

# Modern Tendencies in Contemporary Ink and Wash Painting in Mainland China since New Wave 85 up to the Present\*

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*Moderné trendy v súčasnej maľbe tušom v pevninskej Číne od Novej vlny 85 až do súčasnosti*

**Resumé** Článok sa zaobrá modernými trendami v čínskej maľbe tušom od polovice 80. rokov minulého storočia až po súčasnosť. Autori sa pokúšali reformovať a dať nové impulzy čínskej maľbe. Štúdia prezentuje väčšinu maliarov, ktorí sa snažia reformovať čínsku maľbu tušom inovatívnymi postupmi, čo zahŕňa aj autorov, venujúcich sa abstrakcii, venuje sa aj perspektívam čínskej maľby tušom na pevnine vo všeobecnosti.

**Abstract** This article discusses modern tendencies of the Chinese contemporary ink and wash painting since the mid-1980s till present times. Authors involved in that movement tried to reform and give a new impulse to Chinese ink and wash painting. The article further recounts the perspectives of the modernist trends in ink painting and perspectives of the ink painiting as a whole.

**Key words** Chinese Art · Experimental Ink and Wash Painting · Abstract Painting

Chinese ink painting is facing the same problems today that have been occurring in Chinese painting at least since the period of Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), Chinese painter, scholar, art theorist and calligrapher, who became famous by his

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claim that everything was already invented and it is impossible to find a new style in painting. His almost postmodernist statement was later denied by Shitao 石濤 (1642–1707) and a lot of other independent painters stressing the originality and independent spirit of their work. In any case, it describes the problem appearing in Chinese art history; its long and glamorous tradition is often found to be restrictive for its followers. Search for completing the reform of Chinese painting using the language of modernism is a trend that had begun by Lin Fengmian 林風眠 (1900–1991). We can say that the substance of the new ideas in Chinese painting was to protest against the limitations of tradition. Ink painting has been bearing the heavy burden of tradition for hundreds of years. The specific position of ink painting in China made it very popular, but also brought on the need to reform.

In this paper I will turn my attention specifically to the reform tendencies in ink painting, as it is nearly impossible to analyse all streams within traditional ink painting. After briefly mentioning new literati paintings with their positives as well as their limitations, I will focus on the most progressive tendencies in the ink painting in the contemporary China, namely the movement of the experimental ink and wash painting.

## 1 Sources

Contemporary Chinese art attracts a lot of attention and therefore there is a huge amount of relevant sources. Unfortunately, most of them are focused on modernism, contemporary oil painting, especially political pop, and cynical realism. The catalogue of the exhibition *Ink Art, Past and Present in Contemporary China* by Maxwell K. Hearn<sup>1</sup> gives a wide overview of contemporary Chinese ink painting.<sup>2</sup> Chinese ink painting is briefly mentioned in Gao Minglu's *Total*

<sup>1</sup> Maxwell K. Hearn, *Ink Art, Past and Present in Contemporary China* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> See also Andrews, Julia Frances and Shen Kuiyi, *A Century in Crisis: Tradition and Modernity in the Art of Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1998); Lucie

*Modernity and the Avant-garde in Twentieth Century Chinese Art*,<sup>3</sup> Wu Hung's *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s–2000'*,<sup>4</sup> where one chapter is devoted to a dialogue with tradition, which includes also ink painting. Most of the materials used in this paper are primary sources, mainly the catalogues of the Movement of experimental ink and wash painting, such as *Experimental Ink and Wash Painting of China in the 90's*,<sup>5</sup> *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century*,<sup>6</sup> the catalogue from the exhibition in Lille in 2005; *Encres De Chine Expérimentales*,<sup>7</sup> the catalogue from legendary exhibition in China Art Gallery (*Zhongguo meishuguan* 中國美術館) *Beijing China/Avant-garde*,<sup>8</sup> where 186 artists connected with New Wave 85 exhibited their works. Besides these, there are also catalogues of individual authors, which were provided to me, for instance by Liu Yiyuan 劉一原, Liu Zijian 劉子鍵, Zhang Yu 張羽, Wei Qingji 魏青吉, and Zhang Hao 張浩. My sources include monographs which deal with these artists, e.g. *One Hundred Outstanding Artists*, edited by Yi Mo —墨。<sup>9</sup>

My research is mainly based on my own fieldwork.<sup>10</sup> In 2014, I met Zhang Yu personally, an artist, who claimed to be one of the founders of the movement. His

Olivová, ed., *Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting: Tradition and Experiment* (Prague: National Gallery, 2001); Gordon S. Barraclough, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

- 3 Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-garde in Twentieth Century Chinese Art* (London: MIT Press, 2011).
- 4 Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s–2000s* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014).
- 5 Pi Daojian 皮道堅, ed., *Experimental Ink and Wash Painting of China in the 90's/Jiushi niandai Zhongguo shiyan shuimo* 九十年代中國實驗水墨 (Hong Kong: World Chinese Arts Publication Company Limited, 1998).
- 6 Yu Ren 郁人, ed., *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century/20 shiji mo Zhongguo xiandai shuimo yishu zoushi* 二十世紀末中國現代水墨藝術走勢 (Harbin: Heilongjiang meishu chubanshe, 1997).
- 7 Chen Hongshan, Zhang Yu, ed., *Encres De Chine Experimentales/Zhongguo shangmo dangdai shiyan shuimo zhan* 中國上墨 當代實驗水墨展 (Paris: Pacifica, 2005).
- 8 *China/Avant-Garde* (Beijing: China Art Gallery/Zhongguo meishuguan, 1989).
- 9 Yi Mo —墨, ed., *One Hundred Outstanding Artists/Jingying yishujia bai ren ji* 精英藝術家百人集 (Shenzhen: Shijie huaren yishu chubanshe, 2000).
- 10 I have contacted most of the artists mentioned in my paper; some of them by letters and later by

claim is supported by the catalogues and other publications connected with the movement; and is also visible at the exhibition of his works in Hangzhou in 2014 as well as that of Zhang Hao, another artist involved in ink painting. Most of relevant sources are available in Chinese, for instance, the critical reviews in Chinese art journals *Arts/Meishu* 美術, *The Trend of Art Thought/Meishu sicbao* 美術思潮, *Master Oriental Art/Dajia Dongfang yishu* 大家東方藝術, and others. The New Literati Painting, which will also be mentioned very briefly, attracted more attention of some Western Sinologists, especially in the Czech Republic where a few exhibitions were organized.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to printed sources, some information about painters was found on internet, where I focused on fine arts web portals publishing profiles of various artists as well as information on exhibitions, and also plenty of related articles that have been often published in print media in the past. Some of the painters have their own websites,<sup>12</sup> which provides a good source to download their paintings. There are a large number of websites devoted to Chinese contemporary art, as for example, Artron (*yachang yishu wang* 雅昌藝術網) 99ys (99 *yishu wang* 99 藝術網, Art-Ba-Ba, ARTSPY (*yishu yan* 藝術眼), Artintern.net (*yishu guoji* 藝術國際), and others.

emails (Liu Zijian, Liu Yiyuan, Wei Qingji, Yi Mo, Fang Tu, and others). Some of the artists reacted with a brief answer and allowed me to publish reproductions of their works in this paper and in other research studies, while others answered my questions and sent me their own theoretical articles that describe their work and their views on art.

- <sup>11</sup> This movement was active in the period when I was studying Chinese paintings at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in the years 1992–1993, and my teacher Yao Mingjing 姚鳴京 (b. 1959) was also connected with this movement. Lucie Olivová wrote several articles on this movement mentioned here. One of the exhibitions was *Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting: Tradition and Experiment* in National Gallery in Prague (2001). Zlata Černá also organised exhibitions of several artists somewhat connected with the movement.
- <sup>12</sup> E.g. Liu Yiyuan, email correspondence, April 2, 2014. <<http://liuyiyuan.artron.net/>> (last retrieval May 18, 2017)

## 2 Cultural Background of the 1980s

After the political changes in the late 1970s, when China opened its doors to the world, new ideas and trends of modernism started to enter China. In the early 1980s, a number of foreign literature and important philosophical works were translated into Chinese. Suddenly, the impact of new impulses was a challenge for Chinese artists to try to create in a new way. An important stimulus was the statement of Wu Guanzhong 吳冠中 on the abstract beauty. He was one of the first important artists in contemporary China, who mentioned abstract art in positive sense, speaking about beauty of form; and his statement has often been used by authors active in the movement of experimental ink and wash painting in order to prove the artistic value of their works.<sup>13</sup> The aim of the discussion was to protest against the existing model in Chinese art as the ruling most important model. Since the beginning of 1980s, Chinese public has had a possibility to see in exhibitions not only the works of famous foreign artists, but also those of Chinese artists living in Taiwan, Hong Kong or in the western countries; as was, for example, an exhibition of the experimental painter Liu Kuo-sung 劉國松 residing in Taiwan, which took place in Beijing National Art Museum in 1983. This was the time when many new art groups and movements, including unorthodox and avant-garde, were born in China. The most important of all these groups was probably New Wave 85 (85 xinchao 85 新超), a movement that included almost all kinds of art life.

