

Italian Association for Chinese Studies

Selected Papers | 1

2016



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Indice

PAOLA PADERNI <i>Preface</i>	7
ALESSANDRA BREZZI Four Foolish Pieces: the First Translations of the Italian Futurist Avant-garde	9
DANIELE BROMBAL Policy Oriented Research in Contemporary China. Political Factors and their Influence on Research Processes	29
NICOLETTA CELLI The Dawn of Buddhist Art in China: Preliminary Thoughts on a New Approach to Early Buddhist Images	51
ADRIANA IEZZI “Chinese Modern Calligraphy” as a Reflection of Chinese Contemporary Culture: a Comparison between Modernism (Wang Dongling) and Avant-garde (Xu Bing)	75
ELENA MACRÍ Beyond Tradition. The Practice of Artistic Interaction (<i>ronghe</i> 融合) and its Effect on Modern Chinese Landscape Painting	117
GIANLUIGI NEGRO From Web 2.0 to SoLoMo (from Sina Weibo to Weixin)	151
LUISA M. PATERNICÒ Chinese Language Learning, Teaching and Assessment in Europe: the Need for Standardization	163
MONICA ROMANO Issues, Trends and Cultural Adjustments in Translating the Bible into Chinese	182
TANINA ZAPPONE Soft Language: China’s Political Discourse as a Tool for Soft Power	207
<i>Abstracts</i>	229
<i>Contributors</i>	233

Preface

The Italian Association for Chinese Studies (Aisc), founded in 1979 by Lionello Lanciotti and Piero Corradini, aim to promote and foster scholarly activities related to Chinese studies in Italy. Although studies of Chinese language, history, and civilisation have been established as academic disciplines since the unification of Italy in 1861, compared to other European countries, like France, Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands, Sinological studies in Italy were meagre throughout the first half of the 20th century. Until the 1960s they were limited mainly to two centres: the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples (now University) and the Scuola Orientale of the University of Rome, 'La Sapienza'. By the middle of the 1960s, an important centre of Sinological research and teaching was opened at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Facilitated by the 1970 establishment of diplomatic relations between Italy and China and the growing importance of China on the international stage, many other centres of research and teaching have opened in cities such as Milan and Turin and many other smaller but historically established academic institutions like Bologna, Macerata, and Perugia to name but a few. Since then, we have established several generations of Italian scholars of Chinese studies and distinct areas of research ranging from the ancient past to contemporary China.

In the nearly 40 years since their foundation, Aisc grew both numerically and in the quality of the contributions that their members provide to Chinese studies at the international level. In this spirit, in 2013, the General Assembly of the members of the Association decided to promote the publication of a peer-reviewed, English-language volume.

The essays in this first volume, by authors who voluntarily adhered to the initiative, were presented for the first time in September 2013 at the 14th Aisc Conference held in Procida at the Scuola di alta formazione of the University of Naples, 'L'Orientale'. Almost 60 members took part in the conference, which was organised into different thematic panels. These *Selected Papers* therefore reflect and are partially representative of the variety of topics and diversity of disciplinary approaches that characterise Chinese studies in Italy. Thus, Aisc are glad to present them to an international public.

Paola Paderni

ALESSANDRA BREZZI

FOUR FOOLISH PIECES: THE FIRST TRANSLATIONS
OF THE ITALIAN FUTURIST AVANT-GARDE

Much of European culture benefited from politics and science; it also benefited considerably from literature. If I love the France of Rousseau and Pasteur, I especially love the France of Hugo and Zola. If I love the Germany of Kant and Hegel, I especially love the German of Goethe and Hauptmann. And if I love the England of Bacon and Darwin I especially love the England of Dickens and Wilde. Among the outstanding literary figures of this nation, are there those who dare consider themselves China's Hugo, Zola, Goethe, Hauptmann, Dickens and Wilde?

(Chen Duxiu, *On Literary Revolution*)¹

In the Eighteenth century, the creative center of European literature was located in Great Britain, France and Germany; during that period Italy, in the south of Europe, was just starting to wake from a deep slumber. During the Renaissance, Italy was an artistic inspiration for all European countries. But after this period, Italy was not able to rise again with the same force and spirit [...]

(Zheng Zhenduo, *Northern and Southern Europe in Eighteenth century*)²

These opinions, expressed by two of the most significant Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth movement, Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942) and Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎 (1898-1956), clearly illustrate how much esteem the Chinese had for Italian literature at the beginning of the last century in China, and indirectly suggests the minimal influence that Italian literature had on the Chinese cultural debate during that period. In the first quote Italy is not mentioned at all, almost as if it did not have any outstanding authors capable of offering a contribution to European literature and culture during the 19th century; in the second quote, Italy is appreciated as a cultural driving force during the Renaissance but after that period, it lost its cultural prestige and was unable to offer significant cultural models to the debate generated in China at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.³

¹ Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, "Wenxue geming lun 文学革命论 (On Literary Revolution)," in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought. Writing on Literature, 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 145.

² Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎, "Shiba shiji de Nan Ou yu Bei Ou. 十八世纪的南欧与北欧" (Northern and Southern Europe in Eighteenth Century), *Xiaoshuo yuebao 小说月报* 17, 1 (1926): 3; all translations from Chinese are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

³ One does not need to be reminded that at the end of the 19th century, the Italian Risorgimento

These opinions, which fittingly described the presence of Italian writers and poets in China, are far more accurate when referred to Italian playwrights who, until the mid-50s, were completely absent from the Chinese stage, which presented works, during the first half of the 20th century, by other European playwrights such as the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), the Irish George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) or the German playwright Bertold Brecht (1898-1956), just to mention the most well-known playwrights.

Nevertheless, in the first decades of 20th century, some Italian playwrights were translated and thus introduced to Chinese readers, but still not presented to Chinese audience: the magazine *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志 (*Eastern Miscellany*), in 1922, published *Sacred ground*⁴ (*Linghun de quanli* 灵魂的权利) by Giuseppe Giacosa (1846-1906); and in 1927 *Wenyi yuekan* 文艺月刊 (*Literature and Art Monthly*) published the *Mine hostess* (*Nü dianzhu* 女店主) by Carlo Goldoni⁵ (1707-1793); two years later, in 1929, *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报 offered *The man with the flower in his mouth*⁶ (*Zui shang sheng-zhao de ren* 嘴上生著花的人) by Sicilian playwright, Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936). But before these, other Italian theatrical examples arrived in China, such as the four “futurist foolish *pièces*”, as the translator, Song Chunfang 宋春舫 (1892-1938), defined those Italian works which were published in *Dongfang zazhi* in 1921.⁷

Song Chunfang was not a common intellectual during the first decades of the 20th century. He, as many colleagues of his generation, accomplished his academic growth in Europe, but unlike his contemporaries he directed his studies towards Western drama, studying in Swiss and French academies. In Paris, not only did he studied history of Western drama, but also to improve his language skills he went to theatre every week, so he was a skilled expert in Western Drama. After returning to China, he worked as a professor at the Beijing University, and as a translator and drama critic for various magazines, such as *Dongfang zazhi*, *Xiju* 戏剧, *Xin chao* 新潮, he was among the promoters of the traditional Chinese theatre reform at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁸

aroused great interest among the reformists of the late Qing period; see Giuliano Bertuccioli and Federico Masini, *Italia e Cina* (Bari: Laterza, 1996); Laura De Giorgi and Guido Samarani, *Lontane, vicine. Le relazioni fra Cina e Italia nel Novecento* (Roma: Carocci, 2011); Alessandra Brezzi, ed., *La letteratura italiana in Cina*, (Roma: Tiellemedia, 2008).

⁴ See *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志 19, 2 (1922): 129-142.

⁵ Goldoni's most successful play, in China, was, and still is, *The Servant of Two Masters*, translated for the first time in 1930; see Barbara Leonesi, “Tre Italiani in Cina. Goldoni, Pirandello e Fo”, *HYSTRIO*, 3 (2008): 68; Ileana Di Nallo, “Goldoni in Cina. Un percorso interculturale nel teatro cinese del XX secolo” (PhD diss., University of Urbino, 2010-2011); Carlo Laurenti ed., *Bibliografia delle opere italiane tradotte in cinese 1911-1999*, (Beijing: Ufficio culturale dell'Ambasciata d'Italia, 1999), 107-110.

⁶ See *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报, 20,12 (1929): 1939-1945.

⁷ Song Chunfang 宋春舫, “Weilaipai xiju diyizhong 未来派戏剧第一种 (First type of Futurist theatre)”, *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志, 18,13 (1921): 97.

⁸ Song was born in 1892 in Shanghai; at the age of 13, he obtained the title of *xiucai* 秀才 degree. He first studied at Saint John University in Shanghai, and then, in 1912, having received a schol-

How did he discover these Italian avant-gardists?

We can suppose that Song Chunfang had heard of this avant-garde movement during his stay in Europe, where he studied in Switzerland and France, from 1912 to 1916. It was in this very period that Marinetti's group invaded the Italian and French stages. In addition to his 'personal' encounter, during the same period in China, his compatriots, the modern intellectuals, carefully were examining and studying European literary models, both past and contemporary, to create its own new literary canon. The attention to Italian culture by Chinese intellectuals, though slight as we have seen in the above mentioned quotations, moved in two different directions: the first towards the discovery of Italy's cultural history, implicating the great writers of the distant past, Dante, Boccaccio, or more recent such as Collodi, De Amicis, Deledda, Pirandello;⁹ the other direction observed and examined the most recent European literary movement, the avant-garde, which animated the European literary scene at the turn of the nineteenth century and twentieth century. Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938) was the Italian writer of that

arship he went to the University of Geneva, from there he moved to Paris; he returned in China in 1916, started his career of professor, translator and drama critic. He translated many western plays, among them Expressionist and Futurist dramas. In 1925, for health reasons, he retired in Qingdao, where he founded the famous Cormora (He mu lun 褐木庐) library – from the names of his three favorite French playwrights (Pierre Corneille, Molière and Jean Racine) – to conserve all books he had collected through years. During the first half of the twentieth century, this was the most famous library dedicated to and specialized in Western and Chinese theatre. He died in 1938. The English journalist and writer, William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965), who met Song Chunfang in Beijing in 1920, dedicated to him a chapter ("A student of the Drama") of his *On Chinese screen*. Wang Zhefu 王哲甫 in his *History of Chinese Modern Literature* dedicated few lines to Song Chunfang, describing him as "a Futurist playwright, who had significant merits in promoting New Chinese theatre"; see Wang Zhefu 王哲甫, *Zhongguo xin wenxue yundong shi* 中国新文学运动史 (*History of Chinese Modern literature*) (Shanghai: Jiecheng yinshu ju, 1933), 172; William Somerset Maugham, *On a Chinese screen* (London: William Heinemann, 1933); also see Hu Xingliang 胡星亮, "Song Chunfang: Zhongguo xiandai xiju lilun xianquzhe 宋春舫: 中国现代戏剧理论先驱者 (Song Chunfang: the pioneer of Modern Chinese Drama Theory)," *Zhejiang yishu zhiye xueyuan xuebao* 浙江艺术职业学院学报, 10, no 3 (2012): 28-39.

⁹ These were among first Italian authors translated into Chinese language at the beginning of the Twentieth century on Chinese magazines. In 1921, *Dongfang zazhi* published together with Futurist dramas, a translation of short story by D'Annunzio, "Jinqian 金钱" (Money), *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志 18, 13 (1921): 87-93; instead, in 1921, *Xiaoshuo yuebao* published the Qian Daosun's translation of the first three cantos of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, see Qian Daosun 钱稻孙, "Shenqu yiluan 神曲一脔 (Divine Comedy, a slice of food)", *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 12, 9 (1921): 1-38. The same magazine serialized the translation of *The adventures of Pinocchio* by Collodi, *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 18, 1-12 (1927) and the last number of that year 12, 1927 presented a short story by Grazia Deledda, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1926. Some tales from *The Decameron* appeared in 1928 on *Wenxue zhoubao* 文学周报; on Chinese translations of Italian literary works see Alessandra Brezzi, ed., *La letteratura italiana in Cina* (Roma: Tiellemedia, 2008); Carlo Laurenti, ed., *Bibliografia delle opere italiane tradotte in cinese 1911-1999* (Beijing: Ufficio Culturale dell'Ambasciata d'Italia, 1999).

period most appreciated in China, as Marián Gálík¹⁰ and Raoul D. Findeisen¹¹ have demonstrated in their essays, along with the only other avant-garde movement which Italy was able to offer to world literature in that period: Futurism. As Chen Sihe explains in his important essay, *The avant-garde elements in the May Fourth New Literature Movement*, this dual perspective toward Western literature – one in the past, the other to the most recent period – was the spirit which inspired the May Fourth New literature movement.¹²

Actually Italian Futurism drew the attention of Chinese intellectuals for a short period, we could say that the most intense phase lasted from 1921 to 1925-27,¹³ a period as short as the movement itself, which rapidly vanished from the Italian cultural scene, though appearing in others countries for longer periods, in Russia for example, with its foremost representative, V. Mayakovsky (1893-1930), who was a favorite among Chinese writers. In 1921 two leading magazines, *Xiaoshuo yuebao* and *Dongfang zazhi*, published some articles¹⁴ dedicated to Italian Futurism and the latter offered Song first translations of Futurist plays. In the following years other articles dedicated to various Futurist artistic forms – art, music, poetry, ballet – were published in Chinese magazines. Still in 1927 Futurist echoes resounded in the narrative vein of one of the first Chinese intellectuals, Mao Dun

¹⁰ Marián Gálík, “Gabriele D’Annunzio and Modern Chinese Decadent Drama of 1920s and 1930s”, *Rivista di studi ungheresi*, III (2004): 141-150; Marián Gálík, “Young Mao Dun and the First Chinese Essay on Gabriele D’Annunzio: A Quest for Chinese Literary Decadence,” in *A Passion for China. Essays in Honour of Paolo Santangelo for his 60th birthday*, ed. Ling-yeong Chiu and Donatella Guida (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006), 142-155.

¹¹ See Raoul D. Findeisen, “Two aviators: Gabriele D’Annunzio and Xu Zhimo,” in *Cultural Dialogue & Misreading*, ed. Mabel Lee and Meng Hua (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1997), 75-85.

¹² Chen Sihe 陳思和, “Shilun ‘Wusi’ xin wenxue yundong de xianfengxing 试论五四新文学运动的先锋性 (The Avant-garde Elements in the May Fourth New Literature Movement)” *Fudan xuebao* 复旦学报, 6 (2005): 1-17.

¹³ Chinese interest in Futurism was not strictly limited to this period. During the thirties, for example, Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 (1905-1950) dedicated some pages to this movement and other translations were published in Chinese magazines, *Dangdai wenyi* 当代文艺 or *Bei xin* 北新. However the peak of Chinese attention certainly took place in these four, five years; see Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu. The life and poetry of a Chinese modernist* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1989); Bonnie McDougall, *The introduction of Western Literary theories into modern China 1919-1925* (Tokyo: The Centre for East and Asian cultural Studies, 1977), 205-209.

¹⁴ In those years there were not only the translations by Song Chunfang, but also significant contributions by Mao Dun, published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao*; see Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰, “Wenxue shang gezhong xinpai xingqi de yuanyin 文学上各种新派兴起的原因 (The Reason of the Rising of New Currents in Literature)”, quoted in Guo Zhiyun, “Mao Dun dui weilai zhuyi de jieshou yu wudu 茅盾对未来主义的接受与误读 (Mao Dun’s Reception and Misreading of Futurism)” *Fujian Shida Fuqing fenxiao xuebao* 福建师大福清分校学报, 109 (2012): 78-81; Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰, “Weilai pai wenxue zhi xianshi 未来派文学之现势 (Current Situation of Futurist Literature)” *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报 13, 10 (1922): 2-5; Guo Moruo also dedicated some essays to Futurism; but the limited space available does not allow me to examine those authors in detail; I have preferred to focus on Song Chunfang and his essays on Futurism as he, up to now, is less studied and still less known.

茅盾 (1896-1981), who had already written some articles on Futurism, offering a historical-literary interpretation of the Italian avant-garde movement.

In one of his short stories *Disillusion* (*Huanmie*, 幻滅), printed in episodes on *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, Mao Dun created the main male character, the “self proclaimed Futurist”,¹⁵ giving him the curious name of Qiang Meng (強猛, strong and fierce), and a second symbolic name Weili (惟力, unique or sole force), unquestionably of Futurist inspiration. The commandant Qiang Meng, for example, upon introducing himself to the weak and anguished Jing 靜 (quiet, calm), a female character, says:

Of course, when I was at school, some friends studied literature, but I liked art. At the time, I adored Futurism in art; I pursued intense stimuli, praised bombs, cannons and revolution... every expression of violent destroying force [...]. The battleground is the most suitable place for Futurists; intense stimuli, destruction, changes, going berserk, power worship.¹⁶

I will fight again, nothing seduces me more than the battlefield [...]. There life is more intense, more varied, even more artistic. The long and sharp hiss of a rifle bullet dancing in the air, *ku-ku-ku*, like the cry of a demon [...] The smell of death which intoxicates you more than a good wine. Ah! The excitement! The intense excitement!¹⁷

The Chinese word *weilai zhuyi* (未来主义), which arrived in China through Japan,¹⁸ often appeared in the last pages of Mao Dun’s short story, not only in vehement and fervent, quite exaggerated, assertions of the Commandant Qiang, as we have seen, but also in the psychological portrayal of the male character born from the writer’s pen, making him prefer, in the end, the battlefield to the love for the female character Jing:

For this Futurist, who considered life to be made only of strong and intense impulses, even love was probably a stimulus, which satisfied him. But now he was pleased and therefore he aimed for something else ... for the life of a battlefield.¹⁹

After 1927 Chinese interest towards Italian Futurism gradually faded, probably because from 1924 it was becoming increasingly more evident that Futurism was

¹⁵ This expression was used by Susan W. Chen, see Susan W. Chen, “The Personal Element in the Mao Tun’s Early Fiction,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 43, 1 (1983): 211.

¹⁶ Mao Dun 茅盾, “Huanmie 幻灭 (Disillusion)”, in *Mao Dun quanji - xiaoshuo yiji* 茅盾全集 一小说一集 (Complete Works of Mao Dun – Fiction), (Beijing: Renmin wenzue cubanshe, 1984), vol. 1, 84.

¹⁷ Mao Dun, “Huanmie,” 83-84.

¹⁸ The first Japanese translation of Futurist Manifesto was realized by Mori Ōgai (1862-1922), who used a German translation; see Pierantoni Zanotti, “Echi futuristi sulla stampa giapponese del 1914: cinque casi,” in *Arte dell’avvenire o acqua passata. Interdisciplinarietà, internazionalità e attualità del futurismo*, ed. Donatella Chiancone-Schneider (Colonia: Istituto Italiano di Cultura, 2009), 104-135.

¹⁹ Mao Dun, “Huanmie,” 95.

moving hand in hand with the rising Fascist movement in Italy.²⁰ In China, instead, the May Thirtieth incident (1925) forced Chinese intellectuals to reconsider the relationship between literature and national identity, to reconsider which were the most suitable Western authors and movements to save and to modernize the country. That political incident definitely affected the prevalence of political evaluations over literary considerations.²¹ On the other hand the years 1927–28, marked a turning point in the ideological and cultural orientation of the new cultural Movement in general, and particularly in the transformation of the modern Chinese theatre; some scholars propose 1928 as the final moment of the second stage of theorizing and experimentation of indigenous forms of spoken theatre, *huaju* 话剧, inspired by Western models; from then on the new theatre used a more mature form of expression.²²

But what attracted Song Chunfang to the Futurist movement? What aroused his interest?

One of the most obvious reason was the consonance between the Chinese movement of New culture, May Fourth movement, and Italian Futurism in the will, or the need, to break with tradition, to get rid of the Past, the history of the past, and the subsequent to protest, questioning the literary models of that time which were judged to be inappropriate both in Italy and in China.

The Futurist declaration, to destroy the past and not to be so heavily influenced by the cultural past, often expressed in an aggressive and violent language, was suitable for the Chinese new culture movement, and for its anti traditional spirit; the Chinese intellectuals also wanted to depart from “classical” traditional literature to create new forms, as already explained by various authors.²³ The slogan expressed in the Manifesto of Futurism “We want to demolish museums, libraries and any academic institutes”²⁴ could echo across the Chinese anti-traditional spirit, and through its desire to depart from traditional culture, even if the problem

²⁰ Claudia Salaris, “*Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* di Tommaso Marinetti,” in *Letteratura italiana. Il Novecento*, ed. Alberto Asor Rosa (Torino: Einaudi, 1995) 177–209.

²¹ McDougall, *The introduction of Western Literary theories*; Kirk Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought. Writing on Literature, 1893–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 848–857; Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1990).

²² For more extensive discussions of these questions see Chen, “Twentieth-Century Spoken Drama,” 848–877; Edward M. Gunn, ed., *Twentieth Century Chinese Drama: an Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); Chen Xiaomei, ed., *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Drama*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

²³ See McDougall, *The introduction of Western Literary theories into modern China*, 190–218; Chen, “Shilun ‘Wusi’ xin wenxue;”; Zhang Yinde, “Littérature chinoise et perspectives comparatistes,” *Études Chinoises*, Hors série (2010): 293–311; Liu Siyuan, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary*; Kirk A. Denton and Michel Hockx, eds., *Literary Societies of Republican China* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008).

²⁴ Claudia Salaris, “*Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista*,” 185–187.

of how to deal with the inheritance of the past, that is, to completely destroy it or co-exist with it, was still debated in China during the first decades of the twentieth-century. In any case, in Italy as in China, Futurism and the New literature movement were criticizing literary genres which were pasted down from the past and which were judged inappropriate for the new century.

This peculiarity was emphasized by Song Chunfang in his introduction to the Futurist plays translations, which appeared on *Eastern Miscellany*, when he wrote:

The Futurist theatre is absolutely an Italian product. Why did it appear in Italy? Why are all futurist Italians? Because, except for Greece, Italy is the oldest country in Europe; the Italians way of thinking is quite the same as our Chinese, by worshipping only the ancients, every new ideology is swept away by the idea of History. For this reason the force of rebellion was born there, but this force does not have any charisma outside of Italian boundaries.²⁵

Song, as a playwright, agrees with Marinetti and the others that the theatre functioned as a means of propaganda, and as a means of communication was even more effective than other forms of literature, fiction and poetry; a belief that had begun to establish itself in China since the early experiments of “modern” theatre, carried out in Tokyo by Spring Willow group (*Chunliu she*, 春柳社)²⁶ on the Japanese models, and that were adopted by the New Culture Movement in the texts and staging of the new theatre, *xinju* 新剧, convinced that drama had the ability to reach the masses.

He was a strong supporter of the need to reform the Chinese theatre, as the intellectuals of *Xin qingnian* magazine were, and like them, he was a profound enthusiast of Western theatre, which he wanted to spread in China, as his translation activities demonstrate. However, the baggage he brought back from Europe led him to take a different stand from that of Hu Shi and his colleagues, on what was to restore, or maintain, from their own theatrical past and on which foreign models were to be translated and spread in China.

One of Song’s first public contributions to the cultural debate of that period was his famous list of 100 Western plays published in *New Youth* in 1918. This explicative and synthetic ‘Manifesto’ of Western Theatre was Song’s personal response to Hu Shi’s appeal contained in the article “Constructive Literary Revolution” which appeared in the same magazine the year before. In his article, Hu Shi urged Chinese intellectuals to jointly establish a list of “first-rate” Western works that had to be immediately translated into Chinese.²⁷ Song, a specialist in the history of

²⁵ Song, “Weilaipai xiju diyizhong,” 105.

²⁶ See Liu Siyuan, “The Impact of Shinpa on Early Chinese Huaju,” *Asian Theatre Journal*, 23, 2 (2006): 342-355; Liu Siyuan, “Adaptation as Appropriation: Staging Western Drama in the First Western-Style Theatres in Japan and China,” *Theatre Journal*, 59, 3 (2007): 411-429.

²⁷ Hu Shi, in this article, precisely suggested that 100 novels, 500 short stories, 300 plays and 50

Western and Chinese theater, answered preparing an original and complex list, composed of fifty-eight different names of Western authors, representative of thirteen countries around the world. These authors, these works, according to him, were the essential library that any Chinese intellectuals, interested in theatre, and in particular interested in renovating the traditional Chinese theatre, had to read. In his list Song enumerated some Western authors, unknown to Chinese readers, authors who had never been considered by the group of intellectuals who revolved around the *New Youth* magazine, the most supportive of theatre reform. This list of 100 foreign plays could be seen as the first evident sign of his partial disagreement with Hu Shi and others, and his interest in Italian Futurism is evidence in this dispute. I think we can safely affirm that Futurist plays were used by Song Chunfang, together with other Western authors (Eugène Marin Labiche, Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia) in an instrumental way, as a barricade to hold off the realist “fever” that had taken over the Chinese reformist circles since Ibsen and his “social problem plays”, particularly *A Doll’s House*, captured the *Xin Qingnian* group. For Song Futurist plays were used as an alternative model to be proposed for the reform of Chinese theatre.

Some years later in his essay *To Reform the Chinese Theatre* (1920),²⁸ for example, he strongly criticizes the *Xin qingnian* group, which is unable to go along with and satisfy Chinese audience’s aesthetic tastes with its dramaturgical choices, native and foreign.

According to Song, the plays proposed by the *Xin qingnian* group on the pages of its magazines or staged in Chinese theatres, such as those of Ibsen and Shaw, or the Chinese experiments such as Hu Shi’s *The Greatest Event of One’s Life* (*Zhongshen dashi*, 终身大事),²⁹ were not suitable to the Chinese audience, who, he claimed, were still *youzhi* (幼稚) puerile, childish:

This generation of new writers proposes exclusively *Ghosts*, *Nora* by Ibsen, some plays by the Tianjin Nankai school such as *A false step* and *New village Head* or Hu Shi’s *The greatest event of one’s life*. Although this cannot be taken as a general statement, each of these plays only pose their attention – more or less – on the question of human existence. Who is really interested in this, with the exception of some students and scholars? When I was in Beijing I often told: “most of the plays which have a basis on which to support themselves, should receive appreciation by the whole of the hu-

essays ought to be proposed to be translated into Chinese language. Song Chunfang, “Jinshi ming xi baizhong mu 近世名戲百種目 (List of One Hundred Modern Famous Plays),” *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 5, 4 (1918): 361.

²⁸ Song Chunfang, “Gailiang Zhongguo xiju 改良中国戏剧 (To Reform the Chinese Theatre),” in *Zhongguo xiandai mingjia mingzuo wenku - Song Chunfang*, 中国现代名家名作文库-宋春舫 (*Library of Modern Chinese masterpieces and authors - Song Chunfang*), ed. Jiang Deming 姜德铭 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2001), 138.

²⁹ A play written by Hu Shi in 1919, and inspired by Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, see Chen, “Twentieth-Century Spoken Drama,” 851-853.

man society. The purpose of those who write theatrical plays should be to cater to the psychology of the masses, and not to deal with a part of the society; when we write a drama, our vision cannot be directed to students only, we must think of prostitutes, bureaucrats, drivers as well". For this reason I do not advocate to recommend Ibsen's and other works.³⁰

Problem plays, its representatives (Ibsen, Shaw) and everything written in China along these models, were addressed only to the new academic centers of elite students, not to the masses. This statement calls to mind what Perry Link wrote in his interesting book, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, about the relation between popular literature and the new literature movement: "In the late 1910s and early twenties, the magazine *New Youth* (Hsin ch'ing-nien) was written and read primarily among a tiny number of China's most privileged young intellectuals, many of whom had studied in Japan or the West [...]"³¹

In this essay Song also proposes an original comparison between Western theatre, embodied by Augustin Eugène Scribe (1791-1861), and Chinese traditional theatre, personified by Li Yu 李渔 (1610-1680), that goes beyond the topic of these pages, however it is explicative of the idea of reform which Song advocated: to recuperate elements from their native tradition, to blend them with various foreign models, and to create new theatrical forms, and to bring forth modern theatre. Even the most recent European avant-gardes such as the Futurists were considered in order to renovate the Chinese drama without completely destroying the traditional. Some elements of traditional theatre were, indeed, worth of being kept, such as the symbolism of set design and of the actors movements.

