the Epigraphy school (*chin shi pai*) and the Northern Wei Stele style became very popular in the late Qing period.

In the nineteenth century, along with the industrial revolution and colonialism of the West, the interest in archaeology and anthropology became very popular. Museums in England and other parts of the world displayed not only antiques, paintings, and rare books, but also exotic objects, like skeletal remains of dinosaurs. In 1906 Mark Aurel Stein (1862–1943) persuaded a Chinese Taoist priest, Wang Yuanlu, who had discovered the Dunhuang manuscripts, to sell a large collection of the scrolls which found their way to the British Museum and India Museum. After Stein, it was then Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) who removed a group of the Dunhuang artifacts, presently being stored in the National Library of Paris and other places. In 1899, the oracle bones, which had remained underground for more than three thousand years, were unearthed and recognized as bearing ancient Chinese writing by Wang Yirong (1845–1900), who

<sup>1</sup> Juntao (1992: 44).

<sup>2</sup> Juntao (1963: preface).

was the president of the National Academy of the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Wang was an antiquary with a special interest in epigraphy. Since the discovery of the inscriptions, oracle bones became the much sought-after antiques, thus fuelling a period of fervent plundering. Plundered artworks, such as the Dunhuang manuscripts and bronze vessels, were shipped to Europe, America and Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

With the excavation of these artifacts and their subsequent disappearance in foreign lands, many books on China's ancient heritage and art were written and published in the West.<sup>3</sup> The Chinese themselves realized the importance of these artifacts gradually. In 1928, the Institute of History and Philosophy was established at Academia Sinica, ushering in a new era of China's scientific archaeological exploration.

### 1.2. *Bronze vessels and stone rubbing motifs*

In terms of art, the patterns on bronze vessels and steles became the source of inspiration for artists. For example, Ren Bonian (1840–1895) employed in his painting the rubbings of epigraphy and bronze vessels, which complemented his own seasonal flora paintings. Such combination of techniques was very popular at that time, attesting to the archaeological interests during the late Qing and the early Republican Period, and to the studies of unearthed bronze vessels.

The same year as the Institute of History and Philosophy was established, Tao Yuanqing suggested to Lu Xun that “maybe it is possible to apply ancient bronze vessels or stone rubbing motifs on book-binding,” perhaps due to the circumstantial pressure of that time.<sup>4</sup> Lu Xun received this suggestion enthusiastically. Many of Tao Yuanqing's works, like *Worker Zweilov* (1927), composed of flat shapes in profile, indicate that Tao was inspired by figures engraved on clay slabs from the Han Dynasty. *The Peach-Colored Cloud* (1923) was Lu Xun's translation of a fairytale series by Vasili Eroshenko (1890–1952), a blind Russian poet. The cover revealed Lu's interest in antique motifs, such as the elegant Han Period cloud scrolls. The overall design of the cover was brimming with imagination and dynamism. *The Exploring of the Heart* (1926) was also designed by Lu Xun, and the stone rubbing motifs were derived from the tomb-gate of the Six Dynasties.

Besides Tao Yuanqing and Lu's works, many of Chen Zhifo and Qian Juntao's works were ethnic-driven. The 22<sup>nd</sup> volume of the *Eastern Miscellany* had its cover designed by Chen Zhifo who adopted the horse-cart envoys of the Han stone rubbing motifs as his themes.<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that Chen created a uniform style of book-binding for books published by the Tianma Book Company. The endpapers (*huan chen*) of all books published by the Tianma Book Company were in the form of a couple of flying winged-horses.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For examples: Strin (1907); Pelliot (1924); Hedin *et al.* (1943–1945).

<sup>4</sup> Juntao (1990: 6).

<sup>5</sup> Youguang (1990: 14–16).

<sup>6</sup> Xiaohua (1990: 22–23).

Apart from Chen Zhifo, many of Qian Juntao's book covers were ethnically-oriented as well, including the *Fort-breaking* (1929), *The Palace Museum in 1924* (1929) and others. In 1980, Qian designed a cover for the *Books of Hui'an*. According to Fei Zaishan, Qian's friend:

The form and pattern [of the cover] was inspired by the stele motifs from the Six Dynasties. The upper part of the cover was innovated from the patterns on Buddhist steles, and the lower part was made up of twin wild geese and fruit-bearing gem stalk in a symmetrical form. The whole image was toned with calm colors to give it a sentimental touch.<sup>7</sup>

The cover of the *Books of Hui'an* won the Outstanding Award in the National Competition of Book Design of Contemporary China of the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Yet, Qian Juntao had used almost the same artwork in his *Collection of Juntao's Poems* in 1933, although the collection was not published then. On the cover of the *Books of Hui'an*, Qian only slightly moved the twin wild geese and fruit-bearing gem stalks from the upper half to the lower part. Apart from the motifs from the Six Dynasties Period, the motifs of twin wild geese and fruit-bearing germ stalks have been inspired – in my opinion – by the Arts and Crafts Movement between the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>9</sup>

In 1984, Qian designed *The Letter Correspondence between Lu Xun and Jing Song*. Not only did Qian modify the stone rubbing patterns, he also adopted fish and wild geese in such a way that fish and geese became metaphors of letters in classic Chinese poems.<sup>10</sup> Qian put the fish and wild geese on the front cover and back cover respectively. Furthermore, the abstract symbols of fish and wild geese going in opposite directions were cleverly reflected in the design of the whole book, not in the cover alone.

### 1.3. Seal carving

Another important form of traditional Chinese culture was the art of seal carving. Over time, it became a way for artists to bring out their ethnicity. For instance, the badge of the Beijing Olympic 2008, "China's Seal, The Moving Beijing," was inspired by the art of seal carving. As early as 1978, when Qian Juntao reprinted *The Collection of Imprints of Seal of Long Conquest*, he chose the seal-carving motifs collected in the book for cover design, making the book cover an unexpected artwork.<sup>11</sup> In 1979, Qian designed the cover for the *Collection of Tang's Poems*. In this work, Qian applied the technique of engraving, which would make the characters white after applying red ink paste to imprint seals, and turned the book title into a four-character pattern, forming a scattered motifs with exact-positioned, right and left-inclined, as well as inverted

<sup>7</sup> Zaishan (1992: 47).

<sup>8</sup> Zhide (1992: 53).

<sup>9</sup> The school attended by Qun Juntao, the Shanghai Normal School (*Shanghai zhuanke shifan xuexiao*), was influenced and inspired by the artistic thoughts of John Ruskin and William Morris.

<sup>10</sup> Hongzheng (1992: 8).

<sup>11</sup> Juntao (1992b: 50).



characters.<sup>12</sup> Qian undoubtedly was the pioneer in applying the art of seal carving as decorative art to be used for book cover design.

#### 1.4. Calligraphy

In Qian's pursuit of ethnicity in his book cover design, also calligraphy played an important role, aside from cultural codes and seal-carving. Calligraphy became the first of the visual arts to be recognized within Chinese society as an appropriate pastime for elites. It was the form of art with an explicit relation to its own history and to works of the past.

Qian Juntao was greatly influenced by his tutor Feng Zikai while he studied at the Shanghai Normal School, where Feng emphasized the importance of learning calligraphy. Qian once said: "The learning of calligraphy is directly linked to cover designs. Calligraphy consists of lines which, when you master them, will appear powerful and rigorous. By substituting the lettering with calligraphy to present the book title can be a breezing maneuver at times."<sup>13</sup>

The cover of *Ban-nong's Talk* was designed by Qian in 1926. Although the design betrayed the strong vestiges of Japanese influence, the fact that Qian encompassed the art of cursive script and fauna patterns in a circular form was a novelty in itself. In addition, the brush strokes of the leaf blades on the cover of *Sun of Spring* (1930) exuded a smooth-flowing ink tone. The overall life-like image displayed Qian's mastery of the fluid strokes in calligraphy.

Some were of the opinion that a book title could be written by hiring a calligrapher, and the designers didn't have to do it themselves. Qian Juntao, however, thought otherwise:

An [uninitiated] calligrapher may not understand the intention and need of the designer; hence, the written characters may appear out of place in the whole design. Not only does it not enhance the qualities of the design, it will also upset the original idea. Instead, by complementing the client's needs, the designer himself [learns calligraphy and] writes to produce the calculated effects.<sup>14</sup>

In 2008, the badge of the Beijing Olympics was set against the red background of a Chinese seal to surface a dancing figure waving to form the character "jing," symbolizing the Beijing Olympics. On top of that, "Beijing 2008" was written in the style of clerical script of the Han Dynasty.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Wang Jie, a 28-year-old designer at the time, designed the icons of the thirty-five sports items by using seal script. Wang said:

Seal script embodies smooth fullness, sleek elegance and gentle tenacity. Every brush and stroke [of the seal script] is blended with the implicit and explicit images of the inscriptions

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Juntao (1990: 13).

<sup>14</sup> Juntao (1992: 48).

<sup>15</sup> *Global Views Monthly* (Nov. 20, 2007: 106).

on oracle bones as well as the inscriptions on bronze vessels. Such a portrayal of power and strength coincides with the fighting spirits of the athletes.<sup>16</sup>

The strong black-and-white contrast on the badge originated from the art of stone rubbings, with the aim of accentuating the immense vibrancy. The creations and innovation of Wang Jie incredibly resembled Qian Juntao's views on designs from a half a century ago. From the badge to the thirty-five icons of the games in the Olympics, the designs for the 2008 Beijing Olympics did not only manifest the centuries-long history in contemporary Chinese art by integrating the quintessence of Chinese culture, but also managed to relay and highlight the innovative spirit in designs since the early Republican era.

### 1.5. *The renaissance of string-bound books*

As we have already learned, Lu Xun was himself a talented amateur in the practice of design and his part in the effort to promote design was significant. Although Lu Xun himself was a harsh critic of the traditional Chinese thinking like Confucianism, he reckoned that much of Chinese art heritage was worthy of preservation and learning. As mentioned above, he was very interested in archaic patterns and designs, which he subsequently applied on book-cover designs. Not only did Lu put great effort in preserving ancient Chinese art, but he modified them into a new look. The best examples were the reproduction of *Ten Bamboo Studio Calligraphy and Painting Manual* and the publication of *Beiping Decorated Writing Papers*; the former was duplicated by the craftsmen of the Rongbao Studio in Beijing. Both books were in string-bound format with four punch-holes binding method.

Apart from duplicating classic works, Lu's love for string-bound books was evident in his design as well. During the 1920s and 1930s, Lu Xun took as one of his missions to promote European art, in particular wood cut print, as he saw the potential of the medium for mass education and propaganda. During his later years, Lu Xun published a great number of Western and Japanese prints at his own expense. For example, in 1930 he produced five volumes of foreign woodcuts,<sup>17</sup> each with a preface by Lu Xun. In 1931, Lu reprinted 250 copies of Carl Meffert's *Shimintu zhi tu* and in 1936 he published the *Selected Prints of Kaethe Kollwitz's*. Not only did he try his best to promote the styles of German graphic artist Kaethe Kollwitz (1867–1945), Lu himself also designed the cover for this collection. Both books featured Western art pieces, but their covers were string-bound on the left, matching the pattern of modern Western books. Unlike the four punch-holes binding method on *Beiping Decorated Writing Papers*, Lu Xun applied the six-punch-holes binding method onto the books, adding a pin-eye each at the top and the bottom. Moreover, unlike the traditional string-bound book in which the written title slip was attached to the top left-hand corner of the cover, Lu adhered the slip to the Western horizontal style with left-to-right writing. The overall combination was very much in line with books of the West, but the style is of blending

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. (107, 112).

<sup>17</sup> The five volumes of foreign woodcuts were: *Collection of Modern Woodcuts*, *Collection of Fukiya Kōji's Paintings*, *Collection of Modern Woodcuts*, *Collection of Beardsley*, and *New Russian Prints*.

the East and the West. Another successfully modified example was the one for *Call to Arms* (1926). Lu designed both the cover and the lettering for this work. The cover of *Call to Arms* still possesses the primitive, string-bound appearance; however, it was very Western-looking.

Perhaps it was due to Lu Xun's influence and the drive to pursue ethnicity that other artists, such as Qian Juntao, also often resorted to string-bound in their works. As early as 1929, at the age of 23, Qian published his own new-verse poems, *The Crystal*. As it was on new verses, Qian applied geometrical patterns along with string-bound format. Later, in 1987, he compiled his own 191 old verses and 27 poetic phrases into *Ice Pot Ink Grace*. To bring out the salient features of old verses, Qian specially went for chestnut-color silk gauze and complemented it with string-bound. He did the calligraphy for the book title himself too. The harmony in the book-cover design, and the discerning use of materials, coupled with the superb calligraphy, fully expressed the quintessential nobility and elegance of classic book covers and literati.

## Conclusion

After the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, China's awareness and demand for "design" escalated, albeit the term being alien to the general public in the early twentieth century. Through the artistic languages and codes, the pursuit for modernity and ethnicity were expressed on a common frequency. As a result, the market for book-cover designs in the early twentieth century structurally reflected a change of times. The public have the access to the popular international artistic languages of the twentieth century via book-cover designs. Many readers were enlightened by the powerful image, like *Wondering*, and realized that China, the once long-asleep lion, should awaken.

The development of book-cover designs in the early twentieth century was an important turning point in the growth of the modern Chinese art and design. The book cover design had irrefutably contributed a great deal to the dissemination of new art. The graphic designers underwent the process of assimilating foreign culture and art, or indiscriminate lifting. Subsequently, they introduced Western or Japanese art to the art scene in China, culminating in the integration of foreign essence with the consequence of resurfacing China's unique ethnicity. Along the way, they learnt and struggled a lot. Before the gradual professionalization of "art" and "design" from the early Republican era, book cover designers went through a difficult process of sowing, blooming, and fruit-bearing on this virgin soil of commercial art.

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## International Language of Woodcut Art – Chinese and Polish Avant-Garde in the 1920s and 1930s

Contemporary Chinese woodcut is a well-recognized and analyzed phenomenon. The number of monographs, exhibition catalogues, PhD dissertations and analyses created by Chinese,<sup>1</sup> European, American or Japanese scholars reflect continuous interest in this issue. Polish interwar woodcut created in the context of the rebirth of an autonomous field of art,<sup>2</sup> featuring its own modes of expression has also been thoroughly analyzed. The nascence of modern Chinese xylography took place almost at the same time as the Polish one; the former began in 1931,<sup>3</sup> and ten years earlier Polish woodcut appeared in its new shape. In their matured form both movements overlapped in time; and what needs to be underscored is the fact that they both reached their peaks (as far as the intensity of creative, pedagogical, and popularizing activities of eminent xylographers is concerned) in the 1930s. In view of extensive research into the issues opening the new graphic age in both countries, the main purpose of this paper is to signalize and present certain analogies in respect of the genesis, the form and the modes of expression of modern Chinese and Polish woodcut against the background of prevailing European tendencies in the art of xylography in the 1920s and 1930s. The impact the graphic art of Western Europe had on both Chinese and Polish xylographs, although the extent of this influence was not equal, turned out to be an important formal element that shaped the artistic image of the current.

The new age of Chinese woodcut that started at the beginning of the 1930s was triggered by external motivators of sociological and political nature, whereas the rebirth of Polish woodcut between 1918 and 1939 was caused solely by artistic factors. It coincided with an extremely important period of shaping Polish statehood, when the

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<sup>1</sup> Volumes that are particularly important are: a book written by the co-creator of contemporary Chinese woodcut, Hua (1995); Lu Hun's articles; and the latest monograph by Xiaobing Tang (2008). Moreover, numerous exhibitions presenting the history of Chinese woodcut from the 1930s are regularly organized. The most recent one, organized in New York in April 2009 in the Picker Art Gallery was titled *Woodcuts in Modern China 1937–2008*.

<sup>2</sup> During Young Poland (1897–1914) the dominant methods were etching and lithography, popular among painters, particularly in Krakow milieu. Few artists employed woodcut; specialists in this mode were scarce. During the interwar period a whole number of stimulating phenomena occurred (their beginning can be dated as early as 1913); attempts were made to take advantage of the woodcut techniques as well as gaining formal and artistic identity in the field.

<sup>3</sup> Usually the year 1931 is treated as the beginning of the xylographic movement in China, however, as early as 1928 the works published in magazines (Wang Yiliu, "Awakening," *Sun Monthly*, May 1928) bore all the features of the new mode of expression as far as formal and program aspects were concerned.

country regained its independence after 123 years of national bondage, and as a result searched its own national identity in art. In Poland, the new face of graphic art was to a great extent influenced by folk art; Władysław Skoczylas, one of the initiators of modern xylography referred to folk art of Podhale, was skillfully processing its values into a new unique quality. In its initial stage modern Chinese woodcut had little to do with centuries-old tradition of Chinese graphic art. Independent of native sources and “idolizing” Western patterns,<sup>4</sup> woodcut was used not only by artists but also by ordinary people, particularly when the need for distributing cheap materials on current topics (social and/or revolutionary ones) arose; they were spread throughout the country as leaflets, and woodcut copies turned out to be perfect for that. This mass acceleration and the possibility for everyone to become a xylographer were transformed into a concise and expressive form of those works.

Lu Xun once wrote, “The function of woodblock is, by nature, social education. By using its characteristic contrasts of black and white, it can express powerful emotions. Its rich techniques can express the diverse aspects of society and life.”<sup>5</sup> These words by a distinguished writer, art collector and the patron of the Creative Art Movement constitute the core of modern Chinese woodcut. Lu Xun in his statement underscored the function of graphic art. In the 1930s, turbulent and at the same groundbreaking for shaping the new face of the state of China, art was a direct reflection of the approaching changes. Soon, it became a way of influencing the social consciousness, educating the society and the source of information for the illiterate. Lu Xun presented new understanding of the function of art in numerous magazines; in June 1934 he wrote a foreword to book on modern xylography; he defined creative woodcut as an expressive and innovative public art with its main task being to “record current affairs and present universal themes.”<sup>6</sup> He believed woodcut was the embodiment of the most important values of universal visual language of art because it provided a suggestive message in understandable and original form. Blending the power of the art of the West and the East, modern xylography from the very beginning was cosmopolitan and proletarian, and “the same internal needs were shared by the artists and the society.”<sup>7</sup>

Professor Yan Shancun pointed out that so-called “Creative Print” (*sosaku-hanga*) from the 1930s was to Lu Xun “a substantial and feasible tool for delivering new revolutionary perspectives to many people.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the superiority of the topic, concentrated on social, and later revolutionary issues, and the obligations of xylography

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<sup>4</sup> Lu Xun wrote about Chinese artists: “They are European in method and have nothing to do with ancient Chinese woodblock printing.” He himself played great part in introducing Western art to the Chinese society (his favorite artist was Frans Masereel). He believed that an artist would not be able to create a valuable piece of work if he was not familiar with traditional Chinese graphic art as well as new tendencies in Western art. Xun defined modern woodcut as a combination of traditional graphic art with new European modes of work. In the 1930s the artists took advantage of this technique and employed the possibilities it offered: easiness; speed; and cheapness of obtaining a large number of copies; see Xun (1930).

<sup>5</sup> Xun (1929).

<sup>6</sup> Xun (1981).

<sup>7</sup> To Lu Xun, Feng Zikai and other contemporary xylographers the society meant the working masses that were not only determined political power of modern society but also cultural potential.

<sup>8</sup> Shancun (2000).

towards new times do not eliminate a great formal value of modern Chinese woodcut. Simplified form, working with large planes of sharply contrasted whites and blacks, highlighted powerful content in an appropriate form.

The source of modern woodcut in Polish environment was the struggle for graphic independence, and “one of the manifests of this tendency was the return to woodcut the convention of which constitutes most austere, consistent, and overt graphic technique. [...] The solutions that would fully present and at the same employ distinctive possibilities of this technique were searched.”<sup>9</sup> Modern Chinese woodcut did not rest on similar ideological and technical assumptions, but these were spontaneously fulfilled. Austerity and carving the compositions directly in wood, frequently with a knife, and employing the values of a woodblock, were the elements that became visible in Chinese xylographs.

The force of expression and the brevity of the conveyed message decided on the nature of modern Chinese woodcut. The artistic methods were instinctive; woodcut was a peculiar “cry of protest.” In Poland, searching for the core of national art was simultaneous with conducting certain formal and technical experiments. Artists focused around the Warsaw “Ryt” (Scratch) Association of Graphic Artists (1925–1939), the country’s most active artistic group of that time, wanted to highlight the technical skills, particularly sensing of material. Skoczylas wrote, “Wood is material that is the closest to the Polish heart.”<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of the stimulus that introduced xylography to different countries and distant cultures and pushed them onto new routes, the language of proper woodcut is an international and universal mode of expression. The expressiveness of Chinese graphic art of the 1930s resembled that of German printmakers of *Die Brücke* and *Der Blaue Reiter* Groups, Russian<sup>11</sup> or Polish woodcuts by Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, not only because of one-side influence as the mode of expression results from emotions and the disposition of the artist, the mode of discussing painful topics that build shared experience of people from different cultures. The succinct form, synthetic depiction of the whole object devoid of inessential details, sharp cuts, contrasts of black and white, are the elements that shaped both Chinese graphic works permeated with “vigor” and “energetic spirit,” as Lu Xun defined them, and German or Polish Expressionistic xylographs. Numerous analogies, not necessary influences, can be found between Polish Expressionistic graphic works and those created in China in the 1920s and 1930s. The language of woodcut became a universal tongue when the artist yielding to the rhythm of work fully used the possibilities offered by black-and-white, proper technique and built forceful message. The succinct form was used for depicting difficult and important topics: daily existence of the poor, social differences, violence, suffering, states of extreme physical and psychological ravages – this generalization can be used with reference to woodcuts born in many countries of the East and the West. This technique,

<sup>9</sup> Czarnocka (1962: 260).

<sup>10</sup> The Catalogue of the 1st Woodcut Exhibition of the *Ryt* Association of Graphic Artists, Warszawa, Jan. 1926.

<sup>11</sup> See works by Andrey Goncharov, Vladimir Favorski, Aleksei (Alexei) Kravchenko, Dmitri Mitrokhin, Ivan Lebedev, Nikolai Alekseev, Alexander Yakimchenko, Solomon Judovin.

with the character of the material employed and the explicitness of message seems to be predestined for topic socially important.

Formal concurrence of Chinese xylography with modern Russian or German woodcut art is invariably defined as inspiration by or idolization of Western patterns, but on certain occasions a term “analogy” would be more accurate. Polish woodcut did not gain an extensive representation in Chinese magazines or during art exhibitions, but similarities in forms and modes of expression were numerous. The fact that the extensive analysis by Tang includes a reproduction of a work by Władysław Skoczylas, Saint Sebastian,<sup>12</sup> leads to several reflections. The example provided by the author of the book functions in iconographic categories: suffering (a martyr pierced with arrows) that has no translation into cultural and ideological context of Chinese depictions of dying farmers; soldiers emaciated by hunger or tortured prisoners. The emotional value, modes of expression, and the manner of cutting indicate incredible parallelism in “xylographic” type of reasoning.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the feeling of the material, Chinese and Polish woodcuts are parallel, although a more accurate example would be works from graphic Szlembark portfolios by Tadeusz Kulisiewicz.<sup>14</sup> The issue of concurrence, and not merely one-way influence, lies in the language of woodcut (uniqueness of the technique); if in the emotions one follows the features of the material, “wood,” the effect is the synthetic form as well as striking and direct message. As Zdenek Hrdlička referred to Chinese woodcut:

[...] it is created directly in the material and is sometimes improvised by the artist on the spot: in the front, in the warehouse or the field, with no prior preparation. It is frequently simple, because it is the work of a folk xylographer's hands. The major feature that distinguishes it from the old woodcut art is its vital content and close connection with the current topic.<sup>15</sup>

Specific thematic sphere of modern Chinese woodcut is naturally understandable; it was a certain kind of reportage and, via modes of artistic expression, an incisive commentary on new reality. New attitude to woodcut was vividly manifested in concentrating on social issues: works by Xu Lian, Huang Xinbo, Lai Shaoqi, Pan Ye, Chen Baozhen, Chen Yanqiao, Zhang Hui, Chen Puzhi, Hu Yichuan and other authors refer to those topics. Depictions connected with the ethos of progress: working (workers, farmers, seamstresses), studying at school and broadly understood education of the society, contents referring to political situation and its consequences (“edifying” scenes: revolution leaders, manifestations, marches, shaking off the shackles,<sup>16</sup> but also tragic

<sup>12</sup> Tang (2008: 85).

<sup>13</sup> Despite decorativeness and rhythmization of certain arrangements that defined Skoczylas's style, absent in Chinese woodcuts.

<sup>14</sup> Tadeusz Kulisiewicz (1899–1988), was a Polish graphic designer and artist; a member of the *Ryt* Association of Graphic Artists; between 1928 and 1930 he created a cycle of woodcuts devoted to Szlembark, a small highland village. The works were permeated with expressive force, he monumentalized the topic and gave it a mood of solemnity.

<sup>15</sup> Hrdlička (1951: 21).

<sup>16</sup> Li Hua, *Roar China!* (1936) in which an extremely simplified silhouette of a prisoner emanates with an intense power; this potential is visible in the superbly drawn figure, lips opened in cry. Similar expressiveness is visible in stretched arms of screaming people from woodcuts by Chen Zhonggang *Outcry*



scenes: battle episodes, enslaved people; violence victims: prisoners, the wounded, the killed, widows; orphans; wronged children) are blended with the issues of extremely tough daily existence: natural disasters, poverty and physical suffering in its various manifestations (beggars, the homeless, the hungry, and the thirsty) sometimes in drastic interpretations. Apart from the topics connected with the current political and social situation, frequently appearing themes were these of centuries-old tradition, universal topics constituting the counterpoint for the tragic events. These are portraits, genre scenes (the market, scenes in the courtroom, street, office and school) and landscapes; the force of expression captured in them, although of different nature, remains equal to that of socially engaged woodcuts.

In works depicting traditional topics, beauty and the lyricism of the landscape<sup>17</sup>, the mode of depicting elements of nature (trees, field, spring) and terse decorative elements, despite simplifications constitute a proof of unusual aesthetic sense.

Polish woodcut of that period presents compositions of social nature, people working in the fields or in factories,<sup>18</sup> scenes of social pathologies,<sup>19</sup> handicapped people, the homeless, or crippled persons, prisoners,<sup>20</sup> or insightful portraits of old and work-worn people.<sup>21</sup> In expressive synthesis with geometrized and conventional forms sometimes heading towards abstraction, the members of the *Bunt* (Rebellion) Group from Poznań

(1935) and by Xu Lian *Outcry* (1935); the observable variety of textures is also interesting together with dynamic composition with strongly underscored figure of crying at work *To the Front* (1932) by Hu Yichan.

<sup>17</sup> The examples include: Chen Yanqiao, *Spring Scene* (1935); Pan Ye, *Spring Field* (1935); Li Hua, *New Green* (1934); He Baitao, *Small Boat* (1932).

<sup>18</sup> Examples include: Waclaw Wąsowicz, *A Peasant with a Cart* (*Chłop z wózkiem*, the 1920s) and *Craftsman's Sunday* (*Niedziela rzemieślników*, 1925); Władysław Skoczylas, *Maidens with Baskets* (*Dziewczęta z koszami*, 1928), *Potato Digging* (*Kopanie kartofli*, 1932); Stefan Mrożewski, *Reapers* (*Kosiarze*, 1932), *Miner* (*Górnik*, c. 1935); Eugeniusz Waniek, *Workers* (*Robotnicy*, 1934); Paweł Steller, *In the Mine* (*W kopalni*, 1933), *Coal-Loader* (*Ładowarka do węgla*, 1933); *Upper-Silesian Female* (*Górnoślazczka*, 1933); Maria Hiszpańska-Neumann, *At the Mine* (*Przy kopalni*, 1938); Maria Dunin-Piotrowska, *Dressmaker* (*Krawcowa*); Konstanty Sopoćko, *The Horsewagon* (*Furmanka*, 1932); Wiktor Podoski, *Harvesting Asparagus* (*Kopanie szparagów*, 1930); Stanisław Raczyński, *Village Washerwomen* (*Wiejskie praczki*, 1928), *After Work* (*Po pracy*); Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, *The Plougher* (*Oracz*, 1929), *Women Working in the Fields* (*Kobiety w polu*, 1936), *Girls at Work* (*Dziewczyny przy pracy*, 1931), *Potato Peeling* (*Obieranie ziemniaków*, 1933); *Milking Sheep* (*Dojenie owiec*, 1933); Fiszal Zylberberg, *Sanders* (*Piaskarze*), *Barrow-Men* (*Taczkarze*).

<sup>19</sup> Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, *Poor Men* (*Biedacy*, 1931), *A Lying Man* (*Leżący człowiek*); Wanda Korzeniowska, *A Busker* (*Grajek podwórzowy*, 1931); Stefan Mrożewski, *The Poor* (*Biedota* 1925 and 1928); Leopold Buczkowski, *Female Beggars at the Door* (*Dziadówki na progu*).

<sup>20</sup> Jan Jerzy Wroniecki, *The Deranged* (*Obłąkani*, 1918), *Under the Street Lamp* (*Pod latarnią*, 1919); Fiszal Zylberberg, *Antek* (c. 1936), *A Jobless* (*Bezrobotny*), *The Bound Man* (*Spętany*); Ludwik Tyrowicz, *The Prison* (*Więzienie*, 1927); Franciszek Burkiewicz, *The March of Prisoners* (*Pochód więźniów*, 1936); Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, *A Lying Man* (*Leżący człowiek*); Mikołaj Sasykin, *The Blind Men* (*Ślepcy*, 1944).

<sup>21</sup> Apart from portraits by Kulisiewicz included in Szlembark portfolios, other examples include woodcuts by: Irena Nowakowska-Acedańska, *Old Agatha* (*Stara Agata*, c. 1936); Paweł Steller, *Shepherdess* (*Gaździna*), *Sheep-Breeder from Barania* (*Owczarz z Baraniej*); Fiszal Zylberberg, *Milkman* (*Mleczarz*, c. 1936), *The Portrait of Grandmother* (*Portret babki*, c. 1935); Ludwik Gardowski, *The Head of Highland Woman* (*Głowa góralki*); Janina Kłopotcka, *Walking Women* (*Kobiety idące*, 1936); Władysław Żurawski, *Early Spring* (*Przedwiośnie*, 1934); Stefan Szmaj, *An Old Woman* (*Stara kobieta*, after 1925); Stefan Mrożewski, *The Head of an Old Man* (*Głowa starca*, 1925); Władysław Lam, *The Head of a Female Beggar* (*Głowa żebraczki*, after 1935). Compare: Rong Ge, *Portrait of an Old Man*, 1945.

found their expression, their works close to Chinese woodcuts, but slightly different in the topics they depicted, which included struggle, coup, war, and extreme psychological states.<sup>22</sup> As far as formal analogies to letterpress printing<sup>23</sup> of the artists from the Bunt Group are concerned, one should mention the works by: Lai Shaoqi, *On the Beach* of 1934 (distorted, foreshortened, conventionally depicted figures); a landscape drawn by Situ Zou, *Summer Storm* (1933) similar to the abstract compositions by Jerzy Hulewicz or Władysław Skotarek with cylindrical forms filled with parallel, almost decorative cuts.<sup>24</sup> Superb in their geometrizing convention and somewhat grotesque view, are woodcuts by Tang Yingwei, *Devils* (the 1930s) and *Kiss*<sup>25</sup> (1928), while the works by Xu Xunlei resemble the best creations of the Poznań Group. *Fourth-Class Car* from 1932 by female xylographer Xia Peng can be juxtaposed with a work by Margaret Kubicka *On a Tram* (*W tramwaju*) from 1928;<sup>26</sup> the difference, however, lies in the way of drawing the passengers' faces.<sup>27</sup> The work of Li Hua, *Brooding* (1935), is strongly European, almost decadent in its mood,<sup>28</sup> and its quivering, multiplied cuts and the air of hopelessness remind *The Deranged* (*Obląkani*, 1918) by Jan Jerzy Wroniecki, *A Shadow* (*Cień*, 1935) by Stefan Mrożewski or *Old Man with Noose* (1923) by Käthe Kollwitz.

The aesthetics of Tang Yingwei's woodcut *The Homeless* (c. 1936), presenting three homeless men, is similar to the woodcuts by Tadeusz Kulisiewicz from the Szlembark cycle; farmers are calm and resigned in their wretchedness, and exemplify "passive lasting and sad necessity. [...] They are devoid of rebelliousness, opposition, will to fight."<sup>29</sup> This stillness remains the best illustration of the tragedy of people emphasized in both works by the choice of modes of expression. As far as the method used is concerned, the woodcuts mirror the intuitional feeling of the material, the ability to make the texture more dynamic with simultaneous "immobilization" of the figure. *The Jobless Workers* (1935) by Pan Ye, in its realization of the figures of the men and the child resembles some of the woodcuts by Bencion Michtom<sup>30</sup> and Samuel Cygler.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *The Battle* (*Walka*, Jan Jerzy Wroniecki, 1918), *Street Fighting* (*Walka uliczna*, Władysław Skotarek, 1921), *The Coup* (*Zamach*, Stanisław Kubicki, 1920), *War* (*Wojna*, Jerzy Hulewicz, 1921), *Breakdown* (*Zalamanie*, S. Kubicki, 1919).

<sup>23</sup> The artists used woodcut as well as linocut, which was more frequent.

<sup>24</sup> These are the shapes of tree crowns in the woodcut by the Chinese artist mentioned above.

<sup>25</sup> This work in particular refers to Western European forms; it is worth to compare it with Karl Schmidt-Rottluf's woodcut, *Kiss* (*Der Kuß*) of 1918.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Schuster Kubicka, a German wife of Stanisław Kubicki; intensive relations between Polish and German graphic artists from *Die Brücke* and *Der Blaue Reiter* Groups developed also thanks to her efforts. The biographical entry of the artist, in: Hałasa (2004); see also: Malinowski (1991).

<sup>27</sup> A strong deformation in the work by Xia Peng; in Kubicka's interpretation people are anonymous, their faces are limited to synthetic forms of black and white.

<sup>28</sup> The work deserves to be noticed also because of an interesting psychological portrait of the depicted man.

<sup>29</sup> Grońska (1971: 151).

<sup>30</sup> Especially: *The Jobless* (*Bezrobotni*, 1934); see also: *Beggar* (*Żebrak*), *Starving* (*Głodujący*), *In the Kitchen* (*W kuchni*).

<sup>31</sup> We can list here the following woodcuts from the 1930: *A Meal* (*Posiłek*), *A Rest* (*Odpoczynek*), *The Jobless* (*Bezrobotni*).

Hard and strenuous work is a recurrent topic of Chinese woodcut. *Works Against the Current* (1935) by Luo Quingzhen; *Coolies* (1935) by Chen Baozhen; *Boat Trackers* (1935) by Zhang Hui, *Rickshaw Puller* (1934) by Chen Puzhi, or *Sanitation Worker* (1933) by Xia Peng depict various aspects of the hardship of anonymous workers. Each of those woodcuts conveys the strong content in a slightly different form. *Works Against the Current* strikes a lyrical note in its depiction of the landscape. Interesting framing (each frame is filled with a portrait of a worker), expressiveness and deformation are presented in *Rickshaw Puller*; and black surfaces with small spots of white bring out from the background a pair of cleaners in *Sanitation Worker*, a work using minimal means, austere composition, and strong message. Polish artists in their woodcuts also depicted hard work, but with a few exceptions they were not so succinct and suggestive. The figures were usually treated as individuals, by means of individual features, countenance, wrinkles and specific deformations. More emphasis was put on creating psychological portrait of an individual than on presenting the activity itself; this results in the absence of generalizations and formal synthesis visible in Chinese woodcut.

The concept of work was depicted by Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, Paweł Steller, Eugeniusz Waniek, Fiszal Zylberberg or Waław Wąsowicz in several woodcuts (e.g. *A Farmer Pulling the Cart* [*Chłop ciągnący wózek*]). In works by Skoczylas, Bartłomiejczyk or Raczyński, the pictures of labor are of lighter nature and make genre pictures.

The mode of depicting urbanized landscapes, artistic methods of expression and motifs present in the woodcuts by Zhang Ying (*Wharf*, 1934); Jiang Feng (*Workers on the Wharf*, 1932) or Ye Luo (*Confrontation*, 1933) are close to the views of factories and mines from Paweł Steller's woodcuts. A work by Chen Yanqiao, *Going to Work* (1934), in its composition and technique is close to the creation by Eugeniusz Waniek *The Workers* (*Robotnicy*) from 1934. Social themes were present in Antoni Alster's works showing great emotional force, expressivity, austerity, or even brutality of form.<sup>32</sup>

Polish woodcuts created after 1939 usually lack dramatic flavor of violence and drastic social differences are hardly noticeable.<sup>33</sup> Wiktor Podolski, an outstanding graphic artist, wrote, "With its contemporaneity of the artistic vision of the *Ryt* graphic artists one needs to point out that the contact of this vision with present existence is extremely weak. These graphic artists do not try to take any stance, as visual artists, towards life with its hardships and various other aspects. Formal depiction of their works accurately represents the spirit of the present day; however, they remain silent about the issues brought about by the present day."<sup>34</sup> Topics connected with highland-

<sup>32</sup> Woodcuts: *Rally* (*Wiec*); *The Accident in Siersza Mine* (*Wypadek w kopalni Siersza*), *A Worker* (*Robotnik*); *A Prison Cell* (*Cela więzienna*), *In the Cell* (*W celi*).

<sup>33</sup> Woodcuts of social content are made by Jerachmil Jakub Tynowicki, an artist of Jewish origin, member of the Phrygian Cap Society. His works include: *Agitator*, *Farmhand and Farmer* (*Parobek i gospodarz*), *The Reduced* (*Zredukowani*), *An Invalid* (*Inwalida*); see; Malinowski (2000). Consistent criticism was taken up by the artists from 1<sup>st</sup> Krakow Group [*I Grupa Krakowska*]; the core of Leopold Lewicki's art lied in the rebellion against current social-artistic and political values; he presented scenes from the lives of the poor and working class (strikes, rallies, etc.), as well as depictions of everyday scenes of urban life; his major activities were concentrated on metal techniques: etching, aquatint, drypoint. As late as the 1940s he started working in linocuts.

<sup>34</sup> Podoski (1933: 676).

ers, religious motifs, genre pictures, symbolic-metaphoric current; themes associated with literature and mythology, depictions of architecture, fascination with the city – all dominated over social issues. Apart from the portfolios of the legion artists, a moving cycle *The War (Wojna)*<sup>35</sup> by Zdzisław Prusiewicz, a Poznań graphic artist, and several separate woodcuts<sup>36</sup> presenting military scenes are scarce; the motif of manifestations<sup>37</sup> or marches were rarely depicted, in contrast to Chinese woodcut.

Truly dramatic compositions with a strong force of expression appeared during the Second World War.<sup>38</sup> Stunning in the simplicity of the message conveyed were the woodcuts for the album *POW Camp II [Obóz jeńców II]* by C. Woldenberg from 1943, and the portfolio *Ghetto [Getto]* by Jonasz Stern,<sup>39</sup> created between 1945 and 1956. For Polish and Chinese artists woodcut was a mirror to reflect important and tragic moments in the history, a mode to express protest or rebellion against the suffering of the innocent, such as hunger, death, and extermination.

To sum up, Polish and Chinese woodcuts have some shared phenomena. First of all, one should mention great popularity of xylography, disseminated also through exhibitions.<sup>40</sup> The Modern Prints Society of Guangzhou, the most fertile artistic group in China, systematically added new publications and exhibitions catalogues on the subject. Mass popularization of the technique resulted in numerous lectures on graphic art that accompanied numerous exhibitions traveling around the country; there were also publications devoted exclusively to woodcut. Traveling exhibitions were sent to the Soviet Union, the United States (New York), England (London), and India (Calcutta). In 1929 the associations of woodcut artists began to multiply, the largest number were

<sup>35</sup> A cycle of linocuts, 1930: *The Air Raid (Nalot)*, *The Battle of the Planes (Walka samolotów)*, *The Gas (Gaz)*, *The One Shot Down (Strącony)*, *An Invincible (Niezwycięzony)*.

<sup>36</sup> *A Soldier on the Barricade (Żołnierz na barykadzie)*, before 1926) by Stefan Mroźewski.

<sup>37</sup> Marian Konarski, *Campaniier (Agitator)*, from *The City (Miasto, 1925)* portfolio; Tadeusz Cieślowski Jr., *Feed Us! (Chleba!)*, 1931), *Backstreets from the Inside (Kulisy zaułków)*, 1936); Szejna Efronówna, *Rally in the Factory (Wiec w fabryce)*, c. 1935).

<sup>38</sup> Franciszek Burkiewicz, *The March of the Prisoners (Pochód więźniów)*, *Polish Convicts (Polscy skazańcy)*, 1945); Jerzy Borsukiewicz, *The Death of a Soldier (Śmierć żołnierza)*, *Pacification of Zamość Region (Pacyfikacja Zamojszczyzny)*, 1943); sometimes elements of grotesque were present in: Stanisław Rolicz, *New Europe is Being Built (Budują nową Europę)*, 1942); Stanisław Michał Gliwa, *The First Grave. Monte Cassino (Pierwsza mogiła. Monte Cassino)*, 1944).

<sup>39</sup> *The Portrait of a Woman Behind Bars (Portret kobiety za kratami)* can be compared to *The Prisoner (undated)* by Liu Xian.

<sup>40</sup> During The 1<sup>st</sup> National Joint Exhibition opened in 1935 in the Grand Temple in Beijing over 600 woodcuts were presented (including rare traditional ones) and about 70 reproductions of foreign prints (e.g. by Dürer). Books on graphic art as well xylograph tools were also displayed. The exhibition traveled to several large cities in the country, and was accompanied by seminars on graphic art and meetings with local artists; an enormous effort was made to promote woodcut. In October the exhibition, which aided dynamic development of xylography and which enjoyed great public acclaim, reached the last city – Shanghai. Very soon it became obvious that woodcut was extremely popular and convenient artistic medium, and the next exhibition, The 2nd National Touring Xylograph Exhibition, took place in July 1936, starting in Guangzhou. Both national exhibitions became known as the beginning of the most fertile stage of xylograph movement before the outbreak of the Chinese-Japanese War in July 1937; Tang (2008). In Poland, International Exhibitions of Xylograph were organized in 1933 and 1936, in Warsaw, and were accompanied by similar popularizing events.

seated in Shanghai;<sup>41</sup> others operated in Hong Kong, Beijing, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, and Nanjing. Warsaw's *Ryt* Association of Graphic Artists working on similar rules: they organized exhibitions and propaganda activities, artists presented theoretical dissertations on xylography, traveling exhibitions of contemporary Polish graphic art were held abroad<sup>42</sup> and in small Polish towns.

Chinese xylographers were familiar with avant-garde art of Europe, the United States and Japan.<sup>43</sup> Literary artistic magazines<sup>44</sup> published reproductions of paintings and graphic works of Russian, British, German or Belgian origin; exhibitions of Western art were organized,<sup>45</sup> books devoted to Western art were translated into Chinese (one of the translators was Lu Xun). Furthermore, after studying at European or Japanese universities, young artists returned to the country with fresh attitudes and new perceptions on the form, and were very interested in European avant-garde. Polish artists were familiar with these new tendencies as they appeared.