New Wave 85 appeared mostly in fine art, but in some ways also included other fields of art, such as literature and poetry, and influenced the thought of the whole young generation in that time. This movement was influenced by West and in a very short time, most of the world's major art styles of the 20th century, such as surrealism, expressionism, symbolism, happenings, performance, pop-art to the art of the 1980s mirrored in the works of Chinese avant-garde. The New Wave 85 has formed Chinese avant-garde, which was responding to world art and finding for its own artistic expression.<sup>14</sup>

13 Wu Guanzhong 吳冠中, »Huihua de xingshi mei 繪畫的形式美« [Formal Aesthetics in Painting], *Meishu* 5 (1979), 33–44.

14 Daniela Zhangová, »Premeny čínskeho maliarstva« [The Changes of Chinese Painting], *Výtvarný život / Art Life* 3 (1995), 40.

The relation of Chinese avant-garde movement and contemporary Chinese ink painting is complicated. The famous symbol of Chinese Avant-garde exhibition in 1989 in Beijing Gallery was similar to the traffic sign ‘no U-turn’, which can be interpreted as ‘do not go back’ or ‘do not look backwards’, which can become a symbol of any avant-garde. The Chinese ink has to be understood not as a medium for painting only. It means much more, being a connection with thousands of years of tradition and artists in Chinese art history. For Chinese ink painting, it is impossible to forget the history totally, to discard it like a piece of used paper. It may be one of the reasons why ink painting was relatively under-represented at the above-mentioned exhibition. While the main aim of the New Wave in the 1980s was to protest against tradition, the cultural atmosphere in the Chinese ink painting can be characterised as the revival of Chinese tradition or ‘going back to the roots’. In this period, the New Literati movement, which obviously appealed the tradition of literati painting, was born. Another very important movement, which began slightly later, but is still active, is the Movement of experimental ink painting. This movement and New Literati, have one fact in common, that both their representatives have striven to reform tradition. Both movements are rooted in ancient Chinese culture, but their ways to handle tradition are quite different.

New Literati painting will only be mentioned very briefly here, as I believe that the contribution to the reform of contemporary Chinese painting is not the main value of this movement. More than reforming, they continued to paint in the typical Chinese style, with some small innovations, adapting some slight features of the Western style of painting into their ink painting, e.g. Western composition without using the empty space. This style which was utilized in ancient Chinese landscape paintings and used by earlier Chinese painters is, for example, visible in some paintings of Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻 (1895–1953) or even Li Keran 李可染 (1907–1989), shadowing and dots of watercolor painting in Tian Liming’s 田黎明 (b1955) figural compositions etc.

In fact, the link between this movement and the true ‘literati’ of the past is somewhat vague, and not very essential. Due to the scarce opportunities for this generation of painters to view and study old paintings (until recently, even good reproductions were hard to get in China), it is rather doubtful that ancient masters

could truly be their inspiration.<sup>15</sup> The connections between literati painting and New Literati painting were doubted also by Chinese art theoreticians.<sup>16</sup> In my opinion, in the time when the literati painting was established, the artists came up with new ideas about painting not as a representation, but as an expression of author's feelings and their aesthetics.

Though it should be admitted that New Literati has its place in Chinese art history and they mastered brushwork, my attention was attracted by another movement with strong reform potential and ambitions, which is the movement of experimental ink and wash painting. Experimental ink painting appeared in China in the period of New Wave 85, since Gu Wenda's 谷文達 (b 1955) ink works. His searching was far more than only re-evaluating and criticising tradition. There are no doubts that his bold experiments have opened new ways to modern forms of ink painting.

It is possible to see that ink in the mind of many Chinese painters is not only a technique; it is also a way of thinking. Maybe because modern Chinese painting is strongly influenced by Western art, ink as a typical Chinese medium, is also some acknowledgement of their identity for some authors, accepting abstraction as something which had existed in hidden form in Chinese culture for many hundred years (for example in lines of calligraphy, in highly stylised shapes of flower or scenery in *xieyi* 寫意 painting). It is known that purely abstract painting, without any hint of reality, did not exist in China before the ideas of Western modernism came there.

Contemporary Chinese ink painters, in some way, return to the tradition of literati painting also because they often write about their own works, as the ancient literati painters did many years ago. The positive of this thing is the fact that the author himself, if he/she has good writing abilities, can define the inner meaning of his/her painting better, more spontaneously, more efficiently than

15 Lucie Olivová, »New Literati Painting«, in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture*, <[http://contemporary\\_chinese\\_culture.academic.ru/560/New\\_Literati\\_Painting](http://contemporary_chinese_culture.academic.ru/560/New_Literati_Painting)> (last retrieval June 8, 2016).

16 See, for example an article by Zhu Zhongyuan 朱中原, »Xin wenren hua zhende shi xin ma? 新文人畫真的很新嗎« [Is New Literati Painting Really New?], *Zhongguo wenhua bao—Meishu wenhua zhoukan* 中國文化報·美術文化週刊 [Chinese Cultural Newspaper—Fine Art and Culture Weekly], <<http://review.artintern.net/html.php?id=51911>> (last retrieval June 8, 2016).

anyone else. On the other side, if his/her literary expressing skills are not high enough, it can have bad influence on the acceptance of his/her painting. The movement of experimental ink and wash painting was one of the most active movements in Chinese art in its époque. It can be characterised by its main features: painting on the easel and strong abstract feeling. The artists of experimental ink painting are searching for new logical development. They do not want to import Western art into China directly, but they want to find new directions within its own tradition.

Except from experimental ink painting, there is another very similar style of painting, which is called ‘false, forged calligraphy’ (*wei shufa* 偽書法). It is a kind of abstract painting coming from calligraphy, admitting calligraphy as a source of inspiration, in the end of that process there are no more calligraphic characters but abstract painting with strong calligraphic features. We can find some calligraphic styles in the Chinese history of calligraphy that had reached to the edge of understanding (as is *kuangcao* 狂草 ‘crazy script’, a way of writing *caoshu* 草書 whose strokes are connected) and the formal beauty of the lines highly exceeded the content; the text became only a plea for writing unrestrained lines and express the personality of author. Protagonists of the *wei shufa* realised that that kind of calligraphy can exist only because of its form and there is no more need to have a specific text as a reason for the existence of the lines. The connections between these two styles of painting are unclear, but it seems that only experimental ink painting was able to establish a strong and all-embracing movement, which has attracted attention and whose name is still used in the names of the exhibitions till present times. Of course, there are painters not involved in any of those movements, or some of them participate in the activities of both, but the reasons are more probably personal than purely coming from the position of art.

### 3 *The Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash Painting*

The 1990s brought a great boom to experimental and modern ink and wash painting. In this period, the experimental ink painting formed into a strong

movement, which is highly respected and attracts attention of critics, as we can see from the number of books devoted to its members, and the level of their works is considered as quite high.

When we look deeper into the reasons that brought many of those painters toward experimental ink painting and abstraction, and if we compare their opinions with other Chinese painters, who partially or wholly use oil painting, we can notice two distinguishing facts about painters who use only ink, or consider ink their most favourable medium. Firstly, they often stress the national attributes of ancient Chinese culture and retain ink painting as a traditional Chinese way of expression. But on the other hand, they want to enter into the context of world modern art without losing their own national features. We can see that they want to be accepted by the world modernist movement; to be both Chinese and universal.

