

## Topic: Chinese Contemporary Art – 20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Development

At the turn of the 20th century, under continuous military, economic, and cultural pressures from the West, Chinese intellectuals and artists began to seek help from the modern world to revive their weakening tradition. This New Cultural Enlightenment Movement not only legitimized western Modern Art in China, but also established a mainstream intellectual discourse that later became the foundation of Chinese modern art.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1980s, after Mao died and the Cultural Revolution ended, a new artistic generation embraced western Modern Art again. And this time, the avant-garde movement emerged with a more radical tone of social and cultural criticism. The avant-garde artists saw themselves as cultural pioneers whose task was to enlighten the masses, fight for social reform, and rebel against the past. They criticized the state-dominant ideology, which had long suppressed individuality.<sup>4</sup>

With the failure of the democracy movement in the 1980s, and under the unexpected rise of mass culture, many artists abandoned their humanist passion. In the 1990s, more neutral or even cynical attitudes gave rise to Political Pop and Cynical Realism which were more realistic in appearance. Realist painters attained monetary success while avant-garde artists lost their audience.<sup>5</sup>

Today, China's contemporary artists are generally interested in expressing individual, personal styles and stories, or experimenting with new mediums and technology, or rediscovering traditional arts and updating them for the future. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, artists no longer want to be considered representatives of only their own culture, but desire global acceptance as artists with a style or message that resonates across cultural boundaries.

<sup>2</sup> Gao Minglu, "Toward a Transnational Modernity: An Overview of Inside Out: New Chinese Art," *Inside Out New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu (London, England: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Gao Minglu, "Toward a Transnational Modernity: An Overview of Inside Out: New Chinese Art," *Inside Out New Chinese Art*, ed. in Gao Minglu (London, England: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Gao Minglu, "Toward a Transnational Modernity: An Overview of Inside Out: New Chinese Art," *Inside Out New Chinese Art*, ed. in Gao Minglu (London, England: University of California Press, 1998).

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