Polish press provided extensive commentaries on graphic works from European countries as well as the US presented at International Xylograph Exhibitions in Warsaw. This initiative of Poland encouraged the competition in the field of artistic expression, and presented a vast panorama of talents in woodcut. One should mention that a large part of this milieu constituted female xylographers numerously represented at exhibitions. In the *Ryt* Association alone there were several women,<sup>46</sup> and in the whole country there were several dozen of talented female artists using woodcut as their major means of artistic expression. In China, xylographs were created by men, with the sole notable exception of Xia Peng.<sup>47</sup>

Xylography dominated, in quality and quantity, graphic techniques employed by Polish artists during the interwar period.<sup>48</sup> In China it was an obvious phenomenon. As far as the techniques were concerned, the experiments of some Polish artists centered

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<sup>41</sup> In 1930 Lu Xun established a school for xylographers in Shanghai.

<sup>42</sup> In 1920 a traveling exhibition of contemporary Polish graphic art started its journey to dozen or so capitals and larger cities of Europe; it visited London, Brussels, the Hague, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Tallinn, Riga, Prague, Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Budapest. The exhibitions of Polish woodcut visited Canada, the United States, and Japan (Tokio) as well.

<sup>43</sup> Lu Xun brought a graphic art tutor from Japan, and Chinese budding artists studied at Japanese art schools.

<sup>44</sup> In Xiaobing Tang: selected magazines *Art Field Weekly*, *The Universal*, *Short Story Magazine*; reprints of works by Wassily Kandinsky, Käthe Kollwitz, Clifford Webb, Allen Lewis, C.B. Falls, Frans Masereel, W. Heath Robinson, Edward Warwick, Claire Leighton; from Poland – Władysław Skoczylas.

<sup>45</sup> Till 1935 as many as 27 exhibitions were organized in larger cities; Hrdlička (1951: 18).

<sup>46</sup> Maria Dunin-Piotrowska, Bogna Krasnodębska-Gardowska, Wiktoria Goryńska, Janina Konarska, Salomea Hładki-Wajwód, Maria Rużycka-Gabryel, Wanda Telakowska, Janina Kłopocka and Zofia Elżbieta Fijałkowska (in Black and White [*Czerń i Biel*] Group), Aniela Cukierówna, Imola Łoś, Janina Róża Giedroyc-Wawrzynowicz, Krystyna Wróblewska, and others.

<sup>47</sup> Xia Peng (1911–1935), a student of the Hangzhou National Art Academy, “the only known woman artist interested in woodcuts during this period” (Tang [2008: 127]). Died in prison in 1935.

<sup>48</sup> Outside Warsaw, which remained the leading seat of xylographers (*Ryt* Society; Black and White Group), woodcuts were created in Vilna, Lwow, Krakow (although it still possessed strong traditions of lithograph and metal techniques), Poznań, Łódź, Lublin, and in Silesia. Polish artists who dwelled in or visited Paris worked in woodcuts as well.

on texture issues; various tools were used (e.g. multiple burin, etching stylus) in order to obtain values at times contrary to the nature of woodcut (painterly quality; luminosity<sup>49</sup>). In Chinese woodcuts the main rule was succinctness, pointedness, following the material and one's own observations (of the urban or country life). Deformation was used as an exclamation mark, an indication of "internal rebellion towards established reality."<sup>50</sup> A review of Chinese woodcuts makes one aware that this uncomplicated and cheap technique, which was easy to employ in every environment, as Lu Xun put it, and was equally easy to disseminate, in its form and artistic values offered a whole range of possibilities to an artist who mastered the technical skills and was aware of the goal she or he wanted to achieve. The power of expression and brevity of the message conveyed decided about the face of modern woodcut in China. The employed artistic methods were spontaneous, resulted from the spur of the moment, the necessity of react and respond, also on artistic level, to the socio-political situation. Despite the primacy of the theme, focusing on social issues, the aspect that remains a huge value of modern Chinese woodcut is the form. It was extremely simplified; operating with large planes of sharply contrasted blacks and whites, and highlighted powerful content in suitable shape.

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<sup>49</sup> The best example constitute the works of Stefan Mrozewki, sometimes called the graver wizard; Tadeusz Cieślowski, Jr., who went in for woodcuts based on white lines (also theory of xylograph art), or Stanisław Ostojka-Chrostowski.

<sup>50</sup> Czarnocka (1962: 319).

Xun 1929 = Lu Xun: Preface to: *Selection of Modern Woodcuts*, Shanghai, 1929

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## Shanghai Poinsettia and Nostalgia Counterfeits

1

In his short essay “On the cheongsam,” explaining the origins of the 48-painting cycle *High Mandarin Collar – High Slit. Shanghai in the 1920s*, a contemporary Shanghai artist Lu Zhide recollected his childhood and evoked an image of falling leaves, corresponding with his mother’s autumn cheongsam. He recalled also the afternoon when the Red Guards thronged into his school and the playground covered by leather shoes with broken heels. “The cheongsam worn by Mrs. Chai, who taught us painting, was shredded before our very eyes by ‘little generals.’ We silently watched as she rushed into the office with the cheongsam pieces fluttering about her in the wind.”<sup>1</sup>

After many years Lu Zhide came back to the cheongsam motif in his paintings, exploring Shanghai of the 1920s. It is noteworthy that this cycle is dedicated to the World EXPO which will be held in 2010 in Shanghai, the city mentioned in the artist’s essay once in a quite significant sentence. “Shanghai has become an international city and the Shanghai style of the 20s and 30s gains global popularity.”<sup>2</sup> As Hanchao Lu rightly observed in the article examining fascination with pre-war Shanghai, this fame did not originate from the yearning for times gone by. The analysis of a quite common association of the city’s past and present splendor leads to the conclusion that there exists a specific phenomenon called “Shanghai nostalgia”.

This nostalgia about pre-communist Shanghai turns out to be quite a problematical social phenomenon which is something more than just a sentimental sense of loss of old Shanghai in the age of modernization and longing for its return. Pan Tianshu recognizes Shanghai nostalgia as a “multi-faceted phenomenon that characterizes the cultural scene of post-reform Shanghai and has affected its people in many spheres of everyday life”. He states it answered “the strategic need of the local people for rediscovering, reevaluating, and reinventing colonial Shanghai in the local and global contexts of post-Deng economic privatization, social stratification, and political liberalization”. Hanchao Lu points out that “the Shanghai nostalgia is unique in the sense that it is not essentially about protesting but is in a positive mood in that it is both an approval of the present and an expression of confidence about the future.”<sup>3</sup> It is about the return of the city’s once celebrated Western influence, about the resurgence of the city’s old

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<sup>1</sup> Simbürger, Yongkang (2007: 123).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Hanchao (2002: 173).

commercial spirit and cosmopolitanism. In addition, Hanchao Lu indicates that from its beginning the protest against the Cultural Revolution, against cutting off the past and the city's heyday memories became an important aspect forming this feeling of nostalgia.<sup>4</sup> The disapproval to erase the reminiscences of Shanghai glory days can be easily found in Lu Zhide's narration and seems to constitute a series of portraits of the elegant, a little chimerical Shanghai women.

It is very suggestive that the torn dress has been reintegrated in the paintings of grown-up Lu Zhide a few decades later. This raises the question about the effects of such reintegrations and the ideology that makes one take this trouble. Cheongsam and high heel shoes were the inventions of particular ideologies, so the act of destroying the garments must be regarded as an obvious political act. In her article with a significant title 'What Should Chinese Women Wear? A National Problem' Antonia Finnane brilliantly demonstrates how Chinese women's clothes of the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, modified again and again, accurately reflecting the actual political situation in China and the subsequent images of the Chinese nation.<sup>5</sup> Even cheongsam itself was continually remade and reinterpreted. It turns out to be remade once more, in a particularly interesting style, by Lu Zhide in his painting: *Every bit of fallen blossom means so much less of spring*.<sup>6</sup>

## 2

*Every bit of fallen blossom means so much less of spring* depicts a woman playing a lute, wearing a white cheongsam decorated with poinsettia pattern. Such an unusual dress deserves particular attention, as it is not the first time for this garment to occur in the portrait history of Shanghai women. It recalls at least two calendar posters designed a few decades earlier by the Hang Zhiying studio. One of them advertised Lactogen infant food, while the other was made to advertise a battery producer. The latter portrayed a young woman with a lute. The similarity between this old poster and Lu Zhide's painting is so close that it is impossible to consider it accidental. Dresses, make-up, and jewelry as well as the positions of fingers on the instrument and the stools are the same. It is also possible, of course, to point out some differences, such as, for instance, no beret on the musician's head by Lu Zhide, various hairstyles or colors of high-heel shoes. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that it must have been Lu Zhide's intention to repaint an earlier calendar poster and he made it obvious.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. (172).

<sup>5</sup> Finnane (1996: 99–131).

<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank Professor Wolfgang Behr for his invaluable help with the translation of this title and for suggesting that it alludes to Du Fu's famous poem *The Winding River*. My translation of Lu Zhide's painting title is based on Rewi Alley's translation of Du Fu's poem (*Echo of Classics: Du Fu Selected Poems*, Beijing, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> It may be worth adding that already in prewar Shanghai this poster, like many others, existed in at least two, slightly differing versions. In the other composition the pose of the musician remains the same, but she wears a dress with a peony motif and different jewelry. The background with a lake and pagoda is also different.

Although Lu Zhide's paintings and calendar posters have much in common, it is impossible to equate these two Shanghai women from the images due to their completely different purposes and origins. Yet, still there is a kind of temptation to treat the painting *Every bit of fallen blossom means so much less of spring* as a peculiar representation of an old advertisement poster. The representation is definitely influenced by the experience of nostalgia which another scholar, Dorothy Ko, calls in one of her articles a "postcolonial nostalgia."<sup>8</sup> She refers to this phenomenon when asking the question about a new existence of the revived poster images. As she remarks, "this circulation of colonial or semi-colonial imageries in a post-colonial age generates new meanings [...]."<sup>9</sup> Thus, once more duplicated and distributed images of Shanghai women circulate, losing some old meanings and acquiring new ones. New meanings are generated also in a different process, namely by contemporary artists, who inspired by the calendar poster, keep referring to it in their works, thus transforming the old images.

Any action of this kind is bound to affect our current perception and awareness of Shanghai posters, but it seems that neither artists nor audience are aware of this permanent transformation of the posters heritage. Hardly anyone can see that this transformation is heading in one definite direction. In my opinion, this is the reason why the question about strategies influencing the perception of posters is so important. Thus, I aim to make Lu Zhide's paintings the pretext for discussing the problem, with no regard for such issues as the artist's visualizations of the New Femininity or his visions of the thrilling decades of Chinese and Western cultures blending in Shanghai.

### 3

Although probably no doubts would ever have arisen on the subject of the ambiguity of Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s, it would be much more challenging to prove the ambiguous nature of Shanghai calendar posters and their ambivalent significance. The reappearance of these posters in the Shanghai nostalgia context makes this task more difficult, as the new nostalgic perspective clearly tends to eliminate some fundamental but problematic aspects of the poster heritage that do not seem to match the desired nostalgic vision of these past decades and femininity.

Such artistic works as Lu Zhide's painting establish the explicit yet not entirely true point of view. They make one consider the posters to be only an important aspect of the modernization and efforts to associate them with luxury, youth, and prosperity of idealized and strong New China. The acceptance of such point of view, however, implies an essential distortion and final erasing of an uneasy and awkward yet very important part of commercial posters' heritage. The part importance of which was neither realized in prewar Shanghai nor articulated, although its effects can still be seen today and often keep affecting the world's perception of modern China and Chinese modernity.

<sup>8</sup> Steele, Major (1999: 147)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (147–148).

Calendar posters affected not only the Shanghai style and the ideal of sophisticated Chinese beauty. In fact, they resulted in two images of Chinese woman that coexisted and still coexist today in collective imagination. I attempt to identify and describe the hidden mechanisms of distorting Chinese past and fabricating its modernity in the 1920s and 1930s in another, yet to be published article. I try to analyze the significant role played by calendar poster in reinterpreting of some cultural practices and patterns, in constructing oversimplified oppositions, in unjustified contrasting of “old, backward, weak, inhuman China” with “new, bright, modern, noble-minded West.”

Perhaps in order to rapidly transform the national mentality according to the reformers’ ideals of saving the country, it was indispensable to link the affirmation of the better future of New China with secret yet absolute condemnation of the “old feudal China.” This need was fulfilled by calendar poster. The model of independent, well educated, desirable Chinese beauty propagated by it was contrasted with the image of “traditional Chinese femininity,” reconstructed with negative expressions, such as deformity, subjugation, or disgrace. It is difficult to refer to these antagonistic personifications of pre-modern and modern China. It is also difficult to judge when some generalizations, inventions, and manipulations led to one ideology being replaced by another one, when some noble ideals resulted in elaborating erroneous yet very strong conceptions of pre-modern China culture. Nowadays, these admired posters circulate within this specific nostalgic aura simultaneously and apparently unrelated to different negative attitudes towards “backward and inhumane” China. Nonetheless, one should be aware of how these posters contributed to the constitution of an image of “barbaric, inhumane China;” the image that still influences everyday life and academic research.

#### 4

A stylish and often tight-fitting women’s dress created in the 1920 in Shanghai, discarded in 1980s, soon regained its previous popularity and in 2006 became an inspiration for the series of paintings. Antonia Finnane explains the cheongsam revival by the nostalgia for 1920s and 1930s. She makes also an interesting suggestion that this dress may supply “a vague sense of the connection with a generalized past.”<sup>10</sup> Our attention is drawn by the phrase “generalized past,” especially when confronted with Dai Jinhua’s observations relating to the contemporary crisis of Chinese identity, repressed memory and the necessity to create the twentieth-century China history representations.

Dai Jinhua states that “nostalgic representation here is indeed the best substitute for historical consciousness,”<sup>11</sup> and recognizes the wave of nostalgia to be “an expression of identity construction, one of the many ways of gaining cultural identity.”<sup>12</sup> It “brings new representations of history, making history the ‘presence in absentia’ that emits a ray of hope on the Chinese people’s confused and frenzied reality. A kind of

<sup>10</sup> Finnane (1996: 125).

<sup>11</sup> Jinhua (1997: 148).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* (158).

familiar yet strange representation of history, a long repressed memory emerging from the horizon of history, through the repeated identification of contemporary Chinese history, allows people to receive consolation and gain a holistic, imagined picture of modernized China.”<sup>13</sup> I find it justified to consider Lu Zhide’s paintings in this very context, since his recollection of old Shanghai is in fact about cutting off some elements of its historical past and intending to connect them with redefined/reimagined past in a special way, for some specific reasons.

The artist dedicates his *High Mandarin Collar – High Slit. Shanghai in the 1920s* to the world exposition which can be understood as the suggestion how to treat the heritage of China/Shanghai. His – briefly analyzed in this essay – redefinitions and reshaped associations lead to a more general conclusion. The Shanghai nostalgia and calendar poster which provided the inspiration for the series of portraits of emancipated women within the spaces of the modernizing city, eventually became the main issue examined by the artist. Quite surprisingly, the series proves to reveal the truth about how calendar poster and nostalgia, in specific historical circumstances, finally resulted in two mechanisms of distorting Chinese past.

One of these mechanisms is at least as old as poster itself. What I mean here is the already mentioned attempt of the reformers, reflected in poster art, to reconstruct history and culture of pre-modern China within incorrect categories. It was intended to make China more “civilized” in the eyes of the world and equal to other countries, but in fact it resulted in various negative images of Chinese culture. The current fascination with the Far East reinforces even this negative picture of China through various unreliable publications and events, in theory only popularizing knowledge about China.

The second mechanism of distorting past I would define as idealization of poster and prewar Shanghai. And, as Dai Jinhua said, it is infused with nostalgic sentiments for the imagined China recent history and tries to re-establish national Chinese sense of harmony. Some interviews I made during my stay in Shanghai in summer 2009 with elder Shanghai inhabitants suggest that due to gaps in social memory and history education of the whole generations, such idealizations might somehow be demanded as the easiest way to bring in the illusion of harmony and continuity. However one should be aware, that the consent to such deformations may finally lead to resigning from significance of any kind. In the course of time it may turn out that “nice and old” parts of Shanghai background, as calendar poster or a villa in the previous French Concession, won’t mean anything anymore. They just won’t bother anyone, won’t make the twentieth century history wounds rankle anymore.

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## Investigation of Art Exchanges between China and Poland in the 1950s

The art exchange between China and Poland began in the early twentieth century. In the early 1923, a Polish painter held oil painting and watercolor painting exhibition in Shanghai. In 1937, there was an exhibition of Chinese art held in the capital of Poland, Warsaw. These events set a precedent for art exchange between the two countries. Artistic contacts between China and Poland, however, became closer and more frequent in the early stage of the New China, that is, in the 1950s. The present text, therefore, focuses on the artistic exchange between China and Poland in the 1950s and its purpose is to analyze the process itself, to shed light on the interactive features of the exchange of Chinese and Polish art exhibitions and Chinese and Polish artists, with the special emphasis on the mutual artistic influence in order to present the tradition of artistic exchange and friendly basis for future development in this field.

### 1. The interactive features of the exchange of artistic exhibitions between China and Poland – developments of events

Together with the “Cultural Cooperation Agreement between the People’s Republic of China and the Polish People’s Republic” signed in Warsaw on 3 April, 1951, Poland became the first country which entered official cultural cooperation with China. One of the aspects of the cultural and artistic contacts was art exchange between the two countries, which developed very quickly. Both sides organized a series of art-related exhibitions.

#### *1.1. The exchange of art exhibitions between China and Poland*

##### **a. The art-related exhibitions organized by Poland in China**

In June 1952, the exhibition of Polish posters was held in Beijing. Sixty pieces by famous Polish authors were exhibited, illustrating the fight for peace of Polish people, their struggle against imperialism and their efforts to implement the Six-Year Plan to build the industry of their homeland.

In September 1953, a large-scale “Polish Economic Fair” was held in Beijing. The exhibition organized at the Museum of Art displayed hundreds of items of Polish old

and modern artworks and folk artworks. We can say that it was a kind of general introduction to the panoramic view of Polish art.

In November 1955, an exhibition of Polish posters and book illustrations was toured to many Chinese cities, including Beijing, and Shanghai. More than two hundred and eighty works of art by over eighty Polish artists were displayed, including movie posters, theater posters, political posters and book illustrations.

From 1954 to 1955 a “Polish Folk Paper-Cut Exhibition” was held in Beijing and Shanghai, with over seventy items on display, including the monochrome paper-cut-and-paste-style paper cuts.

In 1958, an exhibition of Polish Folk Art was organized by the Foreign Cultural Liaison Committee in Beijing. The exhibition displayed rich ethnic characteristics of Polish textile printing and dyeing various materials, such as textiles, paper cuttings, and toys. There were over a hundred exhibits on display.

### **b. The art-related exhibitions organized by China in Poland**

Between 7 May and 4 June, 1951, a “Chinese Major Fair” was held in Poland.

On 10 October, 1951, a “Chinese Art Exhibition” was opened in Poland. The exhibition displayed many artworks representing various genres of art, such as engraving, oil painting, traditional Chinese painting, Spring Festival pictures. The exhibition demonstrated the artistry and craftsmanship of old Chinese masters, including precious artworks from the times of the Zhou, Han, Tang, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties. Among the exhibited items were paintings, sculptures, drawings, and works of Chinese arts and crafts numbering over a thousand items. It was the first large-scale artistic exhibition held outside China.

Later on, China organized a series of artistic exhibitions in Poland, including “China Applied Arts Exhibition,” “Dunhuang Mural Exhibition,” and “Modern Traditional Chinese Painting Exhibition” and many others.

### *1.2. Main characteristics of art exhibitions in China and Poland*

On the basis of the analysis of art exhibitions organized by Poland in China and in China by Poland, we can conclude that these art exhibitions were characterized by the following main features:

- a. Both Poland and China attempted to present a kind of outline introduction to the arts of their country, from the old times to the present day. This could be exemplified by the “Polish Economic Fair” of 1953, held at the Museum of Art. The exhibition showed of hundreds of various Polish old and modern artworks and folk artworks. The second example is the “Chinese Art Exhibition” of 1951 held in Poland. The exhibition presented numerous Chinese items of various forms of art, such as engravings, oil paintings, traditional Chinese paintings, and Spring Festival pictures, while the chronological range of the exhibition spanned the long period of Chinese history, from the Zhou to the Qing Dynasty.
- b. Both countries emphasized the significance of folk art exchanges, such as the abovementioned “Polish Folk Paper-Cut Exhibition” held in Beijing and Shanghai



in 1954–1955; the exhibition of “Polish Folk Art Creations” of 1958, organized in Beijing; and the “Chinese Arts and Crafts Exhibition” held in Warsaw, and many others.

- c. Great importance was attached to special thematic exhibitions of art, such as the “Polish Posters and Book Illustrations Exhibition” of 1955 which was held in various Chinese cities, including Beijing and Shanghai. In Poland, for instance, there were organized the “Dunhuang Murals Painting Exhibition” and “Modern China Traditional Chinese Painting Exhibition,” both held in Warsaw.

### *1.3. Artistic and cultural contacts as a means of promotion of mutual friendship and understanding*

The exchange of art exhibitions between China and Poland undoubtedly contributed to the promotion of friendship between the peoples of the two republics, their mutual understanding and increased cultural interactions.

- a. In the 1950s, the exchanges of art exhibitions between China and Poland played an important role as a bridge between two different cultures, promoting friendship and learning from each other. The exhibitions attracted a large amount of attention in both countries, for example, when the “China Arts and Fine Arts Exhibition” was held in Warsaw, it was attended by over 12 million visitors. This number broke the record of the Warsaw exhibitions’ audiences. The opening ceremony of the “Dunhuang Mural Exhibition” was attended by the chairman of the Polish Council of Ministers, Cyrankiewicz who, having seen the exposition, wrote that: “After we Poles visited the exhibition, we have great admiration for the ancient culture of the Chinese people.” And the exhibition presenting Polish posters and book illustrations was held in China for two years, from 1955 to 1957, which actually is another proof in itself. When, in April, 1957, the exhibition returned to Shanghai after being toured to all parts of China, during two days only it was attended by over 5 000 visitors. Polish posters had a great influence on Chinese audience and were highly appreciated by contemporary Chinese artists. After seeing a Polish poster entitled “No more war!” a Chinese volunteer soldier wrote down the following: “The painting tells us in a vivid and powerful way: a bomb can destroy everything. I am a soldier, my responsibility is to defend peace. We must stop the war!”
- b. In order to increase cultural exchange between China and Poland and to gain valuable experience from the Polish authors of the presented posters and books illustrations, the Chinese Artists Association held a special forum. The exhibition gained wide recognition and was highly praised at the forum. There was a general opinion formulated that, firstly, Polish artists were creative and dedicated, while the posters full of clever ideas, with a high level of capability to generalize. Secondly, the styles of Polish posters were diverse, while the modes of expression were prolific and innovative. Thirdly, Polish artists attached a great importance to this form of art, and there were many single pieces that involved many oil painters, cartoonists or craft artists. They created numerous good movie and theater posters since in their opin-

ion it was one of the best means to speak to the masses. In other words, the high achievements of Polish poster authors were worthy to be learned by our artists.

## 2. The cultural agreement between China and Poland

It can be said that the agreement on cultural cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Polish People's Republic of 1953 established cultural contacts which strengthened the understanding between the two countries and enriched their traditional cultures. In accordance with the terms of the agreement, both countries promoted exchanges and cooperation in the fields of culture and art, also through sending every year a cultural delegation to negotiate and conclude an annual cultural implementation plan. Both countries committed themselves to promote and support cooperation between various academic and research institutions, cultural and educational organizations, museums, libraries, archives, etc. The agreement obliged both parties to organize reciprocal visits of professors and students, to establish cooperation between publishing houses, translation and publication of outstanding works of culture and art, including literary, artistic and scientific publications, to exchange books, newspapers and other publications. During the whole decade of the 1950s Polish-Chinese cultural exchanges and cooperation was being steadily developed.

Thus, in accordance with the terms of the Agreement, exchanges between Chinese artists and Polish artists were promoted. Both countries sent their well-known artists to the other country with cultural delegations. Below, I shall briefly describe the Polish artists visiting China, then Chinese artists visiting Poland.

### *2.1. Reciprocal visits of well-known Chinese and Polish artists*

#### **a. Polish artists in China**

In October 1952, the famous Polish artists Tadeusz Kulisiewicz visited China's major cities as Polish cultural delegation member, conveying the friendly feelings towards the Chinese Artists, and painted on the road at any time. His drawings depict the Chinese people's life.

In 1953, the painter Aleksander Kobzdej visited China as the deputy of a cultural delegation. He used Chinese writing brush, ink and wash, rice paper. During the month he visited he painted more than 100 travel sketches. The Chinese Artists Association held a special tour to observe the artist at work.

In addition, in October 1954, the famous young artists Andrzej Strumiłło visited China with the Polish culture delegation. According to the implementation plan of cultural agreement in 1955, among the people who visited China in 1956 was graphic artist Jerzy Panek, in 1957 President of the Association of Polish Artists, the painter Jan Cybis. According to the implementation plan of cultural agreement in 1958, the professor of Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, artist Artur Nacht-Samborski and the lecturer, the painter Leon Michalski visited China.

## **b. Chinese artists in Poland**

According to the implementation plan of the cultural agreement, there were many famous Chinese artists visiting Poland. I will list some of them in chronological order:

1954: famous sculptor Wang Zhaowen as a member of cultural delegation; lantern artist Dengbai accompanied a Chinese arts and crafts exhibition;

1955: famous painter Guan Shanyue and painter Liu Mengdai; painter Cai Zhenhua visited Poland with the Chinese Art Exhibition organized on the occasion of The World Festival of Youth and Students;

1957: painter Hu Yichuan;

1958: painter Chen Chih-fo and graphic artist Chen Yin accompanied the "Modern China Traditional Chinese Painting Exhibition."

### *2.2. Personal contacts of Chinese and Polish artists*

One of the headmasters of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow held the introduction referred to the state of Polish arts at the Wuxi fine arts faculty. Once president of the Association of Polish Artists Jan Cybis discussed with Beijing and Shanghai artists the issues of modern art schools. The director and initiator of the Institute of Industrial Design in Warsaw Wanda Telakowska came to China in 1958 to help organize an exhibition of "Polish Folk Art Creations". In Beijing, she introduced Polish arts and crafts to Chinese arts and crafts circles.

In 1958, painter Chen Chih-fo visited Poland with the "Modern China Traditional Chinese Painting Exhibition." On this occasion, he visited the Institute of Industrial Design in Warsaw, and established contacts with Telakowska. Together, they designed a method of cooperation between folk and professional artists and various kinds of craft patterns. In his opinion, "close cooperation between folk artists and professional artists will not only contribute to more effective mutual acquaintance, but will also lead to mutual personal improvement."

Another person who visited Poland with the same exhibition was graphic artists Chen Yin. He deepened the understanding and knowledge of Polish posters after establishing direct contacts with Polish artists. He found some most striking features characteristic of Polish posters that helped the Chinese to better understand and master the art of creating poster. Inspired by a Polish author of posters, Chen Yin acquainted himself with the role played by posters in propaganda programs and with everyday life of the Poles, both in towns and in the country. According to him, the reason why the Polish poster enjoyed such popularity was that it adhered to the rules of visual design, while processing them creatively at the same time. Concise form and rich, thought-provoking content had a great impact on the spectators.

Today we can say that art exchanges between China and Poland in the 1950s had a profound impact on and greatly contributed not only to the tradition of artistic exchange, but also to development of friendly relations between Poland and China.



# Dissemination of Polish Fine Arts in China in the 1950s

## Introduction

Under the new circumstances of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Poland was the first country to have signed in the 1950s a cultural cooperation agreement with the PRC after its establishment in 1949. An important feature of this period was that both sides paid much attention to the official cultural exchange and its planning. In China, the main cultural and artistic trend at these times was that the artworks presented the new life and praised the people. In such a political and cultural situation, the introduction and propagation of foreign outstanding works of art became a particular cultural phenomenon, and the artworks by Polish artists were especially interesting.

At that time, not only did the Chinese people welcome warmly the concepts of expression of Polish fine arts, but Chinese artists drew upon them in their own artistic productions. The dissemination of Polish works of art emphasized an excellent combination of ideology and artistry in many forms of arts, such as painting, photography, sculpture, poster or caricature. The main means of popularization of Polish artworks were exhibitions and publications, therefore the related exhibition documents and books became an important source that recorded this significant chapter in the history of Chinese-Polish art exchange.

## 1. Background

### *1.1 Official cultural exchange*

As it has already been said, Poland was the first country to sign the agreement on cultural exchange with the People's Republic of China, on 3 April, 1953. This established long and fruitful cultural relations between the two countries which between 1949 and 1954 were tenuous. The next five years, between 1955 and 1960, brought about a significant intensification of this process and one of the major features of this period became systematical official cultural contacts.

Before the 1950s, there were only a few books in China on Poland. In the next decade, however, a great deal of Chinese translations of Polish books appeared which introduced the Polish country, society, economy and people's life to Chinese readers. At the same time, there were numerous artistic activities organized in various parts of

China, such as presentations of Polish music, dance or film shows. The presentations were sponsored by various level departments of the Chinese government. Warsaw soon became an important cultural centre, attracting the attention of Chinese authors and artists.

The fifties were also a decade when the exhibitions of Polish fine art works in China and Chinese artworks in Poland became a very important aspect of the cultural exchange between the two countries. There were many interesting Chinese fine arts exhibitions held in Poland, including the exhibitions of Chinese watercolors and papercuts, Chinese woodcuts, handicrafts, industrial artworks, the exhibitions of Chinese pictures and landscapes, architectural pictures exhibition, etc. At the same time, Polish works of art were presented in China at such exhibitions as, for instance, the Polish poster and book illustration exhibitions, Polish folk art exhibition, Polish architecture, scratchboards, etc.

### *1.2 Role of plastic arts in a socialist country*

On 26 December, 1958, Moscow saw the opening of the “Exhibition of Art of Socialist Countries,” in which China and Poland participated. The exhibition proved to be great success and attracted a large number of visitors. To further promote the development of visual arts, the exhibition committee invited delegates from every communist country to attend a three-day symposium held at the Moscow exhibition hall from 24 to 26 March, 1959. There were some key conclusions emerging from the symposium as, for instance, that the main purpose of visual arts in a socialist country is the furtherance of the goals of socialism, the art forms should be easy to be understood by the people, for they play an important part in popular education.

The propagation of socialism was not the only objective of plastic arts, as we can see on the example of the third issue of *Cultural Relics Reference* of 1950, which described the visit to Poland by sculptor Liu Kaiqu and cartoonist Hua Junwu. They were invited to take part in the conference devoted to the role of art in maintaining the world peace: “Art circles must use the power of art to propagate the importance of defending world peace.”

## 2. Art Communications

The dissemination of art and promotion of culture was made through two main means: exhibitions and publications. They were to play an important role in presenting the cultural life of the nation, including information about the state building, national life of its citizens, their attitude towards peace and their ideals. In addition, both exhibitions and publications were supposed to make full use of traditional cultural resources as well as to create easy and concise art language, comprehensible to all, which had to be a combination of the local folk craft tradition and the style of manufactured products.

### 3. Cultural effects

The promotion of arts and culture was mutual, and in the analyzed period both the Chinese and Poles had great opportunities to acquaint themselves with the civilization of their allied, yet remote and exotic nation. Thus, in the 1950s, Polish fine arts were being disseminated in China, while Chinese fine arts spread via various exhibitions and books in Europe. Those introduced Chinese fine arts to various European countries, including Poland. Such cultural exchange made the West people interested in Chinese arts, not only these reflecting the spirit of the New China, but also in the long and splendid tradition of ancient China art. Exhibitions were held under such banners as: “‘New country image’ – The Understanding and Creation of History, People and Tradition,” or “‘New demotic arts’ – Our Artists Must Keep in Mind that They Are Responsible for Education of their Citizens.”

### Conclusions

In the 1950s, as the result of both official efforts and particular point in history, Polish fine arts spread through China, becoming a remarkable historical phenomenon. The dissemination of Polish art and culture proceeded mainly under the banners of socialist concepts of arts and artists’ obligations toward their socialist homeland. Many of their artistic productions, created with great passion and sincerity, in visual arts, literature or architecture, were meant to strengthen the state, defend peace and promote the people’s welfare, have definitely made an important contribution to the cultural heritage of modern China.

### Appendix

#### **A. The main sources on exhibitions of Polish art in China in the 1950s:**

- 1952: From June 1952 on, the Architectural Society of China held a “Polish Architecture Exhibition” in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou successively.
- 1952: A “Polish Poster Exhibition” was held in Beijing, at the Zhongshan Park in June 1952. Sixty famous posters from Poland were displayed in this exhibition.
- 1953: From 1953 to 1954, a “People’s Republic of Poland Economic Exhibition” was shown in Beijing.
- 1954: The Foreign Culture Communication Bureau sponsored an exhibition of “Poland Folk Paper Cuts,” held in Beijing between 12 and 26 September, 1954.
- 1954: The Chinese Artists Association sponsored a “The Sketch Tour of Polish Young Artist Andrzej Strumiłło” exhibition held in the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in November 1954.
- 1955: A “Polish Architecture Exhibition,” sponsored by the Architectural Society of China, was held in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, in 1955.

- 1955: In November 1955, the Foreign Culture Communication Bureau sponsored an exhibition of “Polish Posters and Book Illustrations,” organized in Beijing in the Working People Cultural Palace. More than two hundred and eighty works by over eighty Polish artists were put on display. The opening of the exhibition, held on 18 November, was announced in *People Daily* on the previous day.  
In the foreword to the catalogue of “The Polish Poster and Book Illustration Exhibition” Armand Vetulani said that Polish artists introduced the posters and book illustrations to the Chinese people as the two forms of arts which best reflected Polish modern social and cultural life. The exhibition was meant as a valuable way of cultural exchange that was to further promote and foster friendship between both countries.
- 1955: A “Polish People Art Photography Exhibition” was held successively in Beijing and Shanghai in 1955, displaying two hundred and ninety four works.
- 1956: In November 1956, a “Visiting China Sketch Exhibition of Polish Artists Jan Zamojski and Jerzy Panek” was held in Beijing at the Fine Arts Museum. Fifty seven sketches and watercolors drew by Zamojski during his visit to Mongolia and twenty four woodcuts produced by Panek during his Chinese journey were put on display.
- 1957: From 6 to 21 April, 1957, a “Polish Poster and Book Illustration Exhibition” was held in Shanghai.
- 1957: Between 24 August and 21 September, 1957, the Zhejiang Province Literary Federation sponsored “The Polish Nineteenth-Century Famous Artist Jan Matejko Art Exhibition,” with eighty three paintings on display.
- 1958: In 1958, the Foreign Culture Communication Bureau sponsored an exhibition of “Polish Folk Artworks” held in the Beijing Working People Cultural Palace. More than six hundred pieces of work, including printed and dyed cotton pieces, knitting, pottery, paper cuts and toys were put on display.  
The Chinese papers, such as *Fine Arts* (no. 9, 1958), *Beijing Daily* (28 August, 1958), *Ta Kung Bao* (27 August, 1958), published the articles on the exhibition. At the opening ceremony, the head of the Institute of Industrial Design Wanda Telakowska introduced the development and experiences of Polish industrial arts to the Chinese audience.
- 1959: Between 29 August and 15 September, 1959, the China Foreign Culture Communication Committee, with the Sino-Polish Friendship Society and the Chinese Artists Association, sponsored and organized “The Polish Landscape Exhibition” at the Beijing Architecture Museum. More than one hundred works, including oil paintings, watercolors, sketches and landscapes, were put on display.
- 1960: On 22 July, 1960, a “Polish Scratchboard Exhibition” was opened in Beijing, displaying one hundred and fifty seven works.

#### **B. The main sources on Polish art publication in China in the 1950s:**

- 1951: *A book of Polish Cartoon Selection* was published by the Pingming Publishing House in March 1951. The book presents thirty three pictures selected from among over seventy pictures included in the *Polska Karykatura Polityczna*, which was brought to China from the Second World Peace Conference held in Warsaw by Chinese delegates. The original preface and title were translated into Polish, Russian, French and English. In the preface, the editor mentioned that Polish caricature



had glorious history, and that in modern Poland caricature was called the Art of Vigilance. This definition was well coined. On the one hand, it reflected the importance of caricature in political struggle, while on the other it showed the shrewd and perceptive eyes of caricaturists looking at arts, society and politics.

- 1954: *A Polish Fine Art Works Selection* book was published by the People's Fine Arts Publishing House in March 1954. The works were chosen from the Polish Economic Exhibition held in Beijing in 1953. At this exhibition displayed thirty one artworks, including sculptures, paintings, prints, posters and caricature drawings.
- 1954: *A Sketches in China and Vietnam* book by Aleksander Kobzdej was published by the People's Fine Arts Publishing House in 1954.
- 1955: A book entitled *The Industrial Arts of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary*, compiled by Zou Bangyan and Cai Mo, was published by the Tongli Publishing House in January 1955.
- 1955: Wang Chaowen's monograph *Essence of Wisdom – the Impression of Polish Posters* was published by the *People Daily*, on 2 December, 1955. The author pointed out the advantage of a poster that using distorted features of people could skillfully and clearly comment on various aspects of modern reality. Polish posters were a fine example of this. According to the author, a growing numbers of Chinese artists should use more boldly their imagination for artistic creation. To avoid mirroring of the reality in artworks and to adapt artistic creations to the demand of modern audience, Chinese artists should, in his opinion, study Polish posters in depth. The essence of wisdom was worth their efforts. The Polish posters presented included political, social, drama and movie posters. Depicting national characteristics, the posters in a metaphorical and skillful way reflected common social phenomena as well as modern and traditional culture achievements.
- 1956 and 1957: *A Polish Poster* book was compiled and published by the New Art Publishing House in June 1956; the illustrations were selected from the artworks displayed at the "Polish Poster and Book Illustration Exhibition" held in November 1955. Under the same title another *Polish Poster*, compiled by Zhang Ding, was published by the People's Fine Arts Publishing House in April 1957, and selected from the same exhibition.
- 1956: A book on *Polish Art Photography Selection* was published by the Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House in April 1956. Seventy two pictures were selected from the original number of two hundred and ninety four exhibits.
- 1958: A book on *Polish Engraving Printing* was published by the People's Fine Arts Publishing House in July 1958. The book contained twenty engravings by fourteen painters.
- 1958: A book *Polish Printmaking Works* was published in July 1958 by the People's Fine Arts Publishing House.
- 1959: A book on *The Movie Propaganda Poster of Poland* was published in May 1959 by the People's Fine Arts Publishing House. The book contained also ten movie propaganda posters by nine artists. According to the publisher, the Polish movie propaganda posters represented Polish national characteristics in a new and specific style, so they would inspire movie propaganda posters in China.



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## *Chinese Aesthetics: An Anthology.* A Book Presentation

The book that is the subject of this review, *Chinese Aesthetics. An Anthology*, has been published as part of a book series entitled *Estetyki świata (World Aesthetics)*, supervised by Professor Krystyna Wilkoszewska of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. The series (published by the Kraków-based Publishing House "Universitas") is meant as an argument in favor of cultural pluralism in the field of aesthetics, whose Western academic discourse has for so long been dominated by European aesthetics. A conference entitled "Etno-estetyka. Estetyki kultur pozaeuropejskich" (Ethno-Aesthetics. Aesthetics of Non-European Cultures) which took place in 2003 and the conference proceedings published shortly afterwards opened the academic discussion on transcultural aesthetics in Poland.<sup>1</sup> The book series to which this anthology belongs introduces aesthetic ideals and their forms of expression in non-European cultures to the general public. With the exception of one book,<sup>2</sup> all the books from the series are anthologies. The series started with an anthology of Japanese aesthetics,<sup>3</sup> followed by other works on the aesthetics of a variety of cultures such as the South American Indians,<sup>4</sup> the Australian Aborigines,<sup>5</sup> or the peoples of Africa.<sup>6</sup> The aesthetic categories depicted in these anthologies are expressed in a rich array of cultural practices: the everyday lives of the peoples concerned, their ritual and religious practices, as well as their arts and the art-related discourses. This imparts a fundamental interdisciplinary character to transcultural aesthetics, which thus transgresses the boundaries of philosophy and becomes related to such disciplines as cultural anthropology, religious studies, philology, or art theory and history. This is also the reason why the texts contained in these anthologies are quite varied in character: they include texts originating in the non-European cultures concerned, such as classical literary works, literary theory, treatises concerning various art forms, as well as essays written by contemporary scholars (Western and non-Western) representing various methodological approaches specific to the disciplines mentioned above.

Chinese art has a long history, and considerations on the process of creation, the role of art and the artist, the criteria used for the appraisal of art works and other con-

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkoszewska (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Wilkoszewska (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Wilkoszewska (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Zajda (2007).

<sup>5</sup> Bakke (2004).

<sup>6</sup> Cymorek (2008).

cepts falling under the scope of modern aesthetics as a discipline, were articulated at an early stage. Moreover, Chinese art, art theory and the philosophical discourse closely related to them were very influential in East Asia. This is why it was inevitable that such a book series as *World Aesthetics* would also include a volume on Chinese aesthetics. As *Chinese Aesthetics. An Anthology* contains texts concerning fine arts, such a publication was all the more necessary, considering the scarcity of works on Chinese art published in Poland so far. Some of them are art histories, written by Polish authors,<sup>7</sup> or translated from other European languages.<sup>8</sup> As reviews of the most significant art genres, trends and artists throughout China's history, these books do not discuss in depth specific art forms and the aesthetic concepts related to them. The publications that do so are even fewer: there are two on painting,<sup>9</sup> and there is a chapter in the book by Sosnowski and Wójcik on the art of gardens.<sup>10</sup> So far, only one book on Chinese aesthetics proper has been published in Poland.<sup>11</sup> However, even in these books on particular arts, very little space is dedicated to the Chinese discourse concerning those forms of art. The Chinese art theorists' voices only appear in short quotations that illustrate the line of argument of the book's author, his or her interpretation of various aspects of the respective arts. Moreover, in most cases the quoted fragments are not translated from the original classical Chinese, but from translations into other European languages, and as such are often inaccurate.

*Chinese Aesthetics. An Anthology* was aimed at supplementing the scarce information on various art forms available to the Polish public, and also at allowing Chinese art theorists to speak for themselves, in first-hand translations from classical Chinese. The structure of the book repeats a formula devised by the series' supervisor, Professor Krystyna Wilkoszewska, and applied by her in the volumes on Japanese aesthetics. The texts contained in the anthology are thematically divided according to the art forms they concern. Each part consists of classical texts and contemporary essays written by Chinese and Western scholars, which sum up or comment at length on the issues mentioned in the classical texts, and thus offer hints as to their reception by European (Polish) readers.

Aesthetics as a branch of philosophy is a recent discipline in China; before the modern era, aesthetic concepts were put forth and discussed in texts that can be classified as philosophy (such as the chapter on music from the *Xunzi*, included in the anthology), poetics (the "Great Preface" to the *Book of Songs*, Lu Ji's *Rhymeprose on Literature* or Liu Xie's *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*), or painting theory (most of the classical texts in the anthology). Through my choice of texts, I intended not only to introduce the concepts themselves, but also to follow their evolution. Readers can thus become acquainted with the issues present in the discourse on art during various historical periods, and also with the transformations in the way they were conceived of and discussed during each of these periods. The earliest of the classical texts in the

<sup>7</sup> Künstler (1991).