Many painters look at abstract ink painting as a way to continue doing traditional Chinese painting with its long history, holding on to the rich expressive ability of Chinese painting in its technique, but try to release themselves from the restrictions of the tradition of Chinese ink painting.

Modern experimental wash and ink painting has been striving to develop Chinese painting as whole. It poses questions that are resonating in contemporary ink painting in China: whether brush strokes (*bifa* 筆法), as presented in the book from Ming dynasty, Jieziyuan 芥子園, or bone method of using brush, splashing and other techniques are not too old and out-of-date in the modern period; how and to which extend it is possible to use traditional ways of ink painting without losing the originality, without being restricted by them. There is a challenge of new techniques that came from Western painting, like watercolour painting or graphics (repeated dying, using spray method or collage). The question is, whether to use them, and if yes, in which way. As per the representatives of experimental ink painting, we can find various answers to these problems, some of them more traditional, some wanting to escape from tradition. Part of them use dry brush (bone method), taking inspiration from Chinese art of calligraphy (some works of Wang Chuan). Some use techniques that do not exist in traditional Chinese ink painting, while some other are trying to find a synthesis of western and eastern elements in their paintings (Wei Qingji).

When we are talking about the basis of the movement of experimental ink and wash painting, there should not be missed the creations of Chinese artists

living in Hong Kong and Taiwan, as are Liu Kuo-sung 劉國松 (b1932), Huang Chaohu 黃朝湖 (b1939), Zhou Lüyun 周綠雲 (1924–2011) and others, whose experimental painting with abstract or semi-abstract features was developing mostly from the 1960s to 1970s. Their works started to appear in Chinese art journals in the beginning of the 1980s. The time period when the movement of experimental ink and wash painting had started to form, the contacts between the artists of Mainland China and Hong Kong and Taiwan had established, and the art from these regions strongly influenced the origin of the movement. At the same time, information on other Chinese artists residing abroad, as are Zhao Wuji 趙無極 (Zao Wou-ki, 1920–2013), Zeng Youhe 曾佑和 (Tseng Yuho, b1925), etc. was received. Their works also had a certain influence on the formation of the movement of Experimental ink and wash painting.<sup>17</sup>

While the conservative part of Chinese ink painters apparently seemed to ignore the new trends in world art and they continued to developing the tradition of ink and wash painting from their own inspirations; artists in the Movement of experimental ink and wash painting, unlike contemporary Chinese artists involved in oil painting, had tried to be a part of modern art trends, but not to lose the Chinese features. They felt ink painting as a proof of their Chinese roots, they felt a strong need to be both Chinese as well as the part of the new world art movement. They struggled with Western centralism that accepted Eastern tendencies in art only as a source of inspiration for Western artists, but hardly accepted contemporary artists from other parts of the world.

### 3.1 *Reactions of Chinese art critics to the Movement*

The Movement of experimental ink painting attracted the attention of art circles since its beginnings. Many of them welcomed the new strong group and new tendencies hoping for the reform of Chinese ink painting. As for Chinese painting

<sup>17</sup> Daniela Zhang Cziráková, »Abstraktná maľba na Taiwane a v Hongkongu v šestdesiatych až osemdesiatych rokoch dvadsiateho storočia« [Abstract Painting in Taiwan and Hong Kong from 1960s until 1980s], in *Sborník z Česko-slovenskej sinologické konference* [Proceedings of the Czech and Slovak Sinological conference], ed. by Pavla Slavíčková (Olomouc: Palacký University, Faculty of Philosophy, 2010), 116–141.

(except of strong traditionalists), there are often heard voices calling for reform. These movements have been occurring in the long history of Chinese painting so frequently that even the calling for reform can be regarded as a part of its self-regeneration. After not very long and successful movement of New Literati, the attention of art theorists had turned to the experimental ink painting. Many art critics, as for example, Pi Daojian 皮道堅, Yi Ying 易英, Yin Shuangxi 殷雙喜 presented very positive attitude towards the movement. Yin Shuangxi claimed:

Experimental ink painting of the 1990s that created the movement is the liveliest of the most significant phenomena in the Chinese art of its time. It can be characterized by painting on the easel and abstract features. These artists are searching for new development within the traditional ink painting. They are not simply trying to directly import Western art for completing the transformation of Chinese painting with ink toward modernism.<sup>18</sup>

Yi Ying tried to sketch an exact definition of the experiment as the main feature of the movement and its potential for reforming ink painting: »The experiment is inherited in the creative process; therefore, speaking of experiments in the ink painting actually could suggest unlimited possibilities for the development of ink painting.«<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Yin Shuangxi, »Gazing the Starry Sky: Forms and Concepts/Ningshi fanxing zai xingshi yu guannian zhijian 凝視繁星在形式與觀念之間«, in Pi Daojian, *Experimental Ink and Wash Painting*, 134.

<sup>19</sup> Yi Ying, »Possibilities of Experimental Wash Painting/Shiyan shuimo de kenengxing 試驗水墨的可能性«, in Pi Daojian, *Experimental Ink and Wash Painting*, 136.



## Plate 1

Liu Yiyuan, »Life Attitude No. 1«, 2006, *ink on paper*, 192 x 179 cm.

Chinese ink painting as a typical Chinese art technique includes the whole network of theories of art and aesthetic principles, which are different from oil painting. It presents a kind of the universe, kept by the old rules, boundaries, techniques and aesthetic principles that were formed for centuries, which ultimately make any innovation very difficult. This is one of the reasons why the attention of Chinese art theorists is focused on any new movement which is promises to bring new tendencies to the development of ink painting. They search for a new starting point for further development of a lively existence of ink

painting, which has been struggling with a lack of new impulses at least for a century.

There is another reason why the movement of experimental ink painting has attracted attention of Chinese art critics and theorists: it was the first group in Mainland China, for whom abstract painting played a huge role. While their response to experimental ink painting was generally positive, the opinions of art critics on abstract ink painting were divided. Although there are abstract elements latently existing in the Chinese fine arts for more than a thousand years, pure abstraction was declined in that period in China for various political or socio-cultural and historical reasons.

### 3.2 *Exhibitions and other activities of the Movement*

Artists of experimental ink painting had large number of exhibitions. Some of them have published books and almanacs on this movement. Some of the most important of them are: 94 Tension of Experiment—Exhibition of expressive Ink and Wash Painting (94 *Zhangli de shiyan—shuimo biaoxian zhan* 94 張力的試驗—水墨表現展, Beijing Gallery, Beijing, 1994), Big Exhibition of Contemporary Ink and Wash Painting (*Zhongguo xiandai shuimo da zhan* 中國現代水墨大展, Taiwan, 1994), 95 Tension of Experiment—Exhibition of Expressive Ink and Wash Painting (95 *Zhangli de shiyan—shuimo biaoxian zhan* 95 張力的試驗—水墨表現展, Beijing Gallery, Beijing, 1995), Ink and Light—Exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Abstract Ink and Wash Painting (*Mo yu guang. Zhongguo xiandai chouxian shuimo* 墨與光—中國現代抽象水墨, Belgium, 1995), Returning Home—Collective Exhibition of Experimental Ink and Wash Painting (*Chongfan jiayuan—Zhongguo shiyan shuimo lian zhan* 重返家園—中國實驗水墨聯展, USA, 1996), 98 Tension of Experiment—Exhibition of Expressive Ink and Wash Painting (98 *Zhangli de shiyan—shuimo biaoxian zhan* 98 張力的試驗—水墨表現展, Beijing Gallery, Beijing, 1998). the exhibition- 20 Years of Experimental Ink and Wash Painting (*Shiyan shuimo ershi nian* 實驗水墨20年, Guangzhou) in 2001 and Review of Experimental Ink and Wash Painting 1985–2000 (*Shiyan shuimo huigu zhan* 實驗水墨回顧展 1985–2000, Shenzhen Art House, 2005). Experimental ink and wash painting even entered the well-known avant-garde Red Gate Gallery in Beijing, where it was exhibited in Avant-garde Experimental Ink and Wash Painting (August 2003). It was also displayed at Twenty Years of Chinese Experimental Ink and Wash Painting (*Zhongguo shiyan shimo 20 nian* 中國實驗水墨20年, Gallery of Guangzhou,

Guangzhou, 2001), Encres De Chine Experimentales/*Zhongguo shang mo—dangdai shiyan shuimo zhan* 中國上墨·當代實驗水墨藝術展 (Lille, 2005), and at later exhibitions, including 90—Experimenting, Viewing and Emulating after Ink and Wash (90—*Shuimo hou shiyan guanmo* 90—水墨後試驗觀摩, Songzhuang, 2013), and such.