According to Song, the mistake made by supporters of realist theatre in China is twofold: on one hand, these dramaturgical choices do not make the circulation of spoken theatre easier, as shown by the repeated failures of audience and cash collections, in the theatres of Chinese cities;³² on the other hand – and this is the strongest allegation – they explain the need for the renovation of Chinese theatre only with regard to the content of the plays, completely forgetting other needed reforms, those relating to technical and artistic aspects of the art. The fact that traditional theatre represents plays having only obsolete contents, "those not suitable to modern audience psychology",³³ is Song's strong belief; however interpreting Chinese theatre reform exclusively by producing realist dramas, based on European models, preferring the literary nature of a drama to its dramatic nature

³⁰ Song, "Gailiang Zhongguo xiju," 138.

³¹ Song, "Gailiang Zhongguo xiju," 138.

³² See Perry E. Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies. Popular Fiction in early Twentieth-century Chinese cities* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1981), 18.

³³ In particular Song refers to the flop of the staging of Hu Shi's *The Greatest Event in Life*, a play inspired by Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and to the box-office disaster of Shaw's *Mrs Warren's profession* (Hualun furen de zhiye, 华伦夫人的职业), directed by Wang Youyou in a Shanghai's theatre in 1920; see Bernd Eberstein, ed., *The Drama*. (Leiden: Brill, 1990) 150-152; Liu, *Performing Hybridity*.

is to miss the essence of what the theatre is. In the essay, *The Future of the Spoken Theatre* (*Huaju de jianglai*, 话剧的将来), published in 1930s, Song underlines how, both in the representations and in the fervent debates on the spoken theatre of those years, fundamental aspects of the dramatic arts were being overlooked – acting, set design, lighting, the conception of the theatre as a physical place and as a concrete space in which the action takes place – exclusively in favour of the plays contents or political and social message.³⁴ For Song, the choice of representing or translating a drama had been – until that time – determined solely by its political contents and not by its aesthetic value and dramatic nature.

Criticism brought by Song to the *New Youth* group were even more severe: basically Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896-1950) and the other members did not capture the quintessence of Western theatre, they were not able to understand the more significant revolutions of European theatre, as explained in the essay on Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966), *Craig's marionettes theatre*, published on *Xin Qingnian* in 1920:

At the end of nineteenth century European drama suddenly had two big revolutions. The leader of the first was naturally Ibsen, the leader of the second was Craig. Ibsen's plays were well known by all people who read *New Youth*, his influence from ancient times until now is matchless, but the aim of his revolution was only focused on script [...]. Someone affirmed that in the history of Western Theatre Ibsen had not really been a Revolutionary, he was instead a Reformer. Craig was the one who truly started a revolution.³⁵

It was during this debate that Song brought Italian Futurists to China, in 1921, by proposing some translations: *Moonlight* (*Yuese* 月色), by the father of Futurism, Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944), already translated in English and published on *Van-ity fair* in 1919; Mario Dessy, who Song presented as one of the “latest” Futurist authors, *Your husband is not ok, change him* (*Huan ge zhangfu ba* 换个丈夫吧), *Alternation of Character* (*Zhaoqin muchu* 朝秦暮楚) by Arnaldo Corradini (1890-1982) and Bruno Corra (1892-1976), never translated into any other language at that time, and the short *There is no dog* (*Zhiyou yitiao gou* 只有一条狗) by Francesco Cangiullo (1884-1977), also translated a foreign language into Chinese for the first time.

Before making any comments or observations on these plays, Song started by saying to his readers:

Futurist theory and its ideas on the reform of theatre are theories of total madmen; the plays they wrote are also ‘crazy’ plays; in our [Chinese] minds there has never been

³⁴ Song, “Gailiang Zhongguo xiju,” 136.

³⁵ Song Chunfang, “Gedenggelei de kuilei juchang 戈登格雷的傀儡剧场 (Craig's Marionette Theatre),” *Xin Qingnian* 新青年, 7, 2 (1920) in *Zhongguo xiandai mingjia mingzuo wenku – Song Chunfang*, ed. Jiang Deming, 7-8.

anything like them. So it is necessary first to read their plays and then make some remarks, otherwise it could be like “a blind man on a blind horse”.³⁶

The Chinese reader would have discovered the reason behind Song’s translation in the following pages, if he managed to endure this madness and not drop the volume that he held in his hands. The reasons were many and Song summarized them in four points:

1. Futurist plays are concise;
2. Futurist plays are comic, farcical;
3. Futurist plays describe the present, the contemporary society;
4. Futurist plays want to break with the past.

Why were these qualities suitable for the Chinese debate of that period? Song does not supply any clear answer to this question. He, indeed, in his article only explains why Futurist plays have these qualities, but not why they are useful for the reform of the theater. We can presume some plausible answers by reading other his articles, and concluding that these qualities could have helped the creation of new plays, a convincing alternative to the “realist fever” of Chinese reformist circles, which were not producing a new alternative theatre according to Song. In the next section the peculiarities of Futurist plays will be analyzed.

Their first quality was to be concise, as Song explained in his introduction:

Except for some works by Marinetti, all Futurist plays are one-act plays, and sometimes they are so short and simple, that they do not even have a form. *There is no dog* has less than thirty words [Chinese characters] counting the title, and only a few seconds are needed to represent it on the stage.³⁷

And some lines below:

Futurists worship “speed and force”, for them “a racing car is more beautiful than the Cathedral of Saint Mark in Venice.”³⁸ Their opinions are only a reaction to the traditional theatre in vogue at that time. Drama with three to five acts with many characters, “totally unrelated”, and hastily portrayed by playwrights, with no relation to the plot. Human life is so short, how can we waste our time by attending such boring shows?³⁹

Futurist plays do not have many characters and their dialogues are short, their dialogues look more like a short “flash pictures”, movie pictures (*huohuo de yingpian*) – Song had in mind the dialogue in *Alternation of character* -, and for this quality are

³⁶ Song here uses the *chengyu mangren qi xima* 盲人骑瞎马, see Song, “Weilaipai xiju diyizhong,” 97.

³⁷ Song, “Weilaipai xiju diyizhong,” 105.

³⁸ Indeed the Futurists compared a racing car to the Winged Victory of Samothrace; see Salaris, “*Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista*,” 178.

³⁹ Song, “Weilaipai xiju diyizhong,” 105.

more suitable for a Chinese audience, who, as already mentioned, Song considered still *youzhi*, childish, puerile, or, as he affirmed in many other essays, still not accustomed to attending performance with long psychological and introspective monologues or dialogues, as was common with Ibsen and realist playwright's works.

Xiong Foxi 熊佛西 (1900-1965), one of the first Ibsenian director who, while recognizing the unquestionable merits of the Norwegian playwright, so admired by Chinese intellectuals, but equally ignored by Chinese audiences, considered the verbosity of the dialogues in his works not apt for Chinese audiences. In his essay *On Ghosts* (*Lun Qunhui*, 论群鬼), when referring to Ibsen's play which he directed in 1929, Xiong Foxi wrote: "the Chinese audience is especially against plays with long dialogues. To watch *Ghosts*, one needs to think and be patient, both of which the Chinese audience is incapable of",⁴⁰ judgment which he expressed again in the essay *Ibsen the social reformer and Ibsen the dramatist* (*Shehui gaizao jia de Yibusheng yu xiju jia de Yibusheng* 社会改造家的易卜生与戏剧家的易卜生): "But he [Ibsen] has a big weakness. He is fond of debating, giving long and boring lectures. Audiences are often left sleepy by the continuous talking on stage, which is especially true if his plays are staged in China. Being used to exciting scenes, Chinese audiences are not favorable to long discussions on stage",⁴¹ it seems practically an apology, an excuse for the resounding flop that his performance of *Ghosts* obtained in Shanghai in 1929.

In his essay *The Future of the Spoken Theatre*, Song writes "If we want the spoken theatre to bloom, we first have to 'create' its audience", because "it is audience the lifeblood of theatre";⁴² and for bringing a new audience to the theater, we need to cultivate a new audience. The Chinese audience does not have any knowledge of spoken theatre and so it is not able to appreciate the new theatre. Some lines below he adds "only if there is an audience, will there be plays, only if there are plays, will there be an audience. Each play reflects the mentality of an epoch".⁴³ Song wants to say that each play is a child of one's time, and this consideration leads us to the third quality of Futurist play: that is, to describe the present, the contemporary society. In the same essay, written in 1937, Song criticizes the choices made by new intellectuals during the 1920s. Using a diachronic prospective he writes:

After the spoken theater raised its first cry of life, at once it became the call for revolution; its only goal was to instill new ideology and to be the call for the revolution [...] But was the mind of the audience which attended these plays ready to assimilate this new ideology? Those who wrote plays should have first instilled into the brain of the

⁴⁰ The article was published in *Yishi bao* 益世报 on December 24th 1929, quoted in He Chengzhou, *Henrik Ibsen and Modern Chinese Drama* (Oslo: Unipub Forlang, 2004), 95.

⁴¹ The article was published in *Yishi bao* 益世报 on November 21st 1929, quoted in He, Henrik Ibsen, 38.

⁴² Song, "Huaju de weilai," 273.

⁴³ Song, "Huaju de weilai," 275.

masses a new theory and only after these new ideas had been absorbed, the masses could have become a faithful disciple: an audience.⁴⁴

If the Chinese audience had an opportunity to attend a “Futurist evening”, a Futurist performance, they definitely would not have been made sleepy by the continuous talking on stage, but they probably would have been amazed by the show of these “crazy” plays, which Song Chunfang defined as “comic pieces lacking any reason” (*mei liyou de huajiju* 沒理由的滑稽劇).⁴⁵

This apparent disapproval shown by Song relates in fact to the second quality that he had once highlighted in his list. The positive aspect would render the works more suitable to the Chinese audience, more inclined to attend comic performances, *huaji ju* (comic genre, farce), at least in this delicate transition phase where spoken theatre still had not found its true character.

This playful argument of Italian Futurists is that one which Song dedicates more detailed explanation to in his comment; first he quotes the Futurist idea that “life is nothing but a great play”,⁴⁶ and then starts to explain how Futurists want to transform every painful, unhappy situation, even illness or death into happy or playful situation, in short “get used to laughing about things that make you cry now”,⁴⁷ as Aldo Palazzeschi wrote in his *An Antidote to Pain* (1913). And after a more accurate analysis, we can discover that words were the same written by Palazzeschi in his futurist manifesto, a text that Song probably read in one of bibliographical sources he used to write his article, a source that he, using scientific methodology and intellectual honesty, quoted at the end of his article, together with other reference books: *The contemporary drama of Italy* written by an American literary critic, Lander MacClintock in 1920. Here some examples of literary travels, from pre-war-time Italy to the America of President Wilson and from there to China, taken from some futurists texts:

Transform hospitals into amusing rendezvous, with exhilarating five o'clock teas, singing cafés, clowns. Oblige the sick to wear comic costumes, make them up as actors, to arouse a constant gaiety among them [...] Transform funerals into masked parades, prepared and led by a humorist who knows how to take advantage of all the grotesque pain. Modernize and make cemeteries comfortable through the use of buvettes, bars, skating rinks, roller coasters, steam rooms, gyms. Organize day and night outings and masquerade balls in cemeteries.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Song, “Huaju de weilai”. 275.

⁴⁵ Song, “Weilaipai xiju diyizhong,” 104.

⁴⁶ Song, “Weilaipai xiju diyizhong,” 104.

⁴⁷ “Palazzeschi *Il contro dolore*,” accessed January 23, 2014, http://www.classicalitaliani.it/futurismo/manifesti/palazzeschi_controdolore.htm; I would like to thank Dr. Pierantonio Zanotti for having cited this source; translation mine.

⁴⁸ Full text is available at “Palazzeschi *Il contro dolore*,” accessed January 23, 2014, http://www.classicalitaliani.it/futurismo/manifesti/palazzeschi_controdolore.htm; Trasformare gli ospedali in ri-

Life is a great game, a huge joke, even the most serious things being made occasion for sport and gaiety. Sickness and sorrow are subjects for jest; the hospital patients, for example are to be dressed in fantastic costumes, painted in hideous and ludicrous masks to excite the laughter of fellow patients; funerals are to be made over into masked processions; churches shall be turned into drinking rooms, bars, roller-skating rinks, theatres, Turkish baths.

據未來派的意思，全世界無非是一個大遊戲場罷了！無論怎樣嚴重悲慘的事，他們看起來，總是一種供人玩笑的好題目。病院里的病人，不應該躺在床上呻吟，應該身上穿了紅紅綠綠的衣服，臉上塗了青黃黑白的顏色給別的病人看！... 禮拜堂不是供人家參拜的，簡直是一種茶寮酒肆罷了！... 就是劇場里頭也是這般！

Conciseness, short and quick dialogues and funny, comic plots are not the only unique qualities that Song ascribes to futurist plays; an important feature of Marinetti and his group's theatre could help to enhance the debate for reforming the Chinese theatre during that period, but a fundamental aspect for transforming Chinese theatre was totally neglected by the supporters of Ibsen's plays: the art of staging, that is the art of performing.

From a reading of Song's essays dedicated to the reform of Chinese theatre, *Why I want to introduce Labiche* (*Wo weishenme yao jieshao Lapixu*, 我为什么要介绍腊皮虚), *Discussion about scripts for the new Chinese Theatre* (*Zhongguo xin ju jubenzhi shangque*, 中国新剧剧本之商榷), *The future of spoken theatre*,⁴⁹ it is not hard to guess the importance Song attributed to the modernization and transformation of those technical tricks essential to the implementation and spectacular staging of the set, confirmed and reaffirmed also by the selection of western playwrights that he proposes from time to time: Gordon Craig, Augustin Eugène Scribe, Adolphe Appia and the Futurists. "Rome was not built in a day",⁵⁰ writes Song in his essay on *The future of Spoken theatre*, wanting with this to launch a double reprimand: on the one hand the *huaju* spoken theatre needed a long time to mature and to fully succeed, not only in creative drama, but also in the formation of an audience prepared to accept it, and this opinion was undoubtedly shared by many intellectuals of the period; on the other hand, you could not overlook the technical aspect, those ingredients – from lighting to set design, to a new conception of theatre as a physical

trovi divertenti, mediante five o' clock tea esilarantissimi, café-chantants, clowns. Imporre agli ammalati delle fogge comiche, truccarli come attori, per suscitare fra loro una continua gaiezza [...] Trasformare i funerali in cortei mascherati, predisposti e guidati da un umorista che sappia sfruttare tutto il grottesco del dolore. Modernizzare e rendere confortables i cimiteri mediante buvettes, bars, skating, montagne russe, bagni turchi, palestre. Organizzare scampagnate diurne e bals masqués notturni nei cimiteri.

⁴⁹ These essays are gathered in the book edited by Jiang Deming, *Zhongguo xiandai mingjia mingzuo wenku - Song Chunfang*, 121-123; 131-134; 273-280.

⁵⁰ Song uses this expression for judging Hu Shi's play, *The Greatest Event in Life*, which according to him is technically immature, *youzhi* 幼稚, childish; see Song, "Huaju de jianglái," 276.

space – essential to the creation of a modern Chinese theatre, as already explained in previous pages.

Futurist theatre, so eccentric, grotesque, absurd, wanted to undermine and distort the rules of the nineteenth-century bourgeois theatre, Romantic and Naturalist, and provide alternative forms of literature and set design. Actually the Futurist theatrical theories did not produce any significant works, but undoubtedly they gave a strong impulse to the break down of all traditional practices and paved on two important innovations: one was the blend of ‘high’ and ‘low’ theatre, that is cultural theatre and variety show. The second was the attention paid for the first time to set design and stagecraft. Two aspects that Song considered essential for creating a new theatre in China. Indeed, in China, according to Song, *Xin qingnian* group was addressing the conceptualization and testing of a new theatre only for new forms of creative literature, ill-suited to the Chinese public, and forgetful of all other dramatic art components. The attention to set design and stagecraft aspects, among the most significant legacies of Futurist theatre, as well as the new concept of theatre as a physical place, achieved through a new relationship between stage and audience, could be useful to start a theatre reform, without completely denying the past traditions. Futurist experiments combined different arts – dance, music, film screenings, dialogues, expertise, which with the necessary distinctions, also belonged to the Chinese theatrical tradition, and were worthy of being reclaimed and reformed, according to Song, rather than abandoned and renounced entirely, as many argued in those days.

According to Song, the shortness and farcical nature of these scripts make the work easier not only for their ultimate user, the audience, but also for their first reader, the translator. It is not possible here to narrate the lively debate which took place in the first decades of the twentieth century with regard to suitable translation strategies wanted to spread western literature and culture, but we should keep in mind that, in the case of plays, the translator had, and still has, a twofold responsibility: the first is to render the play readable, the second, more important, is to render it suitable for the theatrical performance.

According to Song, choosing comic, ironic, funny subjects as proposed by futurist plays, allows the translator to avoid the difficult choice of making a literal translation, *zhiyi* 直译, a sense translation, *yiyi* 意译, or a stiff translation, *yingyi* 硬译, or, as often was proposed for translating plays, a *gaiyi* 改译 that is an adaptation or a remolded translation.

Fu Sinian was probably among the first to propose, during the twenties, a translation approach which would remold the original plays. In his paper *Aspects of Theatre Reform (Xiju gailiang gemian guan, 戏剧改良各面观)*⁵¹ Fu Sinian sustains that the new theatre, *xinju* 新劇, is not mature yet, is going through a preparatory

⁵¹ Fu Sinian 傅思年, “Xiju gailiang gemian guan 戏剧改良各面观 (Aspects of Theatre Reform),” *Xin qingnian* 新青年, 5, 4 (1918): 322-348.

phase, which means that in the case of writing new plays the author is forced to draw from foreign models or translate western plays, which are unfamiliar to a Chinese audience.

“In other words”, Fu writes “a literal translated script cannot be suitable, while a remolded script, instead, in which the form has been changed, and the essence has been kept, is the best”.⁵²

In the intentions of the writer, a “remold” consisted in a heavy review of the script, not only by “domesticating actions” – according to the terminology used by L. Venuti – but even by “cutting, or adding”, in short, an “act of violence”⁵³ as Professor Laurence Wong defined the translation practice between the end of Qing dynasty and the beginning of Republican period. “When you encounter some difficult parts, cut them, add some clarification to the unclear parts, the important thing is not to lose the original meaning”,⁵⁴ as Wang Youyou 汪優游 (1888-1937) suggests on the pages of *Xiju* magazine, almost a self-admonition, advise, recommendation to himself, after his failure as the director of *Mrs Warren’s Profession* in 1929.

Other than the unscrupulousness of the acting, and any disapproval that might be aroused in the modern reader, these translation suggestions seem to confirm the criticism expressed by Song Chunfang to the *Xin qingnian* group, that is of considering the reform of the Chinese theatre simply through the production of texts that were the bearers of newer and more up-to-date ideological messages, completely neglecting to consider the work’s aesthetic value – sacrificing the form to save the “essence”, in short, to give up the dramatic nature *xijuxing* (戏剧性) to enhance the ideological content *sixiangxing* (思想性), or the literary essence *wenxuexing* (文学性).⁵⁵

To these authors, content is more important than the aesthetic value of a script, and therefore it was reasonable to sacrifice the form to save the “essence”. The “original essence”, mentioned by Fu Sinian, is its ideological message and its ideological content (*sixiangxing* 思想性) or literary nature (*wenxuexing* 文学性), not its theatrical and dramatic value (*xijuxing* 戏剧性), as Liu Xin⁵⁶ remarks.

This brings us back to the very first pages, to Song Chunfang’s criticism of the representatives of *Xin Qingnian*, for which their dramaturgical choices, and propos-

⁵² Fu, “*Xiju gailiang gemian guan*,” 338.

⁵³ Laurence Wang-chi Wong “An Act of Violence: Translation of Western Fiction in the Late Qing and Early Republican Period,” in *The Literary Field of Twentieth Century China*, ed. Michel Hockx (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), 21-39.

⁵⁴ Wang Youyou 汪优游, “Benshe choubei shixingbu de tiyi 本社筹备实行部的提议,” *Drama* 戏剧, 1, 2 (1921) quoted in Liu Xin刘欣, “Wenxue de xuanze yu wutai de xuanze. Ershi niandai de xiju fanyi yu gaiyi 文学的选择与舞台的选择. 二十年代的戏剧翻译与改译,” *Xiju yanjiu* 戏剧研究, 5 (2012): 93.

⁵⁵ See Liu, “Wenxue de xuanze,” 93-94.

⁵⁶ Liu, “Wenxue de xuanze,” 93-94.

als to reform traditional theatre stemmed solely from the value and ideology they could envision and the educative function of propaganda it could perform, rather than by the nature of literary work or any innovation it could bring; for the moment the essence of theatre is anchored to a literary text, not to the peculiarities of stage art.—

As yet present research has not found any evidence for the presence of Chinese spectator attending a “futurist evening”, and these dramas were confined to readers of magazines, rather than to theatre audiences. This should not come as a surprise, as it was a common destiny, shared with many western playwrights: Henrik Ibsen, William Shakespeare, Carlo Goldoni, George Bernard Shaw who were often translated, but rarely brought on stage.

During that period activities concentrated mainly on the translations of Western plays, so little energy was spent to stage these drama at new Chinese theatres.

In 1921 Wang Youyou, complaining about the Chinese theatre situation, wrote a letter to Hong Shen 洪深 (1894-1955): “Since the new culture has come into being in China a great many people talk about the theatre; however, mostly their battles take place on paper only. Very few people actually get up onto the stage to work practically, and there are even fewer people who study the theatre as their special subject”.⁵⁷

Song’s choice of proposing plays of rather poor or non-existing contents, as Futurist plays were considered, was probably meant to direct the audience’s attention towards theatrical production, scenic technique, the artistic aspects of the performance, which in the case of Futurist comedies, as Song explains, combine films, dance, music, in short diverse art forms (as in traditional Chinese theatre). At the same time, Futurists are – with Gordon Craig, Eugène Marin Labiche (1815-1888) and many others – primary examples of an attempt to change or break the rules of ‘bourgeois’ European theatre, that is, the romantic and naturalistic theatre of early twentieth century Europe, represented in Italy by Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906) and by Verists authors, such as Giovanni Verga (1840-1922) and Luigi Capuana (1839-1915). For Song, the Futurist translation experiment was a useful and provoking way to reduce the realist ‘fever’ which had spread to the debate on modern Chinese theatre.

It should be noted in passing that the one critic and playwright who struggled most, in the twenties, to preserve, at least partly, the traditional Chinese theatre heritage, was eventually the same person who was able to present and spread Western avant-garde and modern models to China. We could say that that he defended tradition through modernity.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Eberstein, *The Drama*, 18.

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POLICY ORIENTED RESEARCH IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA.
POLITICAL FACTORS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON RESEARCH PROCESSES¹

1. Introduction

The centrality attributed by State authorities to science and technology has been a constant feature of Chinese policy making since the middle of the nineteenth century. Regardless of the nature of the political régime – late imperial, republican, nationalist, or communist – China’s rulers have attributed great importance to science and technology to strengthen State’s authority and to achieve strategic goals of development.² Since the late 1970s, through the ‘Four Modernizations,’ science and technology have become an integral part of the CPC’s political discourse, complementing an ideological structure whose credibility had been severely undermined by the Cultural Revolution.³ The faith in science as an instrument to solve the country’s problems, ensuring the capacity of the Party-State to retain its authority over society,⁴ has been accompanied by an increasing reliance on ‘scientific decision making’ (*kexue juece* 科学决策).

In recent years, policy oriented research has become an essential component of the decision making process of Chinese authorities. The ‘scientific outlook on development’ (*kexue fazhanguan* 科学发展观) put forward by the Hu-Wen leader-

¹ The Author acknowledges the support received from the European Community’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007- 2013) under grant agreement n° 269327, Acronym of the Project: EPSEI, Coordinated by University of Turin - Dipartimento di Giurisprudenza.

² Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Modern Science in China* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 619-620, 641.

³ Deng Xiaoping 邓小平, *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan - Di Er Juan* 邓小平文选 – 第二卷 (*Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Volume II*) (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe 人民出版社, 1993), 85-100; Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child. Science and Policy in Deng’s China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 4-5, 76.

⁴ As Susan Greenhalgh writes in the volume *Just One Child. Science and Policy in Deng’s China*, in the late 1970s “modern science appeared as the way out, a *deus ex machina* that would guide China into the modern world [...] post-Mao years would thus give rise to the rapid development not only of science, but also of scientism, the belief in science as a panacea that could solve all the nation’s problems.” Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, 76.

ship can indeed be read through the lens of an increasing reliance on research as a tool to guide definition, implementation, and evaluation of national policies, towards a more sustainable mode of development.⁵ The drive towards the acquisition of reliable evidence to inform policy making has been particularly evident in areas prioritized in Beijing's domestic agenda since the early 2000s, such as environmental management, social policies, and health care.⁶

In areas of public interest, Beijing entrusts policy research both to ministerial bodies, government-affiliated agencies, universities and research institutes, multilateral and bilateral agencies, and – though to a limited extent – private financial institutions and consultancy firms.⁷ Regardless of their organizational characteristics, institutions producing policy oriented research operate under the sanction of the Party-State, generally in coordination with the pertinent line ministries, utilizing for their analyses either data collected ad hoc in the field, or – more frequently – statistics produced by local governments and transferred upwards through routine information systems.⁸

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the modality through which policy oriented research is conducted in contemporary China, providing a description of how political factors shape research processes, and proposing a tentative analytical structure to frame in political terms phenomena of science politicization. This paper revolves around the following questions: (1) Which political pressures influence policy oriented research in contemporary China? (2) How do different stakeholders and their diverging interests interact along the process of research? (3) Can these dynamics be interpreted as indicative of wider political tendencies at play in the Chinese polity? Empirical answers to these questions will be sought through a case study, pertinent to health policy research in rural China. In the conclusive section, results will be briefly discussed vis-a-vis the analytical framework provided by Fragmented Authoritarianism (FA).⁹

⁵ Tony Saich, *Governance and Politics of China - Third Edition* (Houndmills: Palgrave & Macmillan, 2011), 103; Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Hu Jintao Era. New Leaders, New Challenges* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 44-47.

⁶ With particular reference to the health sector, see Qun Meng et al., "Trends in Access to Health Services and Financial Protection in China between 2003 and 2011: A Cross-Sectional Study," *Lancet*, 379 (2012): 805-814.

⁷ An example is the one of McKinsey & Company, which in 2006-2007 produced a series of recommendation for the then ongoing health care reform.

⁸ Routine information systems are structured along the administrative hierarchy of government bodies (in rural areas: Central - Province - Prefecture - County - Township - Administrative Village).

⁹ On FA, see Kenneth G. Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, eds., *Policy Making in China. Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, eds., *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Andrew Mertha, "Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0: Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process," *The China Quarterly*, 200 (2009): 995-1012.