<sup>8</sup> Sickman, Soper (1984); Prodan (1975).

<sup>9</sup> Miklós (1987); Trzeciak (2002).

<sup>10</sup> Sosnowski, Wójcik (2004).

<sup>11</sup> Jullien (2006).

anthology is “On Music” from the *Xunzi*, dating back to the third century BC, and the most recent is Shen Zongqian’s (1736–1820) treatise on painting, *Jiezhou xue hua bian*.

All anthologies are the result of choice. From among the many equally outstanding and not widely known in Poland Chinese arts, only a few of them could be represented in this anthology, and in only a few of their aspects. The reader will, for instance, find no information on sculpture, the performance arts, or functional art, to quote only a few of the omitted fields. I narrowed my choice to those art forms that were related to the Confucian scholars, falling within the group of “high arts” practiced by them. The traditional literati (*wenren*), the social stratum with the highest prestige in imperial China (as the intellectual, cultural and political elite), constitute the anthology’s coherence factor. They had in common not only a vast knowledge of liberal arts, but also a specific lifestyle within which the “refined arts” occupied an important place. From among them, the key ones were the so-called “three perfections” – poetry, calligraphy and painting – represented in the anthology along with the craft of gardens. The literati were not only authors and connoisseurs of works of art, but also authors of the discourse about these arts. For this reason, I entitled my foreword to the book “An Aesthetics of the Literati,” and decided to open the anthology with an essay on their specific lifestyle and the role arts played in it. Due to the literati’s dual status of artists and theorists, as well as to their engagement in all of the arts mentioned above, the “refined arts” were closely interrelated, which is another point I meant to emphasize in the anthology.

As I have mentioned above, *Chinese Aesthetics. An Antology* is the first publication that makes available to Polish readers classical texts in their entirety or in longer fragments. With the exception of the “Great Preface” to the *Book of Songs*, reprinted from an anthology of Chinese literature published in the 1950s, all other classical texts were for the first time published in translations from the original classical Chinese language. All translations were made by sinologists from three major Polish centers of Chinese philology and cultural studies: the Departments of Sinology at the University of Warsaw and the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and the Institute of Middle East and Far East Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. This makes the anthology the first book in Poland being the result of cooperation between these three academic centers.

In the classical texts included in the anthology, the Chinese theorists can speak for themselves, without becoming part of contemporary scholars’ argumentation. The translations are not meant to guide interpretation. The translators’ interference is kept mostly at the “invisible” level of textual coherence: due to the polysemy of the classical Chinese language, additionally played upon by the authors of many texts in the book, the translators had to make choices between the many meanings of words for the sake of readability in Polish. Where further explanations are needed for non-specialist readers to understand concepts, artistic phenomena, allusions or quotations in the texts, they are included in footnotes. The results of such a translator’s approach may seem somewhat obscure to Polish readers, familiar with the sort of argumentation typical of the European rhetorical tradition. This is, however, exactly the effect I intended to achieve. Apart from the ideational contents of the source texts, I also wished to offer

the readers an example of the characteristic style of the Chinese discourse on art: its lack of a logical coherence in keeping with the European rhetorical tradition, its dislike of precise definitions, and its ambiguity, which offer it a unique poetic quality.

The contemporary essays in the anthology, written by both Chinese and Western authors, were also published for the first time in Poland. When selecting them, I favored those which allow the reader to gain a good insight into the major aesthetic concepts illustrated in the anthology or of the main points I wished to make, such as Luo Zhongfeng's text on the literati lifestyle, Kang-i Sun Chang's essay on literary criticism during the Six Dynasties as aesthetic experience, or François Cheng's two texts on the void in Chinese painting and the mutual influences between poetry and calligraphy. Whenever possible, I included works by established authorities on Chinese fine arts and aesthetics, such as Zong Baihua (aesthetician), Michael Sullivan (historian of Chinese art), Stephen Owen (the famous scholar of premodern Chinese literature), R. Stewart Johnston and Maggie Keswick (experts on Chinese gardens). These texts are unavailable in Polish public libraries, and were obtained from libraries in Taiwan, and the USA. A text by François Cheng was taken from his book sent to the Polish publisher by the Éditions du Seuil in France. Most source texts come from libraries in the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and Japan. As I had no opportunity to go to all these countries and gather the necessary materials myself, and also in order to avoid the cumbersome and long-lasting formalities related to international interlibrary loans, the texts I later included in the anthology were sent to me by friends who kindly agreed to help.

The limited length of the texts contained in the anthology facilitates reading, and together with their authoritative character make for versatility of the purposes they can serve. The anthology has the status of academic textbook (its publication was subsidized by the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education), therefore academic teachers and their students constitute part of its target audience. The book can be useful both for sinology and cultural studies departments, for a variety of courses such as Chinese literature, Chinese civilization, aesthetics, art, and so on. Specialist readers wishing to track down concepts, authors and works in Chinese reference sources will find in the anthology Chinese characters for all the Chinese terms quoted in the texts, as well as for the names of authors of classical texts, the classical texts themselves, and the names of major classical works mentioned in all texts. But the anthology is also designed to meet the needs of the general public. Included in it are a general chronology of Chinese dynasties and major cultural events, against the background of which I placed the authors of the source texts and the stages in the evolution of the art forms and aesthetic concepts mentioned throughout the book. The reader can also find a concise dictionary of historical figures mentioned in the anthology, whose names are written both in Latin transcription and in Chinese characters. Potentially unfamiliar concepts are explained in editor's and translators' footnotes. On the other hand, Chinese characters are also given in the dictionary of historical figures.

*Chinese Aesthetics. An Anthology* is in many aspects a pioneering work, and as such undoubtedly has its shortcomings. Nevertheless, I hope it will open the way for many a remarkable work yet to be published.

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## The History of Traditional Chinese Art in Modern

### Part three



# Modern and Contemporary Art in Poland and China

## 1. The Influence of Western Art Culture

During the 19th century, with the opening of the world market, the influence of Western art culture on China became increasingly significant. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Western art culture entered China through various channels, such as trade, education, and missionary activities. This led to the emergence of a new art culture in China, which combined traditional Chinese art with Western art. The influence of Western art culture on China was not only limited to the visual arts but also extended to the fields of literature, music, and drama. The introduction of Western art culture to China was a process of mutual learning and exchange, which enriched the Chinese art culture and promoted its development.

The process of the introduction of Western art culture to China was a long and complex one. It was not only influenced by the political and economic situation of the time but also by the cultural differences between the two countries. However, the influence of Western art culture on China was undeniable, and it played a significant role in the development of modern and contemporary art in China.

## 2. The Development of Modern Art Culture

### (1) The Emergence of Modern Art Culture

Modern art culture in China emerged in the early 20th century. It was a result of the influence of Western art culture and the need for a new art culture that reflected the social and cultural changes of the time. Modern art culture in China was characterized by its emphasis on individual expression and its rejection of traditional art forms. It was a process of innovation and exploration, which led to the emergence of various art movements and styles. The development of modern art culture in China was a process of mutual learning and exchange with the West, which enriched the Chinese art culture and promoted its development.



## The Elements of Traditional Culture in Modern Chinese Art

At this moment of time, when China is facing both great opportunities for development and challenges from foreign ideologies of different times, regions and nations, Chinese traditional culture which has always followed the guideline that “making the past serve the present and foreign things serve China,” is trying hard to integrate itself into the world’s modern civilization with an open mind and greater confidence via arts, literature and other cultural carriers.

### 1. The Traditional Elements of Chinese Culture

During a continual evolution of more than 7,000 years since the Paleolithic Age, the traditional Chinese culture has assimilated, inherited and carried forward abundant ancient thoughts and wisdom in history, culminating in a splendid civilization with distinctive regional features. From the headwaters of the winding Yellow River to the vast Central Plains, through the rise and fall of dynasties with varying social systems and rituals, it has accumulated huge amounts of specific national characteristics and outstanding ideologies, while a large number of breathtaking cultural relics and products have been left throughout the human history. Today, in the international environment of world-wide globalization, the boundaries of national economy, politics and even culture are being gradually blurred. However, with a strong national consciousness and fresh aesthetic values unique from Western ideologies, the traditional Chinese culture shows to the world its prominent artistic vitality and cultural comprehensiveness via its multimedia approach to self-expression.

The present paper, however, will focus only on a few selected elements of Chinese traditional art, supported and exemplified by ancient philosophies and their aesthetic appeals illustrating their cultural origins and sources.

#### 1.1 *The Elements of Traditional Chinese Art*

##### 1.1.1 Characters and Calligraphy

Originated from pictograms of late primitive society, the Chinese character system is composed of rich font styles and unique rhythmical rhymes, which possibly possesses the most distinctive aesthetic features among all languages of the world. The Oracle-Bone Inscription on tortoise-shells and animal bones during the Shang Dynasty has

been proved to be the dawn of Chinese characters which reflects the ancient naive materialism, lifestyle and aesthetic custom by simple and vivid writing style of that time. Later, the Bronze Ware Inscription, as well as Chun Writing, was prevalent in the Western Chou (Zhou) Dynasty, with a straighter and more vigorous style of font; Chun Writing then evolved into the Big and Small Seal Scripts during the Chin (Jin) Dynasty, and the latter played a very significant role in the further development of calligraphy. From then on, over centuries the Chinese calligraphy experienced a series of transitions from the Clerical Script in early Chin Dynasty to the Blocking, Cursive and Running Scripts in the Han Dynasty, while the Chinese characters eventually developed into a phonogram system with independent aesthetic properties.

The Chinese calligraphy reflects Chinese high sensitivity to the structural continuity and various character shapes, as well as a careful consideration to the balance between strokes. The beauty of the Chinese characters lies not only in their ever-changing formations and spacing between the lines, but also in the experience of free emotional expression when writing with ink and wash of different thickness, shades, curves, strength, softness and humidity on a two-dimensional plane surface, advocating the diverse personalities and natures of the characters.

### 1.1.2 Decorative Patterns

The earliest decorative patterns belonging to traditional Chinese art are to be found on Neolithic painted potteries, usually in the form of black stylized figures of men, fish, frogs or human faces, as well as abstract geometric motifs consisting of parallel bands, crosses, waves and spirals, etc., on the upper part of the clay body, with the lower part undecorated.

Compared to the pottery patterns, the decoration on the Shang and Chou bronze wares shows great respect to the majesty and ritual hierarchy of Chinese slavery societies, featuring a mysterious and solemn style saturated with religious morality. The dense and heavy bronze decoration of the Shang Dynasty was replaced by flat interlocking ribbons and inscriptions during the early Western Chou, followed by rich zoomorphic motifs prevalent in the mid-Chou Dynasty phase, such as *taotie* (T'ao T'ieh),<sup>1</sup> *kuei* (K'uei),<sup>2</sup> phoenix and dragon with certain attributes of power and privileges of ruling classes. Apart from that, to distinguish noblemen from the humbles, a series of magnificent patterns called "Twelve Heraldries" was invented for the Chou's court garments, including sun, moon, star, mountain, dragon, phoenix, flame and other symbols. The twelve heraldries were used for centuries by later feudal emperors, eventually to become the most representative patterns of Chinese ancient formal dresses.

There is also a special category of decorative patterns playing a significant role in Chinese traditional culture, which is called "the auspicious patterns". As one of essential components of Chinese folk customs and the most widely used patterns in conventional art, the auspicious patterns refer to a kind of decorative figures or characters with meta-

<sup>1</sup> *Taotie* (T'ao T'ieh), zoomorphic mask in full face of a mythical monster with a gaping mouth commonly found on ancient Chinese bronze vessels.

<sup>2</sup> *Kuei* (K'uei), a one-legged monster in Chinese fable.

phors or euphonies whose origin can be traced back to the times of Shang and Chou, with their summit in the Ming and Ch'ing (Qing) Dynasties. Those patterns, featuring birds and animals, flowers and fruits, figures, symbols and characters, etc., focus mainly on richness, wealth, reputation, health, longevity, happiness, family prosperity and many other themes. A Chinese knot, for example, is one of the specific applications of auspicious patterns in traditional knitting, blessing people with good fortunes.

### 1.1.3 Color Conventions

Early in the Chin Dynasty, Chinese people developed a special affection for and a strong emotional attraction to the red and yellow colors. In Chinese tradition, red is a color with profound cultural meanings, associated with the sun, flames, or blood, and a few abstract qualities like warmth, auspices or vigorousness. The Chinese worship of yellow originated from the intimate relationship between ancient people and their living environment, the yellow earth and the soil; in *Kao Kung Chi (Kao Gong Ji)*,<sup>3</sup> it is described as "black sky and yellow earth". Yellow symbolizes not only agricultural prosperity and good harvest, but also the imperial glory and majesty, thereafter evolving into the splendid and luxurious gold. Therefore, in a many thousand year history of the Chinese traditional civilization, the red and yellow gradually became the most representative colors of Chinese culture, like the national flag and emblem, telling the world her passionate and united spirit of nationality.

### 1.1.4 Architecture and Decoration

Traditional Chinese architecture, which developed from primitive caves dating back to the ancient times to the magnificent palaces and cities in the late Chinese feudal society, at times experienced some rather turbulent periods. The adherence to the building conventions of the ancients together with the introduction of new materials, techniques and skills, had brought about a mixed style both in appearance and decoration in different regions, vitalizing a glorious civilization throughout its long history. With respect to external characteristic, especially roof styles, Chinese traditional architecture is distinguished by several main characteristics, such as hall, gabled, hanging, tented or pointed roofs, etc. For example, the point-roofed towers built of timber in the Tang Dynasty, the hall-chambered palaces and tombs in the Chin and Ming, and the Ch'ing's delicate gardens and abbeys, had all been regarded as the achievements superior to other architectural construction. As for materials and decorative skills, the tiles of the Chin and bricks of the Han, the timber framework of doors and windows from the Sung and Yuan Dynasties, along with the colored glazed ornaments of the Ming and Ch'ing, belong undoubtedly to the prime examples of handicrafts in the world's history, even by modern standards.

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<sup>3</sup> *Kao Kung Chi (or Kao Gong Ji)*, The Records of Examination of Craftsman, is the oldest Chinese book of diverse crafts in existence, written during the late Spring and Autumn period and the early Warring States period, Qi.

### 1.1.5 Painting and Sculpture

Rooted in the profound traditional Chinese aesthetics and culture, Chinese painting, deeply affected by both Confucianism and Taoism, occupies a very unique place in the world art. It eschews careful visual accuracy in favor of perceiving the lively nature with individual's mind and spirit, advocating the expression of the inner energy via coherent brushstrokes in ideal lines and planes with clever skills; it blends the realistic and free impressionistic features harmoniously together, which is the most obvious difference compared with the Western traditional painting characterized by precise realistic depiction of life. As for themes and motifs, Chinese painting can be divided into three major categories: landscapes, figures and "birds and flowers." From among the three, landscapes are a main genre to reflect the transcendence of worldliness with a lofty, removed state of mind that was always appreciated by ideal men in ancient China.

Like painting, traditional Chinese sculpture had also varied considerably over times and areas with respect to its subjects, forms, styles, techniques and materials. During its centuries-old history, decorative sculpture of daily life use, such as tomb sculpture or religious statues, had always occupied the most important place among all kinds of sculptural arts in China. All sculptures, such as human figures, Buddhist icons, plants, birds and animals, are characterized by their remarkable painterly features and simplified forms, as, for example, the life-size terracotta warriors in the Chin imperial tombs, or wooden and clay funerary figures of the Han and the Buddha sculptures in Tunhuang (Dunhuang) Grottoes.

### 1.1.6 Opera and Drama

Chinese opera and drama, being an exclusive entertainment for high levels of society, have quite a long history and they have evolved from ritual dances in pre-Chin period. Over time, they gradually developed into several regional branches. In the Yuan Dynasty, new forms of playing began to be introduced, which resulted in many different forms of opera, influenced strongly by national literature, dialects, music, dances, fine arts, Wushu or acrobatics. The performers wore elaborate make-up, masks or costumes, which were regarded as essential to the performance. Those heavy make-ups or facial paintings, in particular of the Beijing Opera in Ch'ing Dynasty, was most fascinating to foreigners, and it has gradually become an exaggerated and stylized folk image independent of stage performance, distinguishing itself from other art forms in traditional Chinese culture.

### 1.1.7 Crafts and Materials

As far as the material is concerned, traditional Chinese crafts could be divided roughly into several categories dealing with metal, jade and stone, bamboo and wood, pottery and porcelain, ivory and bone, lacquer-work, and textile, etc., to each of which a different manual craft is attached, like engraving and carving, dyeing and weaving, knitting, forging, firing, woodworking, lacquering, painting and cutting. For centuries, they were playing a very important role in traditional Chinese art and proving their utmost utility, aesthetic properties and high quality. For example, ceremonial bronze

wares of the Shang and Chou symbolize the ritual authority; gold- and silverwares represented people's desire for wealth, while jade wares with their gentle glory best symbolize the refined temperament of the ancients. Moreover, as a synthesis of water, fire, earth and other elements, traditional ceramic wares are also regarded as the supreme masterpieces of crafts for their perfect quality, diverse shapes and rich decorations, while at the same time they show a superb craftsmanship and artistic accomplishment of China.

## 1.2 Traditional Philosophies and Aesthetic Appeals

### 1.2.1 Confucianism and Social Rituals

Confucianism is believed to be founded by philosopher named K'ung-tzu (Confucius)<sup>4</sup> during the Spring and Autumn Period in China, when early ritual authority and the ruling system collapsed in the ever-increasing political chaos accompanied by social and economic reforms. Marked by certain noble ideals, Confucianism is a complex ethical and philosophical system concentrating on moral and social virtues, namely on *jen* ("humaneness") and *li* ("ritual"). A large number of followers and descendent scholars emerged during its centuries-long evolution, like Mencius (Mengzi),<sup>5</sup> with his theory of good human nature, Hsun-Tzu (Xun-zi)<sup>6</sup> with his "evil human nature" doctrine, and Chu Hsi (Zhu Xi);<sup>7</sup> their ideas had all been adopted as the main moral and ritual doctrines at times of different dynasties and regimes.

By virtue of its positive social commitment and strict moralization, Confucianism had a tremendous influence on every aspect of Chinese feudal society, including social politics, economic development, education, meritocracy and even national psychology. Not only did it highlight individual loyalty, filial piety and proper rites for self-discipline in a social order, but also advocated the unity of beauty and virtue, benevolence and humanity in art. As a result, traditional painting and art criticism served mainly a moral and didactic purpose for the regulation of social behavior. On the one hand, for instance, portraits of heroes, emperors, chaste women or filial daughters commonly seen in ancient frescos and scrolls developed art criticism against the background of Confucianism, while on the other they increased the influence of art in ethical moralization and social refinement by setting good examples to the public.

### 1.2.2 Taoism and Taoist Theories

Taoism, another philosophic and religious tradition dating from the Spring and Autumn Period of China with *Tao* ("way" or "path" of life) as its core idea, by many histo-

<sup>4</sup> K'ung-tzu (Kongfuzi, or Kongzi; 551–479 BC), or "Master Kong", was most famous Chinese, thinker, teacher and social philosopher, whose ideas had an immense impact on Asian thought and life.

<sup>5</sup> Mencius (Mengzi; c. 372 – c. 289 BC, or c. 385 – c. 303/302 BC), a Chinese philosopher who developed orthodox Confucianism to such an extent that gained the title of "Second Sage."

<sup>6</sup> Hsun Tzu (Xun-zi; c. 300 (312?) – 230 BC), one of the three greatest Confucian philosophers of China's Classical period and a contributor to one of the Hundred Schools of Thought.

<sup>7</sup> Chu Hsi (Zhu Xi; 1130–1200 AD), was a Song Dynasty Confucian scholar who became the leading figure of the School of Principle and the most influential rationalist of Neo-Confucianism in China.

rians is believed to be founded by Lao-tzu,<sup>8</sup> a great ancient ideologist and philosopher. Theoretical foundation of Taoism was laid by the ideas of Lao and Chuang-tzu.<sup>9</sup> The highly esteemed *Tao* is supposed to be the very essence of the universe and the origin of all entities in nature, to rule every movement and transformation of substances. Its concept of *yin* and *yang*, the symbols of two seemingly contrary forces that are harmoniously interconnected, and the theory of *Wu hsing* (*Wu Xing* – Five Elements) describe the natural order of interactions and counteractions between natural fundamental substances or elements of the universe.

Paying much attention to nature and the liberty of humanity, Taoism emphasizes also men-cosmos correspondence and still holds considerable sway over the world. Contrary to the positive social commitment of Confucianism, Taoism suggests some other options opposite to confusions via “action through inaction,” and beliefs that the universe runs harmoniously in its own way.

Thus, the Chinese traditional art, craft, medicine, literature, alchemy, astrology, cuisine, *Feng shui*<sup>10</sup> and many other disciplines, all were intertwining and interconnecting with Taoist theories throughout history. For example, the contrasting ink-wash effects of the brushstrokes in Chinese calligraphy and painting is regarded as the result of the *yin-yang* theory; what is more, the poetic pursuit of harmony beyond reality within each piece of work can also be seen as a spiritual exploration under Taoist unique influence. As a result, the traditional Chinese art, so to speak, is mainly concentrated on the expression of Taoism.

### 1.2.3 The Development and Spread of Buddhism in China

One of the world's three major religions, Buddhism is generally believed to be founded by Siddhartha Gautama (c. 563 – c. 483 BC), also known as the Buddha or Shakyamuni (“the enlightened one”), who was born of the king Shuddhodana and raised in Kapilvastu more than 2,500 years ago. Buddhism was introduced to China as a foreign religion in times of the Eastern Han Dynasty and began to spread to every corner of the Empire. It had a huge impact on Chinese Confucian-authorized social system and made indelible contribution to the development of Chinese traditional culture.

The Buddhist art, in its all forms including architecture, sculpture, painting, literature, music and many others, went through its growth, prosperity and decline with the ups and downs of Buddhism in China. It is a significant component of traditional Chinese culture and an incredible wonder in the history of world art. Its wealthy treasures of literary materials and artistic motifs not only influenced greatly both Buddhist arts, like sculpture, wall-painting and architecture, but introduced also new subjects and skills to the orthodox art system of that time authorized by Confucianism and Tao-

<sup>8</sup> Lao-tzu (Laozi; flourished 6<sup>th</sup> century BC), or Li Erh, was the first philosopher of Taoism in ancient China and an alleged author of the primary Taoist writing *Tao-te Ching*.

<sup>9</sup> Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi; c. 369 – 286 BC) was an influential Chinese Taoist philosopher and the most significant of early interpreters of Taoism in China of the Warring States period, corresponding to the Hundred Schools of Thought philosophical summit of Chinese thought.

<sup>10</sup> *Feng shui*, is an ancient Chinese system of aesthetics believed to use the laws of both Heaven (astronomy) and Earth (geography) to help one improve life by receiving positive *qi*.



ism. For example, the Han Buddhist figures and wall paintings in the Mogao Grottoes, Tunhuang, as well as the magnificent Tibetan Buddhist building and molten statues in Potala Palace have always been admired as the most exquisite Buddhist works by devoted local artists, craftsmen and architects.

## 2. The Development and Prosperity of Modern Chinese Art

In modern history of China, the term “art” in Chinese came into existence during the May Fourth Movement in 1919, to differentiate it from the term “fine art” that involved fine arts, handicrafts, music, dance and drama, etc. As a key word derived from the Western art concepts of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century cultural transformation and internalization, the word “art” in present sense is still being used by modern Chinese artists, theorists and critics.

This new meaning of “modern art” – through which the vision as well as interest of modern China have been presented to the world – includes various themes, ideas, styles and forms within fine arts, folk handicrafts, designs, animation, photography, music, dance, drama, literatures and many, many others. It is a hybrid art, combining both Chinese and Western elements. It experienced periods of intense development and popularity, after the first Chinese art students studying abroad returned to China in the 1920s to the Japanese aggression in 1937, and again between the national liberation and the Cultural Revolution in 1960s.

After the ten-year Cultural Revolution, in relaxed political environment of the “Reforms and Opening Up” period and optimistic economic atmosphere after the China’s access to the WTO, and in the circumstances of advanced social aesthetic perception derived from the flourishing international communication, the modern Chinese art is still searching for its own pattern and tightly linking itself to the world-wide cultural development of the future. On the one hand, it preserves the most characteristic features of traditional Chinese art and culture; while on the other it is giving a new and powerful impetus to the prosperity of domestic art market and increasing international cultural communication. There emerged in Chinese big cities numerous new art districts, like 798 Art Zone in Beijing, bringing promising prospects of the development of modern art through free expression and creative works.

## 3. The Elements of Traditional Culture in Modern Chinese Art

The modern Chinese art, which has gone through several “conflicts and fusions” with both Chinese and foreign, conventional and modern thoughts, ideas and genres during its continual evolution, is now reaching a high-speed development that encourages cultural pluralism, form innovation and social harmony.

### 3.1 *Traditional Chinese Art as Reference*

In the present context of artistic transition, there are lots of traditional elements of Chinese culture being applied to modern art as the most important cultural references.

#### 3.1.1 Cultural Inheritance, Preservation and Imitation

The most direct, effective and primary way of Chinese cultural preservation and inheritance is to borrow, copy or imitate classical figurations and forms of traditional Chinese arts and crafts in modern art and design.

Built in 1959, the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing designed by Zhang Bo, is one of the Ten Great Buildings constructed on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of China. The external appearance of the Cultural Palace integrates both traditional and modern decorative elements, providing a solemn and grandeur architectural style with strong national character, which has made this exhibition building highly recognized both home and abroad as the best-known masterpiece of Chinese contemporary architecture. The building is designed in accordance with the mandala map of Tibetan Buddhism, with a central exhibition hall extending to the north and two outer wings running off from either side of the main hall. Some other details, such as the upturned eaves roofed with peacock blue glazed tiles, the white and tall central building elevation and the symmetrically arranged rows of windows, advocating a similar decorative style of traditional Tibetan architectures, for example, the Potala Palace.

Another building belonging to the Ten Great Buildings for the tenth anniversary of China, the National Art Museum of China, completed in 1963, is a national art museum with the mission to collect, research, preserve and exhibit modern and contemporary artistic works in China. The main building roofed with yellow glazed tiles was modeled on ancient Chinese attics and ethnic architecture, like the nine-storey tower of the Mogao Grottoes in Tunhuang, embraced by surrounding corridors and pavilions; even the window traceries borrow a lot from the tower's railing arrangements that at the same time represent traditional architecture in this modern building design.

What is more, the new Suzhou Museum designed by world-famous Chinese American architect Ieoh Ming Pei (born April 26, 1917), was completed and officially opened to the public in October 2006. As a contemporary comprehensive museum located in the national historical complex, a modern geometric shape of the new museum combines the architectural features of both traditional landscape of the Suzhou Gardens and a vernacular white-and-grey architecture of Southern China. It has a main well-proportioned courtyard, and several surrounding inner yards, and it is interspersed with ponds, rockeries, bridges, pavilions and other architectural elements, providing a fresh, elegant and vivid international modern style to the adjacent buildings.

As a new landmark building in a modern city getting along with the old town, the new Suzhou Museum presents a mixed style of contemporary exhibition buildings, local residences and innovative modern landscapes together with a rational area distribution, which sets a good example for future landscape as well as public architectural design in China.

Also the modern Chinese interior design and decorations have achieved a great success in blending tradition with innovation. For example, the elaborate ceiling layout of the Banquet Hall on the second floor of the Great Hall of the People in Beijing designed by Chang Shana in the late 1950s, obviously borrowed the ideas and decorative elements from the caisson patterns of the Tang Dynasty in Tunhuang. In central part of the ceiling there hangs a crystal flower-shape lamp encircled by some delicate gold-overlaid plaster moldings, while the over-head sunk panels of four-side checkerboard design, as the light chamfers, dedicate tremendously to the gorgeous and luxurious effect of the hall. Thus, by integrating the traditional decorative style with modern ingenuity, this ceiling design has become an excellent model for modern works decorated with classical ornamentations.

### 3.1.2 Abstraction and Simplification

In addition to what has been said above, some classical imageries in traditional culture have also made a significant progress through a formative simplification and abstraction applied in modern Chinese art.

First of all, let us take a look at the evolution of lotus images in modern Chinese art. Since ancient times, the lotus has been one of the most commonly used motifs in Chinese traditional poetry and prose, painting, sculpture, decorations and handicrafts, for its beauty, upstanding stalk, aromatic petals and overlapping leaves symbolizing integrity and its seedpods standing for fertility. As regards the lotus motif in modern Chinese art, their ever-changing figurations but conventional colors have remarkably raised the grace and invisible charm of this plant painted by different artists, expressing their diverse emotional feelings and spiritual energies by combinations of a skillful use of traditional medium with some degree of Western realism.

In addition, there are also large numbers of abstracted and refined traditional figurations applied in modern Chinese business labels or cultural logos, for example, the company logo of China Unicom and the logo of five-color rings for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, both derived from the abstract pattern of Chinese knot in design and the symbolism of red, representing the integrity and honesty of business.

### 3.2 *Media Explorations and Innovations*

Undoubtedly, stable materials and constant media ensure the preservation and inheritance of Chinese traditional culture, but they also restrict art innovations and further development, confining them to certain limitations of the past. As a result, at the beginning of this new era with highly developed science and technology, all modern Chinese artists face this important question how to overcome these limitations and freely convey modern ideas in the languages of modern art.

For example, in the courtyard of the newly built Suzhou Museum, there is a pile of wave-shaped granite blocks lying in a silent corner which can be seen as a modern interpretation of traditional rockeries in the Suzhou Gardens, or a yellow-tinged three-dimensional silhouette of the “intimate landscape” paintings by Mi Fu (1051–1107

AD) and Mi Yu-jen (1086–1165 AD) from the Song Dynasty, introducing an advanced artistic idea of “painting with stones on the walls” to the public.

Let us take another example, this time the modern development of traditional shadow puppetry. The traditional Chinese shadow puppetry is an ancient form of storytelling and folk entertainment; it uses opaque, often articulated figures made of animal hides or cardboard, presented against an illuminated background to create the illusion of moving images. The puppet, as the most essential component to the play, must be manually dyed and carved on cattle skins in order to present a lively figuration with varied decorations. Though new media and modern techniques have already been introduced into this traditional play, the basic elements and unique characteristics of Chinese shadow puppetry are still maintained in all newly generated art forms. For example, a huge iron sculpture series made by Shu Xingchuan (born 1981) entitled “Gone with the Wind”, provides a new look both at tradition and new ideas about the explorations of space via new medium.

When performing a shadow show, the performers have to manipulate each part of the puppets very carefully, to keep changing the illumination intensity and the distance between puppets and the background, while adding all kinds of audio effects into the changing scenes. As a result, each successful performance of shadow puppetry requires a specific division of labor and a strictly ordered cooperation of the troupers. What is more, making the leather puppets is also a complicated and time-consuming job, and the preservation of the puppets really needs great attention. Therefore, the emergence of digital animations as a vigorous revival of this traditional craft happened just in time; not only does it overcome the abovementioned shortcomings while maintaining the essence of shadow puppetry, but it also simplifies its production process and facilitates the modifications of figures, vitalizing this traditional play with current information, richer effects and fresher narrative techniques of the modern world.

Many other types of works have also stemmed from the modern transition of shadow puppetry as, for example, a popular dancing program broadcasted nowadays in China, entitled “Pretty Sunset”, or a group of painted sculptures that imitate walking puppets.

### *3.3 Combination of China and the West*

Since 1940s, in the context of Chinese nationalization and internalization, the slogan “the East meets the West” has acquired special significance and become an overwhelming fashion in the world’s transition. Exhortations of artists to serve the people and to derive both from foreign art and traditional culture, have borne fruits in modern Chinese art. This new combination of Chinese and Western minds, forms and techniques brings about a new quality in Chinese art, generating new, experimental works that although have broken away from the traditional, conservative styles, yet have fended off total Westernization.

The ink posters, for instance, designed by Kan Tai-keung (born 1942) have always been regarded as the most brilliant works of Chinese calligraphy and painting influenced by Western avant-garde graphic design. In his works, the ink traces transform

into capital letters, landscapes or symbol objects with other tiny elements on a pale visual background, combining a modern minimalist style with a typical Chinese elegance of lines. It is the expression of the deepest affection and highest respect of the artist for the splendid culture and art of his motherland China.

Shu Xingchuan, for example, deriving from the most classical female figures of Western art, like Venus or the Virgin Mary, dresses up his sculptures entitled “Glamour” in blue-and-white porcelain glazing and a red facial make-up (e.g. the ones in Peking Opera), emphasizing restrained Asian beauty in modern appearance of Western women to reveal the current chaos and confusion caused by culture blending as well as the lack of traditional values in modern societies.

#### 4. Future Prospects

As time goes on, an increasing number of Chinese artists has realized that no cultural tradition would have a real opportunity for a long-term development in the future if it was not understood or accepted by the world. Thus, the modern art of China, deeply rooted in both history and modernity, will present to the entire world their unique ideas and enormous vitality by means of more and more inspired artworks, glorifying Chinese traditional culture and inspiring appreciation for Chinese art, both old one and modern, of the contemporary world. And as a nation filled with passion, initiative spirit and humanity, the Chinese are heartily devoting their diligence, intelligence and creativity to explore their specific style of art under the current process of the international blending of cultures.



## Construction and Painting in New China

On the 1 October, 1949, the People's Republic of China was established and Chinese society entered a new historical period. The people devoted themselves to the great cause of building a New China in various fields of economy, culture, science, technology and arts. Artists indulged in their artistic creativities with new attitudes and great enthusiasm. And their works made fruitful achievements in Chinese traditional painting, oil painting and also in other forms of art. Thus, in the period of Republican China various arts flourished, producing most of all artworks in the history of China. The six decades of New China can be roughly divided into two periods, according to the criteria of art creation. The first period encompasses the first thirty years of opening up the virgin soil of arts, from 1949 to 1978; the second period covers the recent three decades of reforms and opening up, from 1979 to the present day. The present article concentrates solely on the examples of Chinese painting and oil painting, making a brief description of the representative achievements in painting from the period between the 1950s, after the founding of New China, and the 1970s marking the end of this era. It focuses on the paintings representing major historical topics and revolutionary war themes, as well as those describing labor and production, and glorifying builders.

### 1. Painting of Major Historical Events and the Chinese Revolution

In the first half of the twentieth century China went through the harsh times of the 1911 War, the Sino-Japanese War, the Civil War, and finally, under the leadership of Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of China (CPC), came the New China. During the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese painters were aware of how hard the new life had been earned, and wanted to incorporate in their arts all the major events of the modern Chinese history and the Chinese Revolution to commemorate people's valiant struggles and pay tribute to the heroes. This concern also served political propaganda and responded to the social will. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were a number of excellent works on these subjects, which constituted a major part of the most important paintings of that period. The masterpieces include the *Great Ceremony of the Founding of the PRC* by Dong Xiwen, *Tunnel Warfare* by Luo Gongliu, *Cracking Fetters* by Hu Yichuang, *Chairman Mao Working in a Yan'an Cave House* by Xin Mang, and *Five Heroes of Mount Langya* by Zhan Jianjun. *Great Ceremony of the Founding of the PRC* was painted by Dong Xiwen in 1952. It shows the solemn moment of the 1 October, 1949, when Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed to the entire world the establishment of the People's Republic of China. This oil

painting owes its composition and color to the Chinese New Year Picture genre, where columns, lanterns, carpets, and flags are all in festive red, to make a grand scene with army parades and cheering people. It is a major historical document as well as an oil masterpiece with elements from the Chinese New Year Picture, making itself a model for subsequent explorers to further nationalize oil painting and create in it a Chinese style. *Tunnel Warfare* was made by Luo Gongliu in 1951, originally it was one of the revolution paintings commissioned by the Central Museum of Revolutionary History in 1950. It depicts a scene with soldiers and folks ready for tunnel warfare – a detail of people's courageous combat during the War of Resistance against Japan. *Cracking Fetters* is a 1950 work by Hu Yichuang. It reproduces a moving moment when soldiers of the People's Liberation Army were liberating the fetters of some imprisoned revolution devotees, signifying China's transition from dark to light. A number of paintings were created before the tenth anniversary of the founding of the PRC in 1959. Representative works include *Five Heroes of Mount Langya* by Zhan Jianjun, *Mao Zedong at Mount Jinggang* by Luo Gongliu, *The Torch Light Parade in Yan'an* by Cai Liang, and *Heroic Sisters* by Wang Dewei. Among them, *Five Heroes of Mount Langya* stands out as the best. Its author Zhan Jianjun is Chairman of the China Oil Painting Society. The work derives from a historical event that took place during the Anti-Japanese War, when five of Chinese soldiers fought against Japanese invaders until they ran out of ammunition and attempted suicide by jumping off Mount Langya. The painting adopts a triangle composition and bold brushstrokes to make the mountain rocks go with the heroic images of the suicidal soldiers, whose strong will and fearlessness live on the canvas. It gives out a strikingly tragic power and reaches the height of "monumental effect." In the 1970s, representative works about the revolution include *Eventful Years* by Lin Gang and Pang Tao as well as *The Taking of the Presidential Palace* collaborated by Chen Yifei and Wei Jingshan. *Eventful Years* depicts the harsh years when the Red Army climbed snow-capped mountains and plodded through grasslands on the Long March toward Northern Shaanxi. *The Taking of the Presidential Palace* recalls the historical events in which the Liberation Army crossed the Yangtze River, seized the city of Nanking, took possession of the presidential palace of Chiang Kai-shek, and finally liberated the whole country. In the first half of the twentieth century, oil painting was taught in new art academies, and during the 1930s, Western Painting Movement was trendy in Shanghai. Yet, in the context of warfare and fighting, oil painting remained unpopular. Changes came in the tides of the paintings about the history of the revolution from the 1950s to the 1970s, when oil painting was spread across China. These works were uniformly done in realistic manners. The subjects included recent wartime events that were familiar to the ordinary Chinese and well-received by them. As a result, oil painting became increasingly popular and accepted by common people in the early stage of New China. It is from this fact that I have come to believe that the oil works on the history of the Chinese Revolution created through the 1950s to the 1970s not only served as political propaganda and historical documents, but they also effectively contributed to the popularization of oil painting, making such an imported art form grow fruitful in China, and eventually lifting it to an important position in China's painting circle, equal to the status of traditional Chinese painting.



It should be pointed out that in depicting major historical events, artists of traditional Chinese painting also made exploratory attempts. In 1957, Wang Shenglie created *Eight Female Martyrs*. It displays eight heroines of the Women's Regiment of the Anti-Japanese Amalgamated Army fighting against Japanese puppet troops and finally letting themselves to be drowned in the river. *Fighting in Northern Shaanxi* by Shi Lu presents the time when Chairman Mao and his fellow communists came to fight in Northern Shaanxi. In 1959, Ye Qianyu painted *Liberation of Beiping*, which shows the grand festive scene of liberated Beiping (Beijing) on 31 January, 1949. These paintings possess critical values as important historical documents.

## 2. Portrayal of Productive Labor and Eulogy of Socialist Constructors

Before the founding of the People's Republic, China was backward socially and economically. In New China, masses of working people became masters of their new society. They were politically inspired and full of working spirits. Workers, farmers, intellectuals, scientists and technicians, they all hurled themselves into labor and constructions with ever increasing zeal. Painters responded to such a new life through oil painting, traditional Chinese painting, and the New Year Picture, as well as prints. In the first thirty years of New China, painters not just looked back into the revolution history, but also reflected the ongoing labor and production. Portrayal of the new life and common constructors became desirable subjects as well.

In the 1950s, art workers started to show construction sites and the new life in their oil paintings. *Sanmen Gorge on Yellow River* by Wu Zuoren shows the construction work at the Sanmen Gorge Reservoir in the Henan province. *Leading to Urumchi* by Ai Zhongxin shows the construction of the road to Urumchi and the factories. Both paintings are large in scale. *Spring Comes to Tibet* by Dong Xiwen and *Inside the Mongolian Yurt* by Chang Shuhong picture the new life of ethnic minorities in New China breezily and warmly. *Fisher Girls* was painted by Lin Fengmian in the 1950s, where he used geometric forms and expressive lines to show the fisher girls' new life.

The 1960s marked greater developments in painting labor and construction as well as in the new life. Prominent works include *Golden Season* by Zhu Naizheng, where two countrywomen are winnowing chaff from grain in the wind. The painting has a golden background and monumental figures, a composition that expresses the painter's will to show working people in an impressive way. *Island Girls* by Wang Xia depicts fisher girls back from the sea in a bold, vigorous and glorious way, making it a typical image of working people in New China. It took Wang Wenbin almost five years to finish his large-scale oil painting *Rammers' Work Chant*, which is 156 cm high and 320 cm wide. The scene covers five smiling country girls who are pounding out a new mountain road while singing out loud their work chant. There is also a large-scale painting *Heroes of the Day* done collectively by the staff of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. It portrays model workers becoming new heroes of the time as they are honored by the state authorities in the Great Hall of the People. *In Front of Tiananmen* by Sun Zixi presents a scene with a group of workers, farmers and soldiers standing

on the Tiananmen Square as if for a group photo. *We Are Walking on the Main Road* by Pan Shixun foregrounds highly motivated working people. *Four Girls* by Wen Bao depicts a scene where four simple girls are having a rest during work interval. In these typical works, we can see ordinary working people presented in glorious and heroic images on canvases. They became heroes of the socialist constructions and the new life, much as the wartime heroes in the historical paintings. These works show a variety of ordinary families, country girls, women militia, cadres of production teams, army persons as well as groups of working people. What they have in common is their smiles, their fresh spirits, their simple goodness and graciousness, as well as their life pursuits and hopes. All these are genuine depictions of working people and their reflections on the life of the New China.

Traditional Chinese painting also achieved much in portraying the images of productive labor. Painters tended to depict small daily scenes filled with joy. Their deft hands vividly portrayed the new life. The first thirty years of the New China saw artists of traditional Chinese painting applying traditional brushwork and ink-effect to the images of the new life in various experimental ways. Judging from their perceptions and techniques, such explorations could be viewed as weeding through the old to bring forth the new. *Testing Mom* by Jiang Yan shows a pupil girl helping her mother to read. *Mother-in-law and Her Daughter-in-law Go to Winter School* shows a mother-in-law supported by her daughter-in-law on the icy way to school for knowledge. Before the founding of the PRC, women generally had low social status and were illiterate, with no education. In the New China, the governments assisted them with learning to get rid of illiteracy – which was genuinely represented in the two works. Besides, harvests gained from productive labor were also subjects of traditional Chinese painting. Major works include *Each Grain Is Hard-Earned* by Fang Zengxian, *Two Lambs* by Zhou Changgu and *Going to Market* by Du Chonghua, and others.

In the mid- and late 1950s, traditional Chinese painting achieved its initial reform success. Through the 1960s to the 1970s, a number of new works came out picturing workers, peasants and life of the masses. Representative works include *Four Generations of a Family* by Liu Wenxi, *New Team Leader* by Yao Youduo, *Sons and Daughters of Emancipated Serfs* by Yu Yuechuan, *Mountain Village Doctor* by Wang Yujue, *Fragrant Breath of Spring and Tea* by Song Zhongyuan, *An Army Recruit in the Mine* by Yang Zhiguang, and many others.

Chinese landscape paintings also played an active role in presenting the new times. Large scenes of constructions and productive working appeared in traditional Chinese paintings. New roads reshaped landscapes; mineral prospectors, scientists or technicians were part of the sights as well. Working scenes were magnificent and intensely expressed. Artists of traditional Chinese painting made a variety of progressive explorations in adapting the old art form to the life in the “new times.”