Apart from the exhibitions mentioned above, where the name of movement can be found in their name, the members of the movement participated at a great number of exhibitions concerning contemporary ink painting or calligraphy in China and abroad, for example, Shanghai—Taibei, Contemporary Ink and Wash Exhibition (*Shanghai—Taibei xiandai shuimo zhan* 上海—臺北現代水墨展, Yokohama, 1996), Reality—Today and Tomorrow, Exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Art (*Xianshijintian yu mingtian* 現實—今天與明, 96中國現代藝術展, Hamburg, 1996), Natural Colour of Ink and Wash (*Shuimo bense* 水墨本色, Wien, 2001), Ink and Paper (Weimar Art Museum, Weimar, 2005), ‘Characters—No Characters’: Exhibition of Contemporary Calligraphy (*Zi—feizi: xiandai shufa yishu zhan* ‘字—非字’ 現代書法藝術展, Toronto, 2005), Passing through—The Way of Contemporary Ink and Wash (*Du—dangdai shuimo fangshi* 渡—當代水墨方式, Vancouver, 2006), Ink and Wash: Art of Chinese Calligraphy (Shuimo: *Zhongguo de shuxie yishu* 水墨：中國的書寫藝術, Denmark 2006), Narration in Ink and Wash (Yokohama Zaim Gallery, Yokohama, 2007), Savoring Images with a Pure Heart: Contemporary Chinese Ink and Wash Invitational Exhibition (Da Xiang Art Space, Taiwan, 2008), Back to the Essence from Ink Painting to Ink (Da Xiang Art Space, Taiwan, 2010) and a lot of other.

Apart from exhibitions, members of Experimental Ink and Wash Movement organized plenty of conferences and workshops, such as: Entry of Chinese Contemporary Ink and Wash Painting to the 21st Century, Conference and Exhibition (*Zou xiang ershiyi shiji de zhongguo dangdai shuimo yantaohui ji zuopin zhan* 走向二十一世紀的中國當代水墨研討會及作品展, Guangzhou, 1996).

#### 4 *Some Representative Authors Devoted to Experimental Ink and Wash Painting, and Their Connection to the Movement*

Although the movement of experimental ink painting began in the early 90s, we can find bold experiments dealing with ink and wash in Mainland China since the New Wave 85 movement started. Some artists connected with New Wave 85 are, Gu Wenda 谷文達 (b1955, Shanghai) who resides in New York now, Xu Bing 徐冰 (b1955), Wang Chuan 王川 (b1953, Chengdu), Shen Qin 沈勤 (b1958, Jiangsu province), Song Gang 宋剛 (b1960, Chongqing), Dong Chao 董超 (b1958, Shandong), and Wang Gongyi 王公懿 (b1946, Tianjin). These artists started to create and exhibit their experimental ink paintings in the mid-1980s, and all of them participated in the exhibition *China Avant-garde* in Chinese gallery in Peking in 1989. Most of them are not closely connected with the movement of Experimental Ink and Wash painting, but had some participation in the movement.

Gu Wenda's installations are covered by Chinese characters and fragments of landscapes, and thus, his works are full of expression and they present dawn of contemporary Chinese ink painting. Unlike him, Xu Bing in his »Book of Heaven« tried to avoid any handwriting, his newly created meaningless 'Chinese characters' were printed in such order to create a look of new language, looking familiar but unknown, with suggestive misleading and misunderstanding of language, and unusual fragmentation. After leaving China, he continued to play with languages and written texts. His »Schools of Calligraphy« uses Latin letters to create a new kind of transcription. His misunderstanding had changed in order to try to find a way to mutual understanding.

One of the best known and most representative Chinese experimental painters is Wang Chuan, an abstract painter, member of Chinese avant-garde movement in the 1980s, who lived in the United States in the period around 2000 and then came back to China. He now lives in Peking. Wang Chuan participated in the exhibition *China/Avant-garde* in 1989 and in many other exhibitions in China and abroad. Some people call him a minimalist artist. In his works, he uses mostly Chinese ink. After a short period in the 90s, he tried to paint oil paintings and experimented with environmental art, but returned to his favourite technique—ink painting. He began as a realistic painter and turned to abstraction in 1980s and his ink works keep the same high standard. According to him, he

likes ancient Chinese painting of Shitao, Zhu Da 朱耷 (Ba Da Shan Ren 八大山人, 1626–ca. 1705) and other individualist painters. Wang Chuan uses broad strokes of brush to express his feelings. He is one of the artists coming from the New Wave 85, who have some connections to the Movement of Experimental ink and wash painting. After he went abroad in 1996, he continued to participate in their exhibitions, and his works were published in the catalogues of this movement. He is one of the artists who work in both techniques—oil painting and ink painting, suggesting an idea, which was hardly understandable in the period of 1990s. But now more and more followers think that ink and oil painting are not so different, it is possible to create in oil painting and not to lose the spirit of Chinese culture. He devoted his life to abstract painting, no matter what medium.

Another important contemporary abstract ink painter is Song Gang. Similar to Wang Chuan, he is also one of the artists involved in New Wave 85. He participated in the exhibition China/Avant-garde in 1989, where he was counted among the boldest as well as very cultivated artists. His abstract works are inspired by Chinese calligraphy bearing features of that art of lines and strokes. The big brushstrokes remind us American Action painting in some ways. Looking at his paintings, we get the impression of the strong influence of *kuangcao*, the most stylised kind of Chinese calligraphy, especially used by ancient masters such as Zhang Xu 張旭 (8th century) and Huaisu 懷素 (737–799), ‘expressionists’ from the late Tang Dynasty as Wang Mo and the works of Zen Buddhist’s painters with their stylisation. We can also feel the speed of his movement and see the drops of ink anywhere. He is not active in the Movement of experimental ink painting of the 1990s, but in comparison to the Movement, his works are of high artistic level.

Shen Qin is also an ink painter, who presented his painting in the 1980s, and he belongs to the generation of China/Avant-Garde in 1989. He is one of representative artists of contemporary ink painting in China. While his earlier works bear some features of surrealism, the new works are more in style of minimalism, in composition as well as in the final realisation. His brushwork is reduced to the pure emotion; he rejects every colour except the variety of black ink. His artistic language breaks the barriers built by traditional painting; he struggles for the harmony between western and eastern aesthetics. His lyrical composition of early works bearing the name ‘mountain’, remind us of wrapped

textiles. They were later transformed into highly stylised geometric landscapes, not at all similar to traditional Chinese landscapes, rather inspired by Western symbolism and cubism than by traditional ink landscapes.

Although Wang Chuan and Shen Qin started to create their ink paintings before the Movement of experimental ink painting was established as movement, they became engaged in the movement, often exhibited their works together with other protagonists of experimental ink painting.



Plate 2

Zhang Yu, »*Serving Tea*, 2017.4.16—Eastern Beautiful Women Tea«, 2017, installation and performance art, Chinese rice paper, glass bowls, Eastern Beautiful Women Tea (tea brand), tables.

The artist, art theorist and curator Zhang Yu (b1959, Tianjin) played an essential role in the establishment of the movement. Zhang Yu participated in the movement since the beginning. He is the curator of numerous exhibitions not only in China, but also abroad. Zhang Yu was the founder and organiser of the movement since its beginning, participating in organising conferences and workshops. He is editor of the series of books on contemporary ink painting published in the end of the 20th century. He organized several conferences on Chinese art of ink, participated in art workshops in Russia, France, Belgium,

Holland and in other countries, co-organised an Encres De Chine Experimentales (Lille, 2005) and many other exhibitions dedicated to ink painting. In recent years, he has organised at least one collective exhibition concerning ink painting or contemporary art every year.

As a painter, he has had a great number of solo exhibitions and participated in a plenty of exhibitions in China and abroad. His early paintings from the 1990s include monochromatic ink compositions with titles such as »Dark Sun«. In his works it is possible to observe certain typical features like rejecting brushwork and using the style of dying ink similar to Liu Kuo-sung's works.