Sources considered in this study include policy documents, published scientific literature, grey literature (reports of government institution, bilateral agencies, etc.), media reports, and data collected through fieldwork. The latter mostly consists of materials collected through participant observation. Where not otherwise specified, information come from the working and research experience matured over the years by the author, particularly in the field of development cooperation. Findings introduced in this paper are preliminary, intended to inform a wider research project, relevant to politicization of policy oriented research in China in the health and environmental sectors. As such, they are still open to discussion and contribution of scholars and experts from different disciplinary and professional backgrounds.

2. Definitions and State of the Field

In *Anna Karenina*, Lev Tolstoj provides a purposely naive description of policy research. Introducing the activity of Anna's husband, the bureaucrat Alexei Alexandrovich, he describes the investigation targeting a remote prefecture as follows:

Three months later the committee sent in its report. The subject-races' conditions had been investigated from the political, administrative, economic, ethnographical, material, and religious points of view. All the questions had received splendidly drafted answers: answers not open to doubt, since they were not the result of human thoughts (always liable to error), but were the outcome of official labours. All answers were based on official data [...] therefore these answers could not admit of any doubt.¹⁰

These words include a set of characteristics commonly attributed to policy oriented research. Firstly, the investigation targets an issue of pressing public concern, the administration of remote areas of the Tsarist Empire, by then reaching its maximum expansion. Secondly, the research is based on the collection of data and information coordinated by the State's bureaucracy, processed by an experts' committee which eventually produces 'answers' included in a report. Finally, research findings are believed to be fruit of a systematic pursue of truth based on impersonality, using tools capable to correct errors caused by human biases.

This description is consistent with those provided by contemporary political science, whereby policy research is defined as a systematic inquiry "on the nature and origins of problems that public policy aims to solve," conducted by experts who make "recommendations for their solution."¹¹ Similarly, practitioners understand this kind of research as a "systematic collection, collation, analysis and in-

¹⁰ Lev Tolstoj, *Anna Karenina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 [1877]), 369.

¹¹ Lawrence M. Mead, "Policy Research: The Field Dimension" (paper presented at the Association for Public Policy and Management Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, November 30, 2014), 1, 4.

terpretation of data of relevance to policy or practice,” often with the purpose of examining “the effect of enacted [...] policies to inform future [...] policies.”¹² Policy research therefore possesses attributes proper both to science—the creation of a discipline-based body of knowledge, adopting systematic methods of analysis – and to the administration of the *res publica*, stretching across the border between the realms of politics – to which policy-makers belong – and science. Or, in Foucaultian terms, between power and knowledge.¹³

The relation between these two realms has been object of careful study by scholars of science and technology studies.¹⁴ Scholars have warned of the possible use of science, perceived as the ultimate arbiter of ‘truth’ in modern societies, to depoliticize “beliefs and practices that are often eminently political, removing them from the arena of contestation” and public debate.¹⁵ On the other hand, the growing recognition that processes of scientific production are influenced by social factors has undermined the previous faith in advisory technical bodies ‘speaking truth to power,’ providing policy makers with answers which, using Tolstoj’s words, “can’t admit of any doubt.”¹⁶

While the use of scientific evidence to guide the development of public policies can be considered a global trend,¹⁷ connections between State authority, politics and research can play out very differently in diverse polities. In general terms, political and economic systems characterized by a higher degree of pluralism are associated to a weaker capacity of the State to retain control over research, as well as to a lower degree of influence on the capacity of scientists to frame alternative visions of development. On the other hand, authoritarian or semi-authoritarian systems are generally seen as characterized by a situation whereby science can be used as a tool supporting the dominating official discourse, and as such is more vulnerable to political pressures.¹⁸ As we shall see in the next sections of this paper, although China’s situa-

¹² UK Office for Public Management, *The Impact of Research on Policy Making and Practice: Current Status and Ways Forward. Literature Review - Report for the Audit Commission* (London: UK Office for Public Management, 2005), 4; Joseph S. Ross and Cary P. Gross, “Policy Research: Using Evidence to Improve Healthcare Delivery Systems,” *Circulation*, 119 (2009): 891.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Bisogna difendere la società* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2010).

¹⁴ See in particular Sheila Jasanoff, *The Fifth Branch: Science Advisers as Policymakers* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ Greenhalgh, Susan, *Just One Child*, 8.

¹⁶ Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life. The Construction of Scientific Facts - Second Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Robert Hoppe, “Policy Analysis, Science and Politics: from ‘Speaking Truth to Power’ to ‘Making Sense Together’,” *Science and Public Policy*, 26, 3 (1999): 201; Pierre Bourdieu, *Il mestiere di scienziato. Corso al College de France 2000-2001* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003), 7-9.

¹⁷ UK Office for Public Management, *Impact of Research*, 2.

¹⁸ Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics and Markets: The World’s Political-Economic Systems* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), xi; Etel Solingen, “Between Markets and the State. Scientists in Comparative Perspective,” in *Comparative Science and Technology Policy*, ed. Sheila Jasanoff (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1997), 33-35.

tion is to some extent consistent with this interpretation, the involvement of a plurality of actors – bearing diverse interests – in research processes challenges the idea of a monolithic State’s authority guiding and controlling policy oriented research.

3. Politicization of Policy Oriented Research in China

3.1 Political Dynamics at Play

With reference to post-Mao China, available literature suggests the considerable presence of phenomena of science politicization, intended as manipulation and instrumental use of research for political purposes. Published literature individuates two clusters of political factors influencing the production of policy-relevant scientific evidence. The first one stems from the preeminent position which central authorities maintain in contemporary China. The Party-State is perceived as capable to ‘set the rules of the game,’ by identifying which questions ‘can be asked,’ setting a research agenda prioritizing among many potential issues of public interest, and defining development targets exerting a pressure upon local authorities in collecting statistical data.¹⁹ Moreover, the official discourse and the language used to articulate it, traditionally affect the very definition of science (*kexue*) and scientific research. As observed by Perry Link, “during the Mao years *kexue* sometimes meant little more or less than ‘good’ or ‘politically correct’ [. . .] a sentence like *ni zhege kanfa bu kexue* ‘this view of yours is unscientific’ did not have to refer to [. . .] any claim that the scientific method had been properly applied.”²⁰

A second group of factors pertains to the sensitivity of research as perceived by different political actors, generally on the basis of their socio-political role and economic interests.²¹ The complexity of research activities, particularly when they require the collection of data in the field, often imply the involvement of a wide range of actors (local governments, security forces, public and private enterprises, communities, etc.), whose interests are not necessarily in line with those of the proponents of the research, and/or the personnel involved in the front line of research. In a paper built upon her own experience in investigating public goods provision in Chinese rural communities, political scientist Lily Tsai notes that “survey research itself is politically sensitive in China. Quantitative description of a popu-

¹⁹ See in particular Maria Heimer and Stig Thøgersen, eds., *Doing Fieldwork in China* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2006).

²⁰ Perry Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 269. See also Michael Schoenals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, 1992), 9.

²¹ Lily Tsai, “Quantitative Research and Issues of Political Sensitivity in Rural China,” in *Contemporary Chinese Politics. New Sources, Methods, and Field Strategies*, eds. Allen Carlson et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 246-265.

lation can be often used as a measure of the performance of particular officials and local governments.”²² Clearly, in reality the two levels intersect and interact with each other, and drawing a boundary between the two would not contribute considerably to the observer’s understanding of the dynamics at play. Indeed, the same limitations posed by the official discourse are in many cases informed by precise interests, according to which some issues might be considered as appropriate to discuss about, other sensitive, and other taboo.

Research targeting national policies or projects and their local implementation provides the most evident examples of these dynamics. In discussing the evolution of population policies, the anthropologist Susan Greenhalgh recognizes the effects of the dominant discourse when she radically questions the idea that in China scientific production “about population can be created outside of, and uninfluenced by, politics.”²³ In analyzing the scientific debate on the construction of the Three Gorges Dam, Alana Boland similarly finds that the production of scientific evidence and the work of experts had “been greatly influenced by political concerns.”²⁴ Research work over the issues taken into consideration by Greenhalgh and Boland can as well be seen as influenced by dynamics of private interest articulation, rooted into an institutional systems where peripheral actors can exert a great influence over the scientific production. According to a researcher employed by a governmental research institution, interviewed by the author in 2013, “when we drafted the report concerning the environmental risks posed by the Three Gorges Dam and submitted it for comments to our local partner [which had commissioned the study], its representatives told us that the report was too negative, and asked us to modify it to make it appear ‘better.’ We reported this suggestion back to our leaders [in Beijing], who later gave us the go-ahead to modify the report according to our partner’s suggestion.”²⁵ Maria Giovanna Merli e Adrian Raftery, in a paper investigating the underreporting of births in rural China, show that due to the incentives built in the evaluation system of local cadres, the latter tend to manipulate birth statistics in order to make them appear in line with government targets.²⁶

²² Tsai, “Quantitative Research,” 249. Works discussing challenges of fieldwork research in China include among others: Anne F. Thurston and Burton Pasternak, eds., *The Social Sciences and Fieldwork in China: Views from the Field* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983); Andrew G. Walder, “The Transformation of Contemporary China Studies, 1977-2002,” in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David L. Szanton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Heimer and Thøgersen, *Fieldwork in China*; Jun Li, “Ethical Challenges in Participant Observation: A Reflection on Ethnographic Fieldwork,” *The Qualitative Report*, 13, 1 (2008): 100-115. Candice Cornet and Tami Bumenfield, eds., *Doing Fieldwork in China...with Kids! The Dynamics of Accompanied Fieldwork in the People’s Republic* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014).

²³ Greenhalgh, Susan, *Just One Child*, 34.

²⁴ Alana Boland, “The Three Gorges Debate and Scientific Decision-Making in China,” *China Information*, 13, 1 (1998): 25.

²⁵ Doc Interview #0809, 2013.

²⁶ Giovanna Merli and Adrian E. Raftery, “Are Births Underreported in Rural China? Manipulation of Statistical Records in Response to China’s Population Policies,” *Demography*, 37, 1 (2000): 109.

Manipulation of data and information to defend one's interest, as shown by Merli and Raftery, appears to be common. In a report published in 2013, the U.S. - China Economic and Security Review Commission warns against the presence of manipulations and omissions in economic statistical data produced in China, notwithstanding efforts put forward by central authorities in recent years to curb these phenomena.²⁷ The pursue of private goals by lower-level officials is found by Cai Yongshun to be among the most common factors leading to manipulation of statistics.²⁸ Private goals of local officials are often tied to those of the local industry: Elizabeth Economy, in describing the challenges encountered by central authorities in producing reliable environmental assessments, points out the negative impact of "personal ties between local officials and enterprise managers, local leaders' concerns over [...] social instability [...] and corruption."²⁹

3.2 Case Study: A Sino-Italian Research on Rural Health Care (2007-2009)

To analyze in detail dynamics of science politicization we now turn to a case study, relevant to a research project on rural health care accessibility carried out between 2007 and 2009. The case study has been selected since it is representative of (a) the current discourse in China relevant to achieving a balanced, i.e., 'scientific' model of development; (b) the importance attributed in recent years to policy oriented research supporting policy making; (c) the presence of diversified interests among socio-economic and political actors, in this case central authorities, local authorities, health care providers, and the general public.³⁰ Moreover, the observed research activity provides a vantage point of observation of the interactions among different actors, since it implied the collection of data through field research, involving all layers of government as well as local communities. The introduction of this case study will review the major stages of the research process, focusing in particular on bottlenecks of political nature. Most materials utilized to draft the following paragraphs comes from participant observation: the author was himself part of the research team carrying out the research taken as case study. In introducing the latter, the author will include information needed to identify major characteristics of the targeted research. Other information not essential for the comprehension of the case study have been omitted, in order to avoid possible negative consequences for the local partners of the research project.

²⁷ Jacob Koch-Weser, *The Reliability of China's Economic Data: An Analysis of National Output* (Washington: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff Research Project, 2013), 4-5.

²⁸ Yongshun Cai, "Between State and Peasant: Local Cadres and Statistical Reporting in Rural China," *The China Quarterly*, 163 (2000): 784.

²⁹ Elizabeth Economy, "Environmental Enforcement in China," in *China's Environment and the Challenge of Sustainable Development*, ed. Kristen A. Day (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 103, 117.

³⁰ See in particular Tony Saich, *Governance and Politics*; Kristen A. Day, ed., *China's Environment and the Challenge of Sustainable Development* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2005).

3.2.1 General Coordinates

This case study discusses a joint project carried out by the Italian Development Cooperation and the Ministry of Health of PRC (MoH)³¹ in three provinces of Central-Western China. The project aimed at supporting the development of equitable health policies in rural China. The main activity of the project was the realization of a study to assess the accessibility of health care services in China's countryside, and the effectiveness of rural health insurance schemes in protecting health care users against financial catastrophe due to medical expenditures.

The project took place at a time when a new stage of the health care system reform (*yiliao tizhi gaige* 医疗体制改革, often abbreviated in *yigai* 医改) had just started. Since 2002-2003, Beijing had given healthcare an important place in her political agenda. This was due to the recognition of the disastrous consequences of policies implemented in the 80s and 90s, when a *de facto* privatization of the health care system and the collapse of the collective insurance system had laid the basis for a dramatic social and health crisis, characterized by (a) scarce accessibility to healthcare services; (b) widespread poverty due to illness and medical expenditures; (c) worsening of health indicators in remote areas of the country; (d) increasing dissatisfaction among disadvantaged strata of the population towards a system increasingly inequitable, ensuring care only to those who could afford it economically.³²

In 2007 – when the research project moved its first steps – the Chinese government was rapidly extending health insurance coverage across the country. At this respect, the major instrument was the New Rural Cooperative Medical Scheme, NRCMS (*xinxing nongcun hezuo yiliao zhidu* 新型农村合作医疗制度, abbreviated in *xinnonghe* 新农合), a community based mutual health insurance scheme administered at county level, heavily subsidized by the government, aimed at providing partial reimbursement for inpatient treatments. The declared target of the reintroduction of health insurance, greatly supported by the Hu-Wen administration, was to ensure more equitable access to health care services, laying the basis for social and economic stability.³³

The introduction of NRCMS, initiated in 2003, was depicted in official statements and media reports as a tremendous success: in only four years, the scheme

³¹ In 2013-2014, the Ministry of Health (*weishengbu* 卫生部) was merged with the National Family Planning Commission (*guojia jihua shengyu weiyuanhui* 国家计划生育委员会), and renamed National Health and Family Planning Commission (*guojia weisheng he jihua shengyu weiyuanhui* 国家卫生和计划生育委员会).

³² Daniele Brombal, "Health Sector Reforms in Contemporary China. A Political Perspective," in *Globalization and Public Sector Reform in China*, ed. Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard (New York: Routledge, 2014), 100-123.

³³ Brombal, "Health Sector Reforms," 103.

had reached a coverage of 90% of the rural population.³⁴ Notwithstanding the official discourse and propaganda, Chinese authorities were aware of the need to assess the impact of health insurance, in order to plan efficiently government investments in health. From an ideological perspective, the importance attributed to systematic forms of policy evaluation was informed as well by the adoption of the concept of scientific development – formally included in the CPC Statute in 2007 – intended as a path to development planned rigorously, with method and rationality, different from an unregulated growth bringing about huge social imbalances.³⁵

3.2.2 Preparatory Phase

This is the background against which in 2007 officials of the Italian Development Cooperation (IDC) and of the Chinese Ministry of Health (MoH), already cooperating on a wide range of issues related to medicine and health care, began discussing a possible joint research project aimed at supporting the development of Chinese rural health policies.³⁶ In this turn of time, such an activity was in line with agendas of both institutions: for IDC, it was coherent with domestic political pressures pushing for cooperation activities focused on policy support and institutional building, combined with a gradual disengagement³⁷ from traditional, more costly activities of service provision to beneficiary populations; for what concerns MoH, the proposed activity was consistent with the great attention given by the government and the Party to the production of scientific evidence supporting the development of social and public policies.

During the preparatory phase, technical staff³⁸ of both institutions – coordinated and supervised by the respective superiors and political cadres – agreed

³⁴ Brombal, “Health Sector Reforms,” 105.

³⁵ Marina Miranda, “La linea politica del Pcc nell’anno delle crisi e delle olimpiadi,” in *La Cina luci e ombre. Evoluzione politica e relazioni esterne dopo Mao*, ed. Carla Meneguzzi Rostagni (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2010), 37

³⁶ With reference to cooperation activities between IDC and MoH, see Cooperazione Italiana allo Sviluppo, *L’intervento della Cooperazione Italiana in Cina* (Pechino: Cooperazione Italiana allo Sviluppo, 2010), accessed January 01, 2014, <http://sedi.esteri.it/utlpechino/italy/file/L'intervento%20della%20Cooperazione%20Italiana%20in%20Cina.pdf>, 41-46

³⁷ Referred to in the diplomatic jargon with the expression “phasing out”.

³⁸ By technical staff, we make reference to the staff directly involved in everyday project’s activities. This roughly included in each of the two involved institutions the following personnel: (a) a senior project coordinator, with a scientific background in medicine, in charge for overall project’s supervision, and entrusted the role to ensure its consistency with the respective institutional goals and priorities; (b) a junior operative coordinator, responsible for the coordination of project activities and the achievement of project objectives. Duties relevant to this position were entrusted by the Italian partner to a junior staff with social sciences background, while in the case of the Chinese partner the person occupying this position had a background in public health. Most communications between the two institutions were handled by staff in this position; (c)

upon objectives and general methodology of the research. These were identified in evaluating the level of accessibility to health care services in Central and Western China and assessing the effectiveness of rural insurance schemes, analyzing original data collected through a household survey. Once agreed upon the main features of the project, these were submitted by the technical staff to their superiors, complete with an estimated budget. Internal approval and the signing of the agreement stipulating respective duties – including financial and human resources to be provided by the two institutions – marked the start-up of project activities, including (a) definition of research protocol; (b) data collection in the field; (c) data validation and analysis; (d) drafting of the research report; (e) communication of scientific evidences produced by the project.

3.2.3 Definition of the Research Protocol

Drafting of the research protocol was entrusted to a joint Sino-Italian team, composed by technical staff who periodically reported the state of advancement of work to respective superiors. In this phase, research staff and experts employed by the Chinese partner gave a negative feedback to the proposal – put forward by the Italian partner – to include among issues to be considered by the research also preventive medicine, with particular reference to vaccinations. The Chinese project supervisor, in justifying this negative feedback, commented during a project meeting that there was “no need to investigate this aspect” (mei you biyao yanjiu zhe ge fangmian 没有必要研究这个方面). This turned out as quite a surprise for the Italian staff, since at the time the issue of irregular vaccination coverage was known to medical professionals operating in China as well as to government officials, and information had begun to percolate through the official media.³⁹

It would be rather difficult to justify the attitude of the Chinese partner on the basis of a scientific and professional judgment: indeed, primary health care is widely recognized as the fundamental component of health care systems, while vaccination clearly is the most cost-effective service which can be provided for by a health care system, averting huge costs in terms of lost lifetime productivity, and

a statistician, employed on a consultancy basis by the Chinese partner ; (d) an administrative assistant in both institutions. The core of the research project team was thus composed by seven people. Whenever needed, the Chinese partner entrusted limited duties – e.g., providing advice relevant to research methodology, collecting information about provinces and counties targeted by fieldwork, providing background policy materials, etc. – to other personnel already employed by MoH.

³⁹ China Daily Online, “Eastern China Province Reports over 11,000 measles cases,” China Daily, May 23, 2008, accessed January 01, 2014, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/23/content_6705744.htm.

treatment.⁴⁰ As such, we need to look for other motives, tracing them in the political and institutional context in which the research protocol was being drafted. At this respect, Chinese researchers and their superiors might have been influenced by the government targets – and related communication strategies – which, as mentioned above, were at the time focused on strengthening insurance systems covering curative treatments expenditures.⁴¹ ⁴² A general approach, the one focused on curative treatments, based as well on hospitals' interests, supportive of government public spending programs centered on the subsidization of curative treatments, much more remunerative than preventive ones.⁴³

Apart from the adherence to the official discourse, the negative attitude of the Chinese counterpart was most certainly informed also by the need, keenly perceived by MoH officials, to handle carefully issues seen as sensitive by local authorities. Indeed, according to the original proposal drafted by the Italian partner, also data on payments made by users for vaccinations would have been collected. According to anecdotal information provided by IDC expatriate personnel, such payments were often occurring, although Chinese legislation provided that vaccinations should have been free of charge.⁴⁴ Clearly, should researchers have found evidence of such illegal behaviors, this could have created embarrassment among provincial authorities, whose cooperation was essential to carry out the research project. Prior to the first meeting of the Project Scientific Committee, which also senior personnel of provincial health departments (*sheng weisheng ting* 省卫生厅) of three involved provinces were expected to join, the parties agreed to *officially* drop the inclusion of the issue of vaccination among research topics.

⁴⁰ Paradoxically, this recognition came in the late 1970's also as a result of the tremendous – and largely successful – effort made by China to establish a primary health care network in rural areas. On the topic, see World Health Organization (WHO), *Primary Health Care: The Chinese Experience* (Geneva: WHO, 1983).

⁴¹ Zhonggong zhongyang, guowuyuan 中共中央, 国务院 (CPC Central Committee, State Council), *Zhonggong zhongyang, guowuyuan guanyu jin yi bu jiaqiang nongcun weisheng gongzuo de jue ding, zhongfa*, 2002 nian, 13 hao 中共中央、国务院关于进一步加强农村卫生工作的决定, 中发 200213 (Decision of the Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council on Further Strengthening Rural Health Work, Centr., 2002 No.13), 2002.

⁴² As an indicative example of the importance attributed to health insurance in government communication efforts, we can consider the inclusion of the New Rural Cooperative Medical Scheme in the online portal titled *Shi da huimin chengce pingxuan* 十大惠民政策评选 (Public Selection of the Ten Major Policies Benefiting the People). Since 2007, the portal – managed by Renmin wang 人民网 – has allowed netizens to select their 10 'favorite' policies among a list of 18. At the time of drafting this paper, the portal was still accessible at http://poll.people.com.cn/192_ctdzb_003/zhengce.php (04/14).

⁴³ Brombal, "Health Sector Reforms," 107-108.

⁴⁴ Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui changwu weiyuanhui 全国人民代表大会常务委员会 (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress), *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo chuanranbing fangzhi fa [2004 xiuding]* 中华人民共和国传染病防治法 [2004修订] (Law of the People's Republic of China on Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases, 2004 Revision), 2004, Art. 15.

The role of the Scientific Committee was to verify the consistency of the research protocol with research's objectives, and to validate the research final report.⁴⁵ The inclusion of provincial health authorities in the Committee was used by MoH as an instrument to ensure political and institutional coverage to research activities in the field. Formally intended to define scientific (*kexue* 科学) research instruments and procedures, the first meeting of the Committee meeting largely revolved around the discussion of modalities through which evidences produced by the report would have been utilized and communicated after the conclusion of project's activities. Their main concern seemed to be that of ensuring that research results were not utilized to evaluate (*pinggu* 评估) the work of local officials, and avoiding comparisons in terms of performance among the provinces targeted by the study. In any event, officials also suggested to restrict access to research's results (*baomi* 保密), not allowing public disclosure. Only once they received satisfying guarantee over these issues, local officials gave the green light to the start-up of field data collection.

3.2.4 Data Collection

The research protocol foresaw the realization of a quantitative study, utilizing data collected in the field through a household survey to be carried out during Spring-Summer 2008, targeting a sample of an approximate 3,500 rural households. In each of the three provinces, two counties with population, surface, and per-capita income close with the provincial average were selected. Main variables of the study were identified in (a) level of access to health care services and (b) level on insurance reimbursement (dependent variables); (c) socio-economic status (SES) and (d) insurance coverage (independent variables).

Field research activities were initiated in Spring 2008 with a *pilot survey*, carried out to test the appropriateness of research procedures. The survey took place in a county located 250 Km south of Beijing, characterized by socio-economic and logistic conditions similar to those characterizing other areas to be targeted by the study. Survey time and modalities were discussed and agreed upon with local authorities at county level. The research team was composed by five researchers employed by MoH, whose personnel managed all communications with local authorities. The participation to field activities of expatriate personnel was limited to one staff, entrusted by the Italian counterpart the role of supporting the Chinese colleague in managing fieldwork, as well as carrying out quality supervision by taking part to all field activities.

⁴⁵ Besides researchers and officials of IDC and MoH, also a number of external invited experts – Chinese and expatriate – were invited to join the Scientific Committee.

Data collection in rural villages was managed through the usual practice employed in such circumstances in China, i.e., with local officials – in this case personnel of county health bureaus and township governments, and village cadres – accompanying researchers during interviews. Activities were finalized on schedule, and the planned number of questionnaire per-day collected. However, despite the apparent success of the pilot survey, the involvement of local officials was soon perceived by the MoH researchers as leading to negative consequences in terms of data reliability and quality. These included (a) scarce control over the definition of the sample, with potential negative impact on its representativeness; (b) difficult access to remote areas, distant from major communication routes, even if they had already been included among areas to be targeted by the research activities; (c) reticence shown by interviewed individuals in answering questions about income, poverty subsidies, health services quality, and insurance coverage, when interviews were conducted in the presence of a local official.

Having assessed these issues through fieldwork and subsequent follow-up discussion in Beijing, the team of researchers defined more stringent procedures, aimed at counteracting the control exerted by local authorities. These practices included: (a) identifying *before* reaching the field the geographical areas to be targeted by survey activities in each of the targeted counties. This identification had to be carried out independently by the research team on the basis of socio-economic indicators and logistic information; (b) entrusting data collection to auxiliary personnel *not* attached to the local government structure, recruited from local nursing vocational training schools (*zhiye peixun xuexiao* 职业培训学校) at prefecture level;⁴⁶ (c) concentrate the maximum possible number of investigators (up to 10-12, the number generally employed during fieldwork) in the same village at the same time, in order to avoid village cadres to accompany each of the investigators.

Thanks to these procedures, during Summer 2008 researchers were able to maintain a much higher degree of control on field activities. This, however, could not entirely eliminate influence by local authorities. Their involvement remained crucial to ensure basic logistics, including transportation and communication with different villages, and adequate board and lodging for a research team now composed by 15 to 17 people (10 to 12 investigators, four Chinese MoH staff, one Italian IDC staff). Indeed, while supporting field activities, local authorities *systematically* tended to “guide” researchers and investigators far from areas where poor and sick peasants were living. In North-Western China, a village cadre suggested investigators not to waste time in reaching the most remote area administered by the village, by saying that people living there were deaf mute, and as such “would not understand your questions, let

⁴⁶ Rural administrative units under the provincial level are: prefecture (*shi* 市); county (*xian* 县); township (*xiang* 乡); administrative village (*xingzheng cun* 行政村). Administrative villages are often subdivided into natural villages (*ziran cun* 自然村).

alone answer them.”⁴⁷ In fact, this turned out to be incorrect: by visiting the families whose interview had been discouraged, investigators found out they that they were leaving in conditions of extreme poverty. In one another case, a village cadre tried to prevent researchers from interviewing members of a family by saying that people living there were mentally ill and violent.⁴⁸ Also in this case, the interview was conducted regardless of the local cadre’s complaints – which in any case were not strong enough to put at risk the activities being conducted in the area. What investigators found out was, once again, rather different from what they had been told: the household was composed by one woman, one man, and a child. The woman had a cancer of the uterus, whose expensive treatment had caused extreme hardship to the family. The child was a female aged four, with leporine lip, who had been abandoned by her parents shortly after her birth.⁴⁹ The child, named Yuanyuan, was formally unknown to local health authorities, and as such had not been vaccinated. Certainly, a source of embarrassment for local officials.⁵⁰ While these instances might simply appear grotesque, it is nonetheless clear that in case they were replicated systematically, they could have jeopardize the representativeness of the sample.