Among these explorations, some were rich in new characteristics. In his works *Steel* and *Steel Furnace*, Ya Ming used water and ink with unusual boldness and fluency to show the steel-making scenes. Lin Fengmian used the cubist geometry to paint *Steel Rolling*. Jiang Yan borrowed characters and colors from the *New Year Picture* for his series of new rural life works. Qian Songyan created many large scene works in well-

-developed techniques. Li Xiongcai followed the scroll tradition in his long painting *Flood Prevention in Wuhan*, succeeding in both the subject and the form. From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, Zhang Ding made progressive explorations in painting industrial subjects by means of water and ink. Such works as *Anshan Iron & Steel Company under Construction* and *Dalian New Port* feature a crisscrossing order of steel frames and cranes that resonate with the rhythms of modern industries.

Through the 1950s to the 1970s, Chinese art circles followed the dialectical materialism of the Marxist philosophy. Realism was regarded as eligible as it matched the dialectical materialism. It resulted in a general tendency to realist techniques, as seen in almost all the works mentioned above. The images in these paintings were easily understood and well-received by the masses of ordinary Chinese, so they worked effectively in educating the public and teaching them aesthetics. The painters were as passionate as their works were authentic. The images they created were sunny and simple, full of vigor and brightness, instead of hypocrisy or depression. The painters were in tune with the cheerful masses, hoping the best for socialist progress. Artworks of this period were credible documents of social constructions in the early stage of New China, which marked as one of the most characteristic qualities of the twentieth-century Chinese art and constituted its most important achievements. These works opened up the way to paint in a realistic manner the subjects on what people love to see in aspects of their struggles, constructions and productions. This way to realism made it different from what was prior to it in China or what was going on in the West. Its achievements and approaches, as well as its historical values, should be highly appreciated. These excellent works of painting, along with the New China's constructive undertakings, will surely go down in history.



# The Posters of Mao Era: A Perspective of Art and Society

## Foreword

I do not know much about Poland. I have heard of Nicolaus Copernicus and Maria Curie-Skłodowska, I have listened to Frederic Chopin's music, I have read the translations of Adam Mickiewicz's poems, I have seen Jan Matejko's paintings, I know that the artificial language of Esperanto was constructed by Ludwik L. Zamenhof and that the sculpture presenting the seated figure of Sun Yat-sen in his Mausoleum in Nanking was made by sculptor Paul M. Landowski of Polish origin. It is not much. However, the Polish posters of the 1950s and 1960s have moved me in a most deep way; they have influenced a whole generation of us, the Chinese of my age. At that time many young Chinese art students studied diligently these posters, as did, for example, my colleague Prof. Guo Li, an eminent designer of Shanghai University. The marvelous Polish posters inspired me to do research into the subject. Luckily for me, I have got warm support from my Polish friends, including Szymon Bojko, Józef Grabski, Jerzy Malinowski, Marcin Jacoby, Stasys Eidrigevicius, Krzysztof Dydo, and others. And one of my students, Miss Chen Shujun, promised me to devote herself to the research. Now, I have an honor and pleasure to introduce Chinese posters of Mao Era to my Polish friends.

## 1. Mao Era (1949–1976) and its cultural meaning

From the nineteenth century on, elites of China, although having different political views, shared one common trait: for them, all the problems of China, including those of arts and culture, were thought of in terms of politics, they all devoted themselves to rebuild the nation or, as the saying goes, to activate the Renaissance of China in the near future. After the victory of the Communist Party led by Mao Zedong in 1949, the era of Mao began, and the art and literature were introduced into Mao's political system.

Approximately, Mao era spans the period between as early as 1942 and 1976. The former date was set by the famous Art and Literature Forum held between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> May that year in Yan-an, in the Northwest China region, then the anti-Japanese war base led by the Communist Party. The latter date is marked by the death of Mao Zedong. The Forum was attended by Mao who delivered a speech there that afterwards was published as the official guidelines of the Party's policy on art and literature. Like his many contemporary enlightenment thinkers, Mao Zedong also regarded art and

literature as one of the tools to save the country. He called himself utilitarian, yet he specified that it was not in a narrow sense, and he was a far-sighted revolutionary utilitarian rather than near-sighted one.<sup>1</sup> Mao agreed with Lenin's viewpoint that literature should be a part of proletariats' enterprise, should form "the gears and screws" of the huge social democracy machinery run by the vanguard of the proletariat.<sup>2</sup> In terms of Mao's view, art and literature had to enlighten the masses. Mao, however, contrary to the Enlightenment in France, wanted the enlightenment not of the middle classes, but the people who formed more than 90% of the Chinese population, namely workers, peasants and soldiers. In order to propagate the Party's political aims and to enhance the culture level of the people, various domains of art, especially the visual arts, were one of the best tools to fulfill the task. Arts were supposed to infiltrate the masses with political contents of the images people liked to look at with easily understood meanings. Because many of the people had little or no education at all, and a great part of them was illiterate,<sup>3</sup> the works of arts that were to serve the Party's purposes had to be popular, direct, easy to understand, with simple message and easy to be copied in large numbers. At that time, the popular art forms were *Nian Hua* (colorful New Year pictures), comic strips and propaganda pictures; they were effective since they could be easily comprehended by people speaking all kind of dialects and illiterate. During the wartime it was difficult to find materials, and that was the reason why the support of the local government in the development of these forms of art was so important.

After 1949, when the New China was established, Mao's speech at the Forum became the guide for the future development of art and literature all over the country, and posters, comic strips and woodcuts came to the front, with Socialist Realism, suitable for propaganda and popularization needs, as an official theory and method of artistic and literary composition.

## 2. Definition and background of China Poster (*Zhaotiehua*)

Poster, for the Chinese, means a printed picture to be exhibited more or less publicly, usually pasted on walls or placard boards. Posters could be divided into three categories: commercial ones, i.e. advertisements; social or political ones, as pictures for propaganda campaigns, including posters announcing various theatrical, cinema or opera performances, etc.; and lastly, entertaining posters, such as New Year pictures. The commercial and social ones are to be displayed in public space, such as street walls or other public sites; the entertaining ones are to be kept in private space, such as on the walls of private rooms, as decorations. The earliest Chinese commercial posters, calendar pictures, in character of New Year Picture, could be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty. The earliest commercial calendar pictures appeared during the reign of Emperor Daoguang, in 1840, in the form of the advertisement of Watson's pharmacy

<sup>1</sup> See: *Mao Zedong* (1967: 698).

<sup>2</sup> Lenin (1987: 93).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the population of 1,500,000 around Yan-an district, there were more than one million illiterates, and more than two thousands witches and wizards; see: *Mao Zedong* (1967: 698).

delivered by the Watson Company in Hong Kong. From then on, the pictures of this kind were attached to a calendar of a solar year with twelve months and a list of twenty four Chinese solar terms. The subject matters of the pictures represent beauties, or ancient stories or legends, in the style of Chinese traditional New Year Picture. Chinese characters printed on the pictures were the names of the firm and its commodities. At the end of a year, the pictures would be sent to clients as presents together with other goods, not only playing the role of beautiful decoration but also serving as calendar, thereby used at least for a whole year. Since the pictures were admired by clients, they helped the firms to sell their goods. Pictures of that kind were the earliest posters in China. During the period of the Republic of China (1911–1949), calendar pictures were very popular in Shanghai. Hang Zhiying (1900–1947) was one of the most successful designers at that time, and – as his apprentice Li Mubai (1913–1991) recalled – earned much money, since he was selling his calendar picture for 300–800 silver dollar apiece, so he was able to buy a car every month.<sup>4</sup>

In the early years of New China, the Party and government leaders paid considerable attention to the forms of mass communication. For instance, *China Daily* of 27 November, 1949, published an article “On Developing the Renewed New Year Pictures” signed by the head of the governmental Culture Department. The author of the text recommended to use popular media and forms, such as the New Year Picture, to spread the people’s democratic ideas and emphasized the need to “care about the masses’ purchasing ability,” which meant that the prices of their artworks “must not be too high.” Then he added, “we should use the traditional issuing network of New Year Picture (for example, incense and candle stores, bookstalls, and peddlers), to capture a large part of the market.” Finally he suggested “to make use of these forms, and to remodel them, making them tools for spreading new arts of this type.”<sup>5</sup>

Whereas the above section presented poster designers’ social background, in the section below we will discuss their economic status.

### 3. Economic situation of China Poster

From 1949, the art mechanism in China began to change. The new government thought highly of the talented artists, especially famous painters, and employed them mostly in national art institutes and colleges, in art museums, art galleries, district culture clubs, literary history institutes, theatres, publishing houses, etc. At that time, almost every artist belonged to a unit of sort. To a certain extent, the artists’ fame and social status depended on the class of their unit. Moreover, socialist public ownership prohibited almost all private economic activities which, together with the recession of art market, made the artists’ income dependant solely on the wages paid by their unit, with no earnings from selling of their works.<sup>6</sup> There were, however, a few artists who still re-

<sup>4</sup> Mingshi (1998: 1701–1716).

<sup>5</sup> Cited after: Yuejin (2002: 18).

<sup>6</sup> During that time, only a few exporting stores and art craft shops, such as Rongbaozhai, could sell traditional paintings and calligraphy works, and only to foreigners to earn foreign currency.

mained outside any unit, like Ha Ding (1923–2003) in Shanghai, but they were soon to discover that without units their lives were far from easy. According to the ideology of New China, the one who worked only for himself or his family was to be condemned by the society. My teacher Lu Hongji (1910–1985), a sculptor and art theorist, in 1954, when he was in charge of building the monument of the Soviet Soldiers Killed in the Anti-Japanese War in the city of Dalian, he made a claim on the remuneration for his building team, and asked the local government for more than 10,000 Chinese *yuans*. Due to this, and because he had refused to take others' opinions while he was working, he was forced to undergo self-criticism sessions time and again afterward. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution most artists did not dare to sign their names on their works or else did it collectively. One of such anonymous works is the famous propaganda painting entitled *Chairman Mao Inspects Areas South and North of the Yangtze River* (1967).<sup>7</sup>

Before the Culture Revolution, some artists might have had the chance to get some extra money, for example, from national art museums or foreign trade companies, which occasionally would buy a few their artworks for their collections or to export them in order to gain some foreign currency. But the amount of artworks was limited and the trade was under strict control, the rewards to artists were low, and only a few artists were lucky enough to have benefited from this rare occurrence. As for private collections, collectors paid artists for their works mostly in kind instead of cash or checks, and what artists received were usually packs of cigarettes and bottles of wine. All these could not change the fact that official wages were the main source of income for Chinese artists. There was, however, one exception: the artist could get a steady licit income in the form of royalty payments after the publication of his work. Apart from publications in newspapers and magazines, or as illustrations or caricatures in books and art albums, the most popular publishing form were posters and comic strips, and the posters included the New Year pictures and propaganda pictures.

Posters generally would include text information and graphics, be it paintings, prints, paper cuts, photographs or pictures of sculptures, installations, even pictures of movies or dramas, etc. As for paintings, they include gouaches, watercolors, oil paintings, Chinese traditional paintings, and prints. Many artists were experienced in making New Year pictures and propaganda pictures, and they enjoyed their successes by publishing their works, thus gaining not only popularity but also the benefits of reward money. According to the reminiscences of Cai Zhenhua (1912–2006), from among New Year pictures, the largest number of copies before the Culture Revolution had a picture by Jin Xuechen (1904–1996) and Li Mubai (1913–1991) entitled *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* (a Chinese legend, tragic story of a young couple fighting against the norms of traditional Chinese society, similar to the Romeo and Juliet story).<sup>8</sup> It was printed in nearly a hundred million copies. Cai also said that the reward

<sup>7</sup> *Chairman Mao Inspects Areas South and North of the Yangtze River* was offered by Zhejiang Workers, Peasants and Soldiers to the Fine Arts University, Zhejiang People's Fine Arts Publishing House, no. 8156.536. 1969, 6. Price: 0.30 *yuan*. Now we know that its authors were Zheng Shengtian, Xu Junxuan, and Zhou Ruiwen from the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts.

<sup>8</sup> Actually the work was made by Jin Meisheng (1902–1989) in 1956.



for publishing a poster was about 250–300 *yuans*, while the reprint was paid about half hundred *yuans* more. But, by the rule of Cai's unit, he had to offer his unit one free piece of his work a year, and only then he could get paid for his other works.<sup>9</sup> Cai's wage was about 100 *yuans* a month, he could make five or six works every year, so the extra money totaling his one-year salary or more. One of his works, painted jointly with two other artists, had about two million copies. Before the Culture Revolution, another influential poster was printed after the painting by Ha Qiongwen (b. 1925): *Long Live Chairman Mao!* (1959). Between 1959 and 1964 the picture was printed over twenty times in various sizes, and had more than two million copies. Moreover, it was used by many firms as an advertisement.<sup>10</sup> In 1952, there were twenty six places all over the country with the rights to print New Year pictures, while there were 420 types of these pictures made by over two hundred authors; the number of their printed copies amounted to seven million.<sup>11</sup> As Jiang Feng (1910–1982, a former leader of the Central Academy of Fine Arts) said, from 1949 to 1951, there were 861 kinds of modern New Year pictures issued in the whole country.<sup>12</sup> According to the statistics from the website of the Shanghai Publishing Archives, during the forty years between 1952 and 1992, the Shanghai Art Publishing Houses published 1655 sets of posters, and the total amount of all copies was about sixty million.<sup>13</sup>

Although the publications in newspapers were paid only several *yuans* apiece, they offered the author a wider circulation and thus greater popularity. For example, a woodcut by Wu Fan (b. 1923) *Dandelion* made in Chinese traditional watercolor block printing was published in many newspapers and magazines for its lively air, and was known to and liked by everybody at that time.

#### 4. Popularity and profits gained through printouts

Just like posters, other artworks could increase their influence by publication in mass media. By the same way, their authors might gain broader popularity. Thus, it was the rank, circulation, and readership of a newspaper, magazine, or publishing house that decided on the artist's status. However, in the years of advocating the core values of equality and collectivism, any extra income and individual fame would lead to the jealousy of others. That was why, during the Culture Revolution, the reward for publications was almost none. Artists were supposed not to sign their names on their works, or else to sign them as a group. Individualism and desire of fame and gain were disallowed. But the popular forms of art, such as poster, did not decline; on the contrary, as a means of education and propaganda it was greatly developed.

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<sup>9</sup> Cai's unit was the Shanghai Artists Association, at that time, many other units had the same rule compulsory for the artists under their control.

<sup>10</sup> See: Mingxian, Shancun (2000: 77).

<sup>11</sup> Shucun (1998).

<sup>12</sup> Feng (2002: 297).

<sup>13</sup> See: [www.book.sh.cn/shpub/hisdoc/](http://www.book.sh.cn/shpub/hisdoc/).

Usually, posters were released in editions of at least over hundred thousand copies, sometimes even several hundred thousands or several millions copies. Perhaps one of these with the largest circulation was a poster after the painting entitled *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan*. This picture was copied, imitated, and printed by many offices, schools, factories, and countryside, for the purpose of propagating Mao's deeds. Just browsing through Stewart E. Fraser's *100 Great Chinese Posters* (1977), we can find there some of the posters with the largest number of copies:

1. Tung Cheng Yi's *Commune Fish Pond*; 77 x 53 cm; People's Fine Arts Publishing House; 1<sup>st</sup> printing – March 1973: 1,370,000 copies; 2<sup>nd</sup> printing – March 1973: 1,870,000 copies. By the way, that means in the same month more than three million. Price: 0.11 yuan.
2. Ho Yu-tsu's *Learn from Lei Feng*; 53 x 77 cm; Shanghai People's Publishing House; 1<sup>st</sup> printing – July 1973: 400,000; 3<sup>rd</sup> printing – August 1973: 1,000,000. There seemed to be a great demand. Price: 0.22 yuan.
3. Ou Yang's *Young Eagle Spreading Her Wings*; 38 x 53 cm; People's Fine Arts Publishing House; 1<sup>st</sup> printing – March 1974: 595,000; price: 0.07 yuan.
4. Lin Ximing and Tang Yun's *Early Spring in South China*; 53 x 77 cm; Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House; 1<sup>st</sup> printing (the original was finished in 1972 but the date of first printing was missing): 20,500 (it seemed to be a trial for a landscape); 2<sup>nd</sup> printing – October 1973: 1,501,000.
5. Liu Chi-ho's *Picking Herbs*; 53 x 77 cm; Liaoning People's Publishing House; 1<sup>st</sup> printing – August 1973: 500,000; 2<sup>nd</sup> printing – October 1973: 1,710,000. Price: 0.11 yuan.
6. Kiang Nan-choon's *Unite Together and Fight for Greater Victory*; 77 x 53 cm; Shanghai People's Publishing House; 1<sup>st</sup> printing – September 1973: 4,000,000. Price: 0.11 yuan.
7. Liu Chih-the's *Old Party Secretary*; 53 x 77 cm; Shanghai People's Publishing House; 1<sup>st</sup> printing – June 1974: 1,040,000; 2<sup>nd</sup> printing – January 1975: 1,340,000. Price: 0.11 yuan.
8. Tong Sieng-ming's *Eagles Spreading Their Wings*; 77 x 53 cm; Hebei People's Publishing House; 1<sup>st</sup> printing – October 1974: 970,000; 2<sup>nd</sup> printing – May 1975: 1,570,000. Price: 0.11 yuan.
9. Kao Er-yi, Cheong Wen-long, Tong Chiao-ming Liang Ping-po's *New Competitors*; 53 x 77 cm; People's Fine Arts Publishing House; 1<sup>st</sup> printing – September 1975: 1,550,000. Price: 0.14 yuan.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the above, a picture by Yang Zhiguang entitled *A Newcomer to the Mine*, was printed in the form of poster, and also of post stamp, picture for private collection, and of calendar. Similar examples are too numerous to be listed here. Works of this kind, which were copied in a great amount and sold as low-price prints, can be directly delivered to the masses, thus serving the needs of Party's propaganda. The artist would have a sense of success after his work was copied in large numbers. For many, perhaps, it was the only road to fame.

<sup>14</sup> Fraser (1977); see also Appendix.

## 5. Copy was valuable, while original was not

There was one common feature of posters, comic strips and print-made works, which was the fact that they could be delivered to audience in printed copies at cheap prices. In order to reach the largest public possible, the works had to be printed in large quantities at a very low price. Also other forms of artistic creations could be printed, either on a single paper sheet in great amounts to be hung up in private or public spaces, or in newspapers and popular magazines, especially the ones with great circulation, or else in the form of book albums for private collections. Moreover, a poster could be copied itself, either the whole one or its part. For example, the head pictures on propaganda placards were copied mostly from the posters popular at that time. Thus, the printed copy of the original artwork became much more important than the original itself and for the mass audience the original was valueless, while its copy was good enough for them. Most of the posters were painted with cheap pigments for commercial advertisement, so they were not durable and could not last long. Because China had no art markets and people did not feel the need of them, in their minds originals, especially those painted with cheap pigments, were only models to be copied. As for the artists and art editors, the important thing was to send originals to the printing press, the last link in the process chain of the creation of an object of art. So they did not care about originals, regarded as mere designs. What was important was to make a perfect print, and for that, if necessary, the author would not hesitate to change the original by cutting and replacing its parts. As soon as the procedure of plate making was finished, the original would be put aside and forgotten. Some of the examples of such badly made originals, painted with rough pigments on bad paper, cut and replaced many times, were poster originals by Cai Zhenhua. In retrospect, we may say that numerous prints completely replaced their originals and were more important than originals. For example, as I have already mentioned above, in 1967, Zheng Shengtian, Xu Junxuan, and their student Zhou Ruiwen, from the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (then renamed as Zhejiang Workers, Peasants and Soldiers Fine Arts University, and now under the name of China Academy of Fine Arts), jointly created a poster *Chairman Mao Inspects Areas South and North of the Yangtze River*.<sup>15</sup> This is one of the most famous posters at the time of the Culture Revolution, with numerous reprints and total number of several million copies. Although the poster was well-known at that time, its authors were unknown and nobody wanted to know them. After finishing the procedure of making plate, the original painting was put aside, and no one cared about it any more. Recently, a collector from Taiwan wanted to buy it for ten million *yuan*s, and the authors have done everything to find it, but with no success so far.<sup>16</sup> In the history of art, Mao's era is a typical period of propaganda art.

During this period, the desire for fame and gain were being held in contempt, yet many artists became famous through the publications of their works in great amounts.

<sup>15</sup> It has turned out that that the original is missing, as discovered by some collectors who wanted to buy it; it may be lost forever.

<sup>16</sup> See: one of the author, Zhou Ruiwen's, "Notice of Searching for a Painting" (photocopy).

For instance, the oil painting *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* printed for propaganda reasons in the largest number was known to almost every Chinese family; statistically everyone had a copy of it. Furthermore, the painting was reprinted on the front page of all kinds of newspapers and all sorts of journals; it was printed on silk and impressed on medallions or badges; it was copied or imitated on propaganda boards displayed in streets and in buildings, in lanes, mines, corporations, offices and schools.<sup>17</sup> As my colleague from the Shanghai University, Professor Sun Xinhua, said, he himself had three copies of this painting in the form of poster. The author of this painting, Liu Chunhua, became the most famous artist and got promotion for this work. As Yang Yuepu from the China Artists Association recalled, great popularity of the propaganda posters saved many pigment factories being close to bankruptcy.

## 6. Some art values deserved to be appreciated

In the period advocating unification of thinking and doing in the whole country, there was strict censorship of both content and form of every artwork. It interfered with many matters, not necessarily connected with political or social problems of the state. For example, there was a nevus on the left side of Mao's chin, but in a poster painting the nevus was incorrectly put on the wrong side, so all the copies of it had to be withdrawn by administrative order. Although the subject matter for art creation was, to a certain extent, rich, the artists felt handicapped in their work. In the society where there was no art market, no individual clients, there was also no art individuality. The artworks of this period were characterized by their colorfulness, smoothness, and brightness (*Hong, Guang, Liang*), huge smiles of the figures in pictures, or their proud and brave postures. The pictured people were arranged and posed as on stage, looked like posing for photograph. In Mao era art was closely associated with politics. Nowadays, however, the criticism against Realism dominating all Chinese art at that time, seem to diminish some of the values of this type of art. Contrary to common belief, it has brought some innovations and developments into Chinese art, unknown to the majority of the Chinese people. For instance, the simultaneous arrangement of time and space which was in vogue at that time, to be seen, for instance, in Robert Delaunay's *The Red Tower* (1911), appeared also in the propaganda poster, *Sailing on the Sea Relies on the Steersman, Doing Revolution Depends on Mao Zedong's Thinking* (1969). This arrangement broke through the limitations of unified time and space prevailing before. In this poster, the Zunyi Meeting Site, the Tian-an-men Square, and the Pagoda of Yan-an, three specific sites of different times and different spaces, were put together as a background of Mao Zedong's figure. This arrangement gives the picture a richer meaning. Though the artists might have not known Delaunay's works, they made a step forward in the history of China art. This progress should be noticed and deserves to be studied in depth; they make the starting point for new art in the period

<sup>17</sup> Mingxian, Shancun (2000); see also: Taschen (2008), especially the essays by Anchee Min, Duo Duo, and Stefan R. Landsberger.

of launching the open door policy, and certainly have inspired the artists of a new generation.

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## Appendix: Propaganda posters of 1970s and 1980s

Author	Title	Press	Impression and number of copies	Price (yuan)
Tung Cheng Yi	Commune Fish Pond	Shanghai People's Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : March 1973 - 1,370,000 2 <sup>nd</sup> : March 1973 - 1,870,000	0.11
Ho Yu-tsu	Learn from Lei Feng	Shanghai People's Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : July 1973 - 400,000 3 <sup>rd</sup> : August 1973 - 1,000,000	0.22
Ou Yang	Young Eagle Spreading Her Wings	People's Fine Arts Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : March 1974 - 595,000	0.07
Lin Ximing and Tang Yun	Early Spring in South China	Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : 20,500 - no data (missing) 2 <sup>nd</sup> : October 1973 - 1,501,000	
Liu Chi-ho	Picking Herbs	Liaoning People's Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : August 1973 - 500,000 2 <sup>nd</sup> : October 1973 - 1,710,000	0.11

Author	Title	Press	Impression and number of copies	Price (yuan)
Kiang Nan-choon	Unite Together and Fight for Greater Victory	Shanghai People's Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : September 1973 – 4,000,000	0.11
Liu Chih-teh	Old Party Secretary	Shanghai People's Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : June 1974 – 1,040,000 2 <sup>nd</sup> : January 1975 – 1,340,000	0.11
Tong Sieng-ming	Eagles Spreading Their Wings	Hebei People's Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : Printing October 1974 – 970,000 2 <sup>nd</sup> : May 1975 – 1,570,000	0.11
Kao Eryi, Cheong Wen-long, Tong Chiao-ming, Liang Ping-po	New Competitors	People's Fine Arts Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : September 1975 – 1,550,000	0.14
Chen Juxian	Good Things Every Year	Shanghai People's Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : February 1984 – 300,000	0.16
Ha Qiongwen	Learn from Martyr Wang Jie	Shanghai People's Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : November 1965 to 7 <sup>th</sup> : January 1966 – 750,000–850,000	0.15
Li Mubai, Jin Xuechen	Chinese Women Volleyball Team Win the World Champion	Shanghai People's Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : April 1982 to 4 <sup>th</sup> : June 1983 – 1,250,000–2,070,000	0.16
Jin Jifa	Learn from Lei Feng	Education Publishing House	1 <sup>st</sup> : December 1974 – 450,000	0.12

## Jerzy Grotowski in China

Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999), a stage director and performance researcher,<sup>1</sup> visited the People's Republic of China as a delegate of the Theatre Unit of the Ministry of Culture and the Arts within the framework of the official exchange program between the two countries' Ministries of Culture. In a newspaper article published a few days before the visit, Jerzy Falkowski, a critic close to the artist and his company, wrote: "During his stay in China, the director of the Opole experimental theatre will establish close artistic relations with makers of contemporary Chinese theatre [...] and study issues of the Chinese theatre style, form, and tradition."<sup>2</sup>

This was not Grotowski's first encounter with Chinese theatre: at the time of his acting and directing studies, Chinese companies visited Poland almost every year with various performances, including classical Beijing operas.

"The Chinese Diary"<sup>3</sup> provides the exact dates of Jerzy Grotowski's visit to China. He flew from Warsaw to Beijing on 11 August, 1962 – on the day of his twenty-ninth birthday.<sup>4</sup> His stay lasted a month, as confirmed by the recent discovery of a photo, taken during an Opole performance of Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*), inscribed: "Beijing, September 10, [19]62. To Director Sun Wei-Shi to commemorate a matter-of-fact and professional discussion. Jerzy Grotowski. Opole, Rynek 4, Teatr Laboratorium 13 Rzędów [Laboratory Theatre of the 13 Rows]."<sup>5</sup> The first sessions in Opole following Grotowski's return took place on 19 September, as Rena Mirecka's diary entry for that day attests: "Beginning of the 1962/1963 season. First classes [*plastique exercises*]." Also worth mentioning is a set of instructions, dated 21 July, which Grotowski

<sup>1</sup> Grotowski (1968); Gu (1984); Schechner, Wolford (1997); Theatre Arts (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Falkowski, Grotowski (1964: 57).

<sup>3</sup> It is my term for a notebook I found in one of the boxes Grotowski left to his brother, Professor Kazimierz Grotowski, when emigrating from Poland in 1982. "The Chinese Diary" comprises 143 unnumbered pages written in black and blue ballpoint in a small (10 x 14.7 cm) notepad with the logo of the LOT Polish Airlines; the paper used to be white, but now it is yellowish. This diary belonged to Jerzy Grotowski's private collection of documents. Professor Kazimierz Grotowski, who was entrusted with the collection in 1982 and took care of it for 25 years, decided to transfer it to the Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich in Wrocław.

<sup>4</sup> In my books: Osiński (1980: 105) and Osiński (1997: 97) I was wrong as to the date of Grotowski's departure, claiming it to be 15 August, 1962.

<sup>5</sup> It was handed over to the Archives of *The Centre for Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and of the Cultural and Theatrical Research in Wrocław*. I do not know the reasons why Grotowski brought that photo back to Opole.

left to his company before going to the seventh World Festival of Youth and Students in Helsinki (29 July – 6 August, 1962) and then to China:

Should my return be postponed due to any problems (later than September 16), Mr Flaszen will take over the duties of artistic manager, and Ms Mirecka will be in charge of studio work. Should Mr Flaszen be absent, Ms Mirecka will stand in as artistic manager.

While waiting for my return, you should carry out intensive (at least 6 hours a day, including Sundays, except for official holidays) studio work and training sessions: plastique exercises (Mirecka), rhythmical exercises (Cynkutis), enunciation (Molik), etudes (Barba).

Besides, Mr Barba or Ms Mirecka should organize a text rehearsal (1–2) to revise for Acropolis. After September 16, Ms Komorowska should start co-operating with Ms Czajkowska (gradual induction).

I would like to stress the necessity of keeping the theatre space neat and tidy.<sup>6</sup>

During the first week after his arrival, on 17 August, Grotowski stayed in Beijing. A week later, on 24 August at noon, he went to Nanjing, where he stayed from the 25<sup>th</sup> through the 28<sup>th</sup>, then to Shanghai (28 August – 2 September), and later to Hangzhou. On 4 September at 6:30 pm, he came back to Shanghai, and at 11:30 pm took the train back to Beijing, where he arrived on the morning of the sixth and stayed until the ninth. It is known that he visited theatrical universities and theatres in Beijing, Nanjing, Hangzhou and Shanghai. The variant spellings of Mei Lanfang's name used by Grotowski in his Chinese diary may indicate that he had not heard about Mei Lanfang before his visit to China: 17 August, 1962, p. 5: "Exhibition devoted to Myi Lan Fan;" in the entry for 18 August, pp. 10–11, it is spelled in Chinese with Polish phonetic transcription: "Myj Lę Fą;" similar spelling was used in several other entries.<sup>7</sup>

There is a copy in Wrocław of *Chuan ju dan jiao bioyan yishu* – which may be translated as "Dan Stage Art in Sichuan Opera" or "The Art of Performing Dan Female Parts in Sichuan Opera" – edited by Yang Youhe and published by the Chinese Theatrical Institute in Beijing in 1960 with a preface by Mei Lanfang entitled "My creative experience," that Grotowski brought back from China. The book's 120 pages have been annotated by Grotowski, most of whose hand-written comments, all technical in character, have been placed under photos of actors. It can be inferred that Mei Lanfang, who had died the previous year, still made his presence felt during Grotowski's stay, which would in turn explain why Grotowski brought photos of Mei back to Opole and told his actors about him.

By the time Grotowski went to China, work on his production of *Acropolis*, based on Stanisław Wyspiański's play of that title was already well-advanced. It would, however,

<sup>6</sup> Two chequered pages written in blue ink, torn from a notebook; in Rena Mirecka's collection.

<sup>7</sup> 21 August, p. 79: "The Museum of the Revolution. All of Chinese history, spanning significantly back [...] Was the reform of Myj Lę Fą a recurrence? That is how it is perceived anyway. Or maybe it was only in the traditional Beijing opera that orchestras were inappropriate. And the stage in the Palace (old!)," 22 August, p. 83: "Myj Lę Fą exhibition at the Royal Palace. Stage decoration: background with wonderful embroidery, two entrances, cut-out curtains. Orchestra to the right?"; p. 85: "Myj Lę Fą exhibition with old drawings. Decorations a bit like European opera, but layered (one of MLF's many proposals) [...]. A photo with Meyerhold. A photo with Stanislavski – holding hands. Books on his own work;" 27 August, p. 104, Nanjing: "Exercising the eye. Myj Lę Fą attached bells to pigeons and followed them with his gaze."



be pointless to search for direct connections between *Acropolis* and what Grotowski saw and experienced in China. The relationship was much deeper and far more subtle: it had to do with the director's and actors' relation to their work, and also the precision of the performance. None of Grotowski's earlier performances had been prepared with such precision, nor had each detail been inscribed in the bodies and voices of the actors with such mastery as in *Acropolis*. In my opinion, this was how Grotowski applied what he had learned during meetings with Chinese actors and their teachers to his own work at the final stage of rehearsals. It was an approach to which he would remain faithful from then on, though in his own style. It is naturally possible that Grotowski had already been trying for a similar precision, and that the Chinese actors he met only strengthen him in his own intuition and desires regarding what was for him the fundamental dimension of actor's technique.

More than thirty years after the visit Grotowski told me that – in keeping with the procedures of the time – he had filed an extensive report on his stay in China, in which he referred among others to symptoms heralding the impending Cultural Revolution. I searched for this report but could not find it.

Luckily, there is “The Chinese Diary.” Moreover, the period has remained fairly vivid in the memory of Maciej Prus, who joined the Laboratory Theatre of the 13 Rows as a young actor. In a 1997 interview he described the period in the following way:

When I first came to rehearsals for *Acropolis*, Grotowski had just come back from his trip to China [...] I remember what *Acropolis* was originally intended to look like. Then it all evolved. I came to work after the summer holidays [...] I played The Maiden, Clio, Helen [...] *Acropolis* was practically ready when I joined the cast [...] I had to get into the part right away... There was a theory created during the first rehearsal, when Grotowski referred to his visit to China. He described the fantastic stamina of Chinese actors who, at the age of sixty or seventy, play sixteen-year-old girls. I don't remember the name of the most famous Chinese actor whom Grotowski saw, but I do have his photo at home somewhere.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after his return, Grotowski started rehearsals by calling a meeting of the ensemble, at which he described his experience in China. In an issue of *Kwartalnik Opolski* there is a note about a meeting organized by the Teatrzyk Małych Form (Small Forms Theatre), at which Grotowski spoke about classical Chinese theatre in the presence of the entire ensemble of the Laboratory Theatre.<sup>9</sup>

At the time, Grotowski himself also frequently stressed the significance of Chinese inspiration in the everyday work of his actors. This was the case during two public meetings with him that I personally attended: on 16 November, 1962, in Poznań, and with the editors of *Pamiętnik Teatralny* on 15 March, 1963, in Opole. He said then:

We do exercises two to four hours a day. The training includes the following exercises: 1) Voice and breathing exercises, based primarily on exercises practiced by Chinese actors. We learn to use the five resonators. The training also comprises enunciation exercises: an actor must learn to close the larynx. 2) *Plastique* exercises, based primarily on Delsarte: centripetal and centrifugal movements. 3) Rhythmical exercises, which are also

<sup>8</sup> Prus (2001: 164–165; 2004: 240–241).

<sup>9</sup> Kronika (1963: 85).

concentration training. Rhythmical exercises also comprise musical compositions which consist of dividing movements into notes, auditory values. They were practiced by Stanislavski. 4) Gymnastic and acrobatic exercises, inspired by Chinese actors' training. 5) Interpretation etudes. This is a specific type of tinkering with one's body very rarely done by actors in the theatre.<sup>10</sup>

The influence was thus most evident in voice and breathing, and gymnastic and acrobatic exercises.

In an interview with Jerzy Falkowski in 1964, Grotowski responded as follows when asked what the most important issues in the theatre were and what would remain unchanged:

What will remain is the actor. What will remain are actors' skills. I have in mind those actors who know what they are doing [...] A performance must be musical, but it is the actor's performance that must be musical. A perfect role always contains a bit of music and a bit of dance. That is why for me the actor – a master of technique – is one of the most important assets in theatre [...] Anyway, each outstanding and self-respecting actor practices such exercises every day (e.g. one of the most outstanding Polish actors, Jacek Woszczerowicz, not to mention actors in classical Oriental theatre, whose daily diligence and achievements are beyond our imagination).<sup>11</sup>

In the same interview, Grotowski went on to say:

In our theatre special attention is paid to actor's training and studying the rules of our craft. Besides rehearsals and performances, actors spend two to three hours daily exercising... This resembles research. We try to find objective rules behind means of human expression. The research is based on verified systems of acting, such as the methods introduced by Stanislavski, Meyerhold, and Dullin, the special training systems of classical Chinese and Japanese theatre and of dance drama in India, the studies carried out by great European mimes (e.g. Marceau), as well as practitioners and theoreticians of expressiveness, and also on the studies of psychologists dealing with mechanisms of human reactions (Jung and Pavlov). Without any exaggeration it can be stated that each 'Laboratory' premiere is born at the price of extremely hard, almost 'back-breaking' work of an ensemble of eight actors.<sup>12</sup>

In later texts Grotowski would also refer to the experience he had gained in China:

In Shanghai, I had the chance to get acquainted with the school of Dr Ling. Dr Ling was a professor at the Medical University and at the Beijing Opera. His ancestors included actors, who performed in classical opera, and he was an actor in his early days; this was the source of his interest in practical work on the voice. It was there that I first understood what a larynx is.<sup>13</sup>

In one of our discussions at Valicelle near Pontedera, Grotowski told me that he had not met Dr Ling personally, just his co-workers and students. The important thing is that the methods of working with the voice practiced by Dr Ling inspired Grotowski and proved useful in his work with actors.

<sup>10</sup> Osipiński (2000: 110–111).

<sup>11</sup> Falkowski, Grotowski (1964: 57).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Grotowski (1980: 122).

On 29 December, 1962, three months after his return from China and over two months after the first performance of *Acropolis*, Grotowski sent greetings “to Comrade Tung” in Beijing. He ended the greetings with the sentence: “I am thinking of your country and your incomparable classical theatre with great warmth.”<sup>14</sup> That the phrase was more than conventional courtesy would be confirmed five years later in a letter to Maurice Béjart of 17 October, 1967:

I received your card from Japan, and I suppose you have found many new associations, new stimuli there; I too have always found the *nō* theatre a very appealing phenomenon. From my latest exotic impressions I would like to mention that I visited Persia [summer of 1967], and I have also seen Indian Kathakali theatre. Aesthetically, it is a magnificent spectacle, but from the point of view of actors’ skills, those of the Beijing Opera were incomparably superior.<sup>15</sup>

This is a significant confession as it runs counter to a stereotype, shared by both researchers and practitioners, according to which Grotowski was a virtually uncritical admirer of classical Indian theatre. It turns out, however, that the founder of the Laboratory Theatre was not blindly enamored of Indian theatre and all things Indian. For one, of all the classical theatre he was personally familiar with, he admitted to preferring Japanese *nō* and the Beijing Opera to Kathakali. It is also not true that his performances were influenced by the aesthetics of one of the classical oriental theatres. What was really important to him was actor’s technique, and, more specifically, attitude to work, seen as both a profession and mission.

The achievements of Grotowski and his team in the Theatre of Productions period (1957–1969) confirm the applicability of a hypothesis formulated in 1949 by Witold Jabłoński, one of the foremost Polish sinologists: “The influence of the Chinese theatre [and its significance for the West] can be realized in a way other than through adaptation: namely, by laboratory analysis of a particular actor’s techniques; not by mimicry, but by transposing them onto appropriate situations.”<sup>16</sup>

The work of Grotowski and his team on *Acropolis* (1962, with successive versions) and *Studium o Hamlecie* (Study of Hamlet) “based on texts by William Shakespeare and Stanisław Wyspiański” (1964), provided confirmation of the above diagnosis: a laboratory analysis of a particular actor’s techniques with a view to transposing them onto appropriate situations turned out to be the correct way to proceed.

<sup>14</sup> A typed letter on white paper, signed on the bottom and top of the page (between the date and letter body) “Tung, Pekin,” one page. Archive of Jerzy Grotowski’s Institute in Wrocław, file 444: “Wishes, seasonal, holiday etc.,” circled digit “8.”

<sup>15</sup> In the French translation received by the addressee, this read as follows: “Je viens de recevoir votre carte du Japon et je suppose que vous y avez recueilli une multitude d’associations des idées et de stimulations nouvelles; j’avoue que pour moi aussi le théâtre no a été toujours un phénomène extrêmement passionnant. Quant à mes dernières impressions exotiques, je dois ajouter que j’ai eu l’occasion de visiter la Perse et, d’un autre côté, de voir le théâtre indien kathakali. Du point de vue esthétique, c’est un spectacle magnifique, mais du point de vue de la technique de l’acteur, il serait difficile à la comparer à celle des acteurs de l’Opera de Pekin” – Polish and French typescript. Archive of Jerzy Grotowski’s Institute in Wrocław, file 445: “Occasional wishes, courtesy letters, 1965–1969,” unnumbered.

<sup>16</sup> Jabłoński (1949: 616).

Grotowski referred to his stay in China and his experiences there in his lectures at the Collège de France. For example, on 2 June, 1997, at the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe he presented his attitude to the terms "Oriental theatre" and "classical theatre":

What, for example, is the classical theatre in France? Classical theatre in France is most probably the Comédie Française, while classical theatre in India and China means extremely ancient forms, passed on from generation to generation to be reconstructed, revised, and performed by each new generation. This is something of significant complexity and may be described as – artificial [...]

For this reason, any inquiry into the nature of "classical theatre" reveals that the borders separating theatre from ritual are becoming blurred. Even more: let's take the Beijing Opera. Is it opera or theatre? And what is theatre? It is hard to answer that question [...] The problem is that it is impossible to delimit a genre. A genre, if alive, will take on various forms [...] In the greatest theatrical forms, in the greatest performances – masterpieces – the borders separating particular genres tend to shift.<sup>17</sup>

A few questions remain. Who was Dr Ling/Dr Lin Jun Quin? According to Grotowski, he was a professor of the Medical Academy and the Beijing Opera; he came from a family of actors performing in classical opera and used to be an actor himself in his early days; this led to his interest in working with voice from the practical point of view.<sup>18</sup> Many actors of the Beijing Opera sought his advice with respect to singing and functions of the speech apparatus. Dr Ling was especially concerned with the role of the larynx. Grotowski confirms that Dr Ling was the first person to show him what the larynx can do.<sup>19</sup> Who were director Sun Wei Shi, Grotowski's interlocutor in the "matter-of-fact and professional discussion," and Comrade Tung in Beijing, the addressee of the appreciation of "incomparable [Chinese] classical theatre?"<sup>20</sup>

The Czech sinologist Dana Kalvodová, a professor at Charles University in Prague, pointed out some parallels between classical Chinese theatre acting and that of Grotowski's actors in her article "Zrcadlo pravého poznání" (The Mirror of True Knowledge) published in the June 1967 edition of the excellent *Divadlo* magazine.<sup>21</sup>

In time, the experiments of the creator of the Laboratory Theatre became very inspiring to the Chinese. This fact was confirmed by the 2000 Nobel Prize laureate in Literature, Gao Xingjian.<sup>22</sup> Izabella Łabędzka points out Gao's interest in Tadeusz Kantor's artistic ideas and in the acting of Ryszard Cieślak,<sup>23</sup> whereas in Lidia Kasarek's article, published in the November 2000 issue of *Więź*, we read:

<sup>17</sup> Transcript from a tape recording, translated by Leszek Demkowicz, verified by me with the translator's consent.

<sup>18</sup> Grotowski (1980: 122). Dr Marta Steiner from the University of Wrocław determined that Ling/dr Lin Jun Quin was a throat specialist and speech therapist, and an opera singer (singing tenor parts in Italian opera).

<sup>19</sup> Steiner (2000: 64).

<sup>20</sup> Osiński (2008: 1: 145–146; 2: 225–234).

<sup>21</sup> Kalvodová (1967: 24–30).