Zhang Yu's work, despite its specific style, has been a great artistic development. In his later works, he has gradually abandoned ink painting on the Chinese paper and now presents himself as an avant-garde artist. His new works include installations, performances, works on glass, as well as ink works sometimes created in very specific ways. By the beginning of the 21st century, he created a series of works made on glass using his fingers to print fingerprints on the glass surface. Some of the works were black, reminding us of his ink paintings; sometimes he used monochromatic colours like red or pink. The process of fingerprinting was recorded and it can be regarded as a kind of performance art, while the results of these performances are semi-transparent works. Although these works do not belong to ink and wash paintings, they still have some connection with traditional ink painting known as the technique of finger painting, which had been used, for example, by Gao Qipei 高其佩 (1660–1734) from the Qing Dynasty. As it can be seen, avoiding any touch of tradition is much more difficult for Chinese artists than it might seem. Zhang Yu's works are usually monochromatic. In his installations he utilises the specifics of the places and genius loci of the regions, where he creates them. These are no more specifically Chinese, he combines the elements of Western and Eastern cultures, which allows his work to resonate more deeply in the minds of Western public, who are not very familiar with the slight nuances of Chinese painting, but are sensitive to the conceptual play of space, time and cultural context.



Plate 3

*Yan Binghui, »Stars Dust«, 1990s, ink on Chinese rice paper, 136 x 68 cm.*

Artist, calligrapher and poet Yan Binghui 閻秉會 (b1956) was active in the Movement of experimental ink painting, but started to take part in contemporary ink painting before the establishment of the movement. He has participated in numerous exhibitions on painting and calligraphy since 1985 and he belongs to the painters presented at the exhibition China/Avant-Garde in 1989. He was in Sweden on cultural exchange, where he published a collection of his poetry and catalogues on his calligraphy.<sup>20</sup> Since 1985, he is trying to express his emotions, which allows his ink painting an entry into spiritual level. For him, the reduction and purity of shape is most important. This artist believes that he can express rich emotions and feelings through the simplicity of shape, bringing us to the 'beyond the shape', state of abstraction. Yan Binghui came from the art of calligraphy, but his paintings remind us something of Western monochromatic abstract painting, with the surface covered by one colour. The author uses only black ink, sometimes enriched with subtle touches of colours. In present days he still continues to devote himself to experimental ink painting, but instead of abstract ink works he creates ink paintings, which are much more connected to the Chinese traditional painting. Both of these seemingly contradictory positions of the artist, traditional painting and abstraction, are linked by his specific style and his brilliant

<sup>20</sup> CV in the materials sent by the artist to the author in 2000.

brushwork. The brushstrokes reflected in his works show a deep understanding of tradition, which, in itself is manifested in the ways of using brush. Perhaps this close connection to traditional Chinese style of ink painting, reflected by mere touch of the brush on paper, was the reason why some protagonists of experimental ink painting had refused brushwork as something that is too liable to the Chinese tradition, and therefore, restraining.

Another painter linked in some ways to the Movement of experimental ink painting in the 90s, is Liu Zijian 劉子鍵 (b1956, Hubei). He uses his own artistic language, avoiding the typically traditional Chinese composition with empty spaces in painting, as well as brushwork. His paintings remind us more of Western composition. He uses the technique of washes, collage, aquarelle and dark ink in contrast with light tones of ink. The whole impression of his work is very depressing: dark space, loneliness, ruins, as if he is showing us the world after a catastrophic war in which people have been defeated by machines. In his paintings we can see hard edges and the composition is akin to formalism. He belongs to a small group of painters, who since the late 1990s until today have maintained their own way of painting. Though the development of his personal style is visible, due to its continuity his works are recognizable without any doubt. He is one of the painters who refuse brushworks as something too strongly attracted to the tradition. His composition is much more similar to the western style of painting than to the Chinese traditional feeling of emptiness.

Wei Qingji 魏青吉 (b1971, Qingdao) belonged to the youngest members of the contemporary ink at the beginning of the movement. He wrote:

In my latest paintings, I am coming from the essence of art. I want to build a new language of ink painting. For me, ink is neither the way to express my origin nor the weapon in the battle between different cultures. This is my natural choice, just because I like ink painting and I am good at using this medium. I would like to give an appeal of the humanism to my works. For me painting is the report of my personal experiences, feelings, ideas, reminiscences, as well as the report of new imaginations, personal emotions, subconscious and historical traces, and there is also the sex and passion.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> »Wei Qingji«, in Yi Mo, *One Hundred Outstanding Artists*, 120.

He never had a problem with accepting or rejecting Western or Eastern culture, tradition or modernism. He just naturally uses his own favourite medium, his way of creation, using collage, white colour on big spaces, sharp pencil lines, and sprays evocating the feeling of freshness. Wei Qingji uses a mixture of western and eastern techniques, where sometimes we can detect the inspiration from Antoni Tapiés or Jackson Pollock, or otherwise he reverts to traditional composition of Chinese ink painting, using the emptiness as important significant component. His paintings give us a glimpse of how the contemporary ink painting could look in future times—free of all discussions, fresh and full of pure joy of painting.

Wei Qingji, like Zhang Yu mentioned above, is one of the artists, who has crossed the borders between contemporary ink painting and Chinese avant-garde. His later paintings imply the elements of pop art and political pop, he has been combining traditional ink and wash painting with acrylic colours, some of his works even remind us of printed techniques. He is often exhibits his works in private galleries (e.g., Red Gate Gallery), because the specific multiversity of his style, suits to their conception.



Plate 4

*Wei Qingji, »Merry Christmas«, 2008, ink on Chinese rice paper, 192 x 250 cm.*

Liu Yiyuan 劉一原 (b1942, Wuhan) is a contemporary ink painter who participated in the movement of experimental ink painting since its beginnings. He presented his works at some big exhibitions of the movement during the 1990s, as was The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century in Guangzhou.

In order to manifest his individual feelings, his reflections on life, his dreams, he left the traditional aesthetics. Liu Yiyuan has naturally followed the path of abstraction. In his paintings, we do not see the landscape, historical monuments, cold mountains and small houses. His works have specific atmosphere, they bear the tracks of personalized nature.<sup>22</sup> The continuity of development of his artistic

<sup>22</sup> Yin Shuangxi, »Guanyu Liu Yiyuan de hua 關於劉一原的畫 [About Liu Yiyuan's Paintings], in

style is visible when we have a look at his works of the last ten or more years. After all the years, there are the same rounded lines, typical for his early works, now sometimes interrupted by tracts of direct lines, resembling to raster. His composition had slowly changed from typical Western full composition to lighter composition with the use of some aspects of the emptiness. He uses different types of compositions now, from fully filled monolithic works, typical for his experimental beginnings; to asymmetric structures. On his website's exhibition space,<sup>23</sup> apart from purely abstract works, there are semi abstract works with traces of insects (spiders), as well as traditional ink paintings, landscapes and herbal compositions.

Yi Mo 一墨 (called also Yuan Mao 袁矛, b1959, Zhejiang) is one of the organizers of the movement. He started to devote to experimental ink painting in the mid-1980s and was seeking for freedom in his paintings. He was editor of an art journal, and he has edited some of the almanacs of the movement of experimental ink panting. He edited and published the book *One Hundered Outstanding Artists*.<sup>24</sup> His main achievement lies in his organizing work; he was chairman of the World Association of Chinese Painters. He does not seem be actually involved in the movement, as is visible from his artworks shown on websites, where his landscapes, figural paintings, flower paintings are more in the traditional style than painted in very experimental way.<sup>25</sup>

Chen Tiejun 陳鐵軍 (Chen Laotie 陳老鐵, b1956, Beijing) is one of the artists, who is active in the movement of experimental ink painting. At the beginning he was involved in calligraphy, landscape and figurative painting, later being inspired by surrealism, he started creating abstract ink painting and organising the exhibitions of ink painting with expressionistic features. In 1995, he participated in Biennale in Venice. Chen Tiejun often uses destruction as a creative process; he combines soft and hard materials to achieve his personal style of painting. He disagrees with painters who reject brushwork in ink painting. He believes that the

Yu Ren, *The Artistic Trend*, 68–69.

<sup>23</sup> Available at: <<http://liuyiyuan.artron.net/works>> (last retrieval July 15, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Yi Mo, *One Hundred Outstanding Artists*.