In political terms, these dynamics can be considered as indicative of the capacity of local interests to hamper researchers’ access to the field, i.e., the physical and social space where data and information needed to the research are stored and must be collected. In the cases introduced above, it is clear that the local interests limiting researchers were essentially those of the local authorities *vis a vis* higher administrative levels, with local officials worried about the fact that materials collected through research activities could have been used to assess negatively their performance.

A kind of concern, as we shall see, characterizing also the phase of data analysis. This time, however, being felt by MoH researchers.

3.2.5 Data Analysis

Once collected, all questionnaires were transported back to Beijing, and then transcribed in excel electronic format by MoH personnel. During transcription work, paper copies of questionnaires remained available to the Italian staff supervising the work. Transcribing questionnaires into electronic format was needed to process data through a statistical software, to determine whether the correlation among different variables could be considered as statistically significant. During the process of definition of the statistical model, a preliminary data analysis was carried out by Chinese researchers, pursuant to the absolute level of accessibility to health care services

⁴⁷ Observation #0627c, 2008.

⁴⁸ Observation #0629, 2008.

⁴⁹ Interview #0629, 2008.

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that in both cases households had already been included among those to be interviewed, on the basis of population registries retrieved at village level.

(August-September 2008). The proxy selected to evaluate the level of accessibility was the unmet health care need, i.e., a condition whereby an individual in need of medical treatment is unable to access care. For what concerns inpatient care, health care need was considered as unmet when an individual, after having been prescribed by a doctor hospital treatment, was unable to access care. Preliminary results of the analysis carried out by Chinese researchers were delivered in an informal document to the staff of the IDC, reporting a rate of unmet need of 30% (30% of hospital treatment prescriptions made in the 12 months before the interview had not resulted in hospitalization). By double-checking information contained in the excel database – shared by the Chinese counterpart – however, Italian staff calculated an unmet need rate of 45%, much higher than the one reported by MoH.

To the informal request of clarification sent by the Italian staff relevant to this discrepancy, the statistician in charge for data analysis in the MoH team replied orally that data analysis should be carried out bearing in mind the need to respect its “scientific nature” (*kexuexing* 科学性), as well as the context in which the research was taking place, and its role in supporting the development of national policies. It is worth noting at this regard that the value *proposed* by MoH researchers (30%) was in line with the level of unmet hospital care need in rural areas reported by the same MoH four years before, in the 2003 National Health Services Survey (NHSS, *guojia weisheng fuwu diaocha* 国家卫生服务调查).⁵¹ This survey constituted – and still does – the major instrument for monitoring the performance of the health care system at national level, and it was accessible through the MoH online portal.⁵² Clearly, producing evidence indicating a performance largely worse than the one found in 2003 – year of introduction of the NRCMS, the new rural health insurance – in one of the major success indicators of the health reform was a thorny problem to deal with for MoH researchers. Releasing such results could have indeed put them in a delicate position with respect to a government rhetoric centered at the time on the indisputable successes achieved in ameliorating the conditions of life of rural population, possibly exposing them to the criticism of their direct superiors and Party organs.

In that case, however, the dispute over preliminary results was solved by the Italian part by making understood that scientific results produced by the study could not be subject to compromise, while as the same time reassuring once more the Chinese colleagues – as already done during the preparatory phase – over the fact that data would have not been released to any third party, unless this had been

⁵¹ Weisheng bu tongji xinxi zhongxin 卫生部统计信息中心 (Center for health statistics and information, Ministry of Health), *Zhongguo weisheng fuwu diaocha yanjiu 2008* 中国卫生服务调查研究 2008 (*National Health Services Survey 2008*, NHSS) (Beijing: Weisheng bu 卫生部 (Ministry of Health), 2009), 50.

⁵² A public version of the 2008 report, including also 2003 data, is accessible at <http://www.nhfpc.gov.cn/cmsresources/mohwsbwstjxxxz/cmsrsdocument/doc9911.pdf>, accessed on 01 January, 2014.

previously agreed upon by both MoH and IDC. Reassured on the issue, and presumably after an internal consultation with their superiors, MoH researchers agreed on the '45% measure' of unmet health care need, blaming the previous discrepancy on technical problems occurred during data analysis.

3.2.6 *Communicating Scientific Evidences*

Circulation of scientific evidences produced by the study was initially restricted to MoH and ICD, as well as provincial authorities involved in the project. During the second meeting of the Scientific Committee, in Autumn 2008, members of the research team, invited experts, and provincial delegates discussed the findings of the study, elaborating policy suggestions aimed at improving local policies in terms of health insurance coverage.

The positive feedback given by the Scientific Committee created the conditions for MoH and ICD to discuss the possible circulation of the report also among other bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies, Chinese research institutes, and ministerial departments having a stake in the development of Chinese health insurance policies (in particular the Ministry for Human Resources and Social Security, MoHRSS, Renli ziyuan he shehui baozhang bu 人力资源和社会保障部). This process was however hampered by the publication of the results of the 2008 National Health Services Survey (NHSS, guojia weisheng fuwu diaocha 国家卫生服务调查). Data utilized for the new NHSS had been collected in 2008, utilizing indicators identical to those of the Sino-Italian project, and targeting a sample with comparable demographic characteristics. The NHSS reported for Central and Western rural China a rate of unmet health care need – the same proxy for health care accessibility used by the MoH-ICD project – of about 25%, much lower than the value reported by Chinese and Italian researchers (45%).⁵³ In this context, the Chinese partner showed a considerable hesitation in sharing findings with an audience wider than the one included in the Scientific Committee. This hesitation was overcome by not giving high visibility to the role played in the research project by MoH: in June 2009, a closed door seminar was held at the Italian Embassy of Italy, inviting to attend a restricted audience composed by delegates of selected national and international institutions.

4. *Conclusions*

The case study introduced above confirms the pervasiveness of politicization phenomena in the production of scientific evidence supporting policy making in Chi-

⁵³ Weisheng bu, *Zhongguo weisheng*, 50.

na, with particular reference to the health care sector. Research process is shaped by socio-political pressures, curtailing – sometimes also through self-censorship – the work of researchers. These pressures are in general terms attributable to factors discussed in the introductory paragraph of the third section of this paper. At this regard, the decision by MoH not to include primary health care among topics covered by the research (vaccinations, see par. 3.2.3) is – at least partially – indicative of boundaries posed by the official discourse to research. The considerable impact of the official discourse was evident also during data analysis. In this phase, Chinese researchers recurred to the rhetoric of the “scientific nature” (kexuexing) of policy research in the attempt to avoid reaching politically inappropriate conclusions (see par. 3.1; par. 3.2.5). Although informally, they tried to persuade the Italian counterpart of the need to compromise on data acceptable for their hierarchical superiors within MoH, and more generally for government officials and Party cadres at central level. These centripetal dynamics, indicative of the direct and indirect control exerted by the central government on research, coexist with other, centrifugal ones. The latter were particularly evident in the repeated attempts by local officials to obstacle researchers’ work during data collection (see par. 3.2.4), limiting their access to the field.

Notwithstanding the capacity to illustrate these dynamics, this case study certainly has its limitations. The major one is perhaps the collaborative nature of the research project discussed in it. To some extent, the fact that research activities were carried out in the framework of an international cooperation project had an impact on the attitude of the Chinese researchers. With particular reference to the final stages of data analysis and communication of scientific evidence, the Chinese staff was subject to substantial pressures from the Italian counterpart. Indeed, the latter had both financial and diplomatic leverage on MoH. It had been agreed that the last tranche of payment for the project – largely funded by the IDC – would have been made only upon positive conclusion of the project. At the same time, the Chinese side perceived that the disagreements over data reliability (see par. 3.2.5) and an overcautious attitude in releasing research findings (see par. 3.2.6) could have jeopardized to some degree future chances of cooperation with IDC. This said, it is nonetheless worth highlighting once more that the Chinese components of the research team managed independently relations internal to MoH, with hierarchical superiors and the Party apparatus, as well as communication with local authorities. Moreover, the presence of expatriate personnel in the field was negligible, being limited to one staff. In short, the research introduced in this paper was consistently planned and carried out in an institutional context comparable to that characterizing other research activities carried out by China’s government institutions.

In political terms, the nature of dynamics illustrated in the case study can be better understood by looking into the different interests of those involved in the project. These interests seem to be fundamentally structured along the central-

local divide: on one side the MoH personnel, whose primary interests lied in carrying out the institutional mission of the Ministry in terms of policy development, ensuring at the same time the continuation and/or the establishment of positive relationships with their hierarchical superiors, the Party apparatus, and – though marginally – international partners. On the other hand, local officials were keen to avoid a negative evaluation of their work, hiding possible discrepancies between data transferred to central authorities through routine health information systems and those collected by external researchers, in this case sent by MoH. It is understandable how local officials, whose career perspectives – apart from political and personal connections – depend on statistics quantifying their performance, considered as particularly sensitive the collection of data carried out by agencies not under their direct control.

To a large extent, these phenomena can be ascribed to a fragmentation of interests within the Chinese society and political system. A large body of literature has been produced on this issue, particularly under the rubric of Fragmented Authoritarianism (FA). This notion was originally introduced to describe the bargaining occurring within the Chinese bureaucracy, both in terms of central-local relations, and among different vertical agencies.⁵⁴ According to the proponents of FA, the study of these bargaining processes – involving bureaucracies with competing interests and/or diverging views of how to best serve national interests – can in many instances explain variations in policy outcomes.⁵⁵ More recently, FA has been adopted as a framework to analyze relations between the public and the private sphere, in a context whereby “the process of policy making has become increasingly pluralized [...] [and] barriers to entry have been lowered.”⁵⁶ In this context, actors previously excluded from the policy making arena – such as disgruntled officials, the media, NGOs, and the public – can act as ‘policy entrepreneurs,’ exploiting bureaucratic fragmentation to propose reframed views of issues present in the local or national policy agenda.⁵⁷ In other terms, the notion of FA, avoiding to focus on distinctions based on formal features of the political system, enables the observer to fully devote his/her attention to processes occurring in a polity which, though remaining authoritarian, is showing an increasing responsiveness to the demands of different interest groups.

Despite the great amount of published literature on the impact of political factors on policy oriented research in China, no considerable effort has been made to inscribe factors influencing scientific production into a precise analytical framework, grasping the current development status of the Chinese political system. In particular, there is a lack of understanding of how centripetal and centrifugal

⁵⁴ Lieberthal and Oksenberg, *Policy Making*; Lieberthal and Lampton, *Bureaucracy*.

⁵⁵ Lieberthal and Oksenberg, *Policy Making*, 9-31.

⁵⁶ Mertha, “Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0,” 995.

⁵⁷ Mertha, “Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0,” 995-1012.

forces at play in the Chinese polity can interact in shaping scientific knowledge on issues of public interest. The application of the FA framework to this field of inquiry could prove extremely useful, if properly adjusted with complementary analytical tools.⁵⁸ Indeed, FA could be used to chart processes through which different actors develop alternative scientific representations of issues of public concern, and consequently utilize them as a bargaining tool to foster formulation of policies sympathetic to their interests.

Shedding light over these aspects requires further research work, to which the present paper will hopefully contribute.

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⁵⁸ Among possible complementary frameworks, it would be worth considering that of "Political Ambivalence," discussed by Rachel Stern in her volume *Environmental Litigation in China: A Study in Political Ambivalence*. According to Stern, the Chinese polity is characterized by the presence of conflicting official (or quasi-official) signals, regarding the desirability of certain political actions and outcomes. According to Stern, different actors – both inside and outside the bureaucracy – have to daily interpret and deal with these signals, which due to their ambivalence concur to the fragmentation of decision-making (Rachel Stern, *Environmental Litigation in China: A Study in Political Ambivalence* (Cambridge and New York Cambridge University Press, 2013). Studying the role of scientific production in coding and decoding such signals would certainly contribute to the research work envisaged in the conclusive paragraph of this paper.

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NICOLETTA CELLI

THE DAWN OF BUDDHIST ART IN CHINA:
PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON A NEW APPROACH
TO EARLY BUDDHIST IMAGES

Preface

It was perhaps inevitable that with the discovery of the remains of a Buddhist culture in Central Asia as a result of the archaeological explorations of the early twentieth century there should have developed and later become entrenched the idea that the spread of Buddhism into China occurred by means of a gradual transmission from the Kuṣāṇa area, followed by a period of sedimentation in Central Asia and subsequent diffusion in China. This often tacit notion of Buddhism's gradual expansion through Central Asia to China became rooted in the field of historical studies and persisted throughout virtually the whole of the twentieth century in the terms summarised by Erik Zürcher:

Buddhism in Han China constitutes the eastern extension of a huge Buddhist expansion that started in the early Kushan period; from the Kushan empire it must have spread east of the Pamir and established itself in the oasis kingdoms along the two branches of the Silk Route, north and south of the Taklamakan desert. From there, in a gradual process of expansion, moving from oasis to oasis, it finally reached China. ... Or, as formulated by John Brough: 'the advance of the Doctrine was, on the whole, a gradual process of infiltration: a position of some sort in Central Asia had already been established, from which secondary tentacles could then reach out into China'.¹

The same, *mutatis mutandis*, occurred in the parallel field of Chinese Buddhist art history, where this wholly speculative reconstruction envisioned a gradual spread

¹ Erik Zürcher, "Han Buddhism and the Western Region," in *Thought and Law in Han and Ch'in China: Studies Presented to Anthony Hulsewé on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Wilt L. Idema and Erik Zürcher (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 168. In a later article on this subject Erik Zürcher, "Buddhism Across Boundaries: The Foreign Input," in John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, eds., "Buddhism Across Boundaries," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, 222 (2012): 6, called this process the "pattern of contact expansion."

of Buddhist images of Gandhāran origin through the efforts of pious missionaries. It stood to reason that the images would have first reached Central Asia, where they would have prompted the production of local art, which in turn would have served as the model for the later development of Buddhist art in China. The natural implication in this reconstruction was that the steps in this geographical diffusion – from Gandhāra to Central Asia and thence to China – expressed the passage of time, so that Chinese works were self-evidently posterior to those of Central Asian origin.

The persistence of this model was certainly encouraged by the fact that in the initial stages the study of Chinese Buddhist art did not constitute an independent field of research, but was considered a branch of the study of Chinese art as a whole, for some even a rather minor one.² It certainly did not help that the diffusion of Buddhist material from Central Asia was confined to just a few, highly specialized publications.

Once this model explaining the spread of Buddhism from India to China had been adopted by scholars studying the history of Chinese art, the art-historical perspective that followed it merely retraced the same steps, attempting to arrange Chinese finds within a relative chronology based on a comparison with Indian models and explaining the development of Buddhist art in China in terms of a gradually diminishing reliance on models copied in its early stages. However, like pieces of a puzzle that just won't fit, the Chinese material refused to match their place in the pre-ordained picture and soon revealed the inconsistencies and contradictions in the theoretical structure.

Remaining in thrall to an inadequate methodology, in many cases relying on the old fashioned stylistic analysis, made it impossible for the discipline to evolve an independent stance and provide a fresh approach. Furthermore, although archaeological research in Central Asia and China at this time did in fact bring to light a certain amount of interesting material, the pioneering and unsystematic nature of the excavations, to the extent that the finds are now hard to place in their original context with any confidence and therefore difficult to date, increased the dependence on historical sources and philological studies.³

This paper will attempt to trace the consequences of following this master narrative, aiming firstly to provide a brief survey of the art historical discipline's tra-

² For a severe judgment of Chinese Buddhist art, see the chapter entitled "L'hérésie bouddhique" in the posthumous work by Victor Segalen, *Chine. La grande statuaire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1972).

³ A symptom of this sense of the subordination of art-historical research can be seen for example in the words of Jan Willem de Jong, "The Study of Buddhism. Problems and Perspectives," in *Buddhist Studies*, ed. Gregory Schopen (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), 16: "Buddhist art, inscriptions and coins have supplied us with useful data, but generally they cannot be fully understood without the support given by the texts." Much has already been written on this subject, for instance in the groundbreaking study by Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997). For China, see, for example, John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

jectory from the first half of the twentieth century, and secondly to give some examples of the persistence of this interpretative model in more recent times. Finally, a case study will bring out the limits of basing an analysis on stylistic considerations and suggest an alternative approach built around the idea that art, especially the image, is the expression of a cultural and historical context, which it can in turn help reconstruct, understand and explore. As sophisticated systems of communication with their own coherent language, images can provide a great deal of information, which can be overlooked if, instead, they are broken down into a series of formal motifs explained exclusively in terms of style. The full meaning can be coaxed out of the form (and even material) of these works when they are viewed as discrete entities designed as vehicles for a specific message. I do not mean to suggest that the art historical perspective, even with a revamped methodology, is exhaustive or uniquely well placed to solve complex dating problems, but I do believe it can offer an original contribution to the multi- and inter-disciplinary interpretation of materials. I shall return to this point later.

Master narrative and past scholarship: transmission by contact

The adoption of the master narrative of the spread of Buddhism in China can be found in all texts devoted to the development of Buddhist art in China. The reconstruction, with minor variations from one author to another, recognized the Indian origin of the earliest Buddhist art in China, posited the spread of models mainly through Central Asia (while acknowledging the possible role of maritime trade)⁴ and tended to place the subsequent artistic development in China among the Northern Wei (386-535). In its vagueness, this commonsense account had the merit of simplicity, but in taking so much for granted it failed to provide a clear definition of the exact relationship between the foreign models and the Chinese

⁴ The debate on the early transmission of Buddhist imagery into China via southern routes, initiated by Chinese scholars, dates from at least the first half of the twentieth century and has been recently refuelled. For a reconstruction of the debate see Rong Xinjiang, "Land Road or Sea Route?," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, 144 (2004): 1-32 and Bai Bin, "Religious beliefs as reflected in the funerary record," in *Early Chinese Religions*, eds. John Lagerway and Lü Pengzhi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1022-25. This southern route hypothesis has also been adopted in art historical circles and Alexander Soper was one of its supporters. For example, see his "South Chinese Influence on the Buddhist art of the Six Dynasties Period," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, 32 (1960): 47-112. More recently, Angela Falco Howard has underlined the importance of the southern route for the early transmission of Buddhism and Buddhist imagery into China. Developed in south and southwest China, this early art is termed *proto-Buddhist*, while proper Buddhist in her view evolved in Gansu in the fourth century under the influence of Central Asian Buddhist art. According to Howard, the early fourth century also saw the first examples of bronze figures copied from images imported from India. On this topic see Angela Falco Howard et al., *Chinese Sculpture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 201-229.

works, relying on generic and chronologically wholly uncertain references to Indian or Central Asian art, as the case seemed to require.

One such example is encountered in Osvald Sirén:

Yet, the most important impulses for the development of the religious sculpture in Northern and Western China were not received directly from India but from the Buddhist centres in Central Asia, where the new religious imagery developed quite early in a kind of Iran-Hellenistic form ... These Central Asian places, such as Kutch and Khotan, served as melting pots for the new religious and artistic ideas, and it is quite probable that they furnished not only missionaries but also skilled workmen to the comparatively uncivilized – and unprejudiced – people, which first supported and encouraged Buddhist sculpture on a large scale in Northern China.⁵

Laurence Sickman suggests that Indian models might have undergone modification in crossing Central Asia, providing the following explanation for the differences between Chinese material and the Gandhāran originals:

During the first centuries after the fall of Han, Buddhism became firmly implanted on Chinese soil. ... When Buddhist Missionaries along the ancient trade routes of Central Asia brought their faith to the great cities of the Yellow River valley ... they brought with them a church already some four centuries old – a complete religious system with holy scriptures, priests, monks, icons and ritual observances. ... Chinese literature abounds with accounts that testify to the making of images in the fourth and fifth centuries, as well as the importation of Buddhist icons which, because they came from India or countries near the holy land of Buddhism, were thought to be of special merit. We cannot consider here the prototypes of this early Chinese Buddhist scripture; it must suffice to say that the styles followed in the fourth and fifth centuries were ultimately derived from Indian and Gandharan models which had been much modified in the thriving centres of Buddhism, through which they passed in the long journey across Central Asia.⁶

Hugo Münsterberg turns his attention to the time span over which the transmission might have occurred:

Since the Buddha image originated in India in the late 1st century and since it would obviously have taken a certain time for it to reach the distant Middle Kingdom across the deserts of Central Asia, the first images may indeed have been brought to China in the mid-2nd century.⁷

⁵ Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century* (1925; reprint, Bangkok: SDI, 1998), xxx-xxxI.

⁶ Laurence Sickman and Alexander Soper, *The Art and Architecture of China*, 3rd ed. (1956; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), 85-6.

⁷ Hugo Münsterberg, *Chinese Buddhist Bronzes* (1967; reprint, New York: Hacker Art Books, 1988), 14.

The same framework underlies the conjectures of William Watson about the Chinese simplification of foreign models:

Buddhist art may have come to China over two routes from its north Indian birthplace – the northern land route through the Tarim Basin and the sea route from India via Indochina. The latter is known to have been taken by merchants from the early second century. Even had prototype images reached China by both of these routes, it is not likely that copies made of them would be easily distinguishable in their simplified Chinese versions.⁸

This reading remains unchanged in a more recent work by the same author:

To be reckoned with through the earlier history of Chinese Buddhist art are intermittent imports from the Buddhist west, remotely north-west India itself, more immediately the Buddhist centres of Central Asia. These imports were models for image types and narrative themes sculptured and painted, and brought with them iconographic and symbolic detail ... After a time of direct copying, with alteration imposed by local taste and a readiness to simplify, or by incompetence or artistic indifference, begins a more creative phase, when the small figures are more fully worked.⁹

And, similarly, the conclusions of Michael Sullivan re-propose the same perspective:

From Gandhāra, Buddhism, and with it this new synthetic art, spread northward across the Hindu Kush to central Asia, there to run like a powder trail along the string of oases to the north and south of the Tarim Basin. Buddhist sculpture preceded Buddhist architecture into China, for it was the images – brought in the luggage of missionaries, travelers, and pilgrims, who were no doubt prepared to swear that what they carried was an exact replica of some famous icon in India or central Asia – that were most deeply venerated.¹⁰

In order to understand better the effects of this master narrative it may be useful to summarize here the three main points this view implies:

1 The transmission of Buddhist art from India to China occurred over a long period of time and implied the mediation of Central Asian centres and “contact” from one centre to the next.

2 The transmission of the images is perceived in terms of styles, modified along the journey across Central Asia. Central Asia is viewed as a useful staging post generically accounting for the stylistic difference between the original Gandhāran model and its distant Chinese descendant. The mediation of Central

⁸ William Watson, *Art of Dynastic China* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1981), 131.

⁹ William Watson, *The Arts of China to AD 900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 113-4.

¹⁰ Michael Sullivan, *The Arts of China*, 3rd ed. (1967; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 98.

Asia could always be invoked when confronted by any Chinese work that was not clearly derived from a precise Indian original. However, the flip side to this was that the notion of Central Asia as an intermediary also threw up some extremely thorny problems, since Central Asian material was found to date at best from the same period as the oldest Chinese Buddhist works, but was far more frequently later than these.¹¹

3 Once in China the image was faithfully copied by the local artists. This point is perhaps the trickiest and the source of numerous misunderstandings in the reconstruction of the emergence of Chinese Buddhist art. Firstly, because there was a conspicuous lack of agreement among scholars as to which exactly were the models (stone sculptures, paintings, sketches, bronzes...) by means of which Buddhist art spread to China. In the second place, because it reduced the creation of Buddhist images in China to the mechanical exercise of creating a replica, giving no thought to the icon of the Buddha as an image created in an Indian cultural context.¹²

This narrative certainly had the merit of being based on common sense and was nothing if not intuitive at first sight. But put to the test, in other words careful analysis of the material and comparison with Indian and Central Asian models, it has proved very awkward to apply, as Alan Priest's reflections imply:

The iconography of the early Wei temples obviously came from India and from the offshoots at least of the Gandhāran school, but the style as it appears at Yün Kang is a far cry from the Gandhāran style. The route of the early Indian influence at Yün Kang I believe to have been across Turkestan. The consensus of archaeological opinion dates the temples of Turkestan oases from the sixth century and dismisses them as provincial works. In style the Central Asian sculptures and wall paintings are a mixture of Gandhāran, Graeco-Roman, Persian, and local elements, and the best of them, especially the wall paintings from the temples of the Kyzil oasis, rank among the most brilliant and exciting things ever created. If these things indeed date no earlier than the sixth century, one can only guess at the missing links between Gandhāra and Yün Kang which caused so complete an art to appear so suddenly at such a remote distance from its parent stem. It has been suggested that the iconography was transported by means of manuscripts which were used as plans by the sculptors of the caves. The linear quality of Wei sculpture seems to encourage this theory. I do not like the term "archaic," which

¹¹ We can see this pre-eminence of stylistic analysis in Osvald Sirén, "The Evolution of Chinese Sculpture," *The Burlington Magazine* 73, no. 420 (1938): 111, with regard to a stele of 493 from Tangxian (Hebei), which the scholar compares with the contemporary art of Yungang, noting differences in a number of details. The difficulty of finding a link between the two leads him to posit a generic Central Asian intermediary: "The figure [on the stele] is thus as a whole rather like some of the early bronze statuettes (from the middle of the century), though executed on a larger scale, in softer material. It may indeed, have been made after the model of some of these statuettes which perpetuated what might be called the Central Asian type in early Buddhist art in China, though by a sculptor who possessed a rather developed feeling for plastic form and endowed his work with individual character particularly in the modelling of the head."

¹² On this point, see below pp. 13-15.

is misapplied to this style, although there are suggestions of the things that are truly archaic in early Greek sculpture. The Wei artists, working from manuscripts, overdid a little what they saw there. The result, however, is altogether sincere and lovely, with simple, sharp lines. The line eyebrows continues without a break down the sides of the nose, the necks are long, almost conical, and the lines of the draperies are clear and simple, with careful balance and repetition.¹³

For most of the twentieth century, Buddhist art in China was represented above all by the Yungang 云冈 caves (fig. 1), which were indeed ideal from this point of view. It is precisely on account of the scarce and random nature of the evidence of early Buddhist art in China that scholars have from the beginning concentrated their attention on cave complexes, especially Yungang, taking it as emblematic of the dawn of the artistic activity. In this regard, Sirén states that: “The archaic period, which starts about the middle of the fifth century and lasts for a century, comprises most of the reign of the Northern Wei dynasty and in addition to this the short succeeding dynasties, known as the Eastern and Western Wei.”¹⁴ Similarly, it is no surprise that the chapter dealing with the introduction of Buddhist art into China in Sickman and Soper’s textbook was entitled “Beginning of Buddhist Sculpture: Yün-kang.”¹⁵

The site contained a large number of works in a good state of preservation and the chronology was quite precise compared with other more problematic locations, such as Dunhuang 敦煌.¹⁶ The cave complex dated from the mid fifth century and its images seemed to record a memory rather than being faithful copies of Gandhāran originals. While “classical” Gandhāran sculpture was based on the naturalistic, plastic rendering of the human body (fig. 2) – the use for example of realistic, irregular folds in the Buddha’s robe and in the conveying of the space occupied by the figure even though in high relief – the Yungang sculptures are distinguished by their elementary, geometric treatment of volumes, two-dimensional approach to the human body and an abstract rather than realistic depiction of its features (fig. 1). These differences were explained as the result of changes to the original Gandhāran model occurring in Central Asia, but (and I think this is a key point) without providing any examples of such a putative intermediate form. Implicit in this approach was the notion that Buddhist art in China was not necessarily inspired by original Indian models but might have been based on Central Asian intermediaries.¹⁷

¹³ Alan Priest, *Chinese Sculpture in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1944), 14.