<sup>22</sup> Kasarek (2000: 11); Łabędzka (2003: 80–98); Gao Xingjian (2002: 43–44).

<sup>23</sup> Łabędzka (2003: 10, 95).

In his journey across the byways of Western avant-garde aesthetics and art, Gao Xingjian eventually returned to his native tradition, finding true formal perfection in the convention of classical Chinese opera. He openly admits owing this rediscovery to Artaud, Craig, Brecht, and Grotowski and their earlier fascination with Far Eastern theatre.<sup>24</sup>

The issues of external influences on contemporary Chinese theatre, especially on Gao Xingjian and other Chinese theatre reformers of the 1980s and 1990s, are broadly discussed by Izabella Łabędzka in one of the chapters of her book *Teatr niepokorny* (The Wayward Theatre) published in 2003 in Poznań.<sup>25</sup> The chapter is titled “Grotowski i chińskie koncepcje teatru ubogiego” (Grotowski and Chinese Concepts of the Poor Theatre). Łabędzka views Grotowski as one of the catalysts that transformed Chinese theatre and this is how she explains it:

This phenomenon is well exemplified by the reception of Grotowski in China in the 1980s. One could even hazard the claim that – in view of the numerous references then made to his *Towards a Poor Theatre* – he is the spiritual patron of the Chinese avant-garde of that time. Yet, his person and his work are associated mainly with the idea of poor theatre: with the rejection of complex theatre machinery and sophisticated set decorations, with placing the actor in the focal point on stage directly facing the spectator, and with the immediacy of direct contact between the two.

The Chinese avant-garde felt particularly close to Grotowski, Meyerhold, Brecht, and Artaud because of the presence – in their practice or merely their theory – of an “Oriental thread,” which made them seem “familiar” [...] All these great reformers of European theatre [...] acted as catalysts for the transformation of modern Chinese theatre. They became something like mirrors in which the Chinese avant-garde could see itself more deeply and fully. They also reawakened interest in the significance of the Far Eastern theatre tradition. Out of this particular encounter of East and West a new and original theater was born, encompassing both avant-garde and tradition, one that was both formally and intellectually contemporary in the best sense of the term.

At the same time, though, this is a theatre still rooted in its home base, in the Chinese past and present, a theatre that is global as well as local, universal as well as specifically Chinese.<sup>26</sup>

Kasarełło mentions Gordon Craig, whereas Łabędzka invokes Vsevolod Meyerhold. This is of no particular importance, since both highly valued Oriental theatre and were inspired by it in numerous ways. Both scholars agree as to the three other names – Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski.

In 1984, the Beijing publishing house Zhongguo xiju chubanshe released *Mai xiang zhipu xiju* (*Towards a Poor Theatre*) by Jerzy Grotowski (Yeri Geluotuofusiji), translated by Wei Shi, and edited by Liu Anyi.<sup>27</sup> During my stay at The Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski in Italy in the spring of 1996, I received from its author a copy of the book in Chinese with the following handwritten dedication: “For. J. Grotowski with respect from Huang Zuolin, People’s Art Theatre, Shanghai China 1988.11.15.”

<sup>24</sup> Kasarełło (2000: 11).

<sup>25</sup> Łabędzka (2003: 80–98).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Izabella Łabędzka’s transcription, Warsaw, 4 May, 1999.

In an interview given to Magdalena Miecznicka in *Dziennik* daily (7 May, 2007), Gao Xingjian spoke of his knowledge of Western literature:

I have read all the great Western writers, including Polish ones. Henryk Sienkiewicz, for instance. I was also familiar with the works of Jerzy Grotowski. I published a review of his *Towards a Poor Theatre* in a theatre magazine,<sup>28</sup> and when I came to Paris [as a political exile in 1987], I read Gombrowicz.<sup>29</sup>

Translated by Joanna Klass and Artur Zapałowski

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## Chinese Inspiration in Jerzy Panek's Prints

One of the fundamental topoi in artists' biographies is the motif of a journey, usually embarked on shortly after art studies and serving as a fundamental and crucial source of inspiration for the artist's further creative activity. Polish artists usually went to Paris, Rome or Munich; more recently they have also traveled to London, Berlin or New York. An interesting phenomenon at the time of the Cold War when trips to the West became virtually impossible, were art trips to the Chinese People's Republic, with which the Polish communist authorities conducted a program of cultural exchange. Due to the long tradition of Chinese art performed on paper, these trips were of special interest to the milieu of graphic artists. The most well known trip to China in the post-war Polish art history was the expedition of Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, who still belonged to the older generation of pre-war graphic artists. The above trip bore fruit in the form of a cycle of drawings entitled *Z notatnika chińskiego* (*A Chinese Notebook*; 1952–1953).

Jerzy Panek (1918–2001), a wood engraver and leading representative of the Kraków milieu of post-war graphic art, who was also a member of the MARG group, embarked on an art trip to China in 1956, right at the beginning of the mature period of his creative activity. "Three days before the October protest of 1956 I flew to Peking (Beijing). It was a shock, similar to a war; only a little different."<sup>1</sup> Panek's merely two-month stay in China exerted a major impact on this artist's biography. The trip became enveloped in a specific mythology which was fueled by the accounts given by the artist himself; some of these are not completely verifiable (e.g. there is an amusing anecdote which says that the artist aroused a sensation already at the airport by his total lack of luggage; apparently he set out on the journey equipped only with a toothbrush).

Panek took full advantage of the possibility to visit a country which was exotic from the point of view of a European. He stayed in the capital Beijing, where he created his works in the wood engraving workshop; later on, he exhibited his works in the local Centre of Culture. It was there that he organized his first individual exhibition which was very favorably received by the press – he obtained very good press reviews. There appeared articles which were illustrated with reproductions of his works. Panek came into contact with Chinese artists. He also visited other cities and cultural centers, such as Shanghai or Nanking. He even obtained an offer of employment at the university in Hangzhou. In Beijing, Panek met Werner Schmidt, a young art historian from the German Democratic Republic (GDR), who specialized in the graphic art of Menzel in the Berlin National Gallery. Panek cooperated with him in the making of a documentary

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<sup>1</sup> Panek (1991: 3).



1. Jerzy Panek, *Chinese Porter*, 1957, woodcut, 19,7x18,5 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek. *Werkverzeichnis der graphischen Arbeiten 1939–1993*, hrgs. von Dieter Burkamp, Keber Verlag in Zusammenarbeit mit der edition pro, b.m. 1995, p. 20

film devoted to the famous old print shop of colored wood engravings – *Rong Boozkai*. Schmidt – who writes about his encounter with Panek in the fundamental source on the artist’s graphic art, entitled *Werkverzeichnis der graphischen Arbeiten 1939–1993*, compiled by Dieter Burkamp – contributed immensely to the purchases of Panek’s works when he became director of the Department of Copperplate Engravings in the Dresden Gallery.<sup>2</sup> Panek brought with him to Poland twenty odd wood engravings executed in China, as well as a sketch-book. As he himself recalls, “I made 24 wood engravings straight away – from palm wood, from pear and from the planed down old engraving boards.”<sup>3</sup> Elżbieta Dzikowska, who published an exhaustive account of Panek’s Chinese trip in the magazine *China* in the year 1962, adds ten wood engravings and linocuts “based on Chinese accessories,” such as “‘Chinese Porter,’ or the ‘Elephant’ (the model is to be found in the Beijing Zoo).”<sup>4</sup> Ewa Garztecka recalls that “as an expression of gratitude for the exhibition, the artist received an original painting of the great Chinese painter – Tsy Paj-sza.”<sup>5</sup>

All those who study and review Panek’s creative activity unanimously draw attention to the crucial significance of the artist’s stay in China. For Danuta Wróblewska, Panek’s trip to China “weighed heavily upon everything in his life,”<sup>6</sup> for Gisela Burkamp, “Panek’s stay in China, but also without a doubt his contact with different fonts and types in his father’s printing house, were an inspiration for him which found its ex-

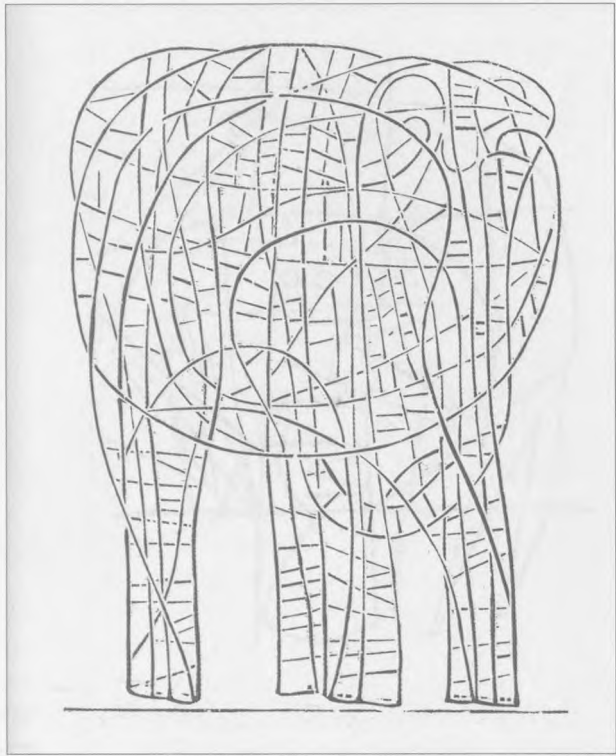
<sup>2</sup> Schmidt (1995: 21–23).

<sup>3</sup> Panek (1991: 3).

<sup>4</sup> Dzikowska (1962: 8).

<sup>5</sup> Garztecka (1958: 3).

<sup>6</sup> Wróblewska (2002: 28).



2. Jerzy Panek, *Elephant I*, 1959,  
woodcut, 65x48 cm

Source: *Jerzy Panek. Werkverzeichnis  
der graphischen Arbeiten 1939–1993*,  
p. 29

pression in engraving signs reminiscent of letters of the alphabet on wooden blocks.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, according to Jan Fejkiel “the exotic and the everyday life in China, but also the culture of wood and paper which he had known for a long time, as it were ‘from home,’ exerted a strong influence on Panek. What was new was his coming into contact with the centuries’ old tradition of black and white print and the abstract self-restraint of Chinese seals.”<sup>8</sup> In the above text, Fejkiel quotes from Wróblewska who wrote about Panek’s Chinese experience: “There he really got hold of paper, of the wooden block and ink, but he did so differently than in Europe. Buddhism, Taoism, the civilization of ideograms, the coming into contact with the scroll as a philosophical concept, the silence of concentration as a threshold beyond which there is cognition.”<sup>9</sup> Fejkiel continues further his reflection on Panek’s work only to conclude: “A few dozen wood engravings executed on the spot, within a brief moment of time and without prior sketches are the capital which will yield benefit and will initiate profound changes in his art. However it is the works grouped in cycles and focused analytically on a single topic, created already after his return from China that will prove decisive for his future.”<sup>10</sup> One of Panek’s series which the 2007 exhibition in Jan Fejkiel Gallery as well

<sup>7</sup> Burkamp (2007: 20).

<sup>8</sup> Fejkiel (2007: 8).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. (8–9).



3. Jerzy Panek, *Banner XVII*, 1962, woodcut, 38,5x30,5 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek, *Chorągwie / Banner*, Jan Fejkiel Gallery, Kraków 2007, p. 63

as the accompanying catalog were devoted to was entitled *Chorągwie (Flags)*. It is from the catalogue to this exhibition that the above quotation comes from. Yet the strongest reminiscences of the “experience of Chinese calligraphy [...] of the art of carving seals and the Chinese alphabet in wood” are perceived by him in the series of illustrations to Dante’s *Inferno* which the artist commenced to create in the year 1964.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, one can conclude that Panek’s stay in the Chinese People’s Republic no doubt played a big psychological role; it opened before him wide horizons onto the world and the cultural heritage whose artistic traditions went back thousands of years. However, at this point one should ask a question whether the immediate result of Panek’s trip to China: the cycle of works which were created there indeed did constitute a radical stylistic turning point in his art. Can we detect in these works any direct influences of the Far-East graphic art? As usual, the answer to the above question is a complex one. In order to formulate it, one has to go back in time and trace back the artist’s achievements from the time before his trip to China. One also has to be aware of the fact that at the time of his departure for China, the artist was no longer young as he was already thirty seven and he had produced a considerable number of valuable art works.

<sup>11</sup> Fejkiel (2002: 13).



4. Jerzy Panek, *Dante (Face en face)*, 1965, Illustration to Dante's, *The Divine Comedy – Inferno*, woodcut, 33x20,5 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek, *Dante Jerzego Panka*, Jan Fejkiel Gallery, Kraków 2002, p. 79

Jerzy Panek came from a family of artisans; as has already been mentioned above, his father was a printer. The artist made his first steps as an artist shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. As he himself recalls, “I went back to drawing in 1937 when I was eighteen. I joined the Institute of Fine Arts and I really went the whole way.”<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, he continues his education in the Krakow *Kunstgewerbeschule* which operated during the German occupation in the years 1939–1943. A numerous group of art students who after the war created the so called Group of Young Artists and later the II Krakow Group, attended this school as it constituted a cover for the continuation of the activity of the pre-war academy. Panek remembers some of his colleagues: “There are here such special groups of students: among those born in 1918, like me, there were Brzozowski, Hoffmann, Mikulski.”<sup>13</sup>

During his studies, Panek dabbled in various graphic techniques; among others, he executed a series of self-portraits and bluntly presented portraits-caricatures of his colleagues and friends. After the war, Panek continued his studies at the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts, which he completed without obtaining a diploma in 1948; he did so, so as to be able to take up his professional activity and earn his living. In the years 1948–1955, he created and exhibited linocuts and wood engravings maintained

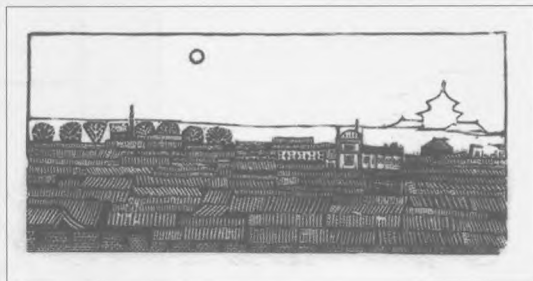
<sup>12</sup> Panek (1991: 3).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



5. Jerzy Panek, *Chinese Stalls – Beijing*, 1956, woodcut, 22x34,5 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek. *Werkverzeichnis der graphischen Arbeiten 1939–1993*, p. 82, no. 91



6. Jerzy Panek, *The Roofs of Beijing in Winter*, 1956, woodcut, 22x34,5 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek. *Werkverzeichnis der graphischen Arbeiten 1939–1993*, p. 83, no. 92

in the Socialist Realist convention. It should be added here that in her essay included in the above-mentioned catalog published by her husband Dieter, entitled *Himself Like a Shepherd. The Image of Man in Jerzy Panek's Wood Engravings*, Gisela Burkamp puts a question mark regarding the Socialist Realism of these works and considering their topics to be a cover for a purely formal search in the sphere of graphic art.<sup>14</sup>

Panek returns to the Academy only in 1955 so as to complete his diploma and graduate. In the same year, he takes part in the legendary National Exhibition of Young Artists in the Arsenal entitled *Against War – Against Nazism*, which accompanies the World Festival of Youth; he regards this exhibition as the first manifestation of the young generation which has decided to break away from Socialist Realism imposed on artists by administrative methods. It is also at that time that Panek decides to change his style modernizing the narrative vision of reality in the Socialist Realist spirit, with elements taken over from the language of the Western European avant-garde, mainly from the Cubist geometrization of form, which he became acquainted with in the course of his studies in the forties. Panek was a great admirer of the art of Pablo Picasso, whom he met at the Congress of Peace in Wrocław in 1948.

The works which he created in China are maintained in a similar stylistic convention. An element which petrifies the Socialist Realist narration is their documentary character. Among the latter wood engravings, one finds, among others such works as: *Chinese Stalls – Beijing*. *The Children of Shanghai*, as well as country and city landscapes: *Shanghai*, *Canton*, *The Roofs of Beijing*, or else monuments e.g. *The Great China Wall*. Whereas *The Chinese Cook – Beijing* is a characteristic element of the Socialist Realist poetics presenting the portraits of simple workers.

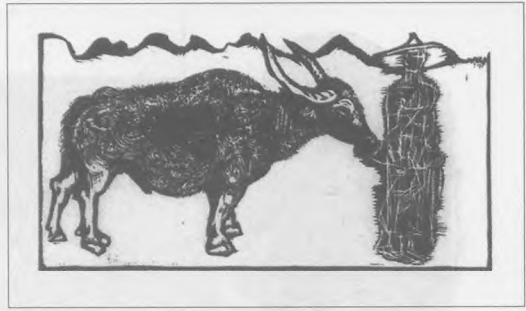
Side by side these more or less realistic presentations, there appeared motifs which heralded an iconography that was typical of Panek. Among the latter, one finds for instance images of animals, in such works as: *A Man from Canton with a Buffalo*, *The Image of a Donkey from Beijing* or some culinary motifs: *The Han-Kau (Hangzhou)*

<sup>14</sup> Burkamp (1995: 42–44).



7. Jerzy Panek, *The Chinese Cook – Beijing*, 1956, woodcut, 29x22 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek. *Werkverzeichnis der graphischen Arbeiten 1939–1993*, p. 84, no. 98



8. Jerzy Panek, *A Man from Canton with a Buffalo*, 1956, woodcut, 22x41 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek. *Werkverzeichnis der graphischen Arbeiten 1939–1993*, p. 82, no. 88

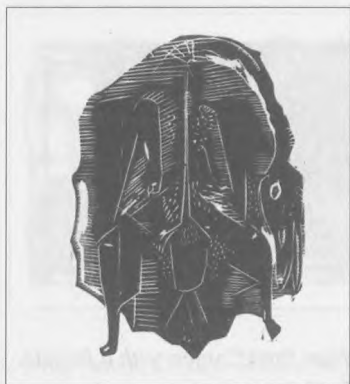
*Fish, The Nanking Duck*. In the latter wood engravings, there appears the element of deformation, and of abandonment of pure Realism and Narrativism, in spite of the fact that the artist continued in them the documentary convention. The way towards a synthesis is marked out by portraits: *Self-Portrait – Shanghai*, *A Woman from Canton* and especially the portraits of *The Old Woman from Han-Czau (Hangzhou)*. The latter go the furthest in the direction of transforming the image into the structure of a sign. The faces of old women furrowed by a network of wrinkles emerge from the black background, like masks or reflections on the material. In the above-mentioned essay, Giesela Burkamp writes the following about these wood engravings:

For *The Man from Canton* who is pushed to the external, right-hand side of the picture by a huge buffalo, and above all for the faces of Chinese old women, which may be regarded as the most beautiful and the most outstanding works of the artist, Panek devises extremely expressive features made up from squares, rhombs and rectangles which divide, support and build up the image, making us look under the skin and thereby revealing the rhythm of muscles and organs, the strings of nerves.<sup>15</sup>

The survival of Socialist Realist stylistics in the wood engravings executed by Panek in China does not surprise one. At that time, Chinese art was also Socialist Realist in character, and what's more, in the spirit of the Soviet realism. On the other hand, what Panek could have learnt in China was technological perfection. As he recalled years later in an interview with Elżbieta Dzikowska, what appealed to him particularly in Chinese art was “respect for craftsmanship. A nation of professionals.”<sup>16</sup> Elżbieta

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. ( 44).

<sup>16</sup> Dzikowska (1998: 123).



9. Jerzy Panek, *The Nankin Duck*, 1956, woodcut, 29x22 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek, *Werkverzeichnis der graphischen Arbeiten 1939–1993*, p. 86, no. 103



10. Jerzy Panek, *A Woman from Canton*, 1956, woodcut, 29x22 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek, *Kobiety*, Jan Fejkiel Gallery, Kraków 2008, p. 12

Dzikowska also wrote in the above-mentioned article which appeared in the magazine *Chiny* that: “What unites Panek with China is not limited exclusively to memories and some formal influences. In his Krakow studio, Panek often makes use of Chinese tools and he uses exclusively Chinese paper for making his prints; he reckons that the whiteness of Chinese paper is the best in the world.”<sup>17</sup> The technique of wood engraving was taught in Chinese schools at that time. Panek brought with him from China a set of

<sup>17</sup> Dzikowska (1962: 8).





11. Jerzy Panek, *The Old Woman from Hangzhou*, 1956, woodcut, 30x22 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek. *Werkverzeichnis der graphischen Arbeiten 1939–1993*, p. 17

small boards for wood engraving, meant to be used in schools. What is characteristic is that he never used them in his work. Contrary to Dzikowska's suggestions – Stanisław Wejman who tidied Panek's studios after the artist's death, is also of the opinion that Panek never used the inks and brushes which he had brought with him from China. He never made brush sketches and his set of Chinese tools for making prints has also remained untouched. What it was like in reality is difficult to surmise today. It is quite certain however that Panek did not directly resort to the use of far-eastern printing techniques, nor did he use water paints and rice paper, the way it was done by Chinese and Japanese graphic artists. However, during the process of printing, he did take into consideration the texture of paper and wood. In his wood engravings, the black is differentiated within the printed stain, just as in the far-eastern prints, creating the effect, as it were, of an imperfect impression of the matrix. As he himself recalls,

In China I have come across the greatest cult of wood. It was also there that I learnt to perceive black and white more profoundly. The Chinese see things differently than us. Their eyes work better. Apart from that, they have an instinct. They know everything about proportions, about the coexistence of black and white. Good paint for printing has to be 400 years old there. I have also touched some incredible papers. A long time ago, my father taught me how to handle paper, so as to be able to feel it. It was in China that I discovered paper for the second time.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Panek (1991: 3).



12. Jerzy Panek, *Head from Hell* (Illustration to Dante's *The Divine Comedy - Inferno*), 1967, woodcut, 27x17,5 cm  
Source: Jerzy Panek, *Dante Jerzego Panka*, p. 147

The far-eastern calligraphy became another source of inspiration for Panek. In her article on Panek's stay in China, Dzikowska wrote that:

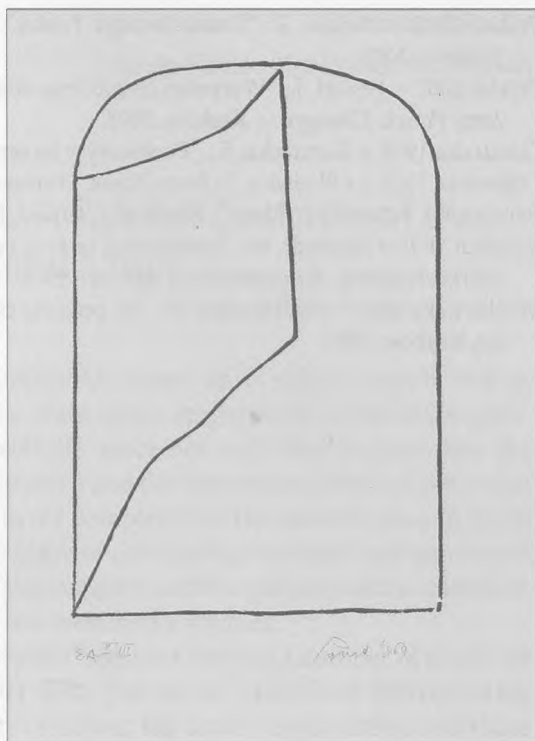
Panek was enchanted by Chinese art, but not by its most commonly known, official varieties, such as painting, sculpture or architecture. It was more its simpler forms, often associated with folk art – New Year images, estampages (rubblings), and especially seals that appealed to the artist more. He liked both the old – imperial and clerical ones – those to be seen only in museums and the contemporary ones which everyone may purchase from a street craftsman-artist, who carves them out on order while we are waiting [...] From the esthetic point of view, the sections of monochromatic, in most cases white-colored background play an equally important role in them as the hieroglyphs cut out on their surfaces.<sup>19</sup>

Panek's monographer Jerzy Olkiewicz reiterates after Dzikowska the topos about the artist's inspiration with contemporary Chinese seals, seeing in it "a continuation of this old tradition in the most plebeian form... a form of art without pomposity, without theories, without slogans – an art growing out freely and naturally."<sup>20</sup>

The succinctness of sign, the free play of black lines against the dominant whiteness of the background which are characteristic of the artist's mature period, to be observed

<sup>19</sup> Dzikowska (1962: 8).

<sup>20</sup> Olkiewicz (1972).



13. Jerzy Panek, *Gate of Hell* (Illustration to Dante's *The Divine Comedy Inferno*), 1969, woodcut, 34x22 cm

Source: Jerzy Panek, *Dante Jerzego Panka*, p. 193

particularly in his series *Dante's Inferno* – which Jan Fejkiel wrote about in the above-quoted article – may be derived from the aesthetics of Chinese writing, based on the calligraphy of a pictogram. Yet besides the very broadly understood inspirations derived from the far-eastern aesthetics, it was primarily Panek's own individual ideological and artistic reflection and the collective experience of the whole milieu of Krakow artists specializing in graphic art that exerted an influence on the shaping of Panek's style in the second half of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s; it was particularly the work of such wood engravers as Stanisław Wójtowicz – Panek's close friend, and Marian Malina, whose graphic art exemplifies an evolution of Polish and European art of the second half of the twentieth century, that had helped shape Panek's distinctive style.

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## Utopias and Expressions. Polish Art Criticism of the 1950s and 1960s

The brief title of the present paper signalizes the frames of its subject matter, that is, a change of the artistic paradigm from the avant-garde utopia to the existential expression. Let me, however, begin with my subtitle, since not only does it determine the nature of the presented discourse (art criticism) and the time span under consideration (the 1950s and 1960s), but it also points to the complexity of the tackled issues. It is not my intention to play the usual academic game of contrasting the value and amount of my knowledge with the time limit of my presentation and the patience of the audience, but to determine my starting point by a few introductory tenets.

To begin with, using the term “art criticism” requires making a number of decisions which are necessary to specify its proper field, that is, the criteria of differentiating between those texts which, as acts of art criticism, fall under my scrutiny, and those which do not belong to the area. Another problem in its own right is the nature of that scrutiny itself. Without getting into a debate on details, I assume that the art criticism of a particular place and time can be described only as an element of the entire artistic system which I understand as the structure of the cultural authority and the mode of its functioning in the space occupied by artists, works, institutions, and audience. Consequently, I do not approach my object of interest in essentialist terms, but I treat it as an element of the discourse on art with its internal stratification and divisions. Moreover, I believe that it is possible as well as desirable to seek relations between the dynamic of discourse and the decisions and value judgments made in a critical text. First, I consider the speaking subject in the text a textual projection of the discursive effort to legitimize the critical judgment – its foundation and function. Second, a particular conceptualization inscribed in the critical text is a projection of historically determined ideas concerning its nature, the way in which it generates meaning, and their social role. Third, a verbal description of the work of art is a textual projection of the available ways of seeing; and finally, fourth, the historical, typological, and axiological order affirmed by the text is a projection of the desirable manner of ordering tradition.

The dates referred to in my subtitle do not just neutrally point to a certain period in history, but they imply my effort to detach from the periodization of the history of Polish art after World War II commonly accepted by Polish scholars: before the socialist realism (until 1950), the rule of the socialist realism (1950–1954/1955/1956), and after the socialist realism. Surely, this line of reasoning has been dictated not only by the turning points of political history or the history of art institutions, but first and

foremost by an assumption that the socialist realism was in Poland just a repressive episode imported from the East and imposed on an essentially Western country to subordinate its culture to the communist doctrine. Still, that subordination was rejected thanks to the resistance of artists, critics, and curators, who in different ways managed to survive a rupture in the development of culture, return to their proper positions, downplay their cooperation with the regime, and restore the normal rhythm of history, naturally directed toward the subsequent phases of modernity. Contrasted with the socialist-realist peril, more and more diminished, neglected, and derided, modernity thus became, as it were, a synonym of culture as such, a repository of all the artistic, moral, and civilizational values. Understood in that way, it conditioned the intellectual and axiological identity of at least two generations of Polish art critics and historians who, in turn, conditioned modernity itself by their attitudes and ideas.

In the context of these two general problems – of art criticism as a field of analytical description and of the periodization of the two postwar decades – I want to focus on no more than two questions. One of them is the idea of the work of art that can be found in the critical texts, which most distinctly characterizes the change in the artistic paradigm. The other derives from my belief that there is a complex relationship between the intellectual projects of art endorsed by Polish art criticism in the 1930s and then in the 1950s and 1960s. In other words, I want to argue that the passage from the avant-garde utopias of the 1920s and 1930s through the socialist realism, which prevailed only for three or four years, and then the modernity of the late 1950s and 1960s was quite smooth.

Let me add just one more minor remark on the sources of the critical texts I will be referring to. Under specific political circumstances determined by the state control, in Poland of the 1950s and 1960s critical texts were published in the journals and magazines which were dealing with the field of the plastic arts. Since 1960, the most important of them was *Przegląd Artystyczny*, actually the only periodical entirely devoted to the visual arts (the applied art was discussed in *Projekt*, while photography had its forum in *Fotografia*). Debates on art were, however, held also in the so-called “socio-cultural” weeklies, such as *Nowa Kultura*, *Przegląd Kulturalny*, *Współczesność*, *Życie Literackie*, *Kamena*, *Po Prostu*, and *Tygodnik Powszechny*.

The avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in its constructivist variant, was one of the most crucial negative points of reference for the advocates of the socialist realism. Referred to as formalism practiced by artists who were isolated from life and concentrated on their abstract visual experiments, it was one of the forces of reaction which hindered the progress of the revolution and the realistic art addressed to the masses. No doubt, the socialist realists constructed their ideological and political enemy, while the basic differences between them and the avant-garde were to be found elsewhere. In fact, both groups had much more in common than they might have thought, and not only because both were more or less radically left-wing, but also for more profound reasons, that is, their approach to the work of art. As we know, at the heart of socialist-realist debates was the idea of realism, ambiguous enough to function as a weapon in political conflicts, but used also against the artists who desperately tried to find their way between Scylla of formalism and Charybdis of naturalism.

The meaning of the term “realism” was repeated by critics after the party doctrinaires, such as Włodzimierz Sokorski (first member of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party responsible for culture, then Minister of Culture, and finally chair of the Polish Radio and Television). Still, it was not only an ideological mantra, but in some cases also an attempt to consider figurative art; from a thematic point of view, including genre painting and portrait, and from an ideological point of view, associated with the Stalinist interpretation of Marxism and intense appeal to the audience.

A good example as regards that last issue are the remarks by Mieczysław Porębski who in his text on the Third National Exhibition of Plastic Arts contrasted the idea of realism and appeal to adopt it as an artistic method (“facing the truth”) with the postulate of augmenting the painting’s “appeal,” which to him meant “imposing a worldview by pictures.”<sup>1</sup>

The care about “appeal,” so often postulated as a must in critical statements, was supposed to be a remedy for crude schematism or simply the poor quality of works on “proper” subjects, a means that would make the spectator appreciate the ideological message. Porębski identified that care with the ways, visual conventions, and psychological devices which, regardless of the political and ideological stance of the artist, would engage the spectator’s emotions and once more reduce art, as he believed, to the status of an instrument of false consciousness. He wrote, “A realistic painting begins when all the recipes have been discarded [...]” In his opinion, the canvas should convey the truth itself, with no mediation of the artistic idiom.<sup>2</sup> In that respect, Porębski came close to the dreams of the avant-garde of the purification of the artistic medium and subordinating it to the truth of reality which would reach the audience directly in an act of immediate communication.<sup>3</sup> That utopian vision differed from the avant-garde ideas from the early twentieth century in the degree of radicalism: the sublimation and simplification of form were replaced by a belief that it could be altogether rejected or, as we would say now, put under disguise. Porębski wanted the truth to emerge from reality under “dialectic, conflicting, and historical” scrutiny, which probably meant grasping and showing by visual means reality in historical motion understood in Marxist terms. If, then, making a reference to Strumiłło’s *Right to Work*, the critic appealed to make the victims of class struggle die in the picture not in vain, he transcended Lessing’s principle of the fruitful moment, demanding the main principle of the historical process to be represented on canvas. Conceived in this way, articulating an eternal, universal truth and revealing it to the spectator in a pure act of reception, the painting came close to the metaphysical ideas of the twentieth-century avant-garde which, in the theories of Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich or Witkacy, imposed on it the task of conveying the universal meaning of the cosmos. As regards the visual representation itself, the task of conveying the historical meaning by a scene from the present reality could be fulfilled by Courbet’s principle of real allegory combined with Matejko’s idea of painting as an illustration of the philosophy of history. The former allowed the artist

<sup>1</sup> Porębski (1953a: 16–44).

<sup>2</sup> Porębski (1953b: 44–46).

<sup>3</sup> Turowski (1990).

to construct a natural narrative situation, in contrast to schematic patchworks, such as the paintings by Juliusz Krajewski (for instance, *Land for the Peasants*) at which Porębski jeered, giving a recipe for success: “never forget about the kulak.” On the other hand, however, by the proper selection of the situation’s components and the overall composition, the artist was able to endow that seemingly natural situation with a surplus of meaning, reaching beyond a simple identification of elements and emerging from the juxtaposition of allegorically rendered figures and objects from different spheres of reality. Just like in the painting of Matejko, the represented individuals and things were to become signs of the historical forces and processes which shaped history in a specific manner. The speculative character of Matejko’s representations, considered in detail by today’s scholars, that is, his preference for arranging scenes which are apparently real, but which in strictly historical terms could have never taken place, seems to precisely correspond with Porębski’s idea of realism, combining the probability of a given scene with some higher historical meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Next to such metaphysical hopes to reach by means of art to the very essence of the world and convey the universal truth in some universal idiom, the critics inspired by the socialist realism, just like the avant-garde, believed that the value of the artistic activity was determined by their political bias, and that the masses needed a new, universal culture founded upon a universal language. The similarity of the artistic projects of the avant-garde and the socialist realism became even more conspicuous after 1954, when the former turned out to be a failure both as art and as an instrument of persuasion, and the critics appealed to artists to redefine the idea of the work of art. They demanded to develop more radical formal innovations as regards composition and the representation of selected messages. Modified in an appropriate manner, form was to direct the spectator’s associations, triggering his or her activity in the process of response. The point was also to “engage the great themes of our time” – not due to the official need, but because of “one’s own personal experience and understanding of the hierarchy of the ongoing processes and issues; by one’s own choice, made on one’s own account.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, the starting point of a realistic painting defined in that way was an emotional reaction to a universal principle discerned in reality. Porębski wrote: “Borowczyk enjoys the reality, he affirms it because he believes in its development.”<sup>6</sup> The idea of expression, which appeared in this essay, was indeed quite particular. Unlike in the theories of symbolism or, later, the avant-garde, emotion was considered by the critic as an instrument of reaching to the essence of reality, creation, and the response of the audience. As such, emotion was superior to intellect, since as an effect of grasping the truth of history and the world, described verbally by reason, it signified the recognition of the location of a given fragment of reality in the common experience of history.

Quite similar were the appeals for more emphasis on form (not as illusion) and emotion by Ryszard Stanisławski who, writing about an exhibition of Guttuso, argued

<sup>4</sup> Malinowski (1987).

<sup>5</sup> Porębski (1954: 47).

<sup>6</sup> Porębski (1954: 46).



that beside the political correctness of the Italian artist, an important reason for his success was the power of emotion and “well arranged geometry of the pictorial field.”<sup>7</sup> Other publications showing the same bent were a 1953 article by Elżbieta Grabska and Roman Zimand,<sup>8</sup> a 1954 Szymon Bojko’s essay on a painting by Andrzej Wróblewski,<sup>9</sup> and the texts of Aleksander Wallis<sup>10</sup> and Andrzej Jakimowicz,<sup>11</sup> published also in 1954. As regards the problem of form, the climax was a statement by Wojciech Fangor, made in a debate during the eleventh meeting of the Council of Culture and Art. Fangor said explicitly that without condensation, reduction, and metaphor – the contributions of abstraction, there was no good poster, film, stage design or architecture. In that way, he eventually identified the socialist realism with formalism.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, I am not trying to downplay the differences between the avant-garde and the socialist-realist ideas, but instead of looking for them in the aspects of the painting’s form or function, I would rather find them in the projected dynamic of response – the creation of the painting’s meanings. Ultimately, the Polish socialist-realist dream of the condensed, metaphorical, and emotionally inspiring idiom reduced the process of generating meaning to the triggering of associations by the painterly substance, almost like in Kandinsky’s theory. The difference was that Kandinsky preferred the universal meaning of pure visibility, while the semantic associations were to him just a desirable or even necessary, but still not ultimate horizon of meaning. They were to be transcended in the process of the purification of meanings liberated from the burden of form to give way to the spiritual. On the contrary, the socialist-realists not only required associations to have their ideologically correct meaning, but also considered them the end of the process of response and the fulfillment of the painting’s function.

As I have demonstrated, the socialist-realist ideas of the Polish critics from the 1950s had much in common with the avant-garde utopias, even though at that time they did everything to deny the affinities which seem obvious today. The same refers to the Polish modernity of the late 1950s and early 1960s, perhaps even to a higher degree. In my opinion, one may misunderstand it without recognizing it as a specific version of the avant-garde tradition filtered through the experience of the socialist realism. It appears that in the context of the critical statements of the period one should perceive the Polish modernity as an element of a tripartite system including the avant-garde, the socialist realism, and modernity itself, and not just as an order of the binary oppositions, such as the avant-garde versus socialist realism or the socialist realism versus modernity, suggesting the return to development of modern art suspended by the socialist-realist episode. In fact, however, the advocates of the Polish post-socialist-realist modernity, quite often former socialist-realists themselves, turned the Polish tradition of the constructivist avant-garde into a strongly negative point of reference. In their view, the avant-garde compromised itself by its naïve utopianism and equally naïve cult

<sup>7</sup> Stanisławski (1954: 46–53).

<sup>8</sup> Grabska, Zimand (1953: 32–43).

<sup>9</sup> Bojko (1954: 3).

<sup>10</sup> Wallis (1954: 5).

<sup>11</sup> Jakimowicz (1954: 11–16).

<sup>12</sup> Fangor (1954: 3).

of the intellect, both undermined by the atrocities of war. Besides, it dissolved in the mass culture and fell apart into a number of personal conflicts for the domination on the market. The critics believed that the later Polish modernity opposed to that tradition direct life experience. First, as in the texts by Tadeusz Kantor or Janusz Bogucki, the point was to reinterpret in rationalist terms the gesture abstract painting of the West as an effect of inventing an immediate and music-like visual idiom which, in Kantor's view, not only liberated the emotional energy from the painterly form, but also, by the apotheosis of the matter, reached to its secret nature discovered in the laboratories of the physicists researching its atomic structure. In such a perspective, abstraction was interpreted in mimetological terms as a visualization of the present knowledge of the micro- and macrocosm, and as an analogue of the modern scientific imagination. Thus, the socialist-realist rule of connecting painting and reality was maintained in a specific manner. Some time later, the essays of Kantor and Porębski brought still another reading of that relationship: both of them emphasized the role of the painterly matter and stressed the importance of chance as a starting point in the struggle with matter. Rejecting the intellectual dominant in the art of the early twentieth century and appreciating the role of the Dadaists and surrealists, they still did not make chance the ultimate aspect of artistic activity, but its beginning. Kantor wrote: "Only the interference of chance in painting turned out decisive. Chance in painting occurs whenever the painterly matter of any kind defines itself and forms itself independently, while the human factor is reduced to the inspiring stimulus, the first gesture and primary motion [...] Only the control over chance creates a new reality [...] It is the moment when human action opposes the activity of the matter."<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the presented theories maintained the connection of painting and reality not by imagery, symbolism or the emotional atmosphere fostered by the control over the universe of the painterly form, but by the struggle with the element of the matter or, more precisely, by comparing that struggle with real life, and by the historically and subjectively specific "kind of behavior" in it. Such an idea of art, with no direct references to existentialism but very close to Rosenberg's action painting, made Kantor write: "Here there is no longer any imitation of the imagined reality. A painting becomes creation itself and a manifestation of life – its continuation."<sup>14</sup>

As we can see, on the one hand, the modern, unrestricted abstraction echoed the avant-garde dream of the universal idiom, in that case exemplified by the control over the matter approached as the vehicle of meaning, while on the other, it favored positive connection of art and life – struggling with the matter as the basic value, and the analogy of the artistic intention and scientific thought. In general, all that placed modern art within the socialist-realist system of values. In the quasi-ideological language, the artist's struggle with the painterly matter became close to the daily toiling of the worker,

<sup>13</sup> Kantor (1957: 6). Porębski wrote similarly, calling into question the definition of Seuphor's abstract painting based on categories of the purity of colors and composition; in Porębski's opinion, modern abstraction challenges the world through the establishment of a fragmentary yet true order of freedom; Porębski (1957: 6). As it seems, Porębski did not, as Markowska suggested, support informel from an aesthetic position but from an existential one; see: Markowska (2003: 236).

<sup>14</sup> Kantor (1955: 3).

which was supposed to make that new abstraction significantly and favorably different from the intellectual, theoretical, and autonomous geometrical abstraction of the pre-war avant-garde and its purely visual, cool satisfaction. Still, what connected the Polish art of the late 1950s and early 1960s with the Western modernism of the same period was the category of expression as an immediate equivalent of existential experience, while chance and the unconscious guaranteed the authenticity of the artistic truth.

In the critical texts of the late 1950s, the most popular version of the expressive art became the simplest one. They also followed the avant-garde dream of the transparent form and communication without barriers, replacing the cipher of conventions. The most important, however, was the emotional message of the work of art, though not in the sense of individual experience but the common emotions legitimized by its connection with a particular moment of history. That was, of course, related to a specific conception of the work as an area of an emotional encounter of the artist and the spectator, whose communication was guaranteed by the historically determined emotional universals. Hence, the truth conveyed by the work of art acquired an emotional value, while the form became emotive so that only approaching it through feeling might lead to truth. In the process of response, that feeling was translated into a series of associations articulated in quite a literary manner. Critics wrote about the green surfaces of fear, lines vibrating with nervous tension or a premonition of the catastrophe triggered by abstract forms. On the one hand, it was a continuation of the avant-garde ideas of the artistic language proposed by Kandinsky, on the other, an attempt to renew the socialist realism by the idiom of condensation and metaphor, able to convey the worldview developed by the communist ideologies.

An avant-garde belief in the direct connection of art and the world, manifested by the necessary utilitarianism of the former, was one of the strongest links bringing together the avant-garde idea of art, the socialist realism, and Polish modernity. Abstraction could be justified and explained by its message which allowed the audience to feel and understand the world in its historical development, while the ideas of the rational organization of space, inscribed in the conceptions of Polish modernists (Oskar Hansen) concerning architecture and urban planning, could be presented and put into practice under the communist regime.

Some critics, such as Jerzy Stajuda, Mariusz Tchorek or Barbara Majewska, did not endorse that utilitarian paradigm, focusing on the Greenbergian historical dynamic of the medium rather than on the Rosenbergian expression. They defined the work of art as a result of the artist's solutions of problems determined by tradition, such as a relationship between the contour and color, the surface and the space. In that case, one might think that the knot of the avant-garde and the socialist realism was perhaps most effectively transcended – neither the belief in the artistic mission of saving the world, nor the conviction that art should persuade people to follow the right way dominated their readiness to consider the processes going on in art, the limits of the artwork, and the riddles of creation which must always address the same question: "how to do it?"