<sup>25</sup> See <[http://gallery.artron.net/2815/g\\_artist\\_show\\_15573.html](http://gallery.artron.net/2815/g_artist_show_15573.html)> (last retrieval July 17, 2016), see also <<http://qcyn.sina.com.cn/lijiang/ljnews/ljyw/2011/0819/1133292228.html>>.

evolution of the ink painting cannot break its relations with traditional ink painting, where brushwork lies in the centre of attention.

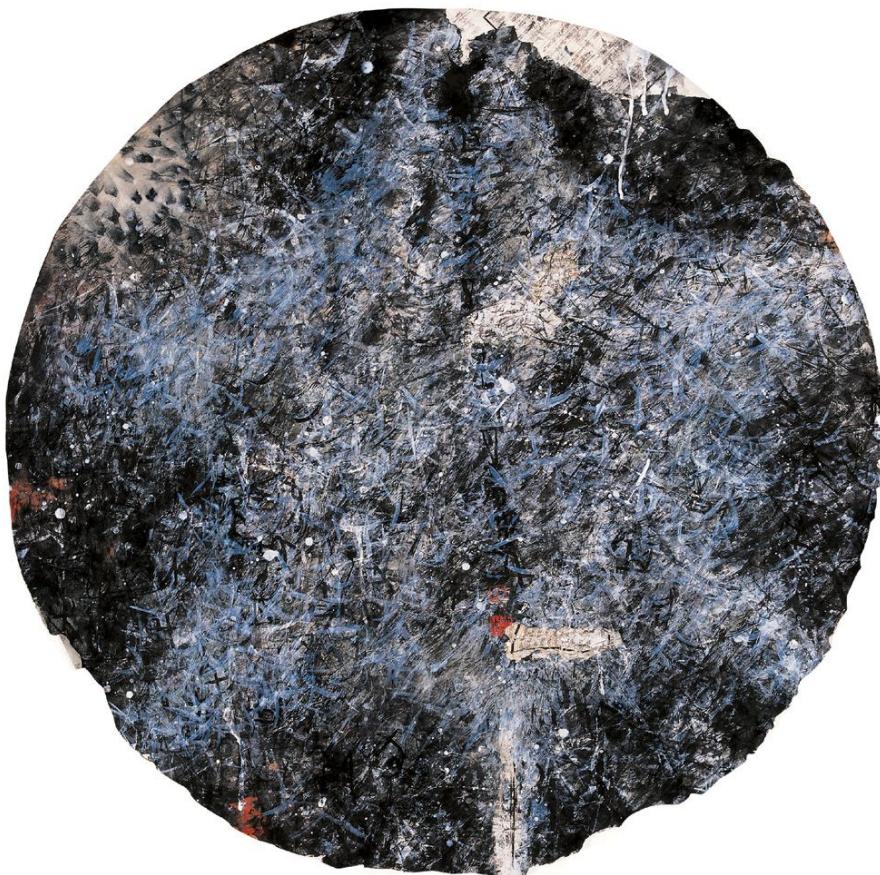


Plate 5

*Wang Tiande, »Work No. 2 in Progress«, 2007, ink on paper, 96 x 96 cm.*

Unlike the other ink painters, Chen Tiejun does not avoid bright colours in his paintings. Beside black ink, he often uses red colour in bright or in a tone of violet.

While the tones of red evoke violence, fighting, destruction to other critics, I sometimes associate them with emotions that are not so depressing or so dramatic. Sometimes red together with blue or green gives lyrical feeling, like 'plum blossoms' (*meihua* 梅花), peonies or other flowers often used in traditional Chinese painting.

In recent years, he has switched to abstract oil paintings. His style of abstract painting has not changed much. He continues to paint traditional figurative motives. His example shows that the boundaries between ink painting and oil painting, which were assumed to be very well defined in the 90s of the 20th century, are gradually blurring.

Another important artist who was involved in the movement in 1990s, and still is connected to experimental ink painting, is Wang Tiande 王天德 (b1960). He is devoted to abstract painting since the 1990s; he participated in a number of exhibitions in China, Experimental Ink and Wash Painting of China in the 90's in Hong Kong in 1998 among other exhibitions. His works can be found in the volume *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the late 20th Century*. He participated in a wide range of exhibitions on contemporary ink painting, as well as the above-mentioned Encres De Chine Experimentales in Lille, in 2005. He held several solo exhibitions in Canada (2004), Hong Kong (2005), New York (2007), etc.

Similar to the artists mentioned above, experimental ink painting of Wang Tiande is only part of his work. In addition to abstract motives, he continuously works with more traditional forms of Chinese painting with ink, especially landscape painting. He writes calligraphy, which is also on the border of semi abstract motives. His abstract paintings consist of compositions in the form of traditional Chinese fan, which delivers a certain degree of 'acceptability' to abstract painting in the Chinese cultural background. In his works, except calligraphy, he uses the technique of dying more than strong emphasis on brushwork.

An interesting part of Wang Tiande's work, which is probably a derivative of his job in the faculty of design, are fashion designs of clothing covered in Chinese characters in a very abstract way and with abstract or semi-abstract motifs. Sometimes the designs are showcased on live models, sometimes they are more like a concept painting, either an abstract ink painting or highly stylized mountains painted in the shape of traditional Chinese clothes that resemble the

Chinese textiles in the earliest ancient graves. His artistic style has slightly shifted from pure painting to painting on the border between design and fashion, but nevertheless retains its continuous line.

Wei Baorong 魏寶榮 (b1946, Tianjin) is a calligrapher, whose ink paintings bear strong calligraphic features. He was involved in the movement in the 1990s, he participated at exhibitions. In his theoretical writings he mentioned the huge impact of Eastern calligraphy on Western abstract expressionism: »Eastern calligraphy has a huge impact on western painting. Its beauty is borderless. If we ignore this fact, we will not be able to use this resource openly and generously, our ancestors will feel sad because of that. The abstract form of similar calligraphy repeats and imitates nature, does not express specific phenomena, tries to express the meaning of life through its symbolized compositions.«<sup>26</sup> From his way of using language while speaking of ancestors, it is visible that the movement became attractive even for artists like him, deeply rooted in traditional expression.

Though Wei Baorong defines himself much more as a calligrapher than as a contemporary painter, he connects ink painting and calligraphy in a very traditional way putting emphasis on stressing the same origin of calligraphy and painting (*shu hua tong yuan* 書畫同源)<sup>27</sup> as the name of his paintings series, which shows his immerse respect towards tradition.

Fang Tu 方土 (b1963, Guangdong) is another painter who was engaged in the Movement for a certain time, but now he is no more involved in experimental ink painting. He is mostly engaged in figural ink painting recently. As one might guess just from looking at his paintings, but also according to his words,<sup>28</sup> Fang Tu is an artist who naturally drifted to abstraction thanks to art-theoretical views with spiritual similarities (*xing si* 形似), often mentioned in the history of Chinese painting.

<sup>26</sup> Wei Baorong, »Yishujia shouji, mengxiang ding neng cheng zhen 藝術家手記，夢想定能成真« [Notes by Artists—Dreams Will Definitely Come True], in Pi Daojian, *Experimental Ink and Wash Painting of China in the 90's*, 70.

<sup>27</sup> See more on his webpage: <<http://weibaorong.findart.com.cn/zuopin/>> (last retrieval May 17, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Correspondence with the painter in 2000.

For better understanding of the dynamics of the movement, it must be noted that the movement was far from being consistent; it included not only the members who were clearly claiming their position of modernism and convinced of experimental ink as its long-term artistic direction. For some painters it was nothing but short period of experiments with form, a kind of inspiration for their later achievements in more traditional artistic genres. Fang Tu belongs to this category of artists, and he is mentioned here as one of them who followed the movement for a certain time in its very beginnings.

Although, in the catalogues and monographs of the movement from the 1990s, the majority of authors were represented by abstract works; not all of them really continued to walk on the path of pure abstraction. One of them is Zhang Jin 張進 (b1958, Beijing). Not all his works are abstract painting; we can also see figural or natural motifs in some of his paintings from that period. His works exhibited in Lille are much closer to abstraction, but without seeing originals it is impossible to be sure whether they are pure abstractions or a kind of semi-abstract works, too. According to the content on the internet, we can see only traditional Chinese paintings and his opinions published on various websites show his critical attitude towards abstraction.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps because of the similar attitude, which is not rare in Chinese cultural circles, the movement of experimental painting with ink sometimes deviates from abstraction towards the shape and content, and for many artists it is quite difficult to stick to abstraction.