¹⁴ Sirén, “The Evolution of Chinese Sculpture,” 106.

¹⁵ Sickman and Soper, *Art and Architecture of China*, 85.

¹⁶ Actually, although there is a general consensus about the dating of the first caves at Yungang (i.e. about 460), there is debate about the chronology of the individual caves. See James O. Caswell, *Written and Unwritten* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988).

¹⁷ A conspicuous chronological problem, which has continued to the present day and includes the

Besides Yungang, the earliest Buddhist art in China was represented by a certain number of bronze statuettes of Buddha and in some cases bodhisattvas (fig. 3). Most of these were gilt bronzes found in northern China and only a couple of examples came from the south. In the first decades of the twentieth century only very few could be dated from the inscription, such as the examples dated 437 and 444,¹⁸ i.e. a few decades prior to Yungang. Accurate dating of the other, inscriptionless bronzes was a tricky matter, and for a small group they displayed a considerable variety. Some of these exhibited characteristics that seemed very close to Gandhāran models and on the strength of this were considered to be the oldest among them. Furthermore, if their dating meant they had to be placed among the very earliest Chinese Buddhist works, i.e. prior to Yungang, trying to establish their relationship vis-à-vis any putative Indian or Central Asian models on the one hand and Yungang on the other was an awkward matter. For example, this difficulty is what lies behind Oswald Sirén's comment:

The earliest dated Buddhist sculptures known to me are some small bronze statuettes of very moderate artistic merit ... They have a certain importance as historical links and proofs of the mixed influences in the early Buddhist art in China, but they reveal very little of the indigenous creative spirit which may be found, for instance, in some of the early rock carvings.¹⁹

The appearance in the 1940s of a dated specimen pushed back the earliest date for the introduction of Buddhist art into China to 338 AD, the date on the inscription on the famous Buddha in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco (fig. 4), making it the earliest example so far of a dated Buddhist image produced in China.²⁰ But in fact this did nothing to clarify the situation, because contrary to what the master narrative would suggest, this earliest known image of Buddha in China appeared

art of Gandhāra and Central Asia (suffice it to mention here the question of the dating of the Kizil caves) and the earliest Chinese Buddhist art, lies behind the most varied theories concerning the relationship between these three areas and their respective chronologies. One of the recurrent problems in the scholarship of the twentieth century involved the dating of the Chinese works, starting with Yungang, and the need to link them to Central Asian evidence and Gandhāran works. Since the latter were thought to date from as early as the 1st century AD, it was hard to account for the gap of three or four centuries. For example, this led Benjamin Rowland Jr., "Notes on the Dated Statues of the Northern Wei Dynasty and the Beginnings of Buddhist Sculpture in China," *The Art Bulletin* 19, no. 1 (1937): 93-4, to reconstruct the scenario in these terms: "I have come to the conclusion that probably not only the remains in Turkestan but also the larger part of the sculpture of Gandhara and Afghanistan is almost exactly contemporary with, or only slightly earlier than, the Chinese art of the Six Dynasties period – in other words, that, although their origins may go back to about one hundred A. D., the Gandhara ateliers were still flourishing in the fourth and fifth centuries of our era."

¹⁸ Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture*, 6 and 33 respectively.

¹⁹ Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture*, xxvii and xxix.

²⁰ René-Yvon Lefebvre d'Argencé, ed., *Chinese, Korean and Japanese Sculpture* (Tokyo–New York: Kodansha Int., 1974), 64-6, pl. 19.

to display Chinese characteristics rather than exhibiting an unequivocal debt to Indian or Central Asian models.²¹

The interpretations given by the scholars were many. For example, according to the interpretation of Mizuno and Nagahiro, the reasons for the Chinese flavour of the Buddha image lay in the local craftsmen, who were unable to comprehend the style of the imported image and simply turned to the more familiar Han tradition to provide a model they could reproduce:

It is understandable that the first images of the Buddha were strongly influenced by popular conceptions derived from indigenous deities rather than by original images from a foreign land. The halo, the lotus throne and the lion throne were adopted for this new god but the general appearance was far from the style of Gandhara and much nearer the Chinese. In fact it is unlikely that the style as seen in the newly arrived foreign god was understood.... From this it may be concluded that, during the Later Chao dynasty when Buddhism first flourished, images were made more in the former traditional style than in the new Western style.²²

Interestingly, we can detect in their words an evident confusion between a work's formal, stylistic and iconographic aspects: a methodological error that has often been ignored and still lurks in many discourses on this subject. Others, such as Münsterberg, first identified an Indian, Gandhāran, influence filtered through "an artistic language... indigenous to China,"²³ while a few decades later he attributed the variations from the Indian model to Central Asian influences (without giving any examples), even going so far as to suggest the bronze was itself Central Asian.²⁴ Sickman preferred to ignore the problem altogether by confining the 338 Buddha to the notes in his famous book.²⁵ On the subject of the tendency to confuse style and iconography, it is interesting to note that the position of the hands in the Buddha of 338 has never been viewed as a significant variation of the gesture from which it sprang, the Indian *dhyānamudrā* (the gesture of meditation). This detail has been either overlooked or explained in terms of stylistic variation or, even when considered from the iconographic point of view, interpreted as a "slight deviation from the canonical norm".²⁶

²¹ Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Toshio, "Buddhist Images Prior to the Yün-kang Caves", in *Yün-kang. The Buddhist Cave Temples of the Fifth Century A.D. in North China*, Vol. 11-Text (Kyoto: Jimbunkagaku kenkyusho, 1953), 83: "This statue is not only the earliest sculpture but also the earliest of all Buddhist remains from China now preserved."

²² Mizuno and Nagahiro, "Buddhist Images Prior to the Yün-kang Caves," 83 and 84.

²³ Hugo Münsterberg, "Buddhist Bronzes of the Six Dynasties Period," *Artibus Asiae* 9, no. 4 (1946): 275-280.

²⁴ Münsterberg, *Chinese Buddhist Bronzes*, 15.

²⁵ Sickman and Soper, *Art and Architecture of China*, 87, n. 6.

²⁶ Falco Howard et al., *Chinese Sculpture*, 227.

Other statuettes were found with marked Indian features and were for this reason generally regarded as being earlier creations. Indeed, they appeared to be the ideal candidates to fill the void prior to the 338 Buddha, too “Chinese” to be the earliest Buddhist sculpture in China. Thus it was that a work like the undated Harvard Buddha (fig. 5)²⁷ was considered in view of its Gandhāran flavour to be a fourth century sculpture, the earliest it could reasonably be on the basis of the 338 Buddha. Although the work matched expectations, on the assumption that the more marked the Indian characteristics, the earlier the date, it created the new and, so far, unrecognized problem of having to account for the existence of two such very different Buddhas in broadly the same period.²⁸ This position of stalemate, in which a considerable number of problems remained unsolved, marks the end of what may be called the first phase in the study of the spread of Buddhist art into China.

When put to the test, the straightforwardness of the early narrative envisaged by scholars was undermined by the awkward nature of the evidence.

The renewed interest in the emergence of Buddhist art in China and the new narrative of long-distance transmission

Signs of a fresh interest began to appear in the late 1980s and 1990s following the discoveries of representations of Buddhist elements mainly in southern China funerary or ritual contexts that enabled them to be dated to the second or third century.²⁹ The presentation and analysis of these items is beyond the scope of the present work and much has been written since their discovery. Suffice it here to point out the interpretations of these materials in relation with the development of Buddhist art in China.³⁰

In many instances the finds involved Buddha images. Since these were confined to the third century at the latest and, as we have seen, the fourth century saw a sudden proliferation of bronze statuettes in northern China, some scholars consid-

²⁷ This is the seated bronze Buddha said to have come from Hebei and now in the Sackler Museum, Harvard University. See Marilyn M. Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1:71-95, pl. I.

²⁸ As will be seen below, the same problem of the relationship between the two Buddhas, San Francisco and Harvard, recurs in different form in Marilyn Rhie's recent interpretation.

²⁹ Yu Weichao 俞偉超, “Dong Han fojiao tuxiang kao” 东汉佛教图像考 (An analysis of Eastern Han Buddhist Images), *Wenwu*, 5 (1980): 68-77.

³⁰ The material includes miscellaneous items: those found in Sichuan tombs, the reliefs in Kongwangshan 孔望山 (Jiangsu), the Buddha images on the *hunping* from Jiangsu and Zhejiang and a few others. For a presentation and discussion of the materials see Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art (2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.),” *Artibus Asiae* 47, no. 3/4 (1986): 263-352, who first discussed the “Buddhist” nature of the specimens. For recent reassessments, see Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China*, 1:27-67 and 112-32; Stanley K. Abe, *Ordinary Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 11-101; and Bai Bin, “Religious beliefs as reflected in the funerary record.”

ered it sensible to infer a link between the two groups, concluding that the northern bronzes derived from the presumed southern forerunners.³¹ They jumped to this conclusion only because the image of the Buddha recurred in both groups, without considering the context in which the works were found, the different purposes of the images and the iconographic imprecision. I should like here to stress that none of these southern Buddha images is iconographically correct. For example, the Buddha on the ceramic stand from Pengshan 彭山 (Sichuan) holds the hem of his robe in both his left and right hand instead of performing the *abhayamudrā* with his right and holding the hem of his robe in his left, as conventionally shown in Indian iconography; likewise, the seated Buddhas repeated on the *hunping* 魂瓶 are not well detailed and the lions, which are seen on the sides of the throne in the Indian iconography, here seem to emerge from the folds of the robe; the arms and hands are also awkwardly arranged.³²

In his famous essay of 1990 mentioned above,³³ the great Dutch scholar Erik Zürcher interpreted these finds rather differently. For Zürcher, these southern pieces exhibited the characteristics of Han-period Buddhism – alongside the hybrid Buddhism that was popular at court and the monastic Buddhism exemplified by the Luoyang translators working in the later second century, there was also the non-systematic, sporadic and uncertain Buddhism illustrated by these finds. Zürcher noticed a number of important points. Firstly, there was a lack of any evidence of a settled monastic Buddhist community in Central Asia until 250 AD (something he considered to be due to the economically backward conditions existing in the oases in the first two centuries of the millennium); at that time the translators came especially from the Western Central Asia territories controlled by the Kuṣāṇa and not from Central Asia. Moreover, he noticed that the Buddhist images found in China – which I have just discussed – dating from the Eastern Han period, displayed the stylistic features of contemporary Gandhāran models, that is they were copies, albeit badly executed, of contemporary Gandhāran works. This in turn meant the models and their copies were separated by no more than a few decades. According to the Dutch scholar, this temporal closeness reflected the “huge wave of expansion that simultaneously carried Buddhism to the Ferghana valley and the North China plain.”³⁴

In view of these points, especially the vacuum in Central Asia and the presence of translators in the Kuṣāṇa border areas, Zürcher put forward a more complex model than the previous one, positing an initial long-distance transmission directly from India and bypassing Central Asia altogether. This had the merit of explaining the episodic and fragmentary nature of the evidence in China, the generally

³¹ Yu Weichao, “Dong Han fojiao tuxiang kao.”

³² For the two images see Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China*, vol. 1, fig. 1.26 a-b and fig. 2.8, respectively.

³³ Zürcher, “Han Buddhism and the Western Region,” especially 164-68.

³⁴ Zürcher, “Han Buddhism and the Western Region,” 281.

irregular and inaccurate translation of certain texts and the absence of Central Asian translators. Applied at the art historical level, this perspective has a number of implications. It suggests that the first Buddhist art reached China not through gradual transmission across Central Asia, but directly from the Kuṣāṇa world. The first Buddhist images found in China were based on Gandhāran or Gandhāran-inspired models and were created not very long after the originals. According to Zürcher: “It was only in the late third century CE that the situation changed, and that a ‘second start’ was made, and that happens to have been the result of the Buddhist conquest of Serindia that had taken place not long before.”³⁵

Buddhist materials revisited: a case study

Zürcher’s conclusions have been partially absorbed by Marilyn Rhie, who is perhaps the foremost scholar in this field at the moment and agrees with the general drift of his reasoning. In the first of her three impressive volumes dedicated to the first phase of Buddhist art in China,³⁶ she distinguishes between the popular and religious expression of Buddhism, of which she finds confirmation in the written records. She also identifies the same “dual track” in the art remains, i.e. the Buddhist elements in funerary contexts and the first religious icons, exemplified by the Harvard Buddha (fig. 5), re-dated by her to the second half of the second century AD, elevating its status to the very first Buddhist image to be made in China that we know of. As a consequence of this redating, with which I agree, she asserts that Buddhist art in China has its origins in the bronze Buddhist icons produced in the first centuries AD and not in the Later Han funerary art informed by foreign Buddhist elements.

Taking up as it does Zürcher’s invaluable insights, this important reinterpretation of the earliest phase in the development of Buddhist art in China certainly marks a turning point in this scholarly field, but I think the time has come to take a closer look at what an art historical perspective has to contribute. Rhie’s close stylistic analysis, supported by frequent recourse to a diffusionist approach, has meant that she has lost an overall perspective of the work and its relation with other comparable bronzes. Her predilection for the analysis of stylistic details, as opposed to considering the work as a whole and giving due weight to other types

³⁵ Zürcher, “Buddhism Across Boundaries: The Foreign Input,” 6.

³⁶ Marilyn M. Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia*, Vol. 1, *Later Han, Three Kingdoms and Western Chin in China and Bactria to Shan-shan in Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia*, Vol. 2, *The Eastern Chin and Sixteen Kingdoms Period in China and Tumshuk, Kucha and Karashahr in Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia*, Vol. 3, *The Western Ch’in in Kansu in the Sixteen Kingdoms Period and Inter-relationships with Buddhist Art of Gandhāra* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

of investigation (for example, formal and iconographic)³⁷ seems to me the biggest drawback in this rather old-fashioned approach to the study of early Chinese Buddhist art (to name only the field that concerns us here) and risks perpetuating ancient errors and generating new ones. This is not to say that stylistic analysis has no place in the field, on the contrary; but any stylistic expression needs to be justified within a broader interpretative framework whose coherence has to be maintained across several levels of examination. It cannot be judged in isolation and self-referentially, laying itself open to the risk of being able to explain the representation of a subject in any style whatsoever. As we shall see shortly with regard to the Harvard Buddha, the limits of a merely artistic approach lead to an image being misconstrued and consequently to dubious reconstructions, such as Rhie's suggestion that the Harvard Buddha (fig. 5) might be placed in the early stages of the production of Buddhist art in China, followed soon after by the San Francisco Buddha (fig. 4). Aside from the formal distance between the two images and the difference in their conceptual basis, which alone might be enough to raise a few question marks as to the nature of their association to one another, the iconographic links each has with Indian models on the one hand and iconographic differences between the two on the other should counsel a certain caution and elicit some sort of explanation for this distance.

Going back to the first bronze Buddhas in China, I concentrate on the Harvard Buddha precisely because it might be supposed it has already yielded all the information it possibly could. But I believe that, properly viewed, it actually provides important clues to the development of these bronze works and the process by which Buddhist art was established in China. Indeed, half a century of scholarly research and discussion of all the possible nuances of the Harvard Buddha's stylistic features has missed a key logical step: if it were Chinese, this bronze would be the only such work of this period to display the *dhyānamudrā* in the orthodox Indian manner, with the right hand over the left (fig. 2), while in the earliest Chinese examples this pose is shown reversed, with left over right (fig. 6). In other examples, among which the San Francisco Buddha of 338 is the most famous (fig. 4), the *dhyānamudrā* is even depicted reversed and with the hands flat against the body instead of lying palm upwards, one upon the other. It has never been noticed that, with very few exceptions, this peculiarity is typical of all Chinese Buddhas, whether in bronze, stone or painted, throughout the medieval period and partly extending into later periods (fig. 7).

³⁷ I use the term "formal" to mean the expression of sense through form. For example, a "classical" Gandhāran image of a seated Buddha will convey the idea of the meditation through the sum of a series of formal details, such as the lowered eyelids and the hunched shoulders, which express the very state of absorption, as well as a specific and essential iconographic sign, the *dhyānamudrā*. This is important when considering certain Chinese images, which seem to omit these formal aspects while retaining the iconography.

This point is significant not only in revealing a characteristic of Chinese Buddhas, but it also carries implications for the transmission of images and the adoption of iconographies from other cultures too. What I aim to show here is that copying the image of the Buddha is not simply a matter of technique and style. There has been insufficient awareness to date that the perception, I would say the deciphering, of an image as iconographically sophisticated as that of the Buddha, was a sensitive process concerning the meeting of two different cultures, Indian and Chinese. My own view is that the changes in the *dhyānamudrā* – the position of the hands reversed³⁸ (fig. 6) and rotated (fig. 4) – are a sign of the Buddha icon adapting to the cultural conventions of the Chinese world. As the analysis below will attempt to show, the origin of the rotated position (fig. 4) probably lies in the incomprehension of the gesture (the *dhyānamudrā*) displayed by the Indian images that reached China, resulting in its gradual mutation into the more familiar position of the hands flat against the body. Instead, the reversal of the position of the hands (fig. 6) has to do with the preference for the left (male) over the right (female) and can be explained as a different arrangement of values within a binary system based on Chinese cosmological concepts, about which I have already written elsewhere.³⁹ In the case of the gesture of meditation (fig. 2), the pre-eminence of the right hand mirrors the importance ascribed to the male gender (and the associated values of purity, goodness, positivity, etc.) in India, which is always allied to the right, over the female, linked to the left. While the male aspect has the same priority in China, the associations are inverted, with male/left having precedence over female/right (fig. 6).

What I want to stress here is that I feel the Harvard Buddha can be drawn out of the isolation to which it has been confined by Rhie's analysis if it is compared with four other bronzes with which it has much in common: similar treatment of the

³⁸ This change is present from the very first images produced in China. To this may be added the point remarked on above: that the representations of the Buddha found in southern funerary contexts display iconographic muddles, if not downright errors, that well exemplify the sort of problems encountered when copying something that is not fully understood. We are tempted to conclude that the Buddha image underwent a reinterpretation in China, or was sinicised from the start. The information we can get from the first Chinese bronze images represents something not very far from what was described by Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 19 regarding the spread of Buddhism to China: "It is thus difficult to speak in simple terms of a Chinese dialogue or encounter with Indian Buddhism. Chinese functioned as the sole Buddhist ecclesiastical language from the inception of Buddhism in the Han down through the medieval period, and given the paucity of bilingual clerics, whatever 'dialogue' transpired took place largely among the Chinese themselves. Their encounter was with a Buddhism already sinified if only by virtue of being rendered, through an often convoluted process of translation and exegesis, into the native tongue."

³⁹ Nicoletta Celli, "A Question of Gestures: Reflections on the Earliest Buddha Images in China," in *The Yields of Transition. Literature, Art and Philosophy in Early Medieval China*, eds. Jana S. Rošker and Nataša Vampelj Suhadolnik (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 101-133.

body and the *uṣṇīṣa* (the protuberance on the top of the head); asymmetric folds in the robe and the smooth and foldless treatment of the robe in the region of the shoulders; a throne with a flat front and rounded rear – instead of the rectangular throne of the later dated examples, like the famous San Francisco Buddha.⁴⁰ Based on their similarity to the Harvard Buddha, these four statuettes could be considered the earliest bronze Buddhas made in China we have.

But five features set the Harvard Buddha apart (fig. 5): firstly, its strict adherence to the Gandhāran models (consider the realistic folds in the robe, the moustache, the iconographic accuracy of the flames leaping out of the shoulders – a detail frequent on the Gandhāran pieces from the Kapishi region); secondly, its considerable size; thirdly, the presence of the *ūrṇā*, the small protuberance in the middle of the forehead, which together with the *uṣṇīṣa* is one of the most important *lakṣaṇa* – or distinguishing marks – in the iconography of the Buddha, as it developed in India (I should point out that the *ūrṇā* is missing on all Chinese Buddhas until the beginning of the fifth century); fourthly, the flames and, lastly but tellingly, the standard *dhyānamudrā*. Reason enough, I think, to suppose this image is not Chinese. To these reasons we can add that some years ago Roderick Whitfield noted in examining the results of a Japanese scientific investigation that the lead isotope of the bronze does not appear in any Chinese, Korean or Japanese sculpture. In view of this and other factors he considers the piece to be “a Gandhāran image imported to China.” Although recognizing that “the image has not a single feature that can be described as Chinese: its sculptural qualities, the votive of the two figures making offerings [...] all point to this conclusion,”⁴¹ he makes no reference to the iconographic characteristics of the image, particularly to the *dhyānamudrā*.

In actual fact the Harvard Buddha exhibits Gandhāra-like features without suggesting a Gandhāran origin, since there is no Gandhāran work that perfectly matches the formal characteristics of this bronze, and the question of where it was made still remains unanswered.⁴² But I think the clues suggest an origin in the regions bordering North-Western Gandhāra (namely, the area of ancient Bactria).

The closest specimen to the Harvard Buddha is the Tokyo Buddha (fig. 6),⁴³ which is conspicuously Gandhāran in flavour and shares several features with the Harvard Buddha, as well as displaying certain differences (inverted position of the hands, absence of *ūrṇā* and flames). It seems probable that the artist followed a clear visual model, an imported image, which would have been similar though not identical to the Harvard Buddha. The *dhyānamudrā* is well performed, with hands portrayed naturalistically in the lap, albeit reversed. The other three similar

⁴⁰ For the four bronzes, see Celli, “A Question of Gestures,” 109–120. Only three of them are discussed by Rhie.

⁴¹ Roderick Whitfield, “Early Buddha Images from Hebei,” *Artibus Asiae* 65, no. 1 (2005): 87.

⁴² In this regard, see Juhyung Rhi, “Images, Relics, and Jewels: The Assimilation of Images in the Buddhist Relic Cult of Gandhāra – or Vice Versa,” *Artibus Asiae* 65, no. 1/2 (2005): 173 n. 20.

⁴³ Celli, “A Question of Gestures,” fig. 6–4 a/b.

bronzes (figs. 8, 9 and 10) share some characteristics that suggest they are copies of copies; the Indian elements have already been toned down and there is a trend towards simplification in many features. Most importantly, in the three bronzes the *dhyānamudrā* is reversed and handled uncertainly, as if the original gesture had been misunderstood.

This situation is very interesting and well exemplifies the problems artists in China would have encountered in comprehending and reproducing foreign images. So, in cases where the original (fig. 5) can be copied, the result is a faithful, if simplified image, with a *dhyānamudrā* very similar to the Gandhāran specimen, even though reversed (fig. 6). On the other hand, misunderstandings and free interpretations are common when copies are two or more times removed. Without an original model at their disposal, artists reinterpreted this alien and often obscure gesture (fig. 8) so as to make it comprehensible (fig. 9). The hands of the Buddha rotate palms inwards to match a position more familiar to the Chinese, the so called *xiu shou* 袖手 (“hands in sleeves”) position, as depicted in Chinese art (the hands are rarely visible and in most cases they are hidden in the sleeves, but there are some specimens where the hands can be seen).

If we consider the Harvard Buddha to be an imported bronze and not one cast on Chinese soil and compare it with similar images made probably at around the same time (figs. 6, 8, 9 and 10), we can say that:

- The dawn of Buddhist art in China can be dated to the early third century and that images of the Buddha were copied from models imported directly from areas of the Kuṣāṇa world, with non-Central Asian intermediaries. This can be inferred from the lack of similar images in Central Asia at that time, as well as from the extraordinary closeness of the earliest Chinese copies to the imported models;
- The copies, even the earliest specimens (fig. 6), were not simply faithful reproductions, passively replicated, as used to be thought, but included a certain amount of (re)interpretation;
- The most ancient statuettes were only rarely direct copies of the original model and were often based on bronzes that were themselves copies; this would explain a number of iconographic changes, as well as giving us an insight into how figures were created which responded to the needs and idioms of the local culture;
- The full complexity of an image like the 338 San Francisco Buddha is not the result of Central Asian mediation, nor an original invention, as suggested by Rhie, but certainly the mature outcome of a process that began with long-distance transmission in the very first centuries AD and developed through the creation of new models in China, from which this image is derived.

In its first phase, from the late second century to the end of the fourth, Buddhist art produced in China must have consisted mainly of small gilt bronze icons. Only

later, starting from the fourth century, did Central Asia play a significant role in the development of Buddhist art in China, when the cave art of Gansu came to the forefront. These border areas were able to exploit the almost contemporary models of Central Asia on the one hand and the bronze icons produced in China on the other. Both influences combined to give birth to the art of Gansu and it is from this standpoint that the art of Yungang becomes more comprehensible.⁴⁴ If we are to make sense of the puzzle that is the founding period of Buddhist art in China, the analysis has to overcome the mind-set that has prevailed for so long and consider these works in their entirety, exploring the relationship between form, content and, not least, the full cultural setting in which they arose.

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⁴⁴ Nicoletta Celli, "Importazioni e invenzioni nell'arte buddhista in Cina del V secolo. La grotta 169 di Binglingsi 炳靈寺," in *Arte dal Mediterraneo al Mar della Cina. Genesi ed incontri di scuole e stili*, eds. Pierfrancesco Fedi and Maurizio Paolillo (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2015), 393-396.

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Fig. 1 - Buddha group, Cave 20, Yungang, Shanxi. Northern Wei, 460-470. From: Clunas 1997, fig. 43



Fig. 2 - Buddha in *dhyānamudrā*. Grey schist, H 58.7 cm. London, British Museum, OA 1913.11-8.18. From: Zwalf 1996, vol. 2, fig. 34



Fig. 3 – Standing Buddha. Gilt bronze, H 15.8 cm. Kyoto, National Museum. From: *Chūgoku* 1992, fig. 6

Fig. 4 – Seated Buddha. Gilt bronze, H 39.4 cm. San Francisco, Asian Art Museum. Later Zhao, 338. From: Rhie 2002, fig. 2.2a



Fig. 5 - Buddha in *dhyānamudrā*. Gilt bronze, H 32 cm. Cambridge Mass., Harvard Art Museums/ Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop, 1943.53.80. From: Rhie 1999, fig. 1.44



Fig. 6 - Buddha in *dhyānamudrā*. Gilt bronze, H 13.5 cm. Tokyo, National Museum. From: *Chūgoku* 1992, fig. 2



Fig. 7 – Seated Buddha, Guyang Cave, Longmen, Henan. Northern Wei Dynasty, end of 5th – beginning of 6th c.
From: *Zhongguo shiku. Longmen shiku* 1991, vol. 1, fig. 160

Fig. 8 – Buddha in *dhyānamudrā*. Gilt bronze, H 14.7 cm. Private collection, Japan.
From: *Chūgoku* 1992, fig. 3



Fig. 9 – Buddha in *dhyanamudrā*. Gilt bronze, H 15.2 cm. Nitta Group collection of Buddhist Art, Tokyo. From: Fisher 1990, fig. 1a

Fig. 10 – Buddha in *dhyanamudrā*. Gilt bronze, H 13.4 cm. Xi'an, Xi'an shi Wenguanbu 西安市文管部 (Xi'an Municipal Cultural Relics Association). From: Rhie 2002, fig. 2.21a

ADRIANA IEZZI

“CHINESE MODERN CALLIGRAPHY”
AS A REFLECTION OF CHINESE CONTEMPORARY CULTURE:
A COMPARISON BETWEEN MODERNISM (WANG DONGLING)
AND AVANT-GARDE (XU BING)

Introduction

Thanks to its strict connection with the literary tradition and the classical writings, calligraphy has always contributed to the extraordinary cohesiveness of the Chinese artistic and cultural tradition.¹ Gao Minglu, one of the most important contemporary Chinese art critics, thinks that this close connection between calligraphy and culture is encapsulated in the concept of *wen* 文:

For thousands of years, Chinese people emphasizes the character *wen* 文, which literally means “characters” (*wenzi* 文字), “knowledge” (*zhishi* 知识), and “culture” (*wenhua* 文化). This phenomenon is particularly reflected in the Chinese character culture. Chinese characters are not simply symbols in semiotics; rather, they are a kind of comprehensive cultural type. The relations among words and picture, vision and logics, feelings and concept, morality and aesthetics are not separate, but interacting and involving with each other. And all the traditional cultural features mentioned above remain in artistic language of Chinese modern artists.²

According to Gao Minglu, “Chinese writing” concerns “Chinese culture” and vice versa; so, calligraphy, “the art of writing”, is also directly linked to Chinese culture.