Still, in all those cases – of the dominant significance of the artist's gesture, of the form reduced to the associative content, of the pragmatism of rationalizing human environment, and of stressing the autonomy of art – what disappeared from sight was

the necessity to reflect on the political control over the artwork. When the time of the socialist realism was over, it was no longer direct ideological oppression, but a much more subtle game of subordination by punishment and reward, by recuperation and marginalization. That game was played far from the mainstream of politics and life, since the farthest reaching conclusions from the avant-garde tradition were drawn not by the critics, but by the authorities. While the former concentrated in the 1960s on their disappointment with modernity and on the anthropological analysis placing man not so much within the frames of the historical process, but in the cage of his social and symbolic constructions, the latter, by imposing on artists and critics the limits of their liberty, became more interested in mass culture. It was the mass culture which, paradoxically, embodied the avant-garde dreams of the culture accessible to everyone and truly universal, and which turned out to be a much more effective instrument and ideological vehicle of power, according to the hopes of the socialist realists.

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## Modernism in Krakow after the Post-Stalin Thaw. The Krakow Group

After the death of Joseph Stalin a new cultural policy enabled Modernism in Poland to re-emerge again, since it had been banned as elitist and bourgeois after 1949. Although (according to the agreements of the Yalta Conference of the Big Three in 1945) Poland still remained a semi-independent country (till the decline of communism in 1989) and a satellite of the Soviet Union, in 1955 a new social consensus approved Modernism again not only as prestigious, ambitious and progressive practice but also as a splendidly isolated and universal cultural movement, i.e. neither involved in any direct actions in the public sphere nor commenting upon any current events. The first consensual style was abstraction. It was no doubt a manifesto of disposing of Socialist Realism – a style treated as Soviet and imposed. And it was formally sanctioned by communist establishment as a visual proof of deep political changes which, in fact, were not so far-reaching. However, it turned out very quickly that abstraction, especially the restrained legacy of harmonious and utopian art of Władysław Strzemiński (1893–1952) and Katarzyna Kobro (1898–1951), was something too limiting for Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990), a leader of the Krakow Group, who preferred more expressive style. After his stay in Paris where he carefully observed the avant-garde scene, Kantor came back to Krakow with new inspirations. The most interesting for him were Tachist paintings by Pierre Soulages (b. 1919), Nicolas de Staël (1914–1955), Hans Hartung (1904–1989), Wols (1913–1951) and Zao-Wou-Ki (b. 1921), whose art smartly combined inventiveness and traditional attitude towards painting with vigorous impasto technique, vibrating color, free and intuitive gesture of brush and spontaneity. Polish artists seemed to be exhausted by Socialist Realism and the necessity to pay tribute to the official state policy. On the other hand, abstract art seemed to express their autonomy in their private aesthetic investigations as a surrogate for any other autonomy not available in the country. The titles of Kantor's paintings had no associations with socialist ideology – they were loosely connected with the external world, using antinaturalistic and nonfigurative visual language. First of all, however, these pictures were anarchic, rebellious, and joyful for their contemporaries.

Poland, the first country to fought with Nazi Germany in 1939, after the war fell prey to Joseph Stalin's imperial policy. After the hecatombs of the war Socialist Realism was supposed to be “a convenient answer to the trauma” for people humiliated and devastated by war experiences, enabling them to reconstruct their subjectivity by offering a sense of new psychological integration.<sup>1</sup> Some artists treated Socialist Realism as

<sup>1</sup> Piotrowski (1999: 32–33).

a real challenge but the artists of the future Krakow Group totally rejected it. For them only a “thaw” and a less hostile and tense policy towards artists would make it possible not only to develop some formal experiments in the field of visual arts but also to act according to their moral code.

In Polish art history since the decline of communism in 1989 a debate has been going on whether the Art Informel style – a symbol of the end of Stalinism – is the first style symbolizing disagreement with communist establishment and a visual emblem of the subsequent phase of dismantling the political system or rather on the contrary – a symbol of more effective methods of communist establishment enabling some controlled spaces of limited sovereignty. Our art history seems to be a thorny issue because from the loss of state independence at the end of the eighteenth century art very often played the role of comforter through various types of parables. In fact, national narratives promoting heroic stories and good examples were more highly appreciated than impartial ones or unprejudiced and radical truth. And mutual interdependence between nationalism and Modernism in the twentieth century has been recently observed by some art historians. Art Informel, having originated in Paris, seemed to express aspirations of the captivated nation under the Soviet rule rather than a real status quo.

For Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998), a poet who wrote some art reviews in the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, canvases by Kantor were somehow disillusioning: they attest to the artist’s character and courage, remaining a demonstration of personal temperament, but unfortunately their aesthetic value was – in his opinion – low.<sup>2</sup> Such opinions aside, Kantor’s canvases certainly caused a creative ferment: they were so different from Stalinist propaganda pictures that became a symbol of aesthetic upheaval and disagreement. As Bożena Kowalska put it some time later, Tadeusz Kantor and his friends who established the Krakow Group were in fact essential for the animation of the culture in the city.<sup>3</sup> (Such were also the hopes of Tadeusz Kantor himself, who in 1957 wrote about the necessity of providing energy to Krakow’s artistic environment and giving opportunity to young gifted artists to come into view.<sup>4</sup>

Krzysztofory, a permanent site of the Krakow Group in the basement of a picturesque palace in Szczepańska Street, remained the place of artistic experiments and very soon gained the status of an independent academy of fine arts and an exclusive club. The beauty of the city of Krakow – a former capital of Poland, with its charming narrow streets and enchanting monuments – should be mentioned here. The vitality of the past created a very specific aura for modern visual experiments. Krakow, as opposed to the actual capital city of Warsaw, had not been bombed or damaged during the war. Modern, abstract pictures were hung at the Krzysztofory Club on the medieval walls of brick and stone and the effect of such juxtaposition was both calming and challenging. However, some critics, unsatisfied by esthetic elegance, claimed that the Krakow Group was not only a sort of fig leaf for the communist establishment but it

<sup>2</sup> Herbert (1957).

<sup>3</sup> Kowalska (1984).

<sup>4</sup> Kantor (1957: 10).

also over-extended high Modernism and did not support any neo-avant-garde youth movements because the artists confined themselves in academic formulas of autonomous and independent art distanced from the real world and new media. Piotr Krakowski, an art critic and professor of the Jagiellonian University, had no doubt that the best time for artistic groups to emerge had already passed when the Krakow Group was establishing in the 1950s, and because it had no consistent artistic program or character, it took the form of an artistic society, focused rather on common enemies than a common goal. And what they really disliked was not only Socialist Realism but also Post-Impressionist tradition.<sup>5</sup> The Krakow Group, however, evolved later on, in the 1960s and 1970s, and however bizarre its ambitions to make “the same” art as behind the iron curtain may have seem, in the 1950s it gave a hope or at least some illusions of freedom to many people and an elegant modernist aesthetics becoming an aesthetics of resistance against Sovietization. As one of the members, Jerzy Bereś, put it once: “it was an island of artists gathered in Krakow around Tadeusz Kantor who contrived to gain autonomy during Stalinist terror” and “a temple of high art” which defended itself against pop-art and relied more on photography than on one’s own imagination.<sup>6</sup> Andy Warhol – for Bereś and his colleagues a symbol of harmful “passive” attitude towards the real world – was very far away from the heroic position of an artist within the Krakow Group. They all wanted to give a new form to the world, to bestow a unique shape on everything and not to appropriate it from the outer world. Their ambition was to say “no” to the actual world. Therefore in the perspective of fundamental disagreement with the present forms and solutions, among the members of the Krakow Group paradoxes occurred: they declared restraint from industrial civilization although their attitudes were modernist and industrial development in Poland was rather very low at that time. They also distanced themselves from Stalinism but, even though the group was radically leftist, they were politically very placid and taciturn. It was the School of Paris which attracted attention of ambitious Polish artists – they willingly prolonged the status of Paris as the capital of the world art because it meant that although political authoritative directions came from Moscow, artistic instructions – thanks to the approved disobedience marking the “Polish way” of communism – came directly from Paris regardless of political circumstances.

Kantor’s abstract paintings made after the political thaw of 1955, with brush traces marking unprompted expression of the inner self and joy of life, were also perceived as a demonstration of individualism and individual experience as opposed to collectivity. But as excretions of the inner self, they favor the modernist cult of an artist, distanced from the outer world. Somehow these spontaneous paintings are a withdrawal from Kantor’s own beliefs into an “intensified realism” of the 1940s. Some critics call that withdrawal from the outer world the revenge of Socialist Realism: the artist was so despondent over any form of Realism during Stalinism that eventually he was satisfied with neutral forms so easily transformed into academism.

<sup>5</sup> Krakowski (1993: 168).

<sup>6</sup> Bereś (1992: 6, 18).

As Zbigniew Warpechowski claimed, after Henryk Stażewski (1894–1988): “An artist who does not fight does not deserve to be called an artist.”<sup>7</sup> But we cannot all too easily blame the artists for their aloofness when expressing war experiences. There was no language to recount the atrocities and a strategy of taciturnity was chosen by many of them as a condition of a new post-war opening. It was only in 1975 that Tadeusz Kantor managed to refer to the war trauma while creating his masterpiece, a theatrical performance *The Dead Class*.

The Krakow Group, transformed from the Group of Young Artists founded in 1946 and officially organized in 1957 as an elitist club of high modernist art, gathered many outstanding artists. Among them we find some senior artists active before World War II in a communist Krakow Group (the so-called “First Krakow Group”) – as Maria Jarema, Jonasz Stern, Jadwiga Maziarska and Adam Marczyński, and a collective of younger artists associated with Tadeusz Kantor, painters: Jerzy Nowosielski, Tadeusz Brzozowski, book illustrators: Daniel Mróz and Kazimierz Mikulski. The youngest collective, called “Group from Nowa Huta” assembled mainly painters (Danuta Urbanowicz, Julian Jończyk, Janusz Tarabuła, Jerzy Wroński, Witold Urbanowicz), thus establishing the status of painting as the most important artistic medium. Regardless of many experiments in such techniques and media as assemblages, emballages, collages, found objects, environments, happenings and even a phase of conceptualism, to have resumed quality painting for the Krakow Group was a way of sustaining the traditional image of an artist as a painter, as someone who creates an individual style and world according to secret knowledge and in traditional media. All of them were opposed to unprocessed photography because according to them it destroyed imagination. Although scenes of Tadeusz Kantor’s theatre may have been influenced by black-and-white photographs, Maziarska’s pictures were inspired by press photographs, all these influences were either hidden or transformed to accentuate formal inventiveness, uniqueness and personal identity of an artist and his intimate signature.

Before having registered a formal artistic society, the future Krakow Group organized many memorable events. We can recognize the beginnings of the future collective in an underground theatre run by Tadeusz Kantor in a private apartment of artist Ewa Siedlecka during the Nazi occupation. After the end of the war the foundation of Artists’ Club and First Exhibition of Modern Art (1948) were undoubtedly the most spectacular milestones. The First Exhibition of Modern Art is known in Polish art history as the last free show of modern art before the obligatory Socialist Realism. Jerzy Nowosielski, who exhibited some abstract paintings there (*Winter in Russia, Battle of Addis Ababa, First Snow, Shipyard*), perceived the show as reckless and self-destructive, because the direction of political changes was then quite obvious for all the participants.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the show was a response to old leftist dreams of creating a cultural event for all political classes, of withdrawing from elitist spaces and problems and designing modern art especially for workers who should not be marginalized as a cultural audience any more. Therefore, groups from factories invited to the First Ex-

<sup>7</sup> Warpechowski (1993: 11).

<sup>8</sup> Nowosielski (1998: 56).



hibition of Modern Art in Krakow were guided by some participant artists and new pact above social divisions was formed, as well as revolutionary solidarity between different groups were underlined. The political establishment, however, had different plans concerning artistic development and the next, Second Exhibition of Modern Art in Poland, was opened after the era of Socialist Realism (1949–1955), in Warsaw (not in Krakow as before) in 1957 – exactly in the same year as the formal registration of the Krakow Group. The price for that registration was evident – the artists agreed not to question the authority or power of the establishment in any way and not to comment on contemporary events and politics.

Apart from Tadeusz Kantor, an influential personality and animator, man of theatre, stage designer and director, the unique role of Jonasz Stern must be underscored. He – as a member of the First Krakow Group established before World War II – gave the Group a sense of an avant-garde tradition and continuation. Stern, a communist activist, political prisoner before the war and Holocaust survivor, initially had the authority and life wisdom, whereas his artistic maturity came afterwards, when he managed to find a form to narrate his war experience – humiliation, fear and hope. In his art he used bones and skins of the fish he angled during summer holiday trips with friends. Those personally caught fish were the main course during canoe expeditions and what was left after meal served as artistic materials. Such poor and – it may seem – worthless bits and pieces were used to make art. The remains of fellowship meals testified both to the friendship during the voyages and to the dignity of any form of life, because fish were not treated only as food but as living creatures with their own dignity and a symbol of community with nature and its laws. Jonasz Stern invented his own language to mourn war victims, his dead companions from Lwow ghetto. But his compositions made as a result of canoe expeditions with friends seemed to have the hope factor for social bonds being rebuilt. Thus – meditating on life and death – the artist tried to continue after the war, to lead himself and his friends out of war's hell. Another famous member of the Krakow Group was Jerzy Nowosielski (b. 1923), who tried to make an almost impossible fusion of modernism and orthodox icons. As a result, he painted female nudes who emitted a mysterious aura and a blend of eroticism with sanctity. It made him one of the most popular Polish painters after the war and his sublime and erotic *Swimmers* and *Bathers* became almost a surrogate laic Virgin Mary whose cult was officially forbidden till the decline of communism in 1989. Nowosielski's spiritual birth took place – according to his own testimony – in the Holy Dormition Pochayiv Lavra in Western Volhynia, annexed to the Ukrainian SSR after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact's in 1939. But the artist was also attracted by the communist ideology. Although theoretically such a combination may seem absurd, it produced many amazing pictures: he called himself “erotic figure” with the mystique of nudity. His art critic friend, Mieczysław Porębski, named his style “eschatological realism.” We can presume that Nowosielski dreamed of a canon in painting as a visual sign of an inner order – that is why he found the strictly coded Socialist Realism initially attractive. But he very quickly realized that the canon he dreamed about cannot be externally imposed. For some critics Nowosielski was only one of many followers of Amadeo Modigliani, but for his admirers he revived modernist painting with the help of ortho-

dox tradition cherished by a religious minority in Poland. He also painted many Eastern Orthodox and Catholic churches, and his opus magnum is the polychromy in the Orthodox Church of St Mary's Birth at Biały Bór in Western Pomerania. It was built in 1992–1997 according to Jerzy Nowosielski's designs, with the collaboration of architect Bogdan Kotarba. The harmonious and ascetic interior is created by three dominant colors: green, red and white. We can see his monumental painting in the Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception in the Azory district of Krakow (1978) and in the Orthodox Church of the Dormition of Our Lady (1972). Nowosielski also remains generous to young artists as the foundation that he established with his wife in 1996 confers prestigious annual awards. Another popular painter, Tadeusz Brzozowski (1918–1987), remained faithful to abstractionism after the post-Stalinist thaw, although many details on his canvases suggesting tearing, ripping, exploding, nailing and hammering inserted a sort of emotional narrative. The pictures were very meticulously executed, with incredibly rich, dark velvet tones, with parts smoothly gleaming and shining as precious jewels. Brzozowski combined the traditional painting workshop with a unique sense of humor: the titles of his canvases were anachronistic, the words sounded intriguing and they gave a sense of continuation of the remote past. Such feelings of Brzozowski's art have their roots in ancient art and continued the tradition of some preceding Baroque artists living in free and rich Poland. It was almost as important as the conviction that his art was both modern and "Western." Adam Marczyński's (1908–1985) abstract painting became famous after an international exhibition of twelve socialist countries (Albania, Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, German Democratic Republic, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Vietnam and the Soviet Union) in Moscow in 1957. It was only Poland who showed modernist painting; other delegations exhibited paintings in Socialist Realist style. Polish department with Marczyński's paintings was the most frequented during the Moscow show provoking fierce and hostile reactions and proving that the Polish authorities were ready to protect specific "Polish way" of socialism after the post-Stalinist thaw. "It was very exceptional," wrote art historian Piotr Piotrowski, "that the Polish communist government decided to appoint Modernism as a practice convenient to built its political identity on the international scene."<sup>9</sup> Jadwiga Maziarska (1913–2003), another painter from the Krakow Group, inspired herself with photographs cut out from illustrated magazines. But she thoroughly transformed the flat pictures into three-dimensional objects by adding wax to the paint and thus creating a personal version of the objective world grasped by camera. These objects were unique and, unfortunately, not appreciated by contemporary critics. It is only recently that her art has been discovered by some younger curators. Older critics described her bizarre post-photography wax compositions as "blobby" or just abominable objects. Generally speaking, women artists in the Krakow Group had a relatively low position and it was only the methodology of Western feminism adopted in the last twenty years that enabled evaluating their work from different perspective and eventually appreciating it appropriately. In Krakow Group women artists were treated as muses, "angels" (Janina

<sup>9</sup> Piotrowski (2005: 76).

Kraupe's nickname was "Angelica"), but behind this courteous and well-mannered words there was a patriarchal and patronizing brotherhood of men-artists. Maria Jarema (1908–1958), another woman artist in the collective, on the other hand, never tried to activate the sense of touch in her works although she was educated as a sculptor. Her major works are subtle gouaches made of colorful and energetic abstract forms which permeate each other and seem to dance. Jarema collaborated with Tadeusz Kantor on stage as a costume designer. It is said that Jarema had a very unique position in the group, even as a female artist: she was the only person Kantor was afraid of. It is difficult to imagine it when we look at old photographs and see a subtle, short and slender woman. But behind her image – she contested it even herself by wearing men's clothes and with daily portion of cursing – she managed to maintain the sense of artistic freedom and intransigence. Although she died prematurely of cancer in 1958, she remained a vivid person for her peers, a symbol of courage, uncompromising attitude and steadfastness. Other female artists, already mentioned Janina Kraupe (Angelica, b. 1921), was searching for her inspiration in Far East calligraphy, while sculptor Maria Pinińska-Bereś (1931–1999), a proto-feminist whose emblematic color was pink, became famous thanks to her "psycho-furniture." Her soft and pinky environments furnished with beds or stools offered imaginative spaces for creative women: delicate and nice but always flooded with sharp irony. Maria Pinińska-Bereś lived in the shadow of her more famous husband, Jerzy Bereś (b. 1930), a sculptor and performer, who used wood for his actions and works as symbol of unspoiled "naked" nature. Bereś himself appeared naked during his actions and his nudity was a mark of honesty and simplicity – always possible, even in the time of political dependency. He called his actions "masses" and was playing a role of a self-appointed priest and usurping prophet, his imagination flooded with Polish Romantic poetry and folk imagery. Tadeusz Kantor once named Bereś the best Krakow artist after Veit Stoss, the famous late mediaeval author of The St Mary's Altar – a masterpiece made of limewood in St Mary's Church (*kościół Mariacki*) in the main square in Krakow. Such a comparison shows how fiercely the Krakow Group fought for fame and prestige, not withdrawing from the boldest statements to raise its status. Among book illustrators Daniel Mróz (1917–1993) should not be omitted as a designer of the trendy Krakow's weekly of the 1960s *Przekrój*. Mróz illustrated many books of important Krakow's writers: Sławomir Mrozek (b. 1930), a columnist and playwright, and Stanisław Lem (1921–2006), a science-fiction and philosophical writer. His illustrations are characterized by an idiosyncratic visual style mixing Max Ernst's surrealism with a large amount of absurdity and nostalgia. Another eminent illustrator, Kazimierz Mikulski (1918–1998), also a stage designer in a puppet theatre for kids, gave form to the adventures of a dog called Ferdynand Wspaniały (*Ferdinand the Magnificent*) by Ludwik Jerzy Kern – a popular book for kids of all ages.

It is said that the 1960s in the Krzysztofory Gallery and Club was a time of great dynamism; Tadeusz Kantor prepared many breathtaking happenings and exhibitions, there were concerts of young composers, exhibitions of Polish and foreign artists. In 1965 in Krzysztofory Gallery there was an exhibition of Pablo Picasso, very popular behind the iron curtain. A coffee bar adjoined to the Krzysztofory Gallery with a table permanently reserved for artists from the Krakow Group became a specific attraction

for students. They loved spending long hours in the dim light of candles there. Some of them came to Krzysztofory just to talk and some of them came to show their sketches counting on advice or help. In 1963 you could have met at the famous table an English actress Rosalinde Fuller. Occasionally, some balls and less formal dancing parties were organized in the club. In the 1970s the Krakow Group gathered the artists whose works were already in the most prestigious Polish museum collections. As Janina Kraupe expressed it, “we stepped into the museum era.”<sup>10</sup> The collective invited some new artists to become members of the society. An eminent composer, musicologist and playwright, Bogusław Schaeffer (b. 1929), and Zbigniew Warpechowski (b. 1938), a pioneer of Polish performance art, became members as well. In the 1970s, the Cricot 2 Theatre of Tadeusz Kantor became worldwide famous thanks to the loud and enthusiastic applause after the dress rehearsal of *The Dead Class* which was shown to the international audience of the Eleventh International Association of Art Critics Congress in September 1975 in the Krzysztofory Gallery. In the 1970s many society members reached their artistic maturity. The Krakow Group was never dissolved but its presence on the artistic scene became less visible after the death of its leader Tadeusz Kantor in 1990. In 2008 Jerzy Bereś announced that the actual Group of Krakow meets every Thursday between 2 and 5 p.m. in the Europejska Cafe. But he also admitted that there were only three permanent frequenters of the meetings: Bereś himself, artist Janina Kraupe and Józef Chrobak, director of the society.<sup>11</sup>

According to Jerzy Bereś, the post-war Krakow Group was established not to continue the avant-garde tradition but first of all to defend the ego and personal identity against totalitarian captivation.<sup>12</sup> Writer Jan Józef Szczepański used a medical metaphor once, describing the role of the Krakow Group in the city: it was a beneficial antitoxin which protected Polish culture against the plague of totalitarianism.<sup>13</sup> For him, recalling the Krakow Group means inspiring non-conformist rebels and mavericks in the old royal city and former capital of Poland. As he asserts, it should be a duty of the actual city establishment. Because the tradition of civilian disagreement forming institutional structures and proving the sense of a voluntary community in the society compelled to unite according to imposed patterns shows how fruitful a consistent “no” pronounced by artists could be. But even without such pompous language, we must admit that some masterpieces created within the Krakow Group became real and important for many of us as personal facts and events of our life. *Eels’ Destiny* (1965) and *Red Chart* (1971) – assemblages by Jonasz Stern or *Composition* (1970) by Jadwiga Maziarska, all to be seen in the National Museum in Krakow, and *The Dead Class* – a theatrical performance by Tadeusz Kantor, available now only as a recorded event, became the “better” fragments of our life.

<sup>10</sup> Kraupe (2008: 8).

<sup>11</sup> Bereś (2008: 65).

<sup>12</sup> Bereś (2002: 157).

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## Nicely Painted, Perfectly Done, Well Sold

We have several spectacular worldwide careers of a number of Polish artists of the 1990s. The whole decade was characterized of a very good reception of Polish art. By any standards, three artists from the Krakow's based *Grupa Ładnie* (the "Nicely Done Group")<sup>1</sup> have achieved a phenomenal success, since Wilhelm Sasnal (1972), Marcin Maciejowski (1974) and Rafał Bujnowski (1974) are currently at the top of the international art scene. Sasnal was not only the hero of the Saatchi's Exhibition *Triumph of Painting* held in London in 2005, but is also the author of paintings with prices over 450 000 US dollars and still raising. The very title of the exhibition in itself is an indicator of his achievements, yet he has got awarded the Vincent van Gogh Biennial Award for Contemporary Art in Europe. His paintings and films are in several museums around the world. Maciejowski is represented by the Meyer Keiner Gallery – one of the best in Vienna – and had a one-man show at the Mark Fox Gallery in Los Angeles. Bujnowski is also quite busy with international exhibitions and residencies. The news on these artists' life and art is widely available on the Internet. Leon Tarasewicz, not the same generation (1957), has been working longer for his position, but now he has some contracts with the galleries in Milan, Vienna and Stockholm. The youngest one, Marzena Nowak (1977), former Tarasewicz's student, may be less known, but she is represented by a gallery in Vienna and Berlin. We can list some more successful Polish painters, but it seems to me that too many strange, "difficult Polish names" could be against the reader. Chosen examples are typical of the new approach and the rest of painters could find place in my typology.

The cover of the monthly *Znak* presenting the discussion on Polish art after the changes of 1989, published at the end of 1998, with three squares in rudiment colors and three brushes in different sizes, refers to the situation I find most attractive – the game with the painting. The discussion initiated by Jan Michalski has begun with his description of those crucial years: "the 1990s in Poland it's a time of progress and disappointments, time sublime and dynamic – seen from the outside; and egocentric, sharply pragmatic from the inside."<sup>2</sup> This sharp pragmatism gave the artists the strategy that could be described as "leaving out the sacred and going to the market," with a permanent confrontation with the mass media culture. Their pictures are mixtures

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<sup>1</sup> According to Marcin Maciejowski, the name was derived from the reaction of a professor at the Fine Art Academy during a show of his paintings: "He stood before my work, looked at it, and in order generally to say something (because he really had to give his opinion) he said 'Yes, OK. Nicely done.'" Rafał Bujnowski was probably the first one to notice. This is how the name of the group was invented.

<sup>2</sup> Michalski (1998: 5).

of commercial signs and signatures, traces of paint referring to “high art.” According to another participant of the discussion, Michał Gorczyca, the most important was the strategy game in which the artists played for the future, for a new century against the past, and the special role of the painting in this game depended on artists’ values and their attitude toward classical painting, including such great painters as Tarasewicz, the last one who believed in “pure art.”<sup>3</sup>

The last decade of the twentieth century brought about several paintings exhibitions, where painting itself was defined in various ways. The last one, *100% Painting*, was organized in 2000 in Białystok; there were also some others: *Painting borders. Painting in 1990s*, at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, in Warsaw in 1997; and in the same year and the same place – *Jerzy Nowosielski, Leon Tarasewicz, Mikołaj Smoczyński*, organized by Milada Slizinska to show artists associated with the spirit of the Orthodox Church and the “great painting traditions.” In 1996 there was an exhibition *Recognition. Paintings from the 1990s*, held in the Bunker of Art Gallery in Krakow. All these exhibitions attempted to search for special values to distinguish new painting from free expression of 1980s. The idea is still alive, as is testified by the exhibition at the Zacheta Gallery in 2006: *Polish Painting of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, based on similar assumptions, to verify a new set of the values, absent in the last decade of the twentieth century. Typical is such a need for defining through decade periods we can find inside institutional frames and connected with painting.

The surge of popular interest in painting of the 1990s had originated – in my opinion – in the special attitude towards this medium. Artists were not interested in classical painting, or all paintings of all time, but rather each one penetrated chosen aspect, something special for him. One cell of the whole chain of affiliations, Thierry de Duve said, painting is tied to convention not because of the medium itself, but because of painting’s associations with historical tradition of the *métier*. According to him: “That an artist works in the medium of painting means that he questions painting for what it has to say about itself and hasn’t said yet. His definition of painting might be: what no painter has done yet. The *métier* gets practiced, the medium gets questioned; the *métier* gets transmitted, the medium communicates or gets communicated; the *métier* gets learnt, the medium gets discovered: the *métier* is a tradition, the medium is a language; the *métier* rests on experience, the medium relies on experimentation. [...] The *métier* is always received from the past; [...] The medium is received from nowhere; it purports to actualize transcendentals [...]”<sup>4</sup>

Undoubtedly, Leon Tarasewicz (b. 1957) is a painter who since the very beginning of his career in 1984 has been asking – through his own painting – rudimental questions about the nature of the medium. Some critics see him as an inventor of a new landscape tradition. His monumental paintings, on walls, floors or columns as well as on canvas and other more traditional surfaces stemmed from the close studies of nature, its rhythms and processes. They radiate the “power of live” and “power for live.” According to Adam Szymczyk, a curator and writer, rhythm can be used in painting

<sup>3</sup> Gorczyca (1998: 36–53).

<sup>4</sup> De Duve (2005: 23).



in two ways: a picture of it can be painted or it can be forced into the structure of composition. In Tarasewicz's paintings rhythm is not accompanied by a melody, it plays a solo part. "While looking for rhythm, Tarasewicz renders the 'ornamental' character of natural landscape: a network of merging time sequences, a series of recurring visual impressions."<sup>5</sup>

Pigments materiality depend on free visual needs. Artist, as a master, who knows what metier is like, and how operate with materiality of oil-colours, is searching for something called (many years ago) 'free paintings painting'. He refers to the sensual aspects of color, experimenting with various combinations, both these tested by many generations of painters and new ones, generated accidentally. He uses colors freely, revealing its microstructure when squeezes tubes of paint or splashes it directly from the can, waiting for new fortuitous combinations.

To the question about what painting is like, Tarasewicz used to respond: "For me, painting is like thinking reinforced by color. In order to be able to define color, one has to place it on a drawing, within a composition or construction. The rest will adjust itself."<sup>6</sup> The artist armed with a postmodern attitude refers openly to several traditions in modern Polish art, like Unism with its discipline, or Colorism with its hedonism – two poles which could meet successfully only in his art. Sometimes in his query he goes back to the nineteenth-century landscapes by such Polish painters as Józef Fałat, what I discovered in Tarasewicz's installation for the Venice Biennale. *To paint*, he had presented in Polish pavilion, we can see as total painting covering whole floor in the Gallery, with clear attribute to Fałat, when he was fascinated with divisionism. Several other projects were ephemerid, too. They are the interventions inside the space of gallery, public outdoor space or in the open nature. In the artist opinion, these events gave him the possibility to experience contact with ordinary people who were not 'art goers' at all.

Tarasewicz's art refers to, first of all, the modernist tradition with its "aesthetic autonomy" materialized by the means of abstraction, but not only. We can also find in it other great traditions, like monumental sacred painting, or 'sublime'. These references form and intensify a typical for Tarasewicz (and some of his pupils) "actualization of transcendence." Jean Baudrillard published in 1990 *Hot Painting: The Inevitable Fate of the Image*, where he emphasized abstract Expressionism as the last illumination in the darkness.<sup>7</sup> The book became very popular among Polish art critics. According to some critics, we could regard Tarasewicz as the last link in the chain of "hot painting."

The meaning of flatness and surface as modernist's legacy – with Greenbergian tradition of aesthetic withdrawal from representation and concentration on inner medium logic – within postmodern interpretations has got much more complex meanings. This is further emphasized in David Joselit's *Notes on Surface: toward a Genealogy of Flatness*, who takes up the issue of flatness, typically associated with teleological readings of modernist painting, and analyses the meaning of optical flatness in postmod-

<sup>5</sup> Szymczyk (2003: 31).

<sup>6</sup> Tarasewicz (2003: 55).

<sup>7</sup> Baudrillard (1990: 250–259).

ernism. He finds the connection in Greenbergian modernism between optical flatness and psychological depth.<sup>8</sup> The best example of these on the Polish ground, in my opinion, are works by Polish female artist, Marzena Nowak.

Nowak is a young painter, video artist, and sculptor. She used to draw patterns on canvas. Her first solo exhibition *Patterns* took place at the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw in 2003. She is “known for her post-structural artworks transforming obsolete patterns and designs of waste fabrics into the fine art of abstraction. By disrobing these old-fashioned, the human body abstracted patterns from their original functions and using them as modern constructions for her art.”<sup>9</sup>

We can see the lines which form a pattern, a structure, but these lines are in some parts so thin and delicate that the surface seems to be losing its materiality and acquiring special atmosphere. I do not mean “atmosphere” in its spatially illusionist sense, but in association to colorist atmosphere (similar to Agnes Martin’s diaphanous monochromatic surfaces overlaid with graphite pencil grids paintings of 1959). Through the grey lines the canvas seems to dematerialize, although the effect depends on the viewer’s distance. It is the middle-distance view that gives these atmospheric effects, then, as you step back, the painting loses them. The artist herself suggests the best viewing distances by the lines on the surface which transform the experience from intuitional into a system. Rosalind Krauss observed: “Since this figure/ground fluctuation varies with the stance of the viewer one might argue that the object, now fully dependent upon its perceiver, has become entirely subjectivized.”<sup>10</sup>

Nowak is playing with the viewers when she “copies” the patterns: they are not devoid of their function and there is no “clear silhouette” on the canvas. This fragility of form does not require viewers’ movement. Artist emphasizes their ambiguity.

In her art, Nowak refers to her childhood, particularly to her mother being a seamstress. Her mother and grandmother were working during the communist period and their sewing patterns, taken from Western journals (or the East German monthly *Burda*), were the objects of desire and indications of modernity and actuality. New, modern fashion clothes were ‘homemade’ for clients and sewers as well.

Nowak still remembers her mother cutting out patterns drawn on fabric. Although she herself does not sew, hates it really, she still is so impressed and obsessed by the procedure that feel forced to record it. Her video investigates the simple process of sewing. Viewers can watch in close up fingers motion and monotony needle movement piercing tissue and listen to sewing-machine. The simplicity and obviousness of the process changes during projection. We are beginning almost to see the kind of oppression, waiting for blood. This collaboration between screening images and fragile paintings on canvas persists.

For a few years works based on her drawn patterns are – generally – on ‘pictures’; they acquired a historical meaning of the medium and are dealing with images. Some of them are on ‘masterpieces’, some on icons. We also can find pure ornamental solu-

<sup>8</sup> Joselit (2000: 292–308).

<sup>9</sup> Text, kunstlerhaus k/haus, Wien, [www.k-haus.at](http://www.k-haus.at).

<sup>10</sup> R. Krauss, *Agnes Martin: The Cloud Kraus* (2000: 87).

tion. Thicket of crossing patterns lines she used as a base for a kind of form-haunts like treasure-haunt. When I am thinking about the procedure she chooses, first of all I imagine her as puzzle constructor. She searches out a form and fulfills or stuffing with color. First one is the deepest – or like in famous song now by Sheryl Crow, ‘for me’ by Cat Stevens *First cut is the deepest*. Nowak’s art makes us think about Warhol’s *Do It Yourself Painting*, which “inscribe the viewer literally, almost physically into the plane of visual representation in what one could call a ‘bodily synecdoche’ – a heroic tradition of twentieth-century avant-garde practice that would instigate active identification of the reader/viewer with the representation and replace the passive contemplative mode of aesthetic experience by an activating participatory mode.”<sup>11</sup> Not only Marzena Nowak realized how attractive and exciting the strategy is.

Looking at one of Nowak’s paintings we can see how similar it is to Kandinsky’s – with a lot of empty space. We recognize the composition, it looks familiar at first glance, but after some time we realize that it is the destruction of Wassily Kandinsky’s legacy. Nowak’s picture evokes the essence of Kandinsky’s abstraction but it is not a critical reevaluation of this tradition. She uses the fragments of Kandinsky’s picture for a different purpose, her abstraction refers only to the masterpiece. In reality, it has no original. Like on Cindy Sherman’s *Film Stills*, there is no original as we already know.

Nowak’s paintings condition of being copies without originals deal with well known, high art masterpieces, or pop icons seen through fragments. These fragments could not be regarded as a reservoir of the masterpiece’s unique identity, but rather as the trace of loss. In her art-historical series she uses the procedure of fragmentation: it is to us – the viewers/readers – to put the fragments together and fill up the rest. During that process we could realize the importance of the pattern made of the fragments of a picture where colors are organized according to strict rules inside cells. These cells form a kind of a grid – seen as modernistic topic. Nowak proposes her own grid concept, born from her very feminine childhood memories. It relates also to the body which makes her paintings more sensitive. The geometrically defined field derived from constructivist abstraction in her paintings could be experienced differently. In all her works she emphasizes parody as a strategy to make art more “feminine.” We already know from Bakhtin that parody is dialogical: “In parody two languages (the one being parodied, and the one that parodies) are crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view.”<sup>12</sup> What is being parodied? Modern masterpiece, grid, abstraction, mastery. What is the language of parody? We can look for inside crafts, fabric, patterns. Where is the place for Pattern and Decoration Movement of the 1970s? I find these questions problematic and ambiguous. To me, her pictures present both the benefits of the pattern and decoration strategy and the parody of it. The movement legalized the existence of fabric and cloth within “high art.” For Nowak, however, more important was the aspect of valorization of loses and added meanings of materials and patterns. Her parodist appropriation operates within the signifying system.

<sup>11</sup> Buchloh (2001: 13–14).

<sup>12</sup> Bakhtin (1981: 76).

Marzena Nowak openly exploits the cliché of feminist art and high modernism. Her canvas that provides the fabric of its being emphasizes the affinity between patterns and paintings. Both are used as quotations from different fields. We could see that, “Its seemingly radical denial of authorship, in fact, proposes a voluntary submission to, and passive acceptance of, the hierarchical ordering systems of a code [...] It remains open whether those who pursue strategies of parodist appropriation know, in advance, that they will emerge victorious from the game of self-denial, once they have been processed through the rules of cultural industry. Or whether their apparent negation of subjectivity and authorship is ultimately only a device to encourage passive acceptance of the limitations that the ideological molds of society holds for its subjects.”<sup>13</sup> Nowak’s art poses the questions rather than offers answers.

First of all, we can place her art within the aesthetic order which, according to Jacques Renciere, is based on permanent mixture of all aesthetic orders formed by modernism. This strategy is crucial also for the artists gathered in *Grupa Ładnie*. Not only did they refer in their art to different aesthetics but also deal with variety of art spaces that not long ago were perceived separately. Their paintings seemed to record artists’ everyday experiences and their attitude toward the communist iconosphere, although the latter is not obvious at first glance. They used to repaint motives from various photographs, both private ones and printed in magazines, sometimes of very bad quality, and transform these frozen images of life in Poland into much more credible and real pictures. The form of their paintings combines the visual language of commercials rooted in pop art – which does not exist in Polish art – with some tricks used in propaganda posters, namely monumental portraits of communist officials which were commonly used in any propaganda event.

Each member of *Grupa Ładnie* has achieved his own signature style in a short time. Generally during *Grupa Ładnie* time they tried to propose a new attitude, where a signature was the necessary logo in the “culture industry” rather than the sign of genius or talent. We can see this in their strategy “from zero to hero,” new in Poland at that time. And they have succeeded (with a little help from some friendly galleries) in making spectacular careers in a very short time what could be seen as a new chance in new time, after the political system broke.

The group as an artistic unit was generally flexible. In contrast to the art of the 1980s, which often had to be discreetly exhibited in small private galleries, *Grupa Ładnie* active between 1996 and 2001, exhibited the works of its members outdoors, in public places. At that time it was popular to exhibit in unusual locations, such as on concrete slabs among blocks of flats. The Open Gallery which operated from 1998 to 2000 and was sponsored by the Art Marketing Syndicate, the largest advertising group in Poland, realized the idea of a gallery open for twenty four hours a day and attracting large audience. Smaller canvases were exhibited at the private Bumper Gallery in Krakow. The next step, in accordance with the logic of the Polish art scene, was made in Warsaw, and for this reason the meeting between *Grupa Ładnie* and the critics from the Raster Gallery in Warsaw in 1998 could be regarded as historical. Since that

<sup>13</sup> Buchloh (2000: 351).

time, Polish critical discourse has consumed “pop banalism” or “nice-ism” and artists from Krakow have achieved the star status in a short time, while their paintings have become the most wanted. An exhibition of 2000 held in Krakow at the Bunker of Art Gallery under the title of *Pop Elite – New Class of Polish Art* showed them as a new elite and at the same time an identity card of deep changes in Polish art structures. At that time, Polish public was ready for attractive, nice-looking art; ready for art to be sold as a product.

The iconography associated with everyday life and themes referring to the period of the Polish People’s Republic, very attractive for the public, were taken from second hand. *Grupa Ładnie* artist’s used to copy all kinds of “ready-made” pictures: photographs published in journals or from privates archives, TV screen pictures etc. They referred to the society based on media images of the world, who acquired the knowledge mainly from television, despite general mistrust of official media. Those painters considered the familiarity of television images as the most attractive and efficient, especially in communication with young audience. Those painters were able to successfully adopt every kind of image and almost every kind of representation could be an attractive illustration of the recent history. At first glance, the viewer can see only some parts of the image, as in close-up, their attention is attracted by every coded motif. Play with Polish identity, the revival of market interest and easel painting, were prominent in this narrative.

Wilhelm Sasnal and Marcin Maciejowski painted on borrowed images, ordinarily banal and pretty kitsch sometimes. Critic Adam Budak has constructed a typology of a bored society taking examples from Maciejowski’s fiction.<sup>14</sup> Looking at the art of *Grupa Ładnie* from the outside, from foreign perspective, we can say that the art of its members gives us an intriguing expression of Polishness, when according to the conventional view “Polishness” was synonymous with provincialism. Their witty irony, actuality of used language and games with quotations gave those typical Polish images more universal value. For the Viennese Gallery even a banal sorrow on Maciejowski’s paintings is pretty and seductive (*Traurig, schön – Sad and Beautiful*). In paintings with machine gun constructors as well as on reproduced *Mahmud Ali*, Maciejowski underlines the character of the appropriated image. The pictures painted from newspaper photos in a simplified graphic style are dealing with comics stripes and a very specific technique called in Polish *wcierka* (oil color – or ink is rubbed onto raft canvas with dry brush) invented for propaganda portraits. Those paintings – as well as many others – are meant to be not the representation but the transfiguration of pictures.

Goshka Gawlik (a Viennese freelance curator) sees nicely painted images of pop culture as a painters’ journey to the periphery and the margin.<sup>15</sup> Painter’s attachment to the medium provoked him continuously to confront appropriated images with “real high art paintings.” His comments written on canvases – some sarcastic, some just funny – are always very important part of the picture. The strategy of ‘crashing’ image and text has acquired an additional meaning due to the special focus on the written and

<sup>14</sup> Budak (2003: 98–121).

<sup>15</sup> Gawlik (2004: 36–45).

painted texts. Some associations with propaganda language made Maciejowski's references more concrete. At the same time he was engaged in a discussion with another contemporary Polish text painter Paweł Susid. They both deal with the construction of new Polishness images. Maciejowski's cycle *Let's Behave Normally* was an important part of it. The pictures from the cycle are not pretty any more – we can see them as beautiful. “Beauty became insolent, arrogant, aggressive. No longer innocent, beauty exerts pressure, shapes us, leaving no room for free breathing. Since beauty ceased to serve the truth, lofty ideals have been soiled. Although sometimes beauty does serve the truth, this service is depraved, degenerated, tantamount to propaganda and obtrusive persuasion”, Sebastian Cichocki wrote in the catalogue of an exhibition *Beauty or Painting Effects*. Although there were no painters from *Grupa Ładnie*, there were some other Polish artists with similar attitude to the medium.<sup>16</sup>

Nothing compares, however, to the written critics of Wilhelm Sasnal's painting – not only in quantity but also in quality. The painter used to characterize himself as a person very sensitive to images. Sasnal from the *Grupa Ładnie* period was regarded as the most important voice of his generation, not only in the opinion of the art historian and critic Andrzej Szczerski of the same generation. Sasnal, in his opinion, not only repainted the past and present. According to Szczerski, “the multilevel attitude to memory characterizes the diverse works. They seem to record the everyday experience of the artist, which often serves as the basis of his work [...] The idea of an inquiry informs the choice of subject matter and the very act of painting the focus on individual experience also introduces the Communist past into the paintings, depicting a society enclosed in ritual habits [...] does not position himself beyond the painting but rather tries to find his own sense of belonging in the bygone world.”<sup>17</sup>

Later on, Sasnal's painting evolved – the images from everyday life were replaced by others, associated with the Holocaust. Drastic iconographical shift and ‘touching the shame’ based on repainted images. Most popular are pictures based on the stills from Claude Lanzmann film *Shoah*. Sasnal's paintings addressing the role of Poles in the Holocaust are specific and transferred the artist into the taboo terrain. Swiss critic Gregor Jansen wrote: “the artist's brutal symbolic references, couched in the aesthetic of Pop Art abstraction, effectively parry the critique [...] Sasnal assimilates visual culture and removes it from the confines of mediatized understanding.” When we look at *The Translator*, a portrait taken from the *Shoah*, we see the face, probably female, deformed and blurred as a sign of the past: “the painting acts as an intermediary in order to translate distant events into the present visual message.”<sup>18</sup>

Sasnal's art was commented upon also by philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who interpreted it as “the impossibility of representation” and saw his paintings as a culmination of the logic of contemporary art. In his opinion, Sasnal's painting *Atomic Bomb* is not “the

<sup>16</sup> Cichocki (2004).