29 »張進批評某些畫家在吸收西方現代藝術的過程中，生搬硬套，是『奶油』加『咖啡』式的水墨畫，說這些畫家（其中包括某些批評家）「正在不自覺地進入到不覺醒或困惑狀的局面，陷入以抽象水墨為標榜的新的被侵略境地中」« [Zhang Jin criticized some painters who enchanted by Western art apply western elements, paint ink paintings as ‘cream’ and ‘coffee’, he says that these artists (and even some art critics) »fell into the trap of admiration at the way this new invasion is presented as abstract ink paintings], in Zhang Jin de shuimo yinji 張進的水墨印跡 [Zhang Jin's Traces of Ink and Wash], <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/shuhua/2011-09/15/c\\_122036963\\_2.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/shuhua/2011-09/15/c_122036963_2.htm)>, source: Xinhua shu hua 新華書畫, September 15, 2011; Xiandai shuimo Zhang Jin: wo dui qian gushi bi dang xia shi gan qingqu 現代水墨張進：我對千古事比當下事感興趣 [Contemporary Ink Zhang Jin: I Am More Interested in Thousands of Stories than in Taking It Too Seriously], <[http://blog.sina.cn/dpool/blog/s/blog\\_599a70fd0101b9ia.html](http://blog.sina.cn/dpool/blog/s/blog_599a70fd0101b9ia.html)> (last retrieval June 9, 2016)

Out of some new painters devoted to ink painting, I would briefly like to mention two of them, namely Lan Chunlei 藍春雷 (b1971, Guangxi), who mostly does ink painting, and Ma Yiyang 馬一鷹 (b1968, Hunan). Other noteworthy artists are—Liang Quan 梁銓 (b1948, Shanghai) who admits to strong inspiration from Taoist philosophy and classical Chinese literature, especially the concept of emptiness, which comes from Zen Buddhist philosophy; the women painters Pan Ying 潘纓 (b1962, Beijing), Liu Xuguang 劉旭光 (b1962, Shandong), Chen Honghan 陳紅汗 (b1969, Liu'an), and many others who participated in the exhibition *Encres De Chine Experimentales* (Lille, 2005).

As already mentioned, not all Chinese artists residing in Mainland China and devoted to contemporary ink were closely connected to the movement. The reasons are diverse, from timing to personal relationships with major actors of the movement. Apart from the movement, there are also other groups involved in contemporary ink painting, as well as some artists that don't belong to any of these groups. One of the artists who didn't participate in the movement is, for example, Zhang Dawo 張大我 (also known as Dawo, b1943, Shanxi province) who lives in Australia and China. His works with strong calligraphic feeling are deeply influenced by Taoist philosophy, especially by Zhuangzi. He insists that his works mostly stem from Chinese tradition; although he has been living abroad for many years, his art is not strongly connected to the Western art. His abstract painting influenced by Zen Buddhist and Taoist philosophy has naturally evolved from Chinese calligraphy, especially from unrestrained lines of *kuangcao*. His works are full of bold emotions, expressive power; we can feel the speed of the brush movement. The composition of his painting often reminds us of the composition of ancient calligraphic inscriptions on stelae or the composition of ink landscape paintings, but it is possible to find works where the lines fill all the space on paper. In some of his works, Zhang Dawo uses dry brush and hectically covers the paper by calligraphic lines. What he is writing is no more calligraphy; it is just a play with ink. Some of his works are painted by brush full of water; his quick brushstrokes leave darker or lighter places on paper.



Plate 6

*Zhang Shuguang, »Ink Work Serie«, 2003, ink on Chinese paper, 46 x 62 cm.*

The last author mentioned here is the accomplished abstract painter Zhang Shuguang 張曙光 (also known as Paolo Zhang, b1967, Heilongjiang), whose works are strongly influenced by Chinese calligraphy, mostly in oil paintings. He spent almost twenty years in Europe, and now lives mostly in China. In most of his works the strong inspiration of Chinese calligraphy is visible. His variety of lines and the way of using brush remind us of the skill of calligrapher with the knowledge of hundreds of year's history of traditional calligraphy, especially in the most unrestrained form—*kuangcao*. At places he plays with informal-looking textures, which can be associated with contemporary movement of art as well as with the ancient Chinese wall painting in their silent decline, where the lines of painting cross the lines of floating time.<sup>30</sup>

### 5 Conclusion—Achievements of the Movement and Its Influence

Ink painters living in Mainland China face problems, which lay beyond art. While Western painters as, for example, Tapiés, admit the inspiration of Eastern art, Chinese ink painters on one hand want to absorb Western impulses, opinions, styles; but on the other hand, want to stay loyal to their own artistic language. They feel this conflict, they are afraid of being accused of copying Western models. Therefore, their aim to propagate or redefine the language of ink is understandable. Experimental ink painting is, as per its name, a bold experiment. We do not know now whether it will succeed or not, only history will tell it to us, or to the younger generation of artists and art theorists.

Consequently, Chinese abstract art, experimental art, and certain types of conceptual art, particularly some small-scale, unsellable, unexciting installation works, have been marginalized in both critical writing and the market.<sup>31</sup>

The most acclaimed factor of the experimental painting with ink at the time of its creation and development was experimenting, testing something new, by

30 Daniela Zhang Cziráková, »Volanie čiar, šepot farieb« [Calling of Lines, Whispering of Colours], *Revue svetovej literatúry* [Revue of the World Literature] 35,2 (1999), 103–104.

31 Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-garde in Twentieth Century Chinese Art*, 10.

which means experimental ink and wash painting could escape the restrictions that China has imposed on ink painting during its long and splendid history. The movement of experimental ink and wash painting is of great importance for contemporary Chinese painting, especially because this movement brought forth strong artistic personalities involved in ink and wash painting, such as Liu Zijian, Liu Yiyuan, Wang Tiande, Zhang Yu, and Wei Qingji. Works of the last two artists are now moving away from strictly comprehended ink painting, but retain some continuity and a specific style. These and other artists are beneficial not only for the further development of contemporary ink and wash painting, but also for the development of contemporary Chinese painting and fine art as a whole. Many of them left strictly understood ink painting; they have become important in the context of contemporary art. Their achievements are connected to other artists, forming abstract paintings, who are part of the movement of experimental paintings, but their works are to some extent inspired by the artistic achievements of the movement.

Unlike other art movements and trends in the Chinese cultural world, which are rather short-lived, experimental ink and wash painting is still a concept that attracts public and artists. It can be found even in the titles of the exhibitions, which took place over the past 2–3 years. For example, an exhibition 90—Experimenting, Viewing and Emulating after Ink and Wash, which took place in December 2013 in the Songzhuang art village near Peking. Apart from the authors belonging to the movement at its beginnings, there are other artists who joined the movement for its appealing idea of experimenting.

Regardless of whether the experimental ink and wash painting applies to artists active in the movement, it was an artistic experience that had a decisive influence on all of their subsequent artistic direction. If it was just a short episode of their painting life, in that case, they certainly made a progress. The significance of experimental ink and wash painting, therefore, is in opening new perspectives for contemporary ink painting, and also creating a significant shift in the minds of Chinese cultural society that began to look at abstract painting with a friendly eye as a result of this experience. The last decade shows that the boundaries between painting with ink and other ‘western’ art techniques are no longer so strictly defined, as it was in the past. This is also proved by the work of some artists of the movement such as Wang Chuan, Chen Tiejun who besides ink painting also deal with oil painting or Zhang Yu who use other avant-garde techniques.