¹ This cohesiveness is also related to the fact that calligraphy in China is not only a means of written communication, as it is in any language, but it is also a means of representation of the universal dynamism (see Cary Y. Liu, “Embodying Cosmic Patterns: Foundation of an Art of Calligraphy in China,” *Oriental Art* 5 (2000): 2-9), an instrument of social cohesion among the political and cultural élite of Chinese literati (see Lothar Ledderose, “Chinese Calligraphy: Its Aesthetic Dimension and Its Social Function,” *Oriental Art* 10 (1986): 35-50), and a political instrument of social control: see Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), and Yen Yuehping, *Calligraphy and Power in Contemporary Chinese Society* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

² Gao Minglu 高名潞, “Women *zhencheng de shenghuo zai jiaxiang zhong* 我们真诚地生活在假象中 (We live in illusion genuinely),” in *Breaking Boundaries – New Works by Wang Xiaosong/Pojie – Wang Xiaosong xin zuopin* 破界——王小松新作展, exhibition catalogue (Florence, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, 8th August– 3rd September 2013), (Shenzhen: Zhejiang University Press, 2013), 12.

This means that when the cultural system begins to change, the art of calligraphy will be modified as well.

In the past, the canonization of classical models, calligraphic techniques, and aesthetic standards contributed to ensure the continuity of Chinese cultural identity, but by the end of the XIX century, as a consequence of the new cultural context,³ the impressive stability and cohesiveness of this art form began to fade, and some elements of “modernity” began to appear in the calligraphic practice. According to Chen Zhenlian,⁴ Zhu Renfu,⁵ and Xue Yongnian,⁶ this transformation started in the eighties of the nineteenth century.⁷ From that moment until the end of the thirties of the twentieth century,⁸ a group of calligraphers of the so-called “Stele School” (*Beipai* 碑派)⁹ created new calligraphic styles inspired by the scripts found on stone carving of the Qin (221 B.C.–206 B.C.) and Han (206 B.C.–210 A.D.) periods and on the stone steles (*bei* 碑) of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534),¹⁰ which caused

³ From the end of the XIX century, and especially since the early 1920s when the Chinese Cultural Movement arose in China, because of the imminent collapse of the Empire and the more and more close relationships with Western countries, new ideas from the West have been introduced into China, influenced all aspects of society and culture. For details, see John A.G. Roberts, *Storia della Cina* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 203–252.

⁴ Chen Zhenlian 陈振濂, *Xiandai Zhongguo shufa shi* 现代中国书法史 [The History of Modern Chinese Calligraphy] (Zhengzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 1996). In this text, Chen Zhenlian divided the history of modern calligraphy in four different stages: 1. the modern period (*jindai* 近代), 2. the period of the Republic of China (*Minguo* 民国), 3. the period after the foundation of the People’s Republic of China (*jianguo yi hou* 建国以后) 4. the contemporary period (*dangdai* 当代).

⁵ Zhu Renfu 朱仁夫, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa shi* 中国现代书法史 [The History of Chinese Modern Calligraphy] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996).

⁶ Xue Yongnian, “Chinese Calligraphy in Modern Era,” in *A Century in Crisis. Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, exhibition catalogue (New York, Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 6th February – 24th March 1998; Bilbao, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 17th July – 15th October 1998) (New York: Guggenheim Museum Press, 1998), 132–145.

⁷ For Chen Zhenlian, the starting point is the year 1881: see Chen Zhenlian, *Xiandai Zhongguo shufa shi*, 487–524; for Zhu Renfu, it is the end of the Qing dynasty (*Qing mo* 清末): see Zhu Renfu, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa shi*, 8–77; for Xue Yongnian, it is the end of the nineteenth century: see Xue Yongnian, “Chinese Calligraphy in Modern Era,” 132.

⁸ For this periodization, see in particular Xue Yongnian, “Chinese Calligraphy in Modern Era,” 132–134.

⁹ The unearthing of many steles of the Qin, Han, and especially of the Northern Wei dynasties in the eighteenth century has increasingly stimulated the study and the appreciation of the written styles found on them (*beixue* 碑学 “stele study”) so that at the end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) a movement of reevaluation of the *bei* (“stele”) tradition prevailed in opposition to the *tiepai* 帖派 (“Model-Calligraphy-Book School”), that had prevailed in China since the Tang dynasty (618–907). For more details about the *tiepai* and the *beipai* in the Qing dynasty, see Ouyang Zhongshi and Fong Wen F., eds., *Chinese Calligraphy* (New Haven&London: Yale University Press, 2008), 350–377.

¹⁰ As Wang Yuchi points out: “Unlike their Southern counterparts, the Northern dynasties failed to leave behind any outstanding calligraphic pieces rendered in ink. Instead, their legacy was a rich store of stone inscriptions, epitaphs, Buddhist votive stelae, and cliff engravings. Among them are many highly valuable pieces that had a profound influence on later calligraphers, particularly on artists of the Qing dynasty. Prior to the Qing dynasty, these stone inscriptions were largely ignored.

a new approach to calligraphy. These early changes, carried out by calligraphers such as Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927),¹¹ He Shaoji 何绍基 (1799-1873), Zhao Zhiqian 赵之谦 (1829-1884), Wu Changshuo 吴昌硕 (1844-1927) etc.,¹² continued in the following period (from the thirties to the eighties of the twentieth century)¹³ thanks to the effort of other important calligraphers such as Yu Youren 于右任 (1879-1964), Shen Yinmo 沈尹默 (1883-1971), Lin Sanzhi 林散之 (1898-1989),¹⁴ Sha Menghai 沙孟海 (1900-1992), Qi Gong 启功 (1912-2005)¹⁵ and many others. In response of the more and more individualistic and unreadable overflow of the stele-style calligraphy in the thirties and forties, the above mentioned calligraphers tried to create new models of writing. They wanted to create readable, elegant and easy to learn calligraphic styles, in order to make calligraphy more accessible to a popular audience. According to the Maoist directives,¹⁶ their aim was a “reform of writing for the convenience of the masses”.¹⁷ The influence of this movement was fundamental for the emergence of the Modernist movement in the mid-eighties¹⁸ (see below). As Xue Yongnian says:

[...] Dignity and solemnity characterize the stele inscriptions of the Northern dynasties”: see Wang Yuchi, “Striving for Perfection amid Social Upheavals: Calligraphy during the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties,” in *Chinese Calligraphy*, ed. Ouyang Zhongshi and Fong Wen F., 176.

¹¹ Kang Youwei was the leading figure of the *Beipai* at the end of the Qing dynasty, especially thanks to his highly influential *Guang Yi Zhou Shuang Ji* 廣藝舟雙楫 [广艺舟双楫] (*Two Oars in the Boat of Great Arts*, 1881), a text on his radical theory on the great merits of the earlier stele inscriptions, that added impetus to the movement. For more details on Kang Youwei, see: Massimo Carrante, “Kang Youwei’s (1858-1927) Study and Vision of the Chinese Calligraphic Art,” *Political Reflection* 3 (2012): 82-87; Liu Zeguang, *A study of Kang Youwei’s (1858-1927) Guang yizhou shuangji* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2000). Kang Youwei’s transformation of calligraphic art has also influenced the contemporary Avant-garde movement, and in particular the art of one of its leading figures, Wang Nanming (b. 1962) (see below). In an interview, the artist revealed that in his style is evident a reference to Kang Youwei’s calligraphic art: Wang Nanming, e-mail message to author, November 21, 2011.

¹² For more details on these artists and other calligraphers of the *beipai*, see Ouyang Zhongshi and Fong Wen F., eds., *Chinese Calligraphy*, 363- 370.

¹³ Xue Yongnian calls this period “the latest stage of the evolution of modern Chinese calligraphy”. See Xue Yongnian, “Chinese Calligraphy in Modern Era,” 134.

¹⁴ For more details on these artists: *Ivi*, 132-145.

¹⁵ For more details on these two artists, see Gordon Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 132-138, 146-152.

¹⁶ During the Yan’an Forum for Literature and Art (2-23.05.1942), “Mao stated that literature and art were not independent of politics. As the party decided correct politics, this meant that literature and art would have to serve the revolutionary tasks prescribed by the party. [...] Literature and art were primarily for workers, peasants, and soldiers”: David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 66.

¹⁷ Xue Yongnian, “Chinese Calligraphy in Modern Era,” 135.

¹⁸ For example, Sha Menghai, Lu Weizhao (1899-1980), and Zhu Lesan (b. 1902), important calligraphers of this movement, directly influenced the art of “modernist calligraphers” Chen Zhenlian, Wang Dongling, and Qiu Zhenzhong because they were their professors at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now China Academy of Art) in the first academic course on calligraphy re-

Particularly since the 1980s, artists who excel at both painting and calligraphy are introducing painterly qualities into calligraphy, thus opening new directions for calligraphy's future.¹⁹

Another turning point in the evolution of the art of calligraphy in the twentieth century occurred in the Maoist period (1949-1976), when calligraphy became an art in the service of socialism and of the working class,²⁰ as Lu Dadong,²¹ Li Yi, and Liu Zongchao²² point out. In this period, especially thanks to the massive use of the *dazibao* 大字报 (“Big-character posters”),²³ for the first time in China's history, calligraphy became a means of expression of the masses with the function of conveying a common political ideology. This revolution in the use of the brush has had a great influence on artists such as Gu Wenda 谷文达 (b. 1955),²⁴ Xu Bing 徐冰 (b. 1955),²⁵ and Wu Shanzhuan 吴山专 (b. 1960)²⁶ and it has been fundamental for the emergence of

opened in 1979 after the Cultural Revolution: see Wang Dongling 王冬龄, *Wang Dongling tan xiandai shufa* 王冬龄谈现代书法 [Wang Dongling talks about Chinese Modern Calligraphy] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2010), 132-133. Lin Sanzhi, instead, influenced in particular Wang Dongling because in late 1968 Wang Dongling joined a group of students in Wujiang, who were being taught by Lin Sanzhi: see Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 164. For further information on these artists, see below.

¹⁹ Xue Yongnian, “Chinese Calligraphy in Modern Era,” 145.

²⁰ See note 16.

²¹ Lu Dadong 鲁大东, “Zhongguo xiandai shufa dashi nianbiao 中国现代书法大事年表 [Chronological Table of the History of Chinese Modern Calligraphy],” in *Zhongguo 'Xiandaishufa' lunwen xuan* 中国“现代书法”论文选 [Florilegium of Theses on Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy], ed. Wang Dongling (Beijing: Zhongguo meishu chubanshe, 2004), 353-380.

²² Li Yi 李一 and Liu Zongchao 刘宗超, *Xin Zhongguo shufa 60 nian: 1949-2009* 新中国书法 60年: 1949/2009 [Calligraphy 60 Years in China: 1949-2009] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei meishu chubanshe, 2009).

²³ “The *dazibao* were a form of handmade popular expression, with no fixed format (they did not even need to be on paper – some chalked on floors), and could include graphics (pictures with texts where called *meishu dazibao*), slogans, puns, poems, commentary, and personal opinions. *Dazibao* were vital to Mao's struggle during the Cultural Revolution”: Cushing Lincoln and Tompkins Ann, *Chinese Posters: Art from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007), 10. *Dazibao* were fundamental for the future development of the art of calligraphy (see below).

²⁴ In an interview, Gu Wenda says that during the Maoist period he wrote lots of *dazibao*, and he also argues that *dazibao* represented the source of inspiration for his works in the mid-eighties: see Zhou Wenhan 周文翰, “Gu Wenda: shanshuihua li chuangchu yema 谷文达: 山水画里闯出野马 [Gu Wenda: A Wild Horse that Broke Out Landscape Painting],” in *Zhuixun 80 niandai* 追寻 80年代 [Seeking for the Eighties], ed. Xin Jing Bao 新京报 [The Beijing News] (Beijing: Zhongxin chubanshe, 2006), 127.

²⁵ Xu Bing says that during his years at Yanqing, when he was a teenager and was sent to the countryside to live among the peasants, he started producing propaganda posters in an attempt to “atone for his father's sins”. This activity influenced his art widely. See: David Barboza, “The Genius of Xu Bing,” *ArtZine China* (2006), accessed February 10, 2012, http://www.artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid125_en.html.

²⁶ An explicit reference to *dazibao* is evident in one of the first and most important work by Wu Shanzhuan, entitled *Red Characters: Big Characters Series* (Chizi: *dazibao* 赤字大字报, 1986). For more details about this work, see: Gao Minglu, *The '85 Movement: Avant-garde Art in the Post-Mao Era*

the avant-garde movement in the mid-eighties (see below). From the 80s, in fact, the panorama of calligraphy was completely renewed, as Ying Li-Hua points out:

Since the 1980s, interest in calligraphy has bifurcated generally into two directions: the traditional and the avant-garde, with the former embraced by calligraphy departments of higher learning as well as amateur calligraphy enthusiasts and the latter primarily by art institutions and independent artists.²⁷

This bifurcation is the result of the phenomenon of “modernization” of calligraphy, that originated in the late Qing period (1644-1911), and continued during the Republic of China (1911-1949) and the Maoist period, as mentioned before, but only in the 80s it arrived at its tipping point. At that time, not only its forms, techniques, functions, materials, and media, but also its own conception had completely modified.²⁸ As Barrass points out, four are the main trends of the calligraphic art in the post-Mao era:

Initially, by far the most influential of these was the continuation of the ‘Grand Tradition’ of Classical calligraphy. Then, in the middle 1980s, a Modernist movement emerged that created an entirely new genre of the art. Later, the decline in the number of truly Classical calligraphers was offset by the rise of many younger Neo-classicists, who keep the Classical ideals alive by setting them within a modern context. More recently still, an Avant-Garde movement has come to the fore, exploring new artistic possibilities by combining calligraphic imagery and techniques with the modern forms of conceptual and performance art.²⁹

While Classicism (*gudianpai* 古典派) and Neoclassicism (*xingudianpai* 新古典派) still reflect the traditional idea of calligraphy, Modernism (*xiandai pai* 现代派) and Avant-garde (*qianweipai* 前卫派)³⁰ have modified the traditional concept of calligraphy completely. So the first two trends represent the contemporary forms of the so-called “traditional calligraphy” (*chuantong shufa* 传统书法), while the last two trends represent the new main tendencies of the so-called “modern calli-

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 169-180.

²⁷ Ying Lin-hua, “Negotiating with the Past: The Art of Calligraphy in Post-Mao China,” *ASIA Network Exchange* 19, 2 (2012): 32.

²⁸ For more details, see the following paragraphs about the Modernist and the Avant-garde movements.

²⁹ Gordon Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 11.

³⁰ Two are the possible translations in Chinese of the expression “avant-garde calligraphy”: the first one is *qianwei shufa* 前卫书法, and the second one is *xianfeng shufa* 先锋书法. For more details about these two translations, see Ma Qinzhong 马钦忠, “*Xianfeng shufa de xiandai qingjing* 先锋书法的现代情境 [The modern situation of the avant-garde calligraphy],” in *Zhongguo ‘Xiandaishufa’ lunwen xuan*, 92-104; Liu Kehua 刘克华, “*20 shiji moqi Zhongguo xiandai shufa de chuanguo qingjing* 20世纪末期中国现代书法的创作情景 [The artistic production of modern calligraphy at the end of twentieth century],” *Yishu bajia* 7 (2008): 264-266.

graphy” (*xiandai shufa* 现代书法).³¹ The four currents together represent the main pieces of the “Chinese contemporary calligraphy” (*Zhongguo dangdai shufa* 中国当代书法) puzzle (Figure 1).³² Among them, only the modernist and the avant-garde movements, that lead to a real transformation of calligraphic art, adequately reflect the rapid changing of Chinese contemporary culture.



Figure 1. A schematic model of the four main currents of Chinese contemporary calligraphy arranged by the author.

The birth of the Modernist and the Avant-garde movements

Why did this radical transformation of calligraphy in the eighties? First of all because, as Barrass points out, that is the moment when “China begins to open up”.³³ In fact, after Mao’s death in 1976 and the so-called “Four Modernizations”, brought about by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, a process of “modernization” started in different

³¹ There is a vivid debate among Chinese art critics on the right use of this expression (*xiandai shufa*). For more details on this topic, see Adriana Iezzi, “What Is ‘Chinese Modern Calligraphy’? An Exploration of the Critical Debate on Modern Calligraphy in Contemporary China,” *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 3 (2015): 206-216.

³² For this differentiation among “traditional calligraphy” (*chuantong shufa*), “modern calligraphy” (*xiandai shufa*), and “contemporary calligraphy” (*dangdai shufa*), see Chen Dazhong 陈大中, *Dangdai shufa chuanguo moshi yu pai liu yanjiu* 当代书法创作模式与派流研究 [A Research on the Main Currents and Creative Models of Contemporary Calligraphy] (Beijing: Rongbaozhai chubanshe, 2005); Liu Zongchao 刘宗超, *Zhongguo shufa xiandai chuanguo lilun zhi fansi* 中国书法现代创变理论之反思 [Rethinking Theories about the Changes of the Chinese Calligraphy in Modern Times] (Nanchang: Jiangxi meishu chubanshe, 2008).

³³ Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 53.

fields of society, a process that from that time on has opened China to the rest of the world.³⁴ In China the 1980s represented a kind of explosive answer to the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 70s, when China was not only cut off from the rest of the world, but was also forced to disown and renounce its own culture. Only an equal and opposite force could contrast such a powerful culture. A spasmodic search for new artistic language and dialogue sent artists in pursuit of multiple lines of enquiry. Modernism and Avant-garde were the main examples of these different lines of enquiry. After decades of political movements, the line of modern Chinese artistic development had been seriously eroded, leaving only traces from which to start and reinvent a new culture.³⁵ As Barrass affirms, in post-Mao era:

Alongside the reforms and the relaxation of restrictions, there was an upsurge of activity in painting and calligraphy. For the first time since the early 1960s, books about Western art could be purchased in China. There were exhibitions of Western art in Beijing and Shanghai, and dozens of Chinese artists were allowed to travel overseas.³⁶

In this context of great experimentation, the first manifestation of dissident art was held in 1979, when the “Stars group” (*Xingxing* 星星),³⁷ the first Chinese Avant-garde artistic movement, organized an extemporaneous exhibition on the gate of the National Art Museum of China in Beijing.³⁸ At the same time, the ancient traditional forms of Chinese art reemerged as an answer to a need of rediscovering Chinese traditional culture which had been annihilated during the Maoist era. Calligraphy soon became as popular as never and the so-called “Calligraphic fever” (*shufa re* 书法热) became so contagious that in 1981 the Government itself founded a Chinese Calligraphers’ Association (*Zhongguo shufajia xuehui* 中国书法家协会) to gather thousands and thousands of calligraphers from all over China.³⁹ Calligraphy exhibitions and competitions became extremely popular, even if the Cultural Revolution educational gap between the old generation of mastered calligraphers and the new generation of not-well-educated youth calligraphers became evident.⁴⁰ At the same time, Japanese calligraphy became highly influen-

³⁴ For a deeper analysis of this particular moment in the history of China, see Marie-Claire Bergère, *La Cina dal 1949 ai giorni nostri* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000), 171-322.

³⁵ For a detailed analysis of how this process directly influenced Chinese art, see Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 214-240.

³⁶ Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 53.

³⁷ For more details about the birth and the evolution of the “Stars group”, see Huang Rui, ed., *Huang Rui: The Stars’ Times, 1979-1984* (Beijing: Thinking Hands + Guanyi Contemporary Art Archive, 2007).

³⁸ This event represents the symbolic birth of the avant-garde and dissident art in China: see Dalu Jones, Filippo Salviati and Mariagrazia Costantino, *Arte cinese contemporanea* (Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2006), 50.

³⁹ See Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 54.

⁴⁰ Barrass says that: “However the impact of Cultural Revolution was too apparent. Among the young there was an overall absence of good technique, scant knowledge of the classics and certainly no ability to write clever variant of classical poems. One positive note was that some of the young

tial in calligraphic circles. Even if it had been already exhibited in China in 1958, 1961, 1962, 1965, 1973, 1977, 1981, 1982, 1983, and 1985,⁴¹ it was only in the 1980s that many Chinese calligraphers were able to visit Japan and see for themselves

artists who had learnt to write big-character posters during the Cultural Revolution had developed a much freer style than could be achieved by the older, classically trained calligraphers": *Ibidem*. Also Yang Yinshi points out that the gap between these two categories is not only in training but also in the age of the calligraphers: "A lot of calligraphers appeared in the early 1980s when the country ended the chaos and turned to economic and cultural development. Some old calligraphers who luckily survived through the period recovered their artistic creativity and obtained respect from people again. The younger generation of calligraphers who stuck to their pursuit for art in the Cultural Revolution emerged after the chaos. These two categories of calligraphers were mainly in two age groups at that time: 60-80 and 30-40." In the first group there are calligraphers such as Sha Menghai, Qi Gong, and Lin Sanzhi, in the second one such as Wang Dongling and Wang Nanming. See Yang Yingshi, "New Trends in Chinese Calligraphy, 1898-1998" (paper presented at a conference on Chinese Calligraphy at the Academy Art Center of the Honolulu Academy of Arts, Honolulu, Hawaii, October 26, 1998), accessed June 6, 2009, <http://www.asiawind.com>.

⁴¹ The first exhibition of Japanese calligraphy in China was held in 1958, when a delegation of Japanese calligraphers, headed by Bundō Shunkai 丰道春海 (1878-1970), arrived in Beijing. The exhibition was held again in 1961, but at the head of the delegation there was Nishikawa Yasushi 西川宁 (1902-1989), one of the sons of Nishikawa Shundō, an important calligrapher of the Meiji period (1868-1912), who was the founder of an innovative current of Japanese modern calligraphy. For more details on this current, see Bruno Riva, "Lo Shō e l'arte contemporanea," in *Shōdo. Lo stile libero. Calligrafia, tradizione e arte contemporanea*, ed. Norio Nagayama (Padova: Casadei libri, 2005), 89-93. The calligraphic style of Nishikawa Yasushi influenced most of Chinese calligraphers who took part in the "First Exhibition of Chinese Calligraphy" (see below). In 1962, another exhibition on Japanese calligraphy entitled *Riben shudao zhan* 日本书道展 (The way of Japanese calligraphy) was held in the Beihai Park (Beijing), and in 1965 another delegation of Japanese calligraphers headed again by Nishikawa Yasushi went back to China. After eight years of absence, in 1973 Japanese calligraphers went back to China, thanks to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1972. From that date, exhibitions on Japanese calligraphy became more frequent in China: in 1977 and in 1982 were held two group exhibitions on contemporary Japanese calligraphy entitled *Riben xiandai shufa zhanlan* 日本现代书法展览 (Exhibition on modern Japanese calligraphy), in 1982 an exhibition on contemporary Japanese seals entitled *Riben kezi zhanlan* 日本刻字展览 (Exhibition on Japanese seals), in 1983 another group exhibition entitled *Zhong-Ri shufa lianhe jiaoliu zhan* 中日书法联合交流展 (Exhibition on the calligraphic interchanges between China and Japan), firstly held in Tokyo in 1981, and finally in 1985 a solo-exhibition of the famous Japanese calligrapher Teshima Yūkei 手岛右卿 (1901-1987), the leader of the "Few Characters" (*Shaozishu* 少字数) current, which strongly influenced Chinese modernist calligraphers. For the historical reconstruction of these exhibitions, see Lu Dadong, *Zhongguo "Xiandai shufa" dashi nianbiao*, 352-358; Liu Canming 刘灿铭, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa shi* 中国现代书法史 [The History of Modern Chinese Calligraphy] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2010), 28-29, 207. For more details on Japanese modern calligraphy, see Zheng Liyun 郑丽芸 and Cao Ruichun 曹瑞纯, *Riben xiandai shufa* 日本现代书法 [Japanese Modern Calligraphy] (Shanghai: Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Press, 1986); Chen Zhenlian 陈振濂, *Xiandai Riben shufa dadian* 现代日本书法大典 [Comprehensive dictionary of Japanese contemporary calligraphy] (Zhengzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 1999); Tamiya Bunpei 田宮文平 et al., *Sho: sengo rokujūnen no kiseki, 1945-2005* 書: 戦後六十年の軌跡1945-2005 [Sho: Developments in the Arts of Japanese Calligraphy over the Last Six Decades, 1945-2005] (Tokyo: Bijutsu Nenkansha, 2005).

how the Japanese had transformed calligraphic art during the post-war period.⁴² This contact with the Japanese avant-garde calligraphy led Chinese calligraphers to experiment a new approach to this form of art, so that by the mid-1980s these artists decided “to push calligraphy much further forward than Japanese had done”.⁴³ These calligraphers, headed by Gu Gan 古干 (b. 1942), Wang Xuezhong 王学仲 (b. 1925), Ma Chengxiang 马承祥 (b. 1937), Dai Shanqing 戴山青 (1944-2004) and others,⁴⁴ in 1985 decided to organize the First Exhibition of Chinese Modern Calligraphy (*Zhongguo xiandai shufa shouzhan* 中国现代书法首展, Figure 2),⁴⁵ in order to show their innovative works and to found the Modernist Calligraphic Movement (*shufa xiandaipai* 书法现代派).⁴⁶ The exhibition was held from the 15th to the 30th October 1985 at the National Art Museum of China (NAMOC) in Beijing with the support of the authorities,⁴⁷ and it represents the symbolic birth of the so-called “Chinese Modern Calligraphy” (*Zhongguo xiandai shufa*).⁴⁸

The artworks displayed in the exhibition were neither calligraphies nor paintings (*yishufeishu, yihuafeihua* 以书非书, 以画非画)⁴⁹ but they were a sort of

⁴² Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 54. The dates of the exhibitions reported by Barrass are 1957, 1958, 1962, and 1978.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ For a detailed reconstruction of the exhibition planning process and of its different phases, see Pu Lieping 濮列平 and Guo Yanping 郭燕平, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa dao hanzi yishu jianshi* 中国现代书法到汉字艺术简史 [A survey history of contemporary calligraphy from “Chinese modern calligraphy” to “the art of Chinese characters”] (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 2005), 19-24. As Pu Lieping and Guo Yanping point out, the most important calligraphers who took part in the exhibition were Huang Miaozhi (1913-2012), Zhang Ding (1917-2010), and Li Luogong (1917-1982), who belong to the old generation of Chinese calligraphy masters, together with Gu Gan, Wang Xuezhong, Ma Chengxiang, and Dai Shanqing, who were the promoters of the exhibition.