<sup>17</sup> Szczerski (2009: 85–96).

<sup>18</sup> Jansen (2004: 89–93).

image of the total destruction, but the destruction of the coordinates we realized as reality.”<sup>19</sup>

Bujnowski, who also “paints nicely,” expresses in his works some important general questions about a medium and its values. He deals with the function of art, its institutional life – including art market – in Poland after the transformation. He repaints images from common pop imaginary and simplifies their forms, presenting them as black and grey flat shapes, coming from photographs. Occasionally, he paints on walls or canvas only the marks of paintings which had hung there once or the smudges made by some unknown factors. He appealed to the viewers’ unconscious or conscious imaginary. He plays with audience not only when he proposes unfinished paintings quality but also proposes on canvas some evident unpropertiousness. When he was building his own painting concept, he penetrated almost all medium’s conventions. He had made a search query on the consciousness of all painting of all times in the context of Polish specificity and expecting the audience with very different aesthetic habits.

Close reading of the paintings by once Nicely Done Group painters goes far away from representation, images and narration (most in Maciejowski’s case). The critics analyzed canvas themselves, their painted surfaces, fulfilled with colours, or left empty.

The flatness, which is – as has been already said – associated with teleological readings of modernist painting, forms the prime element in each picture of *Grupa Ładnie*. Postmodernism has also served as its negation, toward self-referentiality within modern painting. As Fredric Jameson said once: “A new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense [is] perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernism to which will have occasion to return.”<sup>20</sup> If we agree with Joselit, for whom the flatness and surface are the examples of the interrelationship between content and form at the complex ideological juncture of modernity and postmodernity, we have to rethink the artworks by some Polish contemporary artists. They are really sophisticated in their play with modern and postmodern picturality.

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## Beyond Western Criteria: The Establishment of Criteria of Contemporary Chinese Art

Starting from the 1980s, the system of Western criteria has been applied among Chinese art criticism to the evaluation of Chinese art. It seems as if art can develop in China by following the way that Western art has taken, and as if it must count on Western criteria as the only authoritative mode to legitimize itself, hence it is no exaggeration to say that contemporary Chinese art has been built in the system of Western values.

Even so, it remains unsettled for Chinese academia as to when contemporary Chinese art began, which means its definition is carried out in dispute. A group of scholars, with Gao Minglu as their represent, agree that the contemporaneity of Chinese art consist in those specific qualities of contemporary Chinese art that are compatible with China's progress in the modern era, which is, in other words, the embodiment of contemporary spirit. According to China's domestic criteria, terms like "contemporary," "modern" and "post-modern" are defined in difference to the Western perceptions. "Modernity" in China is often referred to "contemporaneity," while since "'85 Art Movement" many have regarded it as an equivalent to "avant-garde."<sup>1</sup> From this logic we may get an equation in contemporary Chinese art, that is, "being contemporary" is "being up-to-date" and "being modern," and "being avant-garde." However, it is also argued that contemporary Chinese art differs from modern art, because modern art calls for self-discipline and aesthetic qualities while contemporary Chinese art aims for causing shocks and shrieks. If we sort out Chinese art of the contemporary age in its timeline, there are at least three basic types in view: the first one commits to being traditional in the forms of Chinese ink painting, oil painting and sculpture; the second one engages in being experimental on the basis of traditional media; the third type ventures to the unbounded realm of various medias including performing, video and installation. It is a fact that the latter two types have constituted the two definitions mentioned above, while art that takes traditional way is but excluded. So much so that we need to look back in time and see how the concepts of contemporary Chinese art have come into being.

During the 1980s, China's policies on art and literature were still heavily marked by the logic of the "Cultural Revolution" which was already past. Yet, with boldness and perseverance, many avant-garde artists tried to seek truth and to reflect society in the

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<sup>1</sup> It is claimed by Gao Minglu in his *Wall* that "being avant-garde" is what it takes to mean "modernity" of Chinese art in the past twenty years. Since *Wall* was finished in 2005, it could be deduced that the period began in "'85 Art Movement."

light of art. Through various journals, such as *Art* and *Chinese Art*, a group of critics began to champion Chinese avant-garde, which culminated in 1989 when a Chinese Modern Art Exhibition was held as a result of the consistent support from artists and critics. The same year saw also a political tension that affected art. In June, the Chinese Modern Art Exhibition was labeled “bourgeois liberalization.” In August, the chief editor of the *Art* journal Shao Dazhen who personally backed up the avant-garde, was removed from his position. In 1990, *Chinese Art* ceased its publication.<sup>2</sup>

This political tension, however, did not last long. In 1992, Deng Xiaoping made his famous “South Tour Speeches,” which paved the way to China’s market economy and made common prosperity the whole nation’s goal. In tune with it, the Chinese government treated the avant-garde with an open yet moderate attitude. Short of governmental recognition, Chinese artists and critics began to seek in the market for approval. The domestic art market, however, compared unfavorably with that of the West which had worked for centuries and was by then pretty mature. So starting from 1993, going abroad was taken as a way to advance Chinese art. On 2 January of the same year, the Hong Kong Arts Center and Hong Kong City Hall opened “China’s New Art, Post-1989.” The exhibition was curated by Hong Kong Art dealer Zhang Songren and Li Xianting, and its major artists, including Wang Guangyi, Li Shan, Ding Yi and Wang Ziwei, also took part in that year’s Venice Biennale. In 1994, Zhang Songren took the works by Wang Guangyi, Li Shan, Yu Youhan, Zhang Xiaogang, Fang Lijun and Liu Wei to participate in the Brasil Biennale. Through exhibitions of this kind, contemporary Chinese artworks gradually made entrance to museums and galleries in the West.<sup>3</sup>

Standing out among the exhibits were works of “Political Pop” and “Cynical Realism.” They were successfully pushed to the international front and for quite a time they were known to the West as the only Chinese avant-garde. This situation went on into the mid-1990s when both forms enjoyed rocketing commercial values in the world market. As early as 1993, works by Wang Guangyi, a Political Pop vanguard, were sold at a price as high as 20 000 US dollars each. In recent years, works by artists like Wang Guangyi, Fang Lijun, and Yue Minjun were often sold at a record-breaking price over 10 000 000 Chinese yuans each in the domestic market. These commercial achievements, despite its bubbles, indeed lifted contemporary Chinese art to a higher level of influence, which could not be obtained in the authorities’ criteria. Essential to the success of Political Pop and Cynical Realism was their intention to interpret art in a political sense – the former put images of Cultural Revolution figures in juxtaposition with world-known trademarks, as if to extend the political, cultural and economic confrontations between the east and the west into the field of art; the latter featured its comical yet cynical laughing, which was seen as a poignant social satire and by some Westerners a “hopeful attitude to save China.”<sup>4</sup> In this sense, contemporary Chinese art from its beginning was given by the Western scholars a characterized identity against the mainstream ideology.

<sup>2</sup> Gao Minglu (85 *Art Movement*: 504–537).

<sup>3</sup> Lu Peng (2006: 965).

<sup>4</sup> Solomon (1993).

Political Pop and Cynical Realism did not take the stage in the “’85 Art Movement,” during which conceptual artists could even get criticized for their techniques alone. In the 1980s, Chinese conceptual artists were mostly assigned graduates for jobs in colleges, high-schools or local cultural institutions, thus bearing a relatively free attitude in creation. They yet lacked support from the domestic system and found trouble in using public space to exhibit their art. Soon they were offered olive branch from foreign art institutions, and meanwhile, swarms of active critics in support of avant-garde went abroad to various destinations, among them Fei Dawei and Hou Hanru were in France, Kong Chang’an was in Italy, Gao Minglu and Zhang Qiang were in America. It was a time when avant-garde critics going abroad really made a scene.

From 1990s, the art field in the west came to be interested in multiculturalism. Many curators favored artists who had a multicultural background and also lived in the centers of Western art. There were even cases when identity and background outweighed artworks. Those who had claimed themselves Western-minded internationalists in “’85 Art Movement” suddenly changed to be “contemporary Chinese artists,” highlighting their Chinese identity. Most conceptual artists living abroad took cultural identity as a strategy to get recognized on the global stage, and to make it work, they often chose visual elements that were typical Chinese. Art in their hands is such a pandering tactic that exploring artistic language is by contrast overlooked.

In doing so, contemporary Chinese art eventually set up its image in the West. Yet, back in China’s own context, the special relationship between “contemporary art” and “avant-garde” was just the divide between contemporary Chinese art and other present forms of art. Since avant-garde was labeled contemporary Chinese art, it was all its privilege to get discussed and documented in the international community, which would be its guarantee to have a place in the world history of art. In this sense, “being contemporary” was more than an abstract perception of the times, it actually turned into a recognizable identity given by the contemporary international artistic criteria, as well as a commitment that it would gain itself historical value and power.

This process has seen the Chinese authorities serving as a pushing force. Now that contemporary Chinese art is becoming increasingly influential, and is able to function as the logo of China’s present art, it is to the advantage of the authorities to keep the ball rolling and make a good use of it. Their agenda started with an attempt to reinforce “Chineseness” in contemporary art, making it an integral part of China’s whole image. Among the major international biennales, the Venice Biennale is the only one that keeps national pavilions. Since 2003, the authorities have planned for four times the Chinese Pavilion, which has become their top showcase of contemporary Chinese art. Early in 1993 when contemporary Chinese artists made debut in Venice, paintings of Political Pop and Cynical Realism dominated the scene. When it was turned in the authorities’ hand, the Chinese Pavilion displayed works of installation, video and multimedia, so it appeared to the outside that contemporary Chinese art was part of the world mainstream; while inside China, it was a rather different. The authorities’ will was best shown at the Beijing International Art Biennale where canvases and sculptures still took the lead. The fact was that the authorities selected works of international character to represent contemporary Chinese art abroad, while within the

country they kept a domestic emphasis on traditional types. The organizers of the Beijing Biennale proudly announced that they stayed with this mode because they insisted on Chinese art values.

It is not difficult for us to see that Chinese artists, critics and authorities are by no exception bent to Western criteria. Their absence of confidence is as typical as the entire world's unanimous submission to such criteria. When we examine art in the twentieth century, especially in the latter half, we can see that almost all nations created artworks in similar styles, which could be unexceptionally traced back to Western modern art. Such an art creation is a tamed one, which has lost its diversity and become increasingly distant from its audience.

The Chinese obsession with Western criteria dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century, when the imperial China had its progress brought to a standstill for not being interactive with the global currents since the seventeenth century. The empire in the 1840s was underdeveloped and poverty-stricken, suffering its resounding defeat to the British Fleet, and decades later, its army was again routed in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. In the wake of such disasters, China's open-minded officials and intellectuals initiated the learning from the West of its advanced science, technology and culture, by means of which they were hoping to subdue the enemies. From then on, Western science, technology and culture swarmed into China, making it possible for Western criteria to prevail.

In the field of art, Western mode was advocated by such scholars as Kang Youwei and Chen Duxiu, who observed that “Only when the realistic spirit of Western painting is adopted can Chinese painting be ameliorated.”<sup>5</sup> It was true, however, that such scholars were objective enough when looking into Western art since they were keenly aware of traditional Chinese studies, as Lu Cheng once criticized that the learning of Western painting in China was but “skin-deep, degrading to a tacky fashion for common vulgar taste,” against which he also proposed that the indispensable approach to reform art was to explicate its scope and essence, which required knowledge and understanding of both Chinese art and Western art in aspects of their origins and transitions.<sup>6</sup> The route of later developments, however, digressed from what those scholars initially intended for; it led to the popularization of establishing Westernized art colleges and disciplines, which laid the Western teaching system as the foundation for art education, leaving China's traditional patterns of art-learning in decline. Objectively speaking, the effect of Western learning in China was never one-sided, it extended the range of Chinese art as demonstrated by the introduction of oil painting that added to the variety of Chinese art and enriched the visual experience of the Chinese people; yet it neglected the learning and passing-down of Chinese traditions, resulting in the distortion, or even the loss, of traditional art forms. Such disadvantages were evident in Chinese painting education, to which sketching was applied as the teaching basis, only to erode the nuances of ink and brushstrokes. Sculpture was a victim as well, for its modern education in China was wholly westernized, edging out the traditional skills to

<sup>5</sup> Duxiu (1999: 29).

<sup>6</sup> Cheng (1999: 27).

the mere hands of small-numbered folk artists. Moreover, the founding of the People's Republic of China did not bring any slight change to turn the situation around; instead, the art teaching in academies copied a mode from the Soviet Union, which replaced the former French one and became the standard education.

From Kang Youwei's advocacy in reforming Chinese painting at the dawn of the twenty century until the late 1970s, China underwent a series of wars and turbulences, as well as vicissitudes of ideologies, yet the wheel of time left one thing unmoved, that is, the consensus resistance to European modernism. The First National Artworks Exhibition in 1929 put Xu Beihong and Xu Zhimo in a debate on modern art, while Xu Beihong's realistic tendency was more favored among artists, as typically remarked by Li Yishi that "Cezanne and Matisse visualized their human nature in the overly honest manners, which, in case of being a negative force to Chinese society, should not be encouraged in this nation. I hereby suggest, in regard to China's current situation, one that had its people infected by mental disorder for over twenty years, that we exploit the power of art to adjust people's minds and console their hearts. Works like those of Cezanne and Matisse are alien enough to the Chinese, and once they are in vogue, society will shake and problems will arise, which in my vision will bring serious troubles." Since the founding of the PRC, many artists, trapped in certain ideological factors, applied art as weapons to class struggles. Western modernism was regarded as a symbol of the corrupted capitalist societies, necessary to be bashed at any rate, while in return the realistic art was left to thrive alone. During this period, art theories based on Marxism were the single choice that Chinese artists had to guide their working, and in this track, the research on Chinese artistic traditions was literally bogged down.

Since the late 1970s, China has turned to reforms and opening-up to the outside world. Through related policies it shows openness to Western modern art. Although up to now it has continued for only thirty years, Chinese artists have already tried all the experiments that had proceeded in the century-long history of Western modern art, and marched into the global arena of contemporary art as a new and pressing force. All the movements, thoughts and schools that took place in Western art, inclusive of post-Impressionism, Symbolism, Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, Structuralism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and others, could find their counterparts in China, hence it would not be overstated to compare the progress of contemporary Chinese art to a "Great Leap." Now it seems that most Chinese avant-garde artists are short of innovativeness in art forms and insightfulness into Western modern art. After all, the soil for Western modern art was different from that of China: artists in the West had practiced the realistic art for several hundred years before they have grown mature in manipulating oil painting elements and generated need for certain self-disciplined qualities in art. Oil painting has developed in China for only about a hundred years; Chinese artists have yet rushed to execute various experiments without having the whole picture of oil painting in mind, only to achieve shallowness and superficiality. Moreover, they are poorly informed of Western art theories and meanwhile deprived of the connection to Chinese traditional culture and knowledge in the ten-year long Cultural Revolution, hence since the 1980s, Chinese artists and critics have in many cases adopted Western criteria indiscriminately, which turned out full of

misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Such cases are most alarming when they borrowed terminologies from Western philosophy, aesthetics and other disciplines with scant knowledge of them, and tried to coat China's realities with Western concepts in hopes of guiding contemporary Chinese art through its own issues, ending up having Chinese people baffled and lost in their unintelligible renderings. Worse still, there were cases in which Western criteria seem to be unjustly overwhelming, as could have been seen at the Venice Biennale – when some Chinese artists were present at the exhibition – he or she would soon get much of China's domestic attention, as if being accepted by the West was an immediate achievement. The concept of contemporary Chinese art, as it is analyzed above, has grown out of the dominant Western criteria, hence its inadequacy and disorientation has already brought severe damages to contemporary Chinese art and its market.

This situation urges the establishment of China's own criteria on its contemporary art. It must be clarified that to establish Chinese art criteria is neither to return to parochial nationalism, nor to reject Western culture and art; instead, it is aimed at further invigorating Chinese art in the global environment, by which to contribute to the entire outcome of human art creation. The establishing process can be significant enough to function as self-examination on Chinese culture. Since globalization is continuously on the move, it demands us to respond wisely to the pros and cons of our own culture, and in the meantime learn from other's strong points.

The new system in the making should thus be open and diverse. It will investigate into its own tradition thoroughly while keep absorbing new information from contemporary Western art. What has already been attained proves that Chinese art is by no means isolated from the outside. It is the truth that in the past Western civilizations have exerted great influences on Chinese art, especially in the Han and the Tang Dynasties. It is also the truth that these influences are well-absorbed to constitute an important part in the entirety of Chinese tradition. The previous successes have made it a convincing point that the way to free Chinese art out of Western criteria is not to resist, or to unwisely antagonize, but to learn from Western wisdom to improve our knowledge structure. Much like we Chinese eat Western cuisine and digest its nutrients without growing blue eyes or bigger noses, the Chinese people come to grips with their art in the context of their own culture and history which, though impaired in the overwhelming torrents of Western culture, should by all means retain its unique aesthetic values.

Similarly, Western scholars should develop an open-mindedness when taking in Chinese art tradition and its criteria, with efforts in grabbing its characteristics and individuality instead of trying to roughly label it nationalism or isolationism. Tolerance and understanding to cultural variety is indeed the only way to obtain cultural prosperity in the future world. Although the history tells that Western art has learned from foreign cultures as well, like Impressionist art owed its debt to Japanese ukiyo-e, and so did Matisse and Picasso to African art. Yet, this uneven way of learning was rather superficial, for Manet could have been more unqualified in sensing the nuances of ukiyo-e like the Japanese did. Hence it calls for an emphasis on mutual learning, instead of setting the West in a commanding position to look at other art forms out of

curiosity. Only when the Chinese have a better understanding of their own culture can they ensure equal communications and mutual benefits. On this concern, I sincerely hope that contemporary Chinese art will harvest its own aesthetics and blossom with its own beauty in the garden of world culture. It should be an enjoyable art to all nations and contribute much more to the world culture. The shame is that contemporary Chinese art is but involved in a global capital play, which has nothing to do with the masses of ordinary Chinese.

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## Alike but Different: Common Themes in Chinese and Polish Art in the New Millennium

When I proposed this comparative topic, I realized how difficult it might be to indicate the similarities and differences in the art of the countries which are so culturally dissimilar. However, having a vivid memory of my visits in Beijing and Shanghai in mind and observing Polish art daily, I felt that comparing them and pointing to areas of overlap was especially tempting.

Let me begin with the title, as it requires a few words of explanation. The word “different” could be defined as “characterized by diversity and dissimilarity of some features, composed of units or elements which are distinct.” “Alike” relates to something or someone possessing characteristics similar to features of another object or person, resembling them in appearance or character, being almost the same. What is significant is that “different” does not mean “disparate,” whereas “alike” does not mean “the same.” Both of these concepts in a way have fuzzy boundaries, and this leaves room for those elements which may turn out to be common to art created in different cultures and different historical periods.

The other reason for undertaking the seemingly futile task of searching for common themes is that while I was observing contemporary Chinese art, whenever I initially noticed difference I also encountered similarity and vice versa. And it is precisely here – where difference and likeness meet – that I will try to demonstrate common themes in the art of the two countries, focusing on the present decade and moving back in time, where necessary.

The turn of the century brought about many political and economic changes in both countries. The result of these changes was a cultural revival as well as new opportunities, which did not only contribute to the emergence of artistic personalities, but also led to a wave of emigration (which especially relates to Chinese artists), participation in various residence programs (which relates to both countries), the first international events and exhibitions organized by state institutions in China, as well as festivals and numerous events devoted to today’s art which have taken place in Poland since the early nineties (some of them with a theoretical focus, some promoting the youngest generation of artists).

This period also abounded in instances of strict censorship. In Poland, it led to extreme situations such as boycotting exhibitions and censoring works of art, for example those created by Grzegorz Klaman, Robert Rumas, Alicja Żebrowska, or accusing the

artist Dorota Nieznalska of an offence against religious feelings.<sup>1</sup> Exhibitions in China, seemingly safe at the time of the “thaw,” did not escape censorship either. In 2000, during the Third Shanghai Biennale, the exhibition entitled, quote, ‘Fuck off’, unquote, was closed after two weeks. It exhibited the pictures by artist Zhu Yu consuming a six-month old, cooked foetus, or the works by Ai Weiwei who presented a set of photos in which he gave the finger gesture to the White House and the Forbidden City in turn. Till the late 1990s, installation, video art and performance were still officially absent from China. In 2000, The First Open International Performance Art Festival took place in Beijing.<sup>2</sup> Two years later, also in the Chinese capital, the First Beijing International Art Biennial was organized by the National Art Museum of China.

What is also significant is that in both countries private galleries and alternative exhibiting spaces enjoy great success and that independent curators have a lot to say in forming tendencies and approaches in art. The major difference is that in China most of these places resemble “smuggling points” from which artworks are sold to private collectors in China and abroad, and a majority of the galleries is owned by foreign art dealers (such as Brian Wallace of the Red Gate Gallery and ShanghArt<sup>3</sup>). The Polish art gallery system operates according to totally different rules and the art market also functions differently.<sup>4</sup> What is similar, however, is that in both countries the influence it exerts on art is significant.

What differentiates Chinese art from Polish art is the fact that art created by artists residing in China differs from works of those artists who temporarily or permanently live abroad. These differences are pointed out by artists themselves as well as by critics. The impact of Western culture on the nature and language of artistic expression in China itself is also significant. In Poland, this is a peripheral phenomenon, which does not have a comparable impact, though here also the question more frequently raised has been: “What should contemporary art be like? Universal *and* national? This question has also been posed in the context of “young” Polish art.<sup>5</sup>

The end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium brought about a boom in individual styles in art of the two countries. What is characteristic of these styles is that themes related to tradition, history and culture intermingle in them with universal variations on the role of the visual and the ways of visualizing. Out of many artistic trends, I selected the two that I find particularly interesting. Both of them are

<sup>1</sup> The work of Chinese artist Cui Xiuwen, *Lady's Room* (2002), presented at the Guangzhou Triennial was censored. The Triennial was organized by the Guangdong Art Museum. In Poland, a video installation *Passion* by Dorota Nieznalska was censored in 2002 (an offence under article 196 of the penal code).

<sup>2</sup> The festival was organized by curators Chen Jin, Shu Yang and Zhu Ming at the Open Realization Art Center, Dashanzi 798 Art District.

<sup>3</sup> Among important landmarks of China's artistic landscape we might mention “art districts,” in which artists as well as art dealers cooperate, exhibit and also often live. The most interesting districts of this kind include: 798 Art District (Dashanzi, 2002), Huajiadi, and Caochangdi Work Station (2005).

<sup>4</sup> It is claimed that Poland lacks a genuine art market, as many significant or even groundbreaking Polish artworks are part of foreign collections.

<sup>5</sup> A discussion on this subject took place in the International Cultural Centre in 2008. The participants included Anda Rottenberg and Jarosław Suchan as well as art critics and historians of art active on the international scene.

the so called women's art, first – created by women artists, especially those dealing with such subjects as a search for the essence of their female/individual nature, the role and place of a woman in society, women's dreams and desires. The second one relates to art which is firmly grounded in reality and encapsulates both individual and social experience. Let me begin with the second trend.

The 1990s were in general a time of experimenting with materials and techniques, but for the sake of this presentation I decided to narrow down the focus and concentrate only on selected artworks to which I will from now on refer to as “home made.” Objects of this kind seem to be an integral part of the art created by many Polish artists, especially women artists. What is characteristic of these artworks is their uniqueness, as each of them is individually designed, as well as the employment of cheap, easily obtainable materials which do not belong to any artistic assortment. Such experiments with different sorts of materials do not have a long history, neither in Polish nor in Chinese art. Among relatively few Polish examples, we should mention: unique textile “sculpture” of Magdalena Abakanowicz, soft objects by Maria Pinińska-Bereś, a series of photographic objects more recently created by Krystyna Piotrowska, and, to some extent, the “cheap” art of the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> In China, a boom in the sphere of experiments with materials began only in the 1990s.

It soon turned out that the potential resting in remnants and scraps opened up many new opportunities. Because of the inexpensive character of these artistic projects, once again in the history of art recurred such questions as: what differentiates an artwork from an ordinary object, what may be the subject of art, and what is the point of artistic “recycling.”<sup>7</sup> In the mid-1990s, Yin Xiuzhen started to use sweaters and shoes in her art (*Woolen Sweaters*, 1995), and later began to create soft, miniature scale models of world metropolises hidden in suitcases (2003–2009). The process of recycling worn-out fabric and clothes, which is compared by the artist to meditation, acquires existential meaning, and gender.

Art critic Gao Minglu considers Xiuzhen as well as e.g. Song Dong a representative of the so called “Apartment Art” (which is a trend in conceptual art). Apartment Art did not arouse any interest in the 1990s, neither in state nor in commercial galleries, and was not presented at international art exhibitions of the Chinese avant-garde.<sup>8</sup> Artists thus exhibited in apartments or in public spaces, using easily obtainable materials, and selecting those materials that highlighted their independence from the commercial art market (the concept of Apartment Art, by the way, has been criticized as derivative and imprecise). There are many similarities between the attitudes of the Chinese representatives of Apartment Art and such Polish artists as Katarzyna Józefowicz, Katarzyna Podgórska-Glonti and Julita Wójcik.

The first of these, Katarzyna Józefowicz, made her debut around the year 2000, though she graduated from the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Gdańsk already in

<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to quote any examples of artworks created out of cheap materials in the context of Chinese art, considering the country's tradition, in which great significance was attached to refined materials.

<sup>7</sup> The question also arises in the context of various “found footage” techniques, though one may have an impression that artists' recycling of film materials gets a more sympathetic response from audiences.

<sup>8</sup> Gao Minglu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, exhibition catalogue, ed. G. Minglu, Berkeley, 1998, p. 162.

1986. The major material she employs in her art is paper. Thus, such works as *The City* (1990–1991) and *Habitat* (1993–1996) are paper objects composed of numerous elements. The artist spends years creating these constructions and at every point of this process they may constitute the beginning as well as the end of her artwork. Józefowicz chose paper consciously not only because of its availability and the ease of processing, but also because of the fact that reusing material already filled with text makes it a particularly meaningful means of expression. The employment of paper, or, as in the case of Xiuzhen, of worn out clothes and textile scraps also relates to problems that concern contemporary man. Information noise, the omnipresence of adverts and commercials, the chaos of the city streets, ongoing industrialization and development of cities are mirrored in delicate and intricate structures, which, as if in a dream, confront us with what is familiar and simultaneously foreign.

There are also many similarities between the art of Yin Xiuzhen and Katarzyna Podgórska-Glonti, a Polish artist from Poznań. At the end of the 1990s, she similarly began to employ clothes in her work. For the Polish artist, these worn out and unwanted clothes revive the memory of their previous owners. Each item of clothing contains a story, each conceals a mystery. Brought back to life, and neatly arranged again, they begin to resemble lines filled with text. This colorful, spatial patchwork composed of textile remnants is capable of transforming space, domesticating it, seemingly disrupting the existing order.

Similar, and at the same time different, themes appear in the art of Xue Tao and Jadwiga Sawicka. Both artists make use of old newspapers, promotional leaflets or television programs, and create cycles of works through recurrently employed techniques. Taken over from the mass culture, these means of conveying unlimited information are deconstructed, taking on new forms. Through depriving these items of their original function and retaining their formal characteristics, the artists turn our attention to certain aspects of contemporary visual culture and lifestyle. They point out that it is characterized by our dependence on mass produced material possessions and information overflow, which make our daily life only superficially familiar and user-friendly.

The employment of cheap, and what follows impermanent, materials used by 'home made' artists raises a question about the value of such art and whether this may be considered art at all. This question is important enough not only in relation to the essence of an artwork itself (dilemmas of contemporary art) but also in the context of its interconnection and dependence on the commercial art market.

In 2001, Polish media and art critics entered into a discussion about whether peeling potatoes in a gallery may be regarded as art. The question was raised after the performance of young artist Julita Wójcik who, wearing a kitchen apron, peeled 50 kilograms of potatoes in the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw. The artist became, as she was described, a symbol of contemporary art – on the one hand regarded as an anti-artist and a swindler, symbolizing the decline in art, but also perceived by others as a heroine, noticing art in the simplest everyday activities. Her subsequent performances were equally interesting and the repertoire of means and techniques she employed revolved around repetitive, banal daily activities such as crocheting, gardening and cooking. These seemingly childish forms concern important and complex

problems and the “home made” style additionally emphasizes significant aspects of merging life with art.<sup>9</sup> Wójcik, similarly to artists creating Apartment Art, frequently presented her art in private apartments and some of her actions took place in the public sphere.<sup>10</sup>

What all the examples I have just mentioned have in common is a certain kind of subtlety, their almost poetic-contemplative character, and the minuteness of workmanship which may evoke a surge of tenderness. These qualities may also confront us with the question about the essence of contemporary culture.

The other trend I decided to present concerns women artists, especially these dealing with female feelings and emotions seen from the perspective of female nature or cultural and social determinants of modern civilization. What distinguishes them is, among other things, the language of artistic expression they employ: using different visual representations of their own body, creating “individual histories” (through story telling, fairy tales and legends), as well as redefining certain symbols and metaphors. The worlds created by these artists are, first of all, the worlds controlled by the system of social and cultural dictates according to which gender is still decisive when it comes to one’s social standing (the dominance of patriarchal culture) and, secondly, the worlds suspended between the material and the spiritual, in which the opposing powers and emotions resting in a human being clash. The body, usually a woman’s body, plays a significant role in their works. What is interesting, approaches to its representations differ considerably in both countries, which is undoubtedly conditioned by culture and politics. In China, the motif of the body, corporeality and a woman’s privacy do not appear in art too often.<sup>11</sup> One of few artists dealing with female nature, needs and anxieties is Lin Tianmiao.<sup>12</sup> Already in the mid-1990s, she took up subjects related to the sphere of woman’s life, making use of everyday domestic items and her own visual representations (*Bound and Unbound*, 1995–1997; *Braiding*, 1995, or “The Proliferation of Thread-Winding”, *Focus No1* 2001). What she foregrounded in her art in subsequent years was the image of a woman as “the Other.” It was typically a female figure hidden behind a veil of hair or thread – mute but at the same time expressing helplessness, a feeling of being lost, an attempt to communicate (*Initiator*, 2004; *Chatting*, 2004; and other works). In her installations and more recently created sculptures, the artist makes use of similar formal elements: white, veils and thread covering the

<sup>9</sup> This may be illustrated with such works as: miniature soft buildings of art galleries and institutions the artist cooperated with presented against a background of the original buildings (one of these buildings was the Ministry of Culture), 2003–2005, *Koronka (Embroidery)*, a portrait of the Arsenal Gallery in Białystok created in 2005, as well as *Falowiec (Horizontal Tower Block)* created between 2005 and 2006. These three-dimensional embroidered objects can be washed, starched and ironed.

<sup>10</sup> Wójcik is one of the more important Polish artists of the young generation. Her artworks are part of public as well as private collections. Wójcik presents her artistic projects in Poland and abroad, for example during residence programs. However, she is not one of the top artists of the mainstream Polish art and her works do not enjoy the status of first-rate artworks in the international circulation of art.

<sup>11</sup> One might hazard a guess that presenting a naked body is still risky, especially in the case of women artists.

<sup>12</sup> Lin Tianmiao studied in China and the USA, which exerted a distinct influence on her art’s specificity.

eyes and heads of female figures, the motifs of eggs/cocoons, items of everyday use, and symbols drawn from Chinese culture as well as from her own memories and experiences. The images, figures and objects created by the artist are ambiguous despite the fact that their form at first sight appears easy to decipher.

The mystical and dreamlike atmosphere of these installations is also an integral part of Agata Michowska's art.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Tianmiao, Michowska concentrates on her own experiences and ways of life, searching for the unity of life and the world, humans and nature. Her minimalist works, including video works, installations or sculptures, merge with the surrounding area, describing pieces of daily life in a completely new way. The artist also makes use of legends and fairy tales (among others the myth about Penelope in *Fairy Tale*, 2006), creating additional layers of meaning. The world created by the artist and the characters inhabiting it seem to be immobilized by their own desires and fears – awaiting, deep in thought, concealed.

Though women appear in the work of both of these artists, it is not what their works are all about. Both artists regard the body as a vehicle of life, emotions, energy and truth about the universal dimension. As Michowska said, “women embody and express these emotions and this truth far better, being more credible and malleable.”<sup>14</sup>

Polish artist Anna Baumgart presents a woman differently. Her voice is decisive, sometimes dramatic and painful. Baumgart tells the stories of women, most frequently using their authentic histories. In her art, she balances between document and artistic creation. The artist tells the stories of women who suffer because of their lack of adjustment to cultural or social models. Her early works (*Films about Love*) and subsequent cycles, *Mothers and Daughters* (2002) and *I've Got It from My Mum* (2002), disclose those spheres of women's emotions that are generally regarded as shameful, “unworthy” of a genuine woman – the embodiment of all virtues, a paragon of maternity and fidelity. In her cycle entitled *Mothers and Daughters*, the artist employed portraits of mothers and daughters published in a women's magazine as well as her own picture with her daughter. These photographs present seemingly perfect relationships, but the accompanying commentaries disclose conflicts and suffering. The Christian symbolism almost imperceptibly integrated into these works relates to the Passion of Christ. A similar juxtaposition appears in the sculptures entitled *I've Got It from My Mum*. Wearing wedding dresses, mother and daughter (these are actually the artist with her daughter) assume perfectly studied and carefully prepared yet unnatural poses (resembling gestures from Tianmiao's sculptures). Both brides appear in front of us, barefoot, their feet marked with stigmata. The blood does not symbolize life but their suffering and sacrifice and the difficulty of preserving culturally established relationships: of happy motherhood and love. This subject is also taken up by Tianmiao. In her cycle entitled *Mother!!!* (2008), headless female figures freeze into various positions. We are never really sure of what intentions they have: are they looking at their incomplete reflections in a mirror, contemplating their changing body? Are they patiently waiting for the changes that are going to take place in their bodies,

<sup>13</sup> Both artists belong to the same generation: Agata Michowska – 1964, Lin Tianmiao – 1961.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.obieg.pl/rozmowy/13162>.

thinking about whether they will retain their femininity? The thread and cocoons which restrain and control their bodies, subordinate female physicality and mentality. The title confirms ambivalent feelings and states related to motherhood – the word “mother,” yelled out, takes on a different meaning, being now tinged with negative emotions and doubts. The work of Anna Baumgart, *Bombowniczka (The She-Bomber)* is different but alike. The sculpture depicts a young pregnant woman. Her face, hidden behind a pig mask, her clenched fist and proudly uncovered womb betray a posture of a woman-warrior. At the same time it is a symbol of “a lonely woman publicly stigmatized for her protruding stomach,” inferior to the standard model of a proper Polish mother. (The subject of motherhood appears particularly important in the context of the policies of both countries.)

Chinese artist of the young generation Chen Linqiang addresses the subject of female nature from a still different angle. Her video, *Twelve Flowers* (2001) attracted critics’ attention not only because of the subject, but also because of a bold way of presentation (many critics noticed connections with classic American feminist art in this work). In *Twelve Flowers*, the artist filmed her own female sexual organs during menstruation, which the viewer can see through a reflection in a mirror. In the background, there are items and flowers normally found in women’s private rooms. The motifs employed by the artist are drawn from traditional Chinese paintings of women, and that is why such requisites as a mirror, flowers and a dressing table are visible in the background. This juxtaposition deconstructs tradition and the established order. The title of the work relates to the Chinese calendar, in which each month has a corresponding flower. Here, however, it is a metaphor of female physicality connected with menstruation taking place throughout a twelve-month cycle. Menstruation blood was employed by Chen in her earlier work entitled *Blood on Paper* (1999), which alludes to traditional Chinese painting. This work was a scroll marked with stains of female blood.

Blood is one of those motifs that appear in the art of women artists in different contexts. Blood has a powerful cultural meaning, being associated not only with the body but also with the spiritual sphere. It denotes life, the unity of body and soul. Blood running from the wound or menstruation blood, however, acquire different qualities and become the subject of odium and impurity. The motif of blood recurs in the art of Polish artist Bogna Burska (who belongs to the same generation as Chen) (*Bez tytułu – Crystals*, installation, Galeria Biała, 2002, *Margaret* 2006). Blood also appears in work of such women artists as Alicja Żebrowska (*World after the World*), Anna Baumgart (*Hysteric, and Other Saintly Ladies*, 2004-video); Man Ching Ying – Phoebe Man (*Beautiful Flowers* 1996; *Rati* 2000/2001).

An attempt to establish what trends will appear in the contemporary art at the beginning of the new millennium is particularly difficult, not only because of its dynamic and expansive character. One might hazard a guess, however, that art created by women artists, both in Poland and China, has already become an important landmark in the landscape of new artistic trends and tendencies. It is distinguished not only by its subject but also by the methods and force of artistic expression. Both trends, that is presenting daily life from the angle of everyday home routine, as well as creating

forbidden representations of femininity constitute important voices in art of the two countries. These voices are becoming even more distinct in a multitude of other narrations. We might conclude that the “common themes” from the title of this presentation, despite the cultural and geographical distance, *do* exist. They appear whenever a person lives under threat, which may relate to the sphere of everyday life as well as the traps set by culture and society. Certain facts and events which took place during the last ten years demonstrated that in both countries the threat is still present. In this context, art takes on the role of a critical manifesto which provokes reflection and change.



## Capsule or Apartment? Remarks on Housing Architecture of the Twenty-First Century

Every generation tries to find optimal solutions for housing architecture, or even to work out a prototype of an ideal house in which all needs of a human being could be satisfied. Among the twentieth-century projects of detached houses one should distinguish the following: the prairie house by Frank Lloyd Wright; the whole series of glass houses proposed by the greatest modernists, including Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson; or the first attempts of standardization and popularization with the Case Study House Program. Apart from detached houses, multi-family buildings were designed, the most successful of which was Le Corbusier's housing unit.

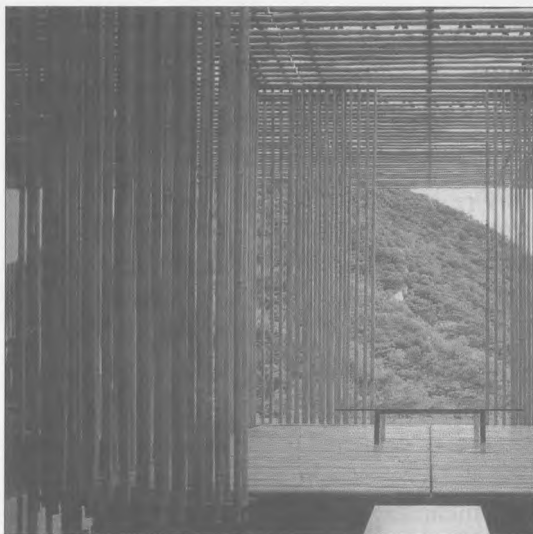
In our times, models of the so-called organic architecture are maintained in the area of housing industry. The main aim here is to adjust a building to the surroundings so that the building becomes complementary to the environment and is never an intruder.

Since 2000 there has been realized an ambitious project of the SoHo – Small Office, Home Office – to develop the area around the busiest part of the Great Wall in Badaling (China). The intention of the owners of the company – Pan Shiyi and his wife Zhang Xin – is to build 59 guesthouses with the cultural-entertainment base (restaurants, cinemas, swimming pools, art galleries, etc.), which would become a weekend recreational centre for tourists and rich inhabitants of crowded Chinese cities.<sup>1</sup> An additional advantage is the fact that twelve top Asian architects take part in the project, including Kengo Kuma, Shigeru Ban, Seung H-Sang.

The Great Bamboo Wall (Fig. 1) building shows that combining tradition with modernity can bring good results. The basic construction material was concrete. However, thanks to using bamboo facings and light open-work bamboo walls the building not only suits the surroundings but also follows the long tradition of Asian construction. Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, a scholarship holder of Columbia University, explained the reason for using the natural material in the following way: “Bamboo has particularly beautiful skin. And bamboo has a soul residing within. In Japan there is a famous children's tale about how ‘Princess Kakuyahime,’ the Moon Goddess, was born inside a stalk of bamboo. People believed the story that she was born inside a stalk of bamboo, because bamboo has peculiar type of skin and possesses a soul.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jodidio (2008: 240).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



1. Kengo Kuma, Great Bamboo Wall, Badaling (China), 2000–2002 (All photos: Author's archive). All photos from the author's archive

The building was a great success, which led to seven other commissions from the SoHo Company.

Gary Chang (EDGE Design Institute) created an extraordinary project.<sup>3</sup> The *Suitcase House* (Fig. 2) is an innovative and revealing look at the space of house.<sup>4</sup> It is treated as a theatre stage on which something is going on and things are changing all the time. For this reason the house is not a dead structure but it adjusts itself flexibly to the present situation, needs and moods of its users. Gary Chang does not use typical walls. If they exist, they constitute a kind of partition wall which can be interpreted as a dialogue between the architect and tradition. The *Suitcase House* is a three-storey building in which a well-lit floor is a kind of *piano nobile*, which in its extreme open form can be five meters wide and 44 meters long. After opening hiding places in the floor the space shows different rooms – a library, a study, a meditation room with a glass floor which allows a direct contact with nature, a kitchen, a bathroom, and even a sauna. After pulling out the stairs from the ceiling, it is possible to enter the terrace on the roof of the house. The *Suitcase House* is an exclusive house, which may offer a spacious living room. Chang's house stimulates imagination – small nooks and crannies hidden under the floor resemble boxes, pockets or – as is suggested by the author – suitcases.

There appears another issue to consider – the problem of small flats. The fact that the problem of small flats is very often dealt with by designers proves the real demand for such spaces. In Western Europe a negative birth rate does not entail the necessity to cram buildings into already developed areas. Nevertheless, in the Far East the problem has been escalating for dozens of years. One of the first signs of architects' involvement in the problem of overpopulation of Asian cities were projects of the Japanese Metabolists. At the World Architecture Conference in Tokyo in 1960 they showed their pro-

<sup>3</sup> Young Asian Architects (2006: 78–83).

<sup>4</sup> Jodidio (2007: 52).