One of the undeniable achievements of the movement of experimental ink and wash painting is the promotion of abstract painting in Chinese cultural background. According to some of the artists participating in the movement, such as Zhang Yu, this movement is more or less closed chapter of Chinese art history. As he claimed: »Experimental ink and wash painting is already history, now it is a contemporary art expressed in the form of ink painting, which means ink painting should enter into the context of contemporary art, otherwise it will not make sense.<sup>32</sup>

The most important achievement of the movement of experimental ink and wash painting lies primarily in what evokes the name of the movement—experiment. This experiment even today raises debates that affect the development of all Chinese art. Its meaning lies not only in the artistic value of the works that have been created, but also that its very existence caused a gradual process of changing views on the art of Chinese artists. Artistic achievements of the movement of experimental ink and wash painting offer a starting point, a new path, or simply an inspiration for Chinese painting in general. At present, it seems that the most avant-garde artists such as Zhang Yu and Wei Qingjie started interacting with the Chinese avant-garde art scene, while some more conservative painters returned to traditional artistic methods of the Chinese ink painting, and some artists continue to work with abstract or semi-abstract ink painting.

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<sup>32</sup> »實驗水墨已經是歷史，今天是當代藝術的水墨表達，就是說水墨必須進入當代藝術的層面，進入語言層面的交流，否則沒有意義。« Author's email communication with Zhang Yu, April 19, 2014.

Musil, Alois. *Ze světa islámu* [Some Notes on the World of Islam], ed. by Pavel Žďárský, case studies by Pavel Žďárský, Luboš Kropáček and Jaroslav Franc. Praha: Akropolis, 2014—444 pp. ISBN: 978-80-7470-062-0

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Prof. ThDr. Alois Musil, dr. h. c. (1868–1944), was—briefly speaking—a prominent Moravian (Czech Republic) pioneering Orientalist, who based his writings and work on his own abundant experience from travelling in Arabian deserts (however, there are many other attributes he should be described by; for example, a priest, cartographer, traveller and scientist, who also managed to become a bedouin tribal leader). The reviewed book presents a unique publication of one of his solid manuscript works 70 years after his death. Present scholars prior to the edition focus on his life and achievements in three studies. The first most significant study on this topic is by Luboš Kropáček. The second study by Jaroslav Franc focuses more on Musil's theological thinking and opinions as also to be perceived from his works. The third one by Pavel Žďárský<sup>1</sup> turns his attention to the book *Ze světa islámu* (*Some Notes on the World of Islam*), which is the subject of the subsequent edition; it simultaneously touches the political context in which it was created.

The work *Ze světa islámu* [Some Notes on the World of Islam] is a self-contained monograph consisting of useful authentic didactic material and a source of indispensable general knowledge for Islamologists. In its logically and chronologically well-arranged chapters it provides a valuable insight into many aspects of the Islamic history, culture, economic conduct and religious issues since short before the rise of Islam until Musil's time. The author does not only provide a list of historical events, but also clearly explains their course and interrelations. He familiarizes us with the essence and meaning of many unclear notions and causes of the phenomena they denote. Thus, he rebuts and corrects some mistaken impressions or opinions spread about those.

Musil describes the Prophet Muḥammad's ﷺ (ca. 570–632 AD) personality and life, the basic structure of the gradually built-up Islamic empire, state administration and government, the position of non-Muslims and behaviour

<sup>1</sup> Pavel Žďárský is a vice-chairman of the Academic society of Alois Musil and thus has access to the most reliable material preserving information about Musil, his works, photographs and correspondence.

towards them within the Islamic empire. He deals with certain momenta responsible for the spread of Islam and its relations to and common features with other religions and cultures. Within it he traces the initial tolerance and backing of Christians in the Islamic state, which later diminished because of certain factors and was more or less wavering throughout the centuries of the Muslim-Christian co-living, up to the gradual regulation of non-Muslim's rights by legal terms. He shows us the origins and development of legislation and judicature (to which the biggest contribution was made by Islam) from the bedouin tribal commons up to the establishment of the schools of Islamic law (*maqāhib*). He states which powers are endowed to which religious authorities and indicates the mode of adopting inevitable new laws, which were (and are) many times also fought against. A chapter is devoted to the development of Islamic theology (the term for which Musil uses the literal Czech equivalent 'bohověda'), where both positive and negative results of the influence (or sometimes help) of other religions and philosophies (e. g. Zoroastrism) are recorded. The author describes in detail the course of prayer (*salāt*), pilgrimage (*haġg*) and other religious duties (*furuq*, Sg. *fard*). He deals with the causes and progress of the clashes in the Islamic community (*umma*) and the subsequent emergence and opinions of both Shiitic and Sunnitic (existing and perished) sects, which, sometimes—as it seems—emerged relatively freely and easily by some persons proclaiming themselves the sole deities. Their basic features, customs and rites are explained. One may learn how Islamic leaders and rulers of the empire in various epochs misused and exploited the religion for their own sake and profit. The most outstanding Islamic thinkers and reformists are introduced, some of whom gradually gave rise to Islamic mysticism and monastic orders. Musil catches the objections towards them and how they defend themselves, at which the multiplicity of possibilities how to explain the sources of Islamic doctrine becomes obvious. He also touches upon the social status of women (the topic much discussed nowadays).

Periods of florescence, then deterioration and internal desintegration are gone through. Musil portrays the rise of journalism in 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries and the Arabic renaissance (*nabda*) in general. He depicts the perplexed modern history of individual countries with a distinguished Muslim population, their way of co-living with other religions and cultures, the most outstanding educational and religious institutions and personalities, influence of European culture (not only) in the times of colonization, which resulted in reformist movements, and subsequently, anti-Westernist and counterreformist movements, which—among others—led to the emergence of panarabism and

nationalism towards the background of the previous theocratic thinking. He describes the consequences of this European influence and foreign policy, points out several problems and defects of the European way of life which Islamic thinkers considered a threat. One may notice that as early as in Musil's time there appeared an obvious absurdity of some aspects of export and import industry, since some domestic plants are superseded by foreign ones and vice versa for some other trades in the respective countries of origin. Musil reflects upon Muslims' attitudes towards the World War I and the political changes of that time, which he was able to perceive personally (having been commissioned to act—among other engagements—as a diplomatic envoy). Within these chapters, for example, it is very interesting to watch the struggles for power in Saudi Arabia.

The work is concluded by predictions of the further development and estimated numbers of Muslims in the Islamic states whose division is revised by the editor and the present-day numbers are added. After the passage of time it is especially interesting to read the author's observations being such because despite the opinion prevalent in his lifetime that Islam was on its decline and would soon vanish under Christian influence, he points out the opposite: mainly in areas of Christian neighbourhood Islam grows stronger (as if to 'save' its identity out of some inner vigilance) and this surmise of his can now be fully confirmed. As a catholic priest, the author, of course, deals with the interrelations between Christians and Muslims and the position of Christians within the Islamic empire, while his inter-religious approach never but fraternal (an approach much needed today). Although he mostly provides a realistic image of the historical data, some of his statements and descriptions of virtues of Muslims in general are not devoid of some idealization (at least in the light of the state of affairs today), as also observed by the editor at some particular points. This may be felt even more at his criticism of some of the Christian practices when compared to those of Muslim at that time.

The book is written in a very interesting and attractive way, scientific and easy to understand at the same time. Due to political reasons, it could not be published earlier, which, to our advantage, enables us to enjoy its impressive today's edition. It is provided with all the necessary notes; multilateral explanations, additions and refinements, which guarantees modernity and currentness of the work and data. The original period stylistics and mode of expression are preserved as far as they comply with the modern morphology and style and no confusion arises. The critical apparatus includes sources of *hadīṣ* and references to other Musil's works where the given points are also touched on, which adds up to the lucidity within his literary output. Some inaccuracies occurred in the original (many of which are terms that have become obsolete, invalid or

inappropriate in the course of time, often because of the (geo)political changes that happened since then). These were corrected, explained and—if needed—new data were added so that readers gain fully valid and current information. This praiseworthy accomplishment demanded a vast range of knowledge on the part of the editor. Period black-and-white photographs (whose origin is stated in the Editorial Note) contribute to the authentic atmosphere of that day's Orient. The work is enriched with a collection of contemporary photographs in colour by present scholars.

The edition is appended by a register of proper names by Josef Schwarz and a selection of relevant literature to this as well as related topics authored by Musil (which is, altogether, very rich) and contemporary Czech scholars, including translations.

This publication (whose enjoyability is further strengthened by its pleasing design) elucidates many unclarities, is relevant for all scholars within the field and it should be included in the list of compulsory literature for academics studying Islam at some level. Thanks to its attractive mode of composition it also fulfils the requirements of wide public who are interested in various aspects of the Islamic history, social life, culture and thoughts, which are still much misunderstood.

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