⁴⁵ For more details on this exhibition, see the exhibition catalogue: Wang Xuezhong 王学仲 et al., *Xiandai shuhua xuehui shufa shoujie zuopin xuan* 现代书画学会书法首届作品选 [Selected works of the “First Exhibition on Modern Calligraphy”] (Beijing: Beijing tiyu xueyuan chubanshe, 1986).

⁴⁶ The artworks displayed in the exhibition were 72 and all of the artists involved in the exhibition were members of the “Chinese Modern Painting and Calligraphy Association” (*Zhongguo xiandai shufa xuehui* 中国现代书画学会). This association was founded in July 1985 and its major task was to successfully organize this pivotal event. The foundation of this association represented the birth of the modernist movement. For more details on this association, see Liu Canming, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa shi*, 68.

⁴⁷ From this moment onward, all the activities organized by the modernist movement have been supported by Chinese authorities, from the “Second Exhibition of Chinese Modern Calligraphy” (1986) until the most recent “International Exhibition of Modern Calligraphy” (2005, 2010, 2015). For a detailed analysis of these exhibitions, see Adriana Iezzi, “La ‘modernità’ della calligrafia. Metamorfosi e influenza della calligrafia cinese all’interno del panorama artistico contemporaneo” (PhD diss., “Sapienza” University of Rome, 2014), 42-85.

⁴⁸ Most of Chinese scholars think that this event represents the beginning of the so-called “Chinese modern calligraphy”: see, for example, the positions of Pu Lieping, Guo Yanping, Liu Canming, Yang Yingshi, Fu Jingsheng, Zhang Yiguo, Shen Wei, and Chen Dazhong. For a detailed analysis of their ideas, see Adriana Iezzi, “What is Chinese Modern Calligraphy?,” 208. According to these scholars, this was the first time that the expression *xiandai shufa* (modern calligraphy) appeared in a title of an exhibition about calligraphy in China.

⁴⁹ Liu Canming, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa shi*, 33.



Figure 2. Gu Gan, Shan cui 山摧 (The Mountains Are Breaking Up), 1985, ink on paper, 93.5 x 87.5 cm, British Museum, London. Source: Liu Canming 刘灿铭, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa shi* 中国现代书法史 [The History of Modern Chinese Calligraphy] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2010): 89.

synthesis between calligraphy practice and painting conceptions. The ideas of “expressionist calligraphy” and “abstract art” were linked in the increasingly pictographic shape of the characters (*biaoxianzhuyi de shufa he chouxiang yishu* 表现主义的书法和抽象艺术),⁵⁰ and in the abstract combination of dots and lines. The re-interpretation of the traditional ideas of painting and calligraphy, the influence of contemporary Japanese calligraphy, the use of new materials, and the emergence of new visions, led to new results in the artistic field as a reaction to the feelings of the time and to the changes in Chinese society.⁵¹ In this context of experimenta-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Wang Xuezhong introduced the exhibition using these words: “The main aim of this exhibition is to show the “modern flavor” (*xiandai gan* 现代感) of Chinese “characters” (*zi* 字). If we want to shape a “modern calligraphic art” (*xiandai shu yi* 现代书艺), we need to embody a “new way of thinking” (*xin de guannian* 新的观念). [...] In our works, we have shown contemporary feelings and foreign absorbed elements; our attempt is to express the way of thinking and the aesthetic taste of contemporary people (*dangdai ren de xintai he meigan* 当代人的心态和美感)”: Wang Xuezhong 王学仲, “Lizan “Xiandai shufa” chushi 礼赞 “现代书法” 出世 [Praising the birth of “Modern Calligraphy”],” in *Xiandai shuhua xuehui shufa shoujie zuopin xuan*, ed. Wang Xuezhong, 2.

tion, many other artists began to take inspiration from modernist movement, producing extremely interesting works. The most important among them was Wang Dongling 王冬龄 (b. 1945), the inventor of the first calligraphic collages that combined Western and Chinese images (see below).

The first shoots of the Avant-garde movement just going to sprout even before the Modernist movement had fully gathered momentum. As Gao Minglu points out: “In the late 1970s, an avant-garde art movement emerged as a new project of modernity, climaxing in the second half of the ‘80s in what we know as the ‘85 Movement”.⁵² This movement, called by Gao Minglu himself “the ‘85 New Wave” (85 *Yishu Xinchao* 85 艺术新潮),⁵³ instigated a parallel and alternative contemporary art history to the Western culture that brought Chinese art from strict socialist realism to mature experimental and conceptual practice in just a few years. The first exhibition of this movement was held at the National Art Museum of China in 1985.⁵⁴ Among the participants there were famous artists such as Gu Wenda, Xu Bing, Wu Shanzhuan, Luo Qi 洛齐 (b. 1960), Zhu Qingsheng 朱青生 (b. 1957), Shao Yan 邵岩 (b. 1960), Yang Jiechang 杨诒苍 (b. 1956) etc., whose attention was focalized toward a revolutionary reflection on calligraphic art. Before them, the first calligrapher interested in this kind of practice was Bai Qianshen 白谦慎 (b. 1955), the forerunner of the avant-garde calligraphic movement. In 1981 he was the first to write eight formal Chinese ‘characters’ which were in fact wholly unreadable because they were arbitrarily composed of section of different characters.⁵⁵ In 1983 Gu Wenda⁵⁶ carved his first “Fake Characters Seal” with two seemingly authentic wholly unreadable Chinese characters. This was the starting point for the avant-garde experimentation and the beginning of the reflection upon Chinese calligraphy and language that aimed at a complete deconstruction of both of them. The results of this attempt were embodied in three important works by Gu Wenda (“The Mythos of Lost Dynasties” *Yishi de wangchao xilie* 遗失的王朝系列, 1983-1987 – Figure 3, “Pseudo-Characters Series” *Xugou wenzi xilie* 虚构文字系列, 1984-1986, and “Speechless #1-2” *Wu yan #1-2* 无言#1-2, 1985),⁵⁷ and other works by Wu Shan-

⁵² Gao Minglu, *The ‘85 Movement: Avant-garde Art in the Post-Mao Era*, 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ The exhibition entitled *Qianjin zhong de Zhongguo qingnian meizhan* 前进中的中国青年美展 (Exhibition of Chinese Youth Art in Progress) was held from 10 to 26 May 1985. It was organised by the *Guoji Qingnian Zhongguo weiyuanhui* 国际青年中国委员会 (International Committee of the Chinese Youth). The artworks displayed in the exhibition were 688, and their aim was an opposition to Chinese traditional art and culture. See “*Qianjin zhong de Zhongguo qingnian meizhan* 前进中的中国青年美展 [Exhibition of Chinese Youth Art in Progress],” *Artnow*, April 12, 2010, accessed October 30, 2012, <http://www.artnow.com.cn/Discuss/Special/SpecialChildArticle.aspx?c=748&ArticleID=24857>.

⁵⁵ For more details, see Bai Qianshen 白谦慎, “*Ye lun Zhongguo shufa yishu de xingzhi* 也论中国书法艺术的性质 [Taking about the quality of the art of Chinese calligraphy],” *Shufa yanjiu* 2 (1982): 28-40.

⁵⁶ For more details on Gu Wenda, see Mark H. C. Bessire, ed., *Gu Wenda: Art from Middle Kingdom to Biological Millennium* (London: MIT Press, 2003).

⁵⁷ For more details on these three works and other works by Gu Wenda about calligraphy, see Me-

zhuan (“Red Humor” *Hongse youmo* 红色幽默, 1986-1987),⁵⁸ Xu Bing (“Book from the Sky” *Tian Shu* 天书, 1987-1991 – Figure 4),⁵⁹ and Qiu Zhenzhong (“The First Four Series” *Zuichu de si ge xilie* 最初的四个系列, 1988-1989 – Figure 5),⁶⁰ which totally overturned the concept of Chinese writing and calligraphy.

These artists are the pioneers of the avant-garde “calligraphic” movement and they also played a leading role in the rise of the avant-garde movement.⁶¹ In 1989 they took part in the first exhibition on experimental art held in China, entitled “China/Avant-Garde Art Exhibition” *Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan* 中国现代艺术展 (NAMOC, 5th–19th February),⁶² focused their art on the reflection on language and writing. 1989 is a memorable year because it represented a turning point in the development of Chinese calligraphic art: the 4th of June 1989 was an upheaval not only in politics, economy, and society but also in culture, fine arts, and calligraphy. From this moment onwards, lots of calligraphers returned nostalgically to the great tradition of the old masters, especially belonging to the neoclassic movement;⁶³ while, the modernists and the avant-garde artists continued to carry on their experimentations, even if increasingly distinguishing their outcomes. The modernists continued to focus on formal execution and stylistic composition, more and more influenced by abstract art and painting techniques; while the avant-garde artists experimented with new languages and new media within the idiom of international contemporary art.⁶⁴ From this moment onwards, calligraphy became the “starting point” for new forms of contaminated art, so losing its entirety and absoluteness.⁶⁵ This process began at the end of the 80s and it is still going on.

lissa Chiu, “The Crisis of Calligraphy and the New Way of Tea: an Interview with Wenda Gu,” *Orientalisms* 3 (2002): 100-104.

⁵⁸ Gao Minglu, *The '85 Movement: Avant-garde Art in the Post-Mao Era*, 169.

⁵⁹ For a detailed analysis of this work and other works by Xu Bing about calligraphy, see Britta Erickson, *Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words, The Art of Xu Bing* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); Carolyn C. Guile, *Reading Space: The Art of Xu Bing* (Hamilton: Colgate University Press, 2009); Jerome Silbergeld and Dora C. Y. Ching, *Persistence-transformation: Text as Image in the Art of Xu Bing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁶⁰ For a detailed analysis of this series, see Qiu Zhenzhong 邱振中, “Guanyu Zuichu de si ge xilie ji qita 关于最初的四个系列及其他 [The “First Four Series” and something else],” *Xin meishu* 2 (1989): 26-29.

⁶¹ For more details about the avant-garde movement in general and the role of these artists in this movement, see Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).

⁶² For a detailed analysis of the exhibition, see Gao Minglu 高名潞, “Fengkuang de yijiubajiu—Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan shimo 疯狂的一九八九——中国现代艺术展始末 [1989—A Crazy Year: A Description of the Beginning and End of the ‘China Avant-Garde’ Exhibition],” *Qingxiang* 12 (1999): 43-76.

⁶³ For more details about this current, see Zhou Junjie 周俊杰 and Li Qiang 李强, “Lun shufa xingudianzhuyi 论书法新古典主义 [Neoclassical calligraphy],” *Shufa yanjiu* 3 (1991): 86-95.

⁶⁴ For more details about the development of these two movements in the 1990s, see Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 60-62.

⁶⁵ This hypothesis was formulated by Qiu Zhenzhong: see Qiu Zhenzhong 邱振中, “Yuanzi shufa – Dui yilei yishu de mingming yu qita 源自书法——对一类艺术的命名与其他 [“Art from calligraphy”],” in *Zhongguo ‘Xiandaishufa’ lunwen xuan*, 276-287. This article was first published in *Xiandai shufa yanjiu bao* 4 (2004).



Figure 3. Gu Wenda, “The Mythos of Lost Dynasties – Form C: Pseudo-Seal Scripture in Calligraphic Copybook#c-1” (Yishi de wangchao xilie 遗失的王朝系列), one of the fifty works of the series, 1983-87, splashing ink on rice paper, 96.52 x 66.04 cm. Source: “Gu Wenda” (official website), accessed July 30, 2013, http://www.wendagu.com/scholarly-ink-art/lost-dynasties-series/lost-dynasties_c-01.html.



Figure 4. Xu Bing, “Book from the Sky” (Tian shu 天书), 1987-91 (installation view at the North Dakota Museum of Arts, Grand Forks, 1992), mixed media installation: hand-printed books and scrolls printed from blocks inscribed with “false” characters, variable dimensions. Source: “Brooklyn Artists Alliance,” accessed May 10, 2012, http://www.brooklyn.org/artists/book_from_sky.jpg.



Figure 5. Qiu Zhenzhong, “Characters to Be Deciphered No. 9” (Daikao wenzhi xilie No. 9 待考文字系列 No. 9), 1988, ink on rice paper, 68 x 68 cm. Source: Qiu Zhenzhong 邱振中, *Shuxie yu guanzhao – Guanyu shufa de chuanguo, chenshu yu piping* 书写与观照 – 关于书法的创作、陈述与批评 [Contemplation of writing: calligraphic creation, expression and criticism] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2005): 112.

The Modernist movement and Wang Dongling

The Modernists still remain deeply rooted in the signified system of Chinese writing, even if they break with the strict rules of Chinese classical aesthetics, focusing on the stylistic exploration.⁶⁶ In their works, they have reduced the number of characters drastically and reshaped them creatively, especially under the influence of the Japanese avant-garde calligraphy currents⁶⁷ emerged after the Second World War, particularly of the two currents named “Few Characters” (*shaozishu* 少

⁶⁶ This assertion is the result of an analysis of hundreds of works by the author during her PhD research.

⁶⁷ The influence of the Japanese avant-garde calligraphy on the Modernists was pointed out by several Chinese scholars such as Qu Lifeng (see Qu Lifeng 屈立丰, “Chonggu 20 nianjimo Zhongguo ‘Xiandai shufa huodong’ 重估20世纪末中国 ‘现代书法运动’ [A Revaluation of Modern Chinese Calligraphy in the Late 20th Century],” *Yibin daxue xuebao* 5 (2008): 108-109), Yang Yingshi (see Yang Yingshi 杨应时, “Shufa zuowei ziyuan: Zhongguo dangdai yishu de xinfangxiang 书法作为资源: 中国当代艺术的新方向 [Calligraphy as a Resource: A New Orientation of Chinese Modern Art],” in *Zhongguo ‘Xiandai shufa’ lunwen xuan*, 227), and Liu Canming (see Liu Canming, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa shi*, 26-32).

字数) and “School of Ink Appearance” (*moxiang pai* 墨象派).⁶⁸ In Japanese modern calligraphy all the strict rules connected with the calligraphic practice have been abandoned and the artists can express their feelings freely: the focus is no longer on characters but on lines, and the emphasis is on ink effects and new supports (from canvas to metallic frame). The mutual interaction⁶⁹ and the numerous exhibitions held in China on this new declination of calligraphy⁷⁰ have had a deep influence on Chinese Modernist calligraphers and painters.

The contamination of styles is another important feature of the Chinese modernist movement, which is strongly influenced not only by Japanese calligraphy, but also by Western art, especially by Western abstract art.⁷¹ There is a latent connection between calligraphy and abstract art, focused on the notion of “abstract lines”.⁷² In Chinese art, the “abstract seed” can germinate at any time and for Chinese calligraphy this germination started when it got in touch and made a connection to Western abstract paintings.⁷³ Since then, in addition to abstract lines, the Chinese went on considering the traditional interaction between “black and white”, “yin and yang”, and “empty and full”⁷⁴ and connected them to the notions of “sign”, “event”, “combinatorial modularity”, “intersubjective communication”,⁷⁵ etc., that are common to both Chinese and Western approach-

⁶⁸ The “Few Characters” current is characterized by the use of few characters in calligraphic works, incorporating them in the painting. This current chooses specific characters as objects of artistic creation endowing them with new, vital qualities. The “School of Ink Appearance” focuses on the use of new ink effects and of original arrangements of visual elements in calligraphic works, turning characters into “ink images”. For more details, see Chen Zhenlian, *Xiandai Riben shufa dadian*, 306.

⁶⁹ The influence of Japanese calligraphy is so relevant for Modernist movement also because most of modernist calligraphers stayed in Japan for months or years, for example Wang Xuezhong from 1982 to 1984, Wang Dongling from 1993 to 1994, and Chen Zhenlian from 1992 until now.

⁷⁰ See note 41.

⁷¹ Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 32-33.

⁷² Chiang Yee calls this feature “the ‘abstract’ beauty of line”, see Chiang Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy. An Introduction to Its Aesthetic and Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 106. The main difference between these two approaches is in their main aims: Western abstract art wants to express the conflicting relationship between man and nature, while abstract calligraphic lines tend to reproduce and rebuild the harmony between these two entities.

⁷³ This germination process is clearly visible in all modernists’ artworks, for example in Li Luogong’s pictures, deeply influenced by Fauves artists, especially by the French painter Maurice de Vlammnick (Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 125); in Wang Dongling’s calligraphies, strongly influenced by European abstract art, particularly by the Russian painter Vasily Kandinsky and by American post-World War II art movements (author’s interview with the artist, May 14, 2012, Wang Dongling’s office in Hangzhou); and in Gu Gan’s paintings too admirably contaminated by the works of Jean Mirò (see Tiffany Beres, “The Art of Gu Gan. Calligraphy as Painting... Painting as Calligraphy”, *Asian Art* 15, 5 (2012): 6-8).

⁷⁴ For more details, see Wendan Li, *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010), 175-183.

⁷⁵ These notions characterized the Abstract Art current in the West, and in particular *Der blaue Reiter* and Abstract Expressionism, which had a great influence on the Modernist calligraphic

es.⁷⁶ As Gu Gan explained,⁷⁷ modernist calligraphers focus on the use of few essential characters imbued with high aesthetic values, because their aim is to combine aesthetic pleasure and meaningful content. Chinese characters become something similar to “symbols” which enlighten the viewers’ minds. So, the viewers are able to understand the meaning of what they are contemplating even if they do not know the meaning of the written characters. Then, the main effort for modernist calligraphers is to creatively reshape Chinese characters (or part of them) in order to catch the attention of different kinds of audience.⁷⁸ Of the five script forms,⁷⁹ they prefer the cursive and the seal scripts rather than the others. They use the cursive script (*caoshu* 草书) because it is the most abstract one, and the seal script (*zhuanshu* 篆书) because it is the most pictographic one. For example, the Taiwanese woman calligrapher Tong Yang-tze 董阳孜 (b. 1942)⁸⁰ uses the cursive script, and more specifically the “wild cursive script” (*kuangcao* 狂草), inspired by the Tang calligrapher Huai Su (737?-799?),⁸¹ while the Sino-Australian calligrapher Huang Miaozi 黄苗子 (1913-2012)⁸² uses the seal script, combined with brilliant colors and geometric schemes inspired by native Australian art.

Finally, as Liu Zijian noted,⁸³ another important characteristic of the modernist movement is the pictorial approach to calligraphy. In this case, the modernists try to exploit the full range effects that have long been known to Chinese painters,

movement in China. See Giulio Carlo Argan, *L'Arte moderna 1770-1970* (Milano: Sansoni, 2007), 160-166, 260-264.

⁷⁶ For this part and for more details on similarities and differences between calligraphy and abstract art, see Adriana Iezzi “Calligrafia d'avanguardia e arte astratta nella Cina contemporanea. L'arte astratta calligrafica” di Pu Lieping, Wei Ligang, Chen Guangwu, Shao Yan, Luo Qi e Fung Ming Chip e l'“espressionismo astratto calligrafico” di Qin Feng e Zhang Dawo,” *Quaderni asiatici* 101 (2013): 44-52.

⁷⁷ See Gu Gan, *The Three Steps of Modern Calligraphy* (Beijing: China Book Publishing House, 1990).

⁷⁸ See Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 30-31.

⁷⁹ The five fundamental script forms are “seal script” (*zhuanshu* 篆书), “regular script” (*kaishu* 楷书), “clerical script” (*lishu* 隶书), “running script” (*xingshu* 行书), and “cursive script” (*caoshu* 草书).

⁸⁰ For more details on the artistic production of Tong Yang-tze, see Michael Goedhuis, ed., *New paintings by Tong Yang-tze*, exhibition catalogue (New York, Goedhuis Contemporary Gallery, 26th March – 19th April 2008) (New York: Goedhuis Contemporary Press, 2008).

⁸¹ For more details on this famous calligrapher, see Adele Schlombs, *Huai-su and the Beginnings of Wild Cursive Script in Chinese Calligraphy* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1998).

⁸² For more details about the artistic production of Huang Miaozi, see Huang Miaozi 黄苗子, *Huang Miaozi shishuhua (shang, xia)* 黄苗子诗书画 (上、下) [Huang Miaozi: Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting, voll. 1, 2] (Shanghai: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2008).

⁸³ See Liu Zijian 刘子剑, “Huihua: kan xiandai shufa de yi ge jiaodu 绘画: 看现代书法的一个角度/ Painting: A Point of View for Modern Calligraphy,” in *Ba-Shu dianbing: '99 Chengdu 20 shijimo Zhongguo xiandai shufa huiguzhan* 巴蜀点兵: '99 成都20世纪末中国现代书法回顾展/*Bashu Parade: '99 Chengdu Retrospective of Chinese Modern Calligraphy at the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Chu Sang 楚桑 et al., exhibition catalogue (Chengdu, Chengdu International Convention and Exhibition Center, 22nd-24th June 1999) (Chengdu: Sichuan International Cultural Exchange Center, 1999), 20-22.

including the use of colored ink, or flecked ink with water, in order to obtain stratified ink effects.⁸⁴ But they have never rejected the use of the “Four treasures of the study” (*wenfangsibao* 文房四宝),⁸⁵ such as paper, writing brush, ink stick, and ink stone, that are the traditional tools used by all Chinese calligraphers and painters, even if sometimes with personal changes or interpretation: Gu Gan, for example, experiments with the use of acrylic paint on paper and wood,⁸⁶ Tong Yang-tze usually writes on gilded paper instead of plain paper,⁸⁷ and Wang Dongling usually writes on newspapers collage.⁸⁸ These two features, the pictorial approach to calligraphy and the use of traditional tools, are directly linked to the fact that all the Modernists are trained calligraphers and/or traditional painters, so showing that they don’t want to give up explicit references to their origins.⁸⁹

Thanks to its perfect balance between tradition and modernity, the modernist movement, which is deeply rooted in Chinese culture even if with a glance to foreigner cultures, has always been supported by Chinese authorities, since its first exhibition in 1985 (see above) until its recent manifestations in the International Calligraphic Biennials of Modern Calligraphy from 1995 to 2010.⁹⁰ In the first period of the diffusion of this movement (from 1985 to the end of 1990s), in fact, the government promoted collective exhibitions and academic symposia on modern calligraphy,⁹¹ publications of books and specialized magazines on this topic,⁹² as well as the foundations of modern calligraphy associations⁹³ in mainland China, in order to reevaluate this ancient art, showing the new face of modern China. As a consequence of all this, Modernist movement became the main calligraphic trend

⁸⁴ See Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 31.

⁸⁵ The “Four treasures of the study” are paper (*zhi* 纸), brush (*bi* 笔), ink (*mo* 墨) and ink stone (*yan* 砚). For more information about these traditional instruments, see Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, *Written on Bamboo & Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books & Inscriptions* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 145-198.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Gu Gan’s work entitled *Concern with no Obstruction* (1998) made with acrylic on wood board in “Artnet”, accessed March 20, 2016, http://www.artnet.com/artists/gu-gan/concern-with-no-obstruction-v88XCfdxy7TG6_rNt9P3Ag2.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Tong Yang-tze’s work entitled *A perfect square has no angles* (*Da fang wu yu* 大方無隅, 2007) made with ink on gilded paper in Adriana Iezzi, “Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy between Tradition and Modernity,” 165.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Wang Dongling’s work entitled *Feeling and Passion* (1999) in Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 168.

⁸⁹ As Wang Dongling points out: “Our creative action certainly requires the support of the tradition and the comparison with it” (*Women de zai chuanguo dique xuyao chuantong de zhicheng he duizhao* 我们的再创造的确需要传统的支撑和对照): Wang Dongling 王冬龄, “Xiangshou xiandai shufa de zhihui 享受现代书法的智慧 [Enjoy the Wisdom of Modern Calligraphy],” *Yishu Dangdai* 4, 3 (2005): 6.

⁹⁰ For a complete overview of the main exhibitions organized by the movement and supported by the government itself, see Liu Canming, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa shi*, 39-67.

⁹¹ Ivi, 80-83.

⁹² Ivi, 70-75.

⁹³ Ivi, 68-70.

in the 90s in China. From the end of the 90s and especially from the beginning of the XXI century, the attempts of the Modernist movement to export this way of thinking and working outside China continued, even supported by the authorities who wanted to show the cultural power of China also outside its boundaries. Foreigner artists began to join collective exhibitions⁹⁴ and symposia held in China, and Chinese modernist calligraphers began to take part in international exhibitions abroad⁹⁵ or to organize solo exhibitions both in China and abroad because of their increasing fame.⁹⁶ The traditional vision resurfaced and the addition of foreign elements became only a pretext and an opportunity to be more comprehensible and easily readable for a foreign audience. Outside China, Chinese elements are nowadays again prevalent, calligraphy is reemerging in its canonic forms, and the innovative features represent only the background of the final works.⁹⁷ Recent works by Wang Dongling are a great example of this ongoing transformation. Wang Dongling is a leading figure of the modernist movement and one of its major theorists.⁹⁸ He is a calligraphy professor at China Academy of Art (Hangzhou) and he is the direc-

⁹⁴ The most important of these collective exhibitions is the “International Exhibition of Modern Calligraphy”. It is held every five years in Hangzhou (the first one was held in 2005), and it is organized by the China Academy of Art. See Xu Jiang 许江 and Wang Dongling 王冬龄, eds., *Shu feishu – Kaifang de shufa shikong 2005 Zhongguo Hangzhou guoji xiandai shufa yishuzhan zuopinji* 书 · 非书 — 开放的书法时空 2005 中国杭州国际现代书法艺术展作品集 [The Act of Writing and of Non-Writing: The Open Space for Chinese Calligraphy. International Exhibition of Modern Calligraphy 2005, Hangzhou, China], exhibition catalogue (Hangzhou, Art Museum of the China Academy of Fine Arts, 30th October – 3rd November 2005), (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2005).

⁹⁵ The most important exhibitions held abroad from 2000 to 2012 were: “Brushes with Surprise: The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China” (London, 2002), “Music without Sound – Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy” (London, 2002), “Calligraphy as a Source and Resource” (Sydney, 2004), “Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy” (Geneve, 2005), “The New Calligraphy” (New York, 2009), “Ink: The New Art Ink from China” (London, 2012) etc. For a detailed reconstruction of these exhibitions, see Iezzi, “La ‘modernità’ della calligrafia. Metamorfosi e influenza della calligrafia cinese all’interno del panorama artistico contemporaneo”, 91-102.

⁹⁶ For an overview of these exhibitions held abroad see the official website of Michael Goedhuis Gallery, the most active gallery outside China involved in this topic: “Michael Goedhuis”, accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.michaelgoedhuis.com>. With regard to solo exhibitions in China, see, for example, Wang Dongling’s “Decanter Ink” Exhibition analyzed below.

⁹⁷ To have a concrete idea of this evolution, see the last two exhibition catalogues of the International Exhibition of Modern Calligraphy held in Hangzhou in 2005 and 2010: Xu Jiang and Wang Dongling, eds., *Shu feishu – Kaifang de shufa shikong 2005 Zhongguo Hangzhou guoji xiandai shufa yishuzhan zuopinji*; Xu Jiang 许江 and Wang Dongling 王冬龄, eds., *Shu feishu – 2010 Hangzhou guoji xiandai shufa yishuzhan* 书 · 非书 — 2010 杭州国际现代书法艺术展 [The Act of Writing and Non-Writing, International Exhibition of Modern Calligraphy, 2010, Hangzhou], exhibition catalogue (Hangzhou, Art Museum of the China Academy of Fine Arts, 20th – 29th June 2010), (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2010).