2. Gary Chang (Edge Design Institute), Suitcase House, Badaling (China), 2000–2001

posal of biomorphic cities which would develop like nature (Fig. 3). Meaningful names of the projects: *Helix City* by Kisho Kurokawa,<sup>5</sup> *Ocean City* by Kiyonori Kikutake,<sup>6</sup> or *Clusters in the Air* by Arata Isozaki<sup>7</sup> were to underline the coexistence of architecture and nature, and the analogy between the functioning of building structures and the development of the natural environment. The Metabolists were characterized not only by their respect for national tradition but mainly by their admiration for the indisputable master Le Corbusier, whose works influenced Japanese works considerably.

The Nakagin Capsule Tower, according to the design of the group's creator Kisho Kurokawa, is a structure consisting of identical concrete capsules, with one round window resembling a porthole, which are put parallel or perpendicularly to each other. It was built to be a hotel for workers. Its users became tenants of the capsule, which was to be moved in the event of changing the workplace. In practice, it was easier to build a new hotel for workers than to move housing capsule endlessly.

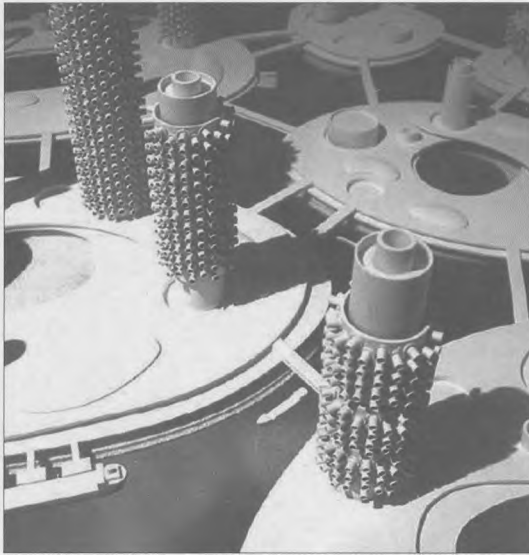
Kurokawa's idea was close to the world trends of the pop-culture of the time and to the activities of the English Archigram Group.<sup>8</sup> The avant-garde idea of *Plug-in City*

<sup>5</sup> Rattenbury, Bevan, Long (2004: 127).

<sup>6</sup> Kikutake (1975).

<sup>7</sup> Rattenbury, Bevan, Long (2004: 112).

<sup>8</sup> Glancey (2002: 204); Rattenbury, Bevan, Long (2004: 14–15); Gössel, Leuthäuser (2006: 372); Wines (2008: 230).



3. Kiyonori Kikutake, Marine City, project 1960

presented by the English at the beginning of the 1960s was a kind of longing dream for freedom not restricted by the place of residence. According to their vision, flats took the form of compatible units-plugs that could be moved by cranes and put inside a new space structure – a base or a platform – in any place. The niche ideas of the members of the Archigram Group were treated as a joke or another utopia. However, almost ten years later Japanese architects proved that the convention of building houses which allows their endless extension by combining blocks, or as it was suggested by the English – plugs, is feasible. The idea keeps coming back and is reflected in contemporary projects, a good example of which is an eighty-meter-high building BUMPS in Beijing of the Chinese SAKO Architects (Fig. 4).<sup>9</sup>

The awareness of “the world getting smaller” which means lack of places to construct houses in multi-million cities stimulates the imagination of contemporary architects who design small flats. The Atelier Workshop from New Zealand stated that a modest, metal barrack, which is associated with the space of construction sites or even rubbish tips, can become a bed-sit in which a living room and a bedroom take their functions in turns, the bathroom is a part of them, and open or drawn aside sides of the “house” create a kind of terrace or balcony.<sup>10</sup> Architects called their project “a portable holiday house.” I quote the word “house” unconvincingly, as the structure resembles more a caravan than a building. I feel relieved by the adjective “holiday” as the word means that the form is temporary and may exist only in summer.

Austrian architect Andreas Strauss presented an extreme example (the Budget hotel in Linz, Austria, 2004). He placed a housing space in a concrete unit of a pipe, suggest-

<sup>9</sup> [www.sako.co.jp](http://www.sako.co.jp) (29.09.2009).

<sup>10</sup> Ekstrema architektury (2008: 55).



4. SAKO Architects, BUMPS, Beijing, 2008

ing that it is a solution for cheap hotel-camping housing, the advantage of which is the possibility to put it in any place on a small area without developed infrastructure.<sup>11</sup>

The two examples presented here are a proposal for temporary or substitute residence. Nevertheless, there exist actual designs of mini-houses designed on narrow, untypical allotments; patches of land, remains of unsuccessful geodetic divisions, which were not taken into consideration while planning the city building development event not so long ago. Inhabitants of Asian extensive metropolitan areas cannot afford such extravagance. The *Natural Illuminance* in Tokyo,<sup>12</sup> designed by two Japanese architects Masaki Endoh and Masahiro Ikeda, occupies merely 35 m<sup>2</sup>. Despite the modest cubic capacity, the work delights with the way it is made and finished as well as with the innovative treatment of the façade. The main elevation, in a form of a regular square, was divided into 25 areas which measure 120 x 120 centimeters each, made from steel painted white, divided from each other by glass slits which are the source of daylight. The simple trick of changing the traditional role of a window and replacing it with a shining frame and a dark filling turned out to be an original solution which makes the object stand out in the dense urban tissue. With their next project *Natural Ellipse* Endoh and Ikeda proved their ability to adjust to difficult conditions of designing in

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Houses of Asia (2003: 208–213); Jodidio (2008: 126–127).



5. Masaki Endoh and Masahiro Ikeda, *Natural Illuminance*, Tokyo, 2001; *Natural Elipse*, Tokyo, 2001–2002

crowded cities and to accept individual needs of a user.<sup>13</sup> The Tokyo ellipse is 53 meters high and is made from waterproof polymeric fibers which can be easily shaped in complicated areas (Fig. 5).

The AZL Atelier Zhanglei shows examples for advocates of more traditional solutions. The *Slit House* (Nanjing, 2007) is a universal proposal, which goes well both with buildings of the capital Jiangsu, more than one hundred years old, and with buildings in any place in Europe (Fig. 6).<sup>14</sup> The second example is the *Brick House* (Nanjing, 2007), which is an effect of direct reference to the traditional Chinese courtyard house.<sup>15</sup>

The above examples show that building small houses is becoming one of the most serious aims of designers' studios in this part of the world. In areas other than the Far East capsules are not the result of necessity. They are created as a kind of experiment, new experience or to exemplify the quest for originality, the need to be different in orderly and predictable urban structures.

Werner Aisslinger, presenting for the first time his *Loftcube*<sup>16</sup> at the Berlin design festival in May 2003, was convinced that the house originating from the idea of caravans would become an asylum for stressed out and busy inhabitants of big cities. The designer came up with the idea of a flat-office, which would be ideal in the reality of the chase for work. This light house moved by a crane was a self-sufficient fully-equipped island, designed in an appropriate way and adjusting to space restrictions. The possibility to place it freely on roofs or terraces of existing houses makes projects of this type comparable to nature, which is why it is called bracket fungus. On 36 m<sup>2</sup> of *Loftcube* there was carried out an idea of a flat with a kitchenette, bathroom with a shower and a living room where a miniature green corner with plants was designed. Studio Aisslin-

<sup>13</sup> Jodidio (2008: 120–125).

<sup>14</sup> Jodidio (2007: 45).

<sup>15</sup> [www.world-architects.com](http://www.world-architects.com) (28.09.2009).

<sup>16</sup> *New Small Houses* (2008: 38–47); Jodidio (2008: 42–47).



6. AZL Atelier Zhanglei, Slit House, Nanjing, 2007

ger, specializing in industrial design, provided also ideas for equipment. Light walls with a washbasin or a sink made integrated elements of equipment. They were made of white material in which there was a hole for a folding tap, and in the wall with a shower there was even a hole for a sponge. Despite its small size, the capsule of the German designer seemed spacious thanks to glass external walls (transparent or frosted glass), white equipment and no internal partition walls.

The Poznań architectural atelier Front Architects suggested in 2007 a mini-house, with its form influenced by the conviction about a change in the social model of life among Western societies rather than by foreseeing problems with finding free areas to construct houses. *Single Hauz* was a manifest of the needs of modern European, who disappointed by the classic model of marriage, chooses to remain single. The cuboid put on the central pillar to which lead metal stairs can be installed in any surroundings – urban, forest, mountain, or as it is shown by visualizations, also in the centre of water basins. Nevertheless, as the designers modeled the form of the house on billboards, the “most natural environment” for *Single Hauzes* was the shoulder of the main artery.<sup>17</sup>

Other possibilities were presented by Kenzo Tange in the 1960s, who proposed the building development of Tokyo Bay by constructing the so-called linear city<sup>18</sup> and Kiyonori Kikutake, who saw the future in “floating cities.” Projects were not carried out but gave rise to commonly used methods of acquiring land from the sea, as it was in Singapore, whose area has risen by twenty percent since the beginning of the 1960s. Another method involved creating artificial areas, a few kilometers away from the real coast, the most spectacular example of which is an island created especially to locate Kansai Airport following the project of Renzo Piano.<sup>19</sup>

Another solution, which is hardly acceptable for users of traditional houses, offers building under the ground. Nowadays such solutions are used successfully in the case of constructing exhibition buildings, a good example of which is the Museum of Contemporary Art and Planning Exhibition in Shenzhen. Designers from the office Coop

<sup>17</sup> [www.frontarchitects.pl](http://www.frontarchitects.pl) (28.09.2009); [www.architektura.muratorplus.pl](http://www.architektura.muratorplus.pl) (28.09.2009).

<sup>18</sup> Kosa (1977: 19).

<sup>19</sup> Glancey (2002: 206); Rattenbury, Bevan, Long (2004: 174).

Himmelblau decided to locate a part of the exhibition space under the ground. Such solutions are used successfully in places under the conservator's protection (excluding archaeological sites), thanks to which neither historical structure nor space are disturbed.

The lack of sufficient daylight – the main disadvantage for many architects designing houses – became an advantage in the works by Tadao Ando. In the Koshino house in Ashiya the daylight comes in through narrow slits, creating a linear frame for concrete structures.<sup>20</sup> The most frequent operation of architects in the case of underground designing is putting a house in a natural hilly area which makes it possible to get more light for living rooms from sunshine. The Polish project of “the Hidden House” by Robert Konieczny in Lower Silesia is a good example here.<sup>21</sup>

The best form of constructing houses in crowded cities is a high-rise building. In Asian countries where the expansion of building areas takes extreme forms, building upwards became an obvious solution. The rise in the price of land, which in Japan at the end of the 1980s was five times higher than in the USA, and more important shrinking of the potential building development areas force architects to develop buildings vertically, even to 500 meters of height. Today, looking at the high-rise buildings of the Chicago School or the Art Deco in the USA we admire mainly the form and architectural details. The number of floors is not as impressive as it used to be. The magic height of the Empire State Building has been surpassed a few times – the Jin Mao Building in Shanghai, Petronas Tower in Kuala Lumpur, or the highest skyscraper “Taipeh 101” in Taiwan. The list includes also the Shanghai World Financial Center, awaited for a long time, which at the stage of designing became referred to as a “bottle opener.”<sup>22</sup> Next modern realizations only prove that what was impossible a short time ago now becomes real with the help of modern technology.

For dozen of years it has been assumed that a spectacular high-rise building may be a means to advertise, to exhibit names of company brands and is the icon of the city and the pride of architects. Such buildings are not only considered in terms of housing development, but also in terms of multifunctional mega-structures – for example the Taipei Tower houses on its 101 floors – apart from exclusive apartments – offices, shops, restaurants, rooms to let for celebrations, recreation centers and libraries.<sup>23</sup>

Recently, the world designers have been paying more and more attention to the issues of ecology and renewable materials, which has led to the building being treated like a living creature in which there must go on a permanent circulation of matter. In 2002 at the international competition the architectural office of Kisho Kurokawa presented a project of the Eco-building.<sup>24</sup> Its elevations consisted of two layers between which there took place a process of filtering the air which was to be transported to usable rooms. Using “the double skin” provided protection against ultraviolet and abnormal weather conditions. Batteries stored solar energy. In the Eco-building it was

<sup>20</sup> Furuyama (2008: 26–29).

<sup>21</sup> [www.architektura.info](http://www.architektura.info) (29.09.2009).

<sup>22</sup> [www.bryla.gazetadom.pl](http://www.bryla.gazetadom.pl) (25.09.2009).

<sup>23</sup> Agnoletto *et al.* (2007: 208–215).

<sup>24</sup> [www.arcspace.com/architects/kurokawa/technopolis](http://www.arcspace.com/architects/kurokawa/technopolis) (25.09.2009).



possible to make a garden in any place inside the building and create passages with trees. Rain-water was to be collected and used to water plants and for sanitary purposes. Thanks to rubbish selection it was possible to make organic fertilizers from organic waste, and from the rest – fuel which would be used by home generators. In this ideal modern housing unit, equipped with public spaces, relaxation and recreation centers (sport facilities), shops, restaurants, bars and cafeterias nothing could be wasted, even energy generated by office workers would be renewed and used as a source of heat. Asian heirs of Corbusier's vision of architecture would astonish the master himself.

The Eco-building has not been created yet, but the Zhongtaigai Box in Shanghai shows how ecological operations can support the processes of renewal and adaptation of seemingly useless buildings.<sup>25</sup> Kengo Kuma decided to give a new function to an old warehouse, against common trends of replacing old buildings with new ones. Behind the green façade constructed by steel plant pots with ivy, there is a multifunctional building with flats, offices, a studio for lightning designers, and even a swimming pool.

An original shape and a variety of functions are still obligatory when building high-rise buildings. Designers give buildings aerodynamic shapes which help to defeat the powers of nature and oppose boxes created by modernists.

“Modernism has a famous motto: A house is a machine for living in. However, as the machines and the society constructed upon it have experienced dramatic changes, how should we understand today's architecture now? What message should the architecture convey if it is distancing away from the industrial age?”<sup>26</sup> The answer to the questions provided by the Chinese office MAD is their buildings.

It is surprising that modern designers are still inspired by an ideal human figure. However, it is not the Vitruvian Man, but a dynamic man of the modern world. If it is possible to translate a soft silhouette of a human body into a building structure, why not make it move? David Fischer in his project for Dubai proves that it will probably become a fact.<sup>27</sup> Thanks to total computerization users of individual floors can place them in different positions in order to get optimal sun exposure and an appropriate view behind the window. In this way users of a building influence its external shape.

What will the housing architecture of tomorrow look like? It may be multi-level urban planning, foreseen in science-fiction films, as is suggested by the studio MAD. Cities may be placed under gigantic shades protecting us against ultraviolet and environment pollution, as it can be seen on models presented in one of the high-rise buildings in Seoul. Or maybe the vision of the Dutch office NOX is the closest to the architecture of the future?<sup>28</sup> Designers show interactive architecture which works directly with a human, or maybe the other way round – a human cooperates with (paraphrasing words of great Corbusier) an intelligent computer for a flat.

<sup>25</sup> Jodidio (2007: 92–97).

<sup>26</sup> [www.arcspace.com/architects/mad/absolute/absolute.html](http://www.arcspace.com/architects/mad/absolute/absolute.html) (02.02.2009)

<sup>27</sup> [www.architects24.com/mediadb/news/347/david-fisher](http://www.architects24.com/mediadb/news/347/david-fisher) (02.10.2009)

<sup>28</sup> Jodidio (2004: 288); Gössel, Leuthäuser (2006: 566–567)

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## Chinese Art Scene in 1979–2000 from the Perspective of Performance Art

The practice of performance art in China did not really become obvious until the mid-1980s. However, taking a step back to the late 1970s, several events were to provide the basics for the development of performance art and for the present discourse on performance art.

In this field we should mention the artistic activity of the Stars Group with their first open-air exhibition in Beijing in 1980.<sup>1</sup> The character of the group's activity helps us to sketch the nature of the subsequent examples of performance art in China, namely, the group organization and the public artistic activity. Artists, pushing the limitations of already widely applied artistic genres, gave through live performed events the profound expression of the human conditions and reflected new social character of their environment. Their collective way of artistic collaboration proposed a new model of sociologically engaged culture valid through the course of the 1980s. The diversity of artistic styles that appears to have exploded on the Chinese art scene may certainly be attributed in part to the reintroduction of the Western art and ideas and in part to the rediscovery of intrinsic values of Chinese culture and its philosophical heritage. The process of permeation of ideas became evident with such initiatives as art exhibitions,<sup>2</sup> student exchanges and circulation of Western art catalogues and magazines.

Nevertheless, we observe the explosion of the new art practice along with the "85 Art Movement" (*bawu meishu yundong*), also called the "New Wave" (*bawu xinchao*). This nationally spread group movement in a period of intense artistic activity from 1985 to 1989 manifested itself through various conferences, exhibitions, performances and manifestos. During that time the term for performance art in China was coined. Artists and critics applied the term *xingwei yishu* which literally means "behavior art." The concept of behavior, deeply embedded in Chinese classical culture considering any individual behavior (*geren shenti xingwei*) as the expression of social feeling introduces to the discourse on Chinese performance art intrinsic sociological overtones. The behavior and art was joined together by Tian Zifang, who commented on the story of Lord Yuan of Song<sup>3</sup> with a statement "why is that as early as two thousand years ago behavior and procedure was seen as 'true art' rather than technique of painting itself?"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dan (2002: 11).

<sup>2</sup> National Art Gallery hosted Jackson Pollock exhibition in 1981 and Robert Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Exchange, Beijing edition in 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Attributed to Zhuang Zhou (Zhuangzi) tradition.

<sup>4</sup> Dawei (1997: 53).

Within terms broadly applied in the beginnings of the 1980s and rarely used afterwards one can find *huodong*, *yundong*, *xingdong*, where the second element of those three compounds refers to “action” (*dong*). Whereas *huodong* means simply activity or movement, *yundong* refers to the “series of movements,” broader in scope, an objectionable campaign. One could translate *xingdong* as “to take action.” The two first terms can be related to the legacy of many “mass people movement” launched between 1949 and 1979 as to the revival of interest in the May Fourth Movement of 1919 in the intellectual debate of the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> Reading social action into performance helps to visualize socio-historical changes during the period of economic and institutional reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978.

The last term of much interest which appears in the discourse on performance art is the term of body art that includes *shenti* – body, or more accurately *body-person*. This term explains how a person is shaped in relation to social, cultural and physical environment.

The discourse on performance art is often divided into two distinct periods which separate developments of the 1980s from these of the 1990s. The first decade is often associated with the development of Chinese avant-garde and the time when artists and intellectuals shared ideals of the construction of a new modern Chinese culture echoing the 1919 May Fourth Movement. The decade ended prematurely in 1989 with the massive student protest at Tiananmen Square or in terms directly connected to the visual art with a Chinese avant-garde exhibition held in February 1989 at the Chinese Art Gallery in Beijing.

The quest for high culture which began in the early 1990s moved to the background and was replaced with pop-culture acting accordingly to the principles of the market. The ideals and icons of the recent past were rechanneled in Cynical Realism and Political Pop. Superficially genuine, multiplied images of body populated Chinese artists’ canvas. The trend coincided with the growing interest in the representation of the body in the *raw* state. Artists started to introduce to their art practice not only the external, naked human body, but also multiple characters beneath the surface – the abject and the body-flesh. This kind of representation challenges universal, conservative perception of corporeality by offering a new opportunity to promote the awakening and regeneration of public morality.

The transition between these two decades can be seen in the field of performance art as an increasing interest in everyday life in the context of global culture. The idea of everyday life is equal to the idea of contemporary reality that determines the life of an individual and changes the face of art or the expression of opposition to the adaptation of artistic practice to the popular demands of the art market.

The discourse on Chinese art should include a broader range of topics and should examine a specific context. To paraphrase Harold Rosenberg, we should realize that the way towards an intercultural evaluation of the work of art is not only through seeing but also through listening. Careful evaluations should be made to detect how the work of art functions in its primary context.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Berghuis (2006: 60–61).

<sup>6</sup> Mosquera (2005: 223).

Performance art in China appears to pose challenges to conventional systems of styles, techniques and concepts imposed by the officially promoted and traditional culture. In the *Strecher Series* (1986) of the Black Union Group one of the members was put in a self-made “canvas-cangue.”<sup>7</sup> The previous year’s performance of Wang Qiang *Artist after Hours* shows the artist sculpting self-portrait in which he poses motionless wearing the plaster suit.<sup>8</sup> A very crude statement regarding the state and values of contemporary culture illustrating a break from the *langue de bois* of art was a site-specific performance made in 1987 by Xu Yihui and Cai Xiaogang, entitled “Archaeological excavations on a waste disposal site”. The artists duo dressed in white sets of clothes, plastic gloves and dark sun glasses excavated a scull from the disposal site of the Jiangxi Province Economic and Technological Development Zone.<sup>9</sup> Adherents of the ’85 Movement led by Xiamen Dada were most interested in redefining the relationship between art and reality, and the artist’s engagement with the public.<sup>10</sup>

The provocative and satirical Xiamen Dada performance in which thirteen artists publicly burnt their work took place in 1986. The name of the group proves a certain strategy in contemporary Chinese art consisting of “quoting” or “transplanting” the artistic genres and formulas into the new spatial and temporal context. Wu Hung claims that this performance was possibly inspired by a kind of Dadaist nihilism but at the same time recalled the burning of books and artworks during the Cultural Revolution,<sup>11</sup> still vivid in the memories of Chinese intellectuals. Likewise, the interest in the fragmentation of language had its origins in the Cultural Revolution and expressed a certain oppression of the writing language. In the 1985 performance “Wrapping Up – King and Queen” by Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi both artists were wrapped in scraps of Chinese newspapers. Early performance art included in its agenda “linguistic games” with the Chinese characters employed in isolation from their primary context, like, for example, in the Work Number One: – *Yangshi Taiji Series* of the Pond Group from 1985.

In the mid-1980s, a place to reach the public was also the theater with performances staged in front of the live audience in which the artists put emphasis on choreography, body and common experience inflected with the theatre theories of Jerzy Grotowski.<sup>12</sup> Visual art, theater performance, music and other forms of media met in the performances of the Southern Artists Salon and Brothers Song Yongping and Song Yonghong.

The crowning achievement of the 1980s came with the Chinese Modern Art Exhibition held in the most important national art institution of the time. During its tumultuous course, between openings and forced endings,<sup>13</sup> many performances were included in the exhibition program. On 5 February, 1989, Xiao Lu and Tang Song per-

<sup>7</sup> Minglu (2006: 172).

<sup>8</sup> Peng, Dan (1995: 214–215).

<sup>9</sup> Berghuis (2006: 69).

<sup>10</sup> Hong, Zhenhua (2006: 9–12).

<sup>11</sup> Hung (2005: 313).

<sup>12</sup> Berghuis (2006: 58–59).

<sup>13</sup> Because of Xiao Lu’s now historical action, the entire exhibition was forced by the authorities to close to the public just 3 hours after the opening. Despite the fact that Tang Song was immediately arrested and his artistic partner surrendered herself to the authorities as well as organizers’ self-critique.

formed their happening “A Dialogue,” during which Xiao fired live gun-shots at Tang’s installation made of two phone kiosks. The performance’s effect on the art scene was significant, outweighing the immanent reading of the work.<sup>14</sup> This, as well as Zhang Nian’s *Hatching Eggs* of 1989, anticipated the impossibility of communication between civil society and the authorities. As Köppel-Yang remarks, performance is typical of the 1980s, an excellent example of the embroilment of art in intellectual discourse.<sup>15</sup> Another radical performance staged during this exhibition spoke of impossibility to establish equal dialogue between the creation of art and its production.<sup>16</sup>

After 1989, the Chinese art scene entered its decline. In a chain-reaction, artistic, curatorial and journalist activity slowed down. From the late 1980s on, many Mainland artists were already living abroad and achieving recognition for their work. On the one hand, the 1990s performance art saw the critique of art production itself,<sup>17</sup> materially oriented culture,<sup>18</sup> and on the other, artists gave voice to the crisis of artistic identity.<sup>19</sup>

Starting in the early 1990s, the artists living and working in the Beijing East Village engaged in performances for secretly invited guests, created spontaneously in makeshift circumstances, in basements, in private apartments or outdoors. The performances showed interest in new types of aggressive, embodied practices. Because of being staged in makeshift circumstances, the role of documentation increased. To understand them in the context of their own time is critical. The period of rapid economic transition had brought a sudden loss of a secure social position and a struggle for new identity surpassed the society. Performance artists began using the body in direct reference to the self.

The most famous artists of the abovementioned community were Ma Liuming, Zhu Ming and Zhang Huan. Today, they are internationally recognized as prominent performance artists. Living and working in China in the early 1990s, they were confined to their community and exposed to censorship due to the character of their art practice. The first to discover this was Ma Liuming when he performed naked his *Fen–Ma Liuming Lunch I* (1994), that earned him two months in prison and led to the dispersal of the East Village Colony a few months later. The first version was performed a few months previously in his apartment where he performed in a female floral dress while wearing female make-up. This was the moment when androgynous Fen Ma Liuming was brought into existence (Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming*, 1993). The performance ended with the artist drank his own semen after having masturbated. Ma Liuming’s defiance had a certain sexual ambiguity with which he consistently challenges all material indications by which we define our own identity.

The work of another East Village artist, Zhu Ming, is equally important to the development of performance in 1990s China. In the artist’s performances, his body often formed a zone where the personal and social experiences met and collapsed. His work

<sup>14</sup> Köppel-Yang (2003: 174).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. (26).

<sup>16</sup> Wu Shanzhuan’ *Big Business*, 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Lanzhou Art Group, *Funeral*, 1993; Song Dong, *Sondong Art Travel Agency*, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Lin Yilin, *A Wall Crossing a Street*, 1994.

<sup>19</sup> Zhu Fadong, *This Person Is for Sale*, 1994.

*Foam* (1994) insisted on the interaction between the stress and pain imposed on the public body/flesh and the private body/self internalized in his performances through the physical endurance.

One particularly influential artist who came out of the East Village is Zhang Huan. His performances can be characterized by physical endurance and mass demonstration. The first one of such performances was Zhang Huan's *12 Square Meters* (1994), during which he was sitting in the public toilet for three hours covered in fish oil and honey that attracted innumerable flies. Another was his *65 Kilograms* (1994), when he was suspended bound and gagged from the ceiling while blood dripped from incisions in his body made by surgical scissors. The mass demonstration is particularly evident in Zhang Huan's *To Raise the Water Level in the Fishpond* (1997) in which he and his fellow performers stood naked at Nanmofang fishpond in order to displace the volume of water with their own bodies. For those three artists the naked body was a kind of language that reflected the personal feelings of the self, and expressed these feelings to a larger audience in staged performances.

The artists of the first half of the 1990s direct our sense of art towards deeper discussions on social configuration, identity, sex, collective consciousness, material society and individual features. During the second half of the 1990s, several artists made performances in which they placed the emphasis on the body in action, physical endurance and transcendence of the body, and further explored concepts surrounding the body in relation to its environment. The outstanding examples include He Yunchang's *Gold Rays* (1999), *Talking with Water* (1999) and Song Dong's *Water Sealing* (1996), as well as the group performance *To Add Another Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* (1995). The abovementioned performances neither produced any outcome nor had clear result. In *Talking with the Water* He Yunchang was seen dangling from a crane above a river and holding a knife to "cut" the running river in half. Song Dong was trying to seal the river with his stamp. Performed on the side of the mountain, *To Add another Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* gathered a group of artists who piled their naked bodies on top of each other. The bodies of performing artists served as an unparalleled physical form in the exploration of the spiritual will; or a discovery of perceptual potentiality, or self-liberation, even if one could say that they failed, and their attempts seem to have been in vain.<sup>20</sup>

The outcome of performance art situates this artistic genre and its actors at the forefront of change. The study of the subject matter shows the art scene of the 1980s and 1990s in its eternal quest for sense of life mirroring the reality and its constraints. Vigilance and introspection of history and civilization highlight the inherently arbitrary nature of collective values or the circumstances of daily life. Constantly questioning the nature of art, performance artist are going further establishing the common platform of exchanging ideas and opening the public space for dialogue.

<sup>20</sup> Xin, Weiwei (2005: 2).

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## Threads between Past and Future: Lin Tianmiao's Installations

In 2004–2006, there was an exhibition traveling through America and Europe, presenting Chinese contemporary art, entitled “Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China.”<sup>1</sup> The title, reflecting the main content and problems of the exhibited artworks, inspired me to title my article in a similar manner. Among the presented items there was an installation called “Braiding” by Lin Tianmiao, whose work will be a focal point of my interest. Her words were another inspiration for me when writing this article. She said that threads used in the installation present “the ever-present tension between tradition and modernization in today’s China.”<sup>2</sup>

Title threads bind together the past constructed from the history, customs, traditions and culture, with the future, which is the symbol of modernization and technology. The analogy, however, is to be found not only in the artist’s work. Women’s craft, especially weaving and embroidery is a reflection of the past, while a self-portrait created by new media is a mirror of the future. At the same time, Lin Tianmiao uses quotes from the culture and the new technologies as an artistic medium which locates her installations within the postmodern stream of art. Other strategies used by artists in this artistic era, such as eclecticism of styles, intertextuality<sup>3</sup> playing with the viewer perception, or “double-coding”<sup>4</sup> are also present in the works by Chinese artist. In his book *Art against Art*, Andrzej Książek summarizing the theories of postmodernism observes that: “The material of postmodern art is not the reality but the passive material provided by ancient arts. The efficiency of citation is based on constant references to past arts, on deriving from the infinite reservoir of motives, subjects, ideas, forms, styles, trends.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The exhibition was presented, for example, in New York (June–September 2004), Chicago (October 2004–January 2005), Seattle (February–May 2005), London (September 2005), and Berlin (March–May 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Tsao (www).

<sup>3</sup> Intertextuality is a deconstruction of words and signs through using them in a new context, quoting them with changed meaning. In 1969 Julia Kristeva used this word for the first time in her publication “Semeiotike”. In the Polish literature, it is described for instance by Paweł Leszkowicz, see: Leszkowicz (2001: 32–34).

<sup>4</sup> According to Charles Jencks, “double-coding” of postmodern artwork means that it is addressed to two, different receivers: “experts and ordinary public;” Carlson (2007: 213).

<sup>5</sup> Książek (2001: 162).

Lin Tianmiao's artworks are not direct quotations of the ancient Chinese art, but they are replete with references to women's textile crafts, such as weaving and embroidery.

### Craft as a context for women's creation

The sources of inspiration for postmodernism are also symbolic and allegorical figures, often immortalized in literature and fine arts. Female weavers, sewers, or seamstresses appear in various mythologies around the world, associating women with production and decoration of the clothes. One Greek legend tells us the story of a maiden called Arachne who had attained such skill in embroidery and weaving that challenged Athena, a goddess of craft, to a contest. Athena won the contest and turned the girl into a spider.<sup>6</sup> In the Chinese collection of myths there is an important love story about Altair the Herd-Boy and Vega the Weaver-Girl.<sup>7</sup> According to the legend, Altair and Vega were young lovers living in the heavenly realm. They were deeply in love and spent all their time together, ignoring their duties of tending to the celestial herds and weaving. This made angry the Gods of Heaven who turned them in the stars separated by the Milky Way and only allowed to see each other once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month in Chinese lunar calendar. This corresponds to August in Western calendar and it is celebrated as a feast of women. On that day, "dressed girls set tables at the gate with various toiletries, such as: mirrors, combs, scissors, flowers, powder etc. are offered to the Weaver-Girl. They burn incense, pray, open their hearts, whisper their love secrets. They ask for skills of handwork, query about their embroidery abilities, and organize a contest of stringing threads in the moonlight."<sup>8</sup>

The stories presented above are important for the works of contemporary artists, who use references to women's textile crafts in their creations. Another significant story for arts in China is the history of the Silk Road<sup>9</sup> and the myths associated with invention and production of silk. There are many ravishing legends on the birth of silkworm and silk, so I will mention only a few, such as the legend of Empress Leizu who discovered the silk secret,<sup>10</sup> and a woman with the horse's head, Matou Niang, goddess of silk worm cocoons,<sup>11</sup> because in China women were responsible for production of silk and care of worms producing cocoons.<sup>12</sup> All this, together with the extraordinary culture of

<sup>6</sup> Markowska (2000: 41).

<sup>7</sup> Eberhard (2001: 258); Künstler (1985: 247–257); Walters (1996: 39).

<sup>8</sup> Pawlik (2007: 54–59). This version of the story based on: Shengtao (1988).

<sup>9</sup> Kajdańska, Kajdański (2007).

<sup>10</sup> The legend of Empress Leizu tells that one day she saw cocoons on the mulberry tree, which grow up in the imperial garden, and after collecting the cocoons she accidentally dropped them to a cup of tea. When she tried to remove them from her tea, she saw that they became long threads; Franck, Brownstone (1978: 45–46).

<sup>11</sup> Before the woman with the horse's head became goddess, she was a mortal girl and her life was very ordinary. Some day she laughed through horse's skin, which was drying on sun. Then it came alive and wrapped around the girl who turned into magic character; Eberhard (2001: 98).

<sup>12</sup> More about a history of silk and its kinds, which are produced in China, and also about its embroidery: Hang, Guo (2008: 60–74); Kajdańska, Kajdański (2007: 12–46).

the “women’s writing” – *Nü Shu*<sup>13</sup> and separate women’s habits, have a profound impact on China today’s artists. In her article on “Poetry and Women’s Culture in Late Imperial China,” Charlotte Furth wrote that separated space allowed women to concentrate on “the activities and creations of women which men have had no special interest in, whether women’s activities, rituals, crafts, social networks or domestic skills and points to activities of women marked as legitimate in a social/cultural division of labor approved by a patriarchal or other male-dominated orthodoxy.”<sup>14</sup>

All the above presented a thick layer of significant cultural references which allows us to analyze thoroughly Lin Tianmiao’s installations, including a series of “Bound and Unbound,” built in 1995–1997. In this work, Lin wrapped ordinary household objects and tools of domestic female activity in white thread. In this way she completely enveloped pots, pans, kettles, bowls, but also bicycles and other mechanical devices, turning them into soft and friendly forms resembling of silkworm cocoons. “Through these acts, she ended the useful lives of these utensils by stripping them of their functions and revitalizing them as beautiful object” – we read in the catalogue of the exhibition “Paris–Pékin,” held in October 2002 in Paris.<sup>15</sup>

And what is the meaning of threads in her works? As the artist explained in the form of poem:

Thread can change the value of things,  
turning the useful into  
Futile and futile into useful.  
Thread can both collect and break up power.  
Thread can represent gender and change identity.  
Thread is both real and imaginary.  
Thread is sensitive and sharp.  
Thread is process, something you go through.<sup>16</sup>

The cultural identity issues undertaken by the creator are most evident in such works as “Braiding” (1998) or “Hai” (2001). In the latter, Lin attached long, wandering silk threads to her giant self-portrait on canvas.<sup>17</sup> These fibers were read out by the curators of the exhibition “Between Past and Future. New Photography and Video from China” Wu Hung and Christopher Phillips as “a metaphors for all the tiny habits and customs that make up culture, and which can be experienced as binding from which it requires great strength to break free.”<sup>18</sup>

Threads, strands, fibers, but also clothes, are artistic media used by other contemporary Asian women artists. They quote their native traditions and customs associated

<sup>13</sup> Furmanik (2007: 60–65).

<sup>14</sup> Furth (1992: 2).

<sup>15</sup> Chang, Decrop (2002: 122).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> In the “Braiding”, from the photographic self-portrait leave threads that come together in a thick rope resting on the exhibition floor space, while the ‘Hai’, she used video projection, and the threads are moving away from it at right angles until the opposite wall, creating an area of translucent, silky wall.

<sup>18</sup> From the press release of the exhibition “Between Past and Future”: [http://sites.asiasociety.org/arts/past\\_future/perform01.html](http://sites.asiasociety.org/arts/past_future/perform01.html).

with women's crafts in their works. Together with Lin Tianmiao's installations, they form a group of art realizations focused mainly on the identity of Asian women. Chen Qingqing (b. 1953, Beijing, China),<sup>19</sup> for example, constructs some of her works, such as "Chair of Roses" (2000) or "Follow the wing" (2006) with plant fibers which symbolize vegetation, but also the Earth with its crops, the ground and a female element – the Yin. They are also a material for unusual woven dresses that are reminiscent of historical patterns of Chinese dress (series "Relics Unearthed Copy – Wei Jin Dynasty Dress," 2002 or "Artificial Artifact – Ming," 2005).<sup>20</sup> Another artist, Kim Sooja (b. 1957, Daegu, South Korea)<sup>21</sup> uses the traditional Korean fabrics. She creates her works of textiles called *bojagi* or sewn pieces of them, such as *bottari* – bundles,<sup>22</sup> which serve as universal bags, but also the dowry of a bride or gift wrapping; it is used also for enfold-ing dead bodies and for keeping valuables inside. By contrast, Chiharu Shiota (b. 1972, Osaka, Japan)<sup>23</sup> is an author of huge spatial installations made of threads (for example "State of Being," 2008) reminding cobwebs. She also ties together symbolic objects such as shoes ("Dialogue from DNA," 2004).

Common for all the artist mentioned above are references to women's arts and crafts, although made in different ways. They allow us to juxtapose their works and include in the postmodern feminist art movement.

## Self-portrait and gender identity

One of the constantly recurring motifs in the Lin Tianmiao's art is self-portrait. It is usually a large format photography or video projection which shows only a face. It does not bear any characteristics or marks of gender identity. At the first view, it is impossible to tell the sex of the person on the screen. Is it a woman or a man? She/he does not reveal her/his emotional state either. Because of their eyes looking into empty space and lack of hair, the person reminds the head of a Buddhist nun or monk. What are, therefore, the elements of the self-portrait that builds the image of gender and cultural identity?

According to Judith Butler, both sex and gender are a society construct that allow to maintain developed rules and standards. They have been built by repeated behavior of many generations which are assigned correspondingly to the sexes.<sup>24</sup> An awareness of the phenomenon of gender "performativity" enables to exceed set boundaries as

<sup>19</sup> Full biography of the artist, see: [http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en/2007-03/07/content\\_93839.htm](http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en/2007-03/07/content_93839.htm).

<sup>20</sup> More artworks are presented on websites such as: <http://www.redgategallery.com/artists/chen-qingqing-gallery> or <http://www.artnet.com/artist/424242566/chen-qingqing.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Most of artist' projects and her biography are allowed on her official website: <http://www.kimsooja.com>.

<sup>22</sup> Brewńska (2003: 33–34).

<sup>23</sup> Chronological list of artists' projects could be found on her official website: <http://www.chiharu-shiota.com>.

<sup>24</sup> See: Butler (2008).

often do contemporary artists.<sup>25</sup> To make this strategy real, however, “[...] quoting the norms, knowing that they are cited in the gestures, behavior, words, they must be hidden, that same act, the embodiment of these norms could be accomplished.”<sup>26</sup> In her reflections on sex and gender, Butler also raises the question of women identity. Is it possible to distinguish women, to extract them “from the class, racial, ethnic relations and the other axis of powers, which also establish identity?”<sup>27</sup> She considers that it is not. Dimensional identity is not possible. Sexual and culture identification intertwine and define each other, because only through the filter of culture we can determine gender of the person and individual members of society affected by its shape.<sup>28</sup>

In this context we can say that the determination of gender and cultural affiliation in the case of Lin Tianmiao's self-portraits as, for example, in a series of “Focus” (2006–2007), is made by threads or silk strands affixed to her face. At the same time, they identify her as a woman, heiress of the tradition of women's craft, and as a Chinese, successor of the history, legends and tradition of the Silk Road, but also as an artist who uses fiber as a postmodern medium of artistic expression. On the other hand, she also employs new digital technology to reproduce her face. Thus she links tradition and culture with modernity, whose symptoms are progressive modernization, globalization and technological society. They lead, among other things, to a dematerialization of existence, to unification and virtual identity.<sup>29</sup> These big, fleshless, and devoid of characteristic features faces become important only in contact with soft silk. Technology, as a product of culture assigned mainly to a male-dominated activity, gets in touch with nature, which is a feminine space.<sup>30</sup> The threads make one whole, as the Yang complements the Yin in the Taijitu symbol. What do the installations by Lin Tianmiao say is that “The future is not possible without the past.” Even with huge technological development and rejection of human materiality, her/his identity cannot exist without the past, which is made up of history, tradition and ancient culture.

In Lin Tianmiao's artworks, her self-portrait reduced to her face becomes an image of her identity. This is also true in the case of other Chinese artists such as Zhang Huan (b. 1965, An Yang City, He Nan)<sup>31</sup> and Li Yongbin (b. 1963, Beijing).<sup>32</sup> The former is the author of a photographic series “Family Tree Portfolio” (2001), in which his face is gradually cloaked by Chinese characters. The latter artist deforms his portrait by blurring it or putting another portrait on the first one. For example, in the first series of video works entitled “Faces,” which began in 1996, he put on himself the face of an

<sup>25</sup> Examples could be works of artists such as: Cindy Sherman, Katarzyna Kozyra, or Yasumasa Morimura.

<sup>26</sup> Mizelińska (2006: 51).

<sup>27</sup> Butler (2008: 47).

<sup>28</sup> Benedict (2002: 79–80).

<sup>29</sup> Giddens (2007).

<sup>30</sup> According to metaphysical dualism, there exist in the world binary, analogical couples of contraries: male – female, form – matter, mind – body, activity – passivity, culture – nature; see Hyży (2003: 21–34).

<sup>31</sup> More information about the artist and his works see: Brewińska (2003: 25) and <http://www.artnet.com/artist/725127/zhang-huan.html>.

<sup>32</sup> More information about the artist and his works see: Brewińska (2003: 8) and <http://www.artnet.com/artist/423903637/li-yongbin.html>.

old lady. Even more drastic visual actions are made by Japanese artist Ryoko Suzuki (b. 1970, Hokkaido).<sup>33</sup> In her project "Bind" (2001), she photographed her head wrapped with tightly wound pigskin that has been soaked in blood. In this way she brings up the issues of female sexuality and cultural identification, because in Japan a naked body was seen in erotic context.<sup>34</sup> In each of the creations presented above the face plays the role of a medium to express artist's struggle for constructing their identity.

In Lin Tianmiao's artworks, threads bring together the past with the future, culture and tradition with modernization and technological society. They relate women's crafts and their traditions to the art based on new media. The artist was able to use the postmodern strategies and feminist thought in order to construct unique and moving artworks which tell us the stories about contemporary Asian women identity.

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<sup>33</sup> A photographic series "Bind" and other works by the artist are to be found in her official website: <http://www.ryokobo.com>.

<sup>34</sup> This motif has also been used by Nabuyoshi Araki, see: Brewińska (2000).

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The book documents an exceptional event – the first conference joining Polish and Chinese art historians, organized by the Polish Society of Oriental Art, now the Polish Institute of World Art Studies in Warsaw and Confucius Institute of Jagiellonian University in 2009. The outcome of this meeting is a collection of texts covering various topics. They include syntheses of different periods and phenomena through the history of Polish and Chinese art; the rarely investigated matters of the artistic contacts between both countries, especially as researched and presented from the Chinese point of view; and the reflections on affinities and common tendencies in modern and contemporary art of China and Poland. The whole volume allows the comparison of the areas of interest and approaches presented by art historians of both countries, as well as insight into the Polish research on the Chinese art, now developing very dynamically. It is worth mentioning that the Chinese version of the volume will appear soon.

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