⁹⁸ The most important essays written by Wang Dongling on this topic are gathered in: Wang Dongling 王冬龄, *Wang Dongling tan xiandai shufa* 王冬龄谈现代书法 [Wang Dongling’s essays on modern calligraphy] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2010).

tor of the *Zhongguo meishu xueyuan xiandai shufa yanjiu zhongxin* 中国美术学院现代书法研究中心 (“China Academy of Art Modern Calligraphy Research Center”), the most important modern calligraphy research center in China nowadays.⁹⁹ He received a strong traditional arts education, deeply influenced by great calligraphy masters, such as Lin Sanzhi,¹⁰⁰ Sha Menghai,¹⁰¹ and Lu Weizhao 陆维钊,¹⁰² who were his professors at Nanjing Normal University and at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now China Academy of Art).¹⁰³ At Zhejiang Academy, Wang Dongling attended the first calligraphy university master, which was opened after the Cultural Revolution, together with other important contemporary calligraphers like Qiu Zhenzhong and Chen Zhenlian. From 1989 to 1992 he went to USA, where he worked as a professor at Minnesota University, and in 1993 he studied art and calligraphy in Japan for a year.¹⁰⁴ Thanks to his experiences, in his art, he is able to combine traditional practice with foreign elements in a double-face production.¹⁰⁵ His most famous works are in fact cursive script calligraphies made on foreign newspaper collages.¹⁰⁶ In his last series, he has also used photos,¹⁰⁷ envelopes,¹⁰⁸ and magazine

⁹⁹ For more details on this research center, visited by the author on May 13, 2012, see Liu Canming, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa shi*, 69-70.

¹⁰⁰ Lin Sanzhi (1898-1989): he was born in a small village near Nanjing from a peasant family. He was firstly noted in 1972 by Guo Moruo, who was fascinated and enraptured by his works. He is famous for his characteristic “iron lines”, a result of a surgical operation, in which three of his fingers have been sewn together, and so admired by the Japanese calligraphers. He plays a fundamental role in the passage from classicism to modernism, because he was the great master of Wang Dongling. See Liu Zongchao, *Zhongguo shufa xiandai chuanguan lilun zhi fansi*, 78-79.

¹⁰¹ Sha Menghai (1900-1992): he was born in Ningbo, and then he moved to Hangzhou, which became the center of radiation of his art. It is one of the leading figures of traditional calligraphy during the first period of the PRC. He was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, but after that he was rehabilitated and his art has known a new golden age. See *Ivi*, 80-81.

¹⁰² Lu Weizhao (1899-1980): born in Pinghu (Zhejiang province), he is a calligraphy master who was able to blend together seal script, clerical script, painting techniques, and cursive expressiveness in his characteristic style named *huai bian zhuan* 蹀扁篆. His compositions are characterized by the dilation of the space among characters, and by the reduction of the space among columns, so that he often creates apparently wrong links among characters belonged to different columns (in the sense that the radicals of the characters placed on the right columns seem to belong to the characters placed on the left columns). See *Ivi*, 131-132.

¹⁰³ See note 18.

¹⁰⁴ For this information and for more details on the *excursus studiorum* of Wang Dongling, see Wang Dongling 王冬龄, “*Wo de xue shudaolu yu tihui* 我的学书道路与体会 [My training experiences to become a calligrapher],” in *Wang Dongling chuanguan shouji* 王冬龄创作手记 [Records on Wang Dongling’s artworks], ed. Wang Dongling (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2010), 44-56.

¹⁰⁵ For more details on Wang Dongling’s artistic production, see Wang Dongling 王冬龄, *Wang Dongling shufa yishu* 王冬龄书法艺术 / *Wang Dongling’s Works* (Beijing: Rongbaozhai chubanshe, 2007); Xu Jiang 许江, *Shufadao: Wang Dongling shufa yishu* 书法道: 王冬龄书法艺术 / *The Way of Calligraphy: Wang Dongling’s Work* (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2011).

¹⁰⁶ See Wang Dongling, *Wang Dongling shufa yishu*, 240-251.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, the series entitled “Ten Views of the West Lake” (2011) in *Ivi*, 260-271.

¹⁰⁸ See the series entitled “Envelopes” (2008) in *Ivi*, 308-317.

sheets¹⁰⁹ instead of newspaper collages. I'm going to analyse one of the pieces of the series "Calligraphic styles and bodies" (*Shuti* 书体, 2012), made on magazine sheets, which clearly shows recent changing in the modernist approach. The work I have selected is entitled *Calligraphic styles and bodies: Weston's Heart Sutra – A* (*Shuti: Weisidun de Xin Jing A* 书体·韦斯顿的心经A) (Figure 6). It is part of a series composed of eight calligraphies written on magazine sheets of the size of 25 x 20 cm each. The series was exhibited for the first time during the *Hangzhou kuanianzhan – Xing mo zhi Wang Dongling gezhan* 杭州跨年展——醒墨之王冬龄个展 "Decanter Ink, Hangzhou Cross Year 2011-2012, Wang Dongling Solo Exhibition", at the Sanshang Art Gallery of Hangzhou from the 13th to the 23rd of May 2012.¹¹⁰

The core of this work is calligraphy written in cursive script by Wang Dongling in his distinguishing "mannerist" style, well-characterized by extremely ample, variable and flowing brush strokes which finally turn upwards or downwards with



Figure 6. Wang Dongling, "Calligraphic Styles and Bodies: Weston's Heart Sutra – A" (*Shuti: Weisidun de Xin Jing A* 书体·韦斯顿的心经A), 2012, ink on magazine sheet, 25 x 20 cm, courtesy of the artist. Source: a photo taken by the author during the opening ceremony of "Decanter Ink, Hangzhou Cross Year 2011-2012, Wang Dongling Solo Exhibition", Sanshang Art Gallery, Hangzhou, May 13, 2012.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, the works entitled "The New" (2007), "The Perfections of Wisdom" (2007), and "Midnight Songs of Springs" (2007) in Ivi, 320-321, 328-329, 332-333.

¹¹⁰ The author saw the whole series during the opening ceremony of the exhibition that took place in the Sanshang Art Gallery (Hangzhou) on May 13, 2012.

sharpened angles and long breathes. The content subject is the Heart Sutra (*Xin Jing* 心经), one of the most important texts for Chinese calligraphers from ancient times until today.¹¹¹ The framework of calligraphy is a magazine sheet instead of traditional *xuan* paper: the English title of the picture reproduced on this sheet, together with its date and the name of the portrayed woman (*Nude on Sand, Oceano, 1936 [CHARIS WILSON]*), suggests that it is a Western magazine; page number (95) is also visible on the bottom right. The black and white photograph reproduced on the magazine is a famous work by Edward Weston (1886-1958),¹¹² the artist named in the title of the work. The portrayed woman is one of the most famous Weston's partners named Helen Charis Wilson (1914-2009), as the English title shows. In this photograph she is totally naked lying on the beach. This photo is part of one of the most famous series shot by Weston at Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes, an isolated area of massive sand dunes in the center of California. Charis Wilson recalled that in the moment of the shoot, Weston was concentrated on photographing the landscape, when she took off her clothes and rolled down the sand dunes. He immediately focused his camera on her, capturing both the spontaneity of her freedom and her unabashedly sensual form.¹¹³ The photos of this remarkable series "mark the climax of Weston's quest for a modern figurative style"¹¹⁴ and show Weston's modernist approach to photography: his research focused on pure, simple and real forms, on their timeless essence, on their highly tactile and ethereal substance.¹¹⁵ These features perfectly reflect some of Chinese calligraphy characteristics. For this reason, Weston's picture represents the perfect framework for Wang Dongling's calligraphy, a calligraphy that never comes out of that frame, which entirely occupies the sandy background, and never touches the naked body.

In the author's intention,¹¹⁶ the purpose of this series is to realize an integration between i) Chinese and Western universes, ii) traditional and modern approaches, and iii) local and global cultures. The integration between tradition and modernity is realized through the Heart Sutra calligraphy: this text is traditional, but also

¹¹¹ From ancient times until today, all the most important Chinese calligraphy masters have been interested in the transcription of this text, such as Ouyang Xun 欧阳询 (557 - 641), Zhang Xu 张旭 (713 - 740), Su Shi 苏轼 (1037 - 1101), Zhao Mengfu 赵孟頫 (1254 - 1322), Wu Zhen 吴镇 (1280 - 1354), Wen Zhengming 文征明 (1470 - 1559), Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555 - 1636), Bada Shanren 八大山人 (1626-1705), Fu Shan 傅山 (1607 - 1685), Qianlong 乾隆 (1711 - 1799), Deng Shiru 邓石如 (ca. 1739/1743 - 1805), Wu Changshuo 吴昌硕 (1844 - 1927), Yu Youren 于右任 (1879 - 1964), etc.

¹¹² For more details on Richard Weston and his art, see the official website of the artist: "Richard Weston," accessed March 21, 2016, <http://edward-weston.com/edward-weston/>.

¹¹³ Charis Wilson and Wendy Madar, *Through another Lens: My Life with Edward Weston* (New York: Straus and Giroux, 1998), 17-55.

¹¹⁴ Theodore Ellis Jr. Stebbins, *Weston's Westons: Portraits and Nudes* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ The reported information is the result of an interview with Wang Dongling by the author. The interview took place on May 14, 2012, in Wang Dongling's office in Hangzhou.

modern, both in its content and in its “written history”. Not only ancient great masters, but also important modern calligraphers have shaped remarkable copies of it: it embodies the whole history of Chinese calligraphy from Ouyang Xun (557-641) to Wang Dongling, from tradition to modernity. The “modernity” of this work is also stressed by other important elements: i) calligraphy framework is a photograph, and photography is a modern form of art; ii) that photograph is a reproduction in an art magazine, and reproductions in magazines refer to contemporary mass media society; iii) the author of that photograph is Edward Weston, one of the most important photographers of the twentieth century and one of the leading figures of photograph modernist movement; iv) the main subject of the photograph is a nude, a “modern” subject that in China was forbidden until recent years.

The integration between China and the West is possible because both China and the West are equally represented in this work:

1. China through i) calligraphy, Chinese art form par excellence, ii) the use of ink, Chinese art tool par excellence, iii) calligraphy used as a colophon, as usual in Chinese traditional painting;
2. the West through i) photography, an art form of Western origin, ii) the American photographer and model (Edward Weston and Charis Wilson), iii) the nude, a traditional subject in Western art, which was rejected by the Chinese tradition until the 20th century, iv) the English title of the photograph, v) the page number written in Arabic numerals according to Western tradition.

The reason for mixing so many codes (Chinese writing, English title, Arabic numerals, photographic image, magazine framework, mass media language, etc.) is probably due to Wang Dongling, who, in his works, tries to fuse different and unrelated languages into the only one which is universally comprehensible: the meta-language of art. In his desire for an easier accessibility to art, we can also recognize his attempt to integrate local and global cultures. In this work, local culture is embodied within the calligraphy written in Chinese characters: Chinese writing is a closed writing system that is comprehensible only for its traditional users (Chinese people). On the contrary, global culture is embodied within contemporary society symbols and features: i) worship of images (the nude), ii) mass media hegemony (the magazine sheet), iii) individualistic society (the subject of a single woman that occupies the whole scene with her body), iv) the babel of languages (Chinese, English, and Arabic codes). This work definitively seems to show an attempt by Wang Dongling to incorporate “non-Chinese” elements into the Chinese traditional framework, using modern instruments and supports (the magazine sheet and the photograph of a nude) in order to combine and intermingle i) tradition and modernity, ii) Chinese and Western cultures, and iii) local and global cultures. These are the results of a preliminary analysis of this work, but the question about

the relationship between local and global cultures is more complicated than it can appear at first glance.¹¹⁷

However, after a careful analysis, we can just determine that, despite the declared intention of the artist himself, the hegemonic system of this work remains the Chinese hegemonic system, while Western references are only specious and incidental. The concept of this work clearly shows this assumption: the main aim of this work (and of the whole series), as pointed out in its title, is not to reconcile cultural dichotomies, but to create a strict connection between “calligraphic styles” (*shuti* 书体) and “human bodies” (*renti* 人体). In this specific work, Wang Dongling’s attempt is to create a connection between his cursive style and an image that in its sinuous forms can reproduce and evoke the movements of his windy brush.¹¹⁸ In order to reach his goal, he uses a didactic method: he borrows an image that is part of the iconographic apparatus of the counterpart (the West) in order to explain a Chinese concept that can be assimilated to the selected image. The utmost goal of Wang Dongling’s work is indeed to illustrate the meaning of some calligraphic fundamental concepts like “dynamism”, “vitality”, “fleshiness” and “solidity” of brush stroke, “bone structure/skeleton” of calligraphic composition etc. through a real, solid and sensual body and through the discontinuous, irregular, voluptuous, and harmonic shape of its forms.¹¹⁹ The continuous, modulated and dynamic line of Charis Wilson’s body is similar to Wang Dongling’s cursive script changeable line, drawn in a continuous and rhythmic flow, and shaping a harmonic and perfectly balanced composition. The result is evident: even if Wang Dongling uses Western images, he remains deeply focused on his Chinese cultural reference system. By using an external device, he wants to convey a Chinese concept deeply rooted in his own artistic tradition, translating it from a code to another. It is not a coincidence that the selected text, the Heath Sutra, is also a translated text: it was originally written in Sanskrit and then translated into Chinese. Over the years, more than twenty different Chinese translations of this text were suggested, and the most famous among them, written by Xuan Zang 玄奘 (600-664) and composed of 260 characters, is the one that Wang Dongling provides in this work.¹²⁰ He tries to shift from an inter-linguistic translation to a meta-linguistic and intercultural translation, but with no really satisfactory results.

Wang Dongling’s attempt to create a real integration between different or opposite elements is also weakened by sharp contrasts that suddenly emerge in this

¹¹⁷ This analysis suggested by the author was then discussed with Wang Dongling during the interview that took place in Wang Dongling’s office (May 14, 2012, Hangzhou).

¹¹⁸ During the interview with the author, Wang Dongling said that this was his first explicit intention (May 14, 2012, Hangzhou).

¹¹⁹ Wang Dongling explained his intention with similar words during an interview by the author (May 14, 2012, Hangzhou).

¹²⁰ This assertion is the result of the comparison between the text translated by Xuan Zang and the text written by Wang Dongling.

work. For example: i) the contrast between the Heart Sutra content (an exhortation to go beyond the physical world and its materialism) and the photograph content (a strongly physical image of a high tactile and sensual woman's body); ii) the contrast between a reproducible image (an image printed on a magazine sheet sold in thousands of copies all over the world) and a unique and unrepeatable image shaped by the hand of a single man in an irreplaceable moment and in an inimitable way; iii) the semiological contrast between calligraphic sign and photographic image, between linguistic language and pictorial language, between abstract signs and figurative images. Even iv) the use of the word "heart" *xin* 心 in the title refers to an opposite cultural vision: in Western tradition, the word "heart" simply refers to the organ of the human body that is the source of emotion and passion, while in Chinese tradition, the word *xin* 心 refers to the psychophysical entity that ensures the harmonization of the energy/vital flow between the human microcosm and the universal macrocosm. On one hand, the references are passion and feelings; on the other hand, they are balance and harmony. The undisputed winner of this metaphorical battle always seems to be Chinese culture and its calligraphic tradition. As Wang Dongling points out:

中国现代书法是中国传统艺术的核心艺术，最能体现中国艺术精神。

Zhongguo xianzai shufa shi Zhongguo chuantong yishu de hexin yishu, zui neng tixian Zhongguo yishu jingshen.

Chinese modern calligraphy is the core of Chinese traditional art, and it embodies the real essence of Chinese art.¹²¹

In the last decade, for Wang Dongling and all the modernist calligraphers, the opening to the West culture, to the international market, and to the exhibition system have led to a contamination of styles, even if only in the formal aspects of their works. The essence of their art is not so different from ancient times because they are still deeply rooted and dependent on Chinese tradition: Chinese characters remain the basis of their works as well as techniques, tools, and aesthetic taste remain the same as in the past. However, Modernists are determined to include Western elements in their works because now they aim at shaping calligraphic forms so that they can be easily accessible and more attractive for Western audience. From the 80s to the beginning of the 21st century, their goal and their audience have totally changed: in the 80s and 90s they were deeply influenced by Japanese and Western art and inserted foreign elements in their works in order to get Chinese traditional calligraphy away from its origin. Nowadays, outside China, they are again going back to the traditional essence and use foreign elements not to move away from tradition but to approach this tradition to a "distant" foreign audience (see Wang Dongling above). In recent years, the cultural function of tradi-

¹²¹ Wang Dongling 王冬龄, "Xindai shufa jingshen lun 现代书法精神论 [The essence of modern calligraphy]," *Xin meishu* 1 (2007): 10.

tion and the so-called “Westernization” process, have been completely overturned by the modernist movement. That puts in evidence the inversion of an important cultural trend in China nowadays.

The Avant-garde and Xu Bing

As to the Avant-garde movement, it breaks with the tradition completely, aims at a radical, total transformation of calligraphic art, rejects the use of legible characters, and experiments with new languages and new media within the idiom of international contemporary art, in order to make people reflect upon human condition or to challenge conventional thinking.¹²² The result of this process is the creation of works of art that are universally comprehensible, such as abstract paintings, performances, conceptual works, installations, digital or multimedia creations etc., that are not indissolubly joined to Chinese writing system because their comprehension does not totally relied on characters recognisability.¹²³ Moving away from the original and fundamental substance of traditional calligraphy (the Chinese writing), these art forms are often described as “anti-calligraphy”¹²⁴ (*fanshufa* 反书法,¹²⁵ *feishufa* 非书法,¹²⁶ *feihanzi shufa* 非汉字书法, *wuzishufa* 无字书法),¹²⁷ because they produce a kind of de-construction of traditional calligraphy, a sort of negation of it. According to Professor Wang Nanming:

中国现代书法和传统书法有反对的关联。[···] 现代书法不是书法，[···] 书法在现代书法中的作用，与其说是用来证明书法的价值，还不如说出于一种“暗示”的需要。¹²⁸

¹²² Barrass says that: “Their aim, like that of the avant-garde in other countries is to explore new frontiers of their art. Through the use of novel techniques, the creation of adventurous compositions and the expression of contemporary ideas, they want to produce works that command attention in order to make people reflect upon a subject or to challenge conventional thinking”: Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 36.

¹²³ For more details on this interpretation, see Iezzi, “Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy between Tradition and Innovation”: 167-176.

¹²⁴ This definition was firstly used by the art critic Zhang Nan in: Zhang Nan 张楠, “*Xiandai shufa: shiji mo qingjie piping* 现代书法——世纪末情结批评/A Criticism of the Complex of Modern Calligraphy at the End of the Century,” in *Ba-Shu dianbing: '99 Chengdu 20 shijimo Zhongguo xiandai shufa huiguzhan*, ed. Chu Sang et al., 15-18.

¹²⁵ See Qu Lifeng 屈立丰, “*Chonggu 20 nianjimo zhongguo 'xiandai shufa huodong'* 重估20世纪末中国“现代书法运动” [A Revaluation of Modern Chinese Calligraphy in the Late 20th Century],” *Yibin daxue xuebao* 5 (2008): 108-109.

¹²⁶ See Xu Jiang and Wang Dongling, eds., *Shu · fei shu-Kaifang de shufa shikong, 2005 Zhongguo Hangzhou guoji xiandai shufa yishu zhan*, 1.

¹²⁷ See Qian Qinggui 钱清贵, “*Zhongguo Xiandai Shufa chuanxin zhi wo jian* 中国现代书法创新之我见 [My opinion on the new ideas arisen from Chinese modern calligraphy],” *Shufa yanjiu* 2 (2002): 54-56.

¹²⁸ See Wang Nanming 王溟南, “*Hou chouxiang yishu yu guannian yishu zhong de shufa 'anshi'* 后抽象艺

Zhongguo xiandai shufa he chuantong shufa you fandui de guanlian. [...] Xiandai shufa bushi shufa, [...] shufa zai xiandai shufa zhong de zuoyong, yuqi shuo shi yonglai zhengming shufa de jiazhi, hai buru shuo chuyu yi zhong “anshi” de xuyao.

What links modern calligraphy to the traditional one is its radical opposition to it. [...] Modern calligraphy is not calligraphy yet [...] because the function of calligraphy in modern calligraphy is more to meet a ‘need of hinting’ (*‘anshi’ de xuyao*) than to prove the value of calligraphy itself.

The question about the real “nature” of modern calligraphy has opened a vivid debate among Chinese art critics in China nowadays.¹²⁹ In the avant-garde works of art, calligraphy seems to have been completely distorted to be replaced with something else. In this process, calligraphy represents the starting point of the creative process but not the finishing line.¹³⁰

My analysis shows that¹³¹ two main currents characterize the avant-garde “calligraphic” movement:

1. the first one, called with different names (“Endgame art”,¹³² “art-and language movement”,¹³³ and “conceptual art”),¹³⁴ particularly focuses on the deconstruction of the writing system and language: the artists Gu Wenda, Xu Bing, Wu Shanzhuan, and Qiu Zhijie belong to this sub-current;
2. the second one focuses especially on the calligraphic line, intending it as the performance in itself and as its abstract beauty as well: the artists Wei Ligang, Pu Lieping, Qin Feng, Zhang Dawo, Zhang Qiang etc. belong to this sub-current.¹³⁵

Just to sum up:

While traditional calligraphy has always been simultaneously a “verbal art” and an “abstract art”,¹³⁶ the “art of writing characters” (*xiezi yishu* 写字艺术) and the “art of writing

术与观念艺术中的书法 ‘暗示’ [Calligraphic Hints in Post-Abstract Art and Conceptual Art],” *Dangdai yishu* 3 (2005): 12.

¹²⁹ For more details on this debate, see Iezzi, “What is ‘Chinese Modern Calligraphy?’”: 209-210.

¹³⁰ For more details, see Qiu Zhenzhong, “Yuanzi shufa – Dui yilei yishu de mingming yu qita”: 276-287.

¹³¹ See Iezzi, “Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy between Tradition and Innovation”: 168.

¹³² See Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, 279.

¹³³ For more details on these two definitions, see Norman Bryson, “The Post-Ideological Avant-Garde,” in *Inside Out – New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu, exhibition catalogue (New York, Asia Society, 15th September 1998 – 3rd January 1999), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 51-58.

¹³⁴ See Gao Minglu, “From Elite to Small Man”, in *Inside Out – New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu, 158-166.

¹³⁵ The starting point of this analysis was Barrass’s assertion: “Whithin the Avant-garde movement there are two main types of work: pieces that concentrate on the abstract beauty of calligraphic lines and ink techniques, and those which more explicitly reject the traditional ideas of calligraphy”: Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 38.

¹³⁶ See Zhang Yiguo, *Brushed Voices: Calligraphy in Contemporary China*, exhibition catalogue (New York, Miriam & Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, 15th April – 6th June 1998), (New York: Miriam & Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University Press, 1998), 5.

lines” (*xiantiao yishu* 线条艺术),¹³⁷ in the avant-garde view, instead, calligraphy splits into these two parts and becomes a “verbal art” or an “abstract art”, the “art of writing (un-meaningful) characters” or the “art of writing (painting-like) lines”. If it becomes a “verbal art”, its aim is the deconstruction and the annihilation of the Chinese writing system that becomes unreadable and meaningless; the aesthetic flavour and the abstract beauty of the line and of the calligraphy composition is no longer important and the artists focus on the concept behind the artwork. On the other hand, if it becomes an “abstract art”, the artists try to forget the connection between calligraphy and language. Although they give up the system of Chinese written characters, they don’t shake off the structural composition and the formal pattern arranged on the ‘calligraphic line’. In this way, the aesthetic perception is similar to the structure of Chinese characters and to the structural composition of a piece of traditional calligraphy, but no characters have been written, and no texts can be read. The result is something more similar to abstract painting than to calligraphic work. In both cases, the artworks don’t have “written characters with meaning” that could interfere with the pure visual image. This means that signs no longer belong to the “code of readable written language” (only understandable by a Chinese audience), but in the first case to the “code of rational thoughts” and in the second case to the “code of emotional feeling”¹³⁸ that can appeal respectively to ‘the ability to reflect and question’ or to ‘the aesthetic sense’ of contemporary people all over the world. In this way, from being a local form of art, calligraphy opens itself to a global comprehension.¹³⁹

The final result is the creation of works of art that can’t be longer assimilated only to calligraphic art, but also to universally comprehensible forms of art (Figure 7), such as:

1. Abstract or post-abstract (calligraphic) art (*Chouxiang yishu* 抽象艺术 or *Hou chouxiang yishu* 后抽象艺术),¹⁴⁰ like in Pu Lieping 濮列平 (b. 1959), Wei Ligang 魏立刚 (b. 1964), Chen Guangwu 陈光武 (b. 1967), Shao Yan, Luo Qi, Fung Mingchip [Feng Mingqiu] 冯明秋 (b. 1951), etc.;
2. Abstract (calligraphic) expressionism (*Chouxiang biao xian yishu* 抽象表现艺术), like in Qin Feng 秦风 (b. 1961), and Zhang Dawo 张大我 (b. 1943);
3. Conceptual art (*Guannian yishu* 观念艺术), like in Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, Qiu Zhenzhong, Wu Shanzhuan, Qiu Zhijie 邱志杰 (b. 1969), Wang Nanming 王南溟 (b. 1962), etc.;
4. Performance art (*Xingwei yishu* 行为艺术), like in Zhang Qiang 张强 (b. 1962), Zhu Qingsheng 朱青生 (b. 1957), Song Dong 宋东 (b. 1966), Zhang Huan 张洵 (b. 1965), and Wu Wei 吴味 (b. 1963);
5. Contemporary dance (*Xiandaiwu* 现代舞), like in some choreographies by the Guangdong Modern Dance Company (*Guangdong xiandai wutuan*) 广东现代

¹³⁷ See Liu Canming, *Zhongguo xiandai shufa shi*, 28.

¹³⁸ See Qian Qinggui, “*Zhongguo Xiandai Shufa chuanxin zhi wo jian*”: 56.

¹³⁹ Iezzi, “Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy between Tradition and Innovation”: 168-169.

¹⁴⁰ This definition was used for the first time by Wang Nanming in: Wang Nanming, “*Hou chouxiang yishu yu guannian yishu zhong de shufa ‘anshi’*”: 12-14.

- 代舞团), the Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan (*Yunmen wuji* 云门舞), the Yin Mei Dance, the Shen Wei Dance Arts, and the City Contemporary Dance Company (*Chengshi dangdai wudaotuan* 城市当代舞蹈团);
6. Multimedia art (*Duomeiti yishu/Xinmeiti yishu* 多媒体艺术/ 新媒体艺术) like in Feng Mengbo 冯梦波 (b. 1966), Zheng Guogu 郑国谷 (b. 1970), etc.;
 7. Graffiti art (*Tuya yishu* 涂鸦艺术), like in King of Kowloon (*Jiulong huangdi* 九龙皇帝, 1912-2007), Kwan-yin clan (*Guanyin clan* 观音CLAN), Kong2, IDT crew, etc.¹⁴¹

These innovative art forms show the strong reaction of contemporary artists who are fighting against the hegemony of a dominant culture that restricts (and channels) their creative freedom. In the past, this way of thinking couldn't be accepted by the authorities, that especially in the 90s, after the Tian'anmen square protests, contrasted these artists, because they were considered dangerous for the stability of the whole country.¹⁴² Lots of these artists in fact decided to emigrate to freely express their ideas through art.¹⁴³ Xu Bing is one of them (see below). In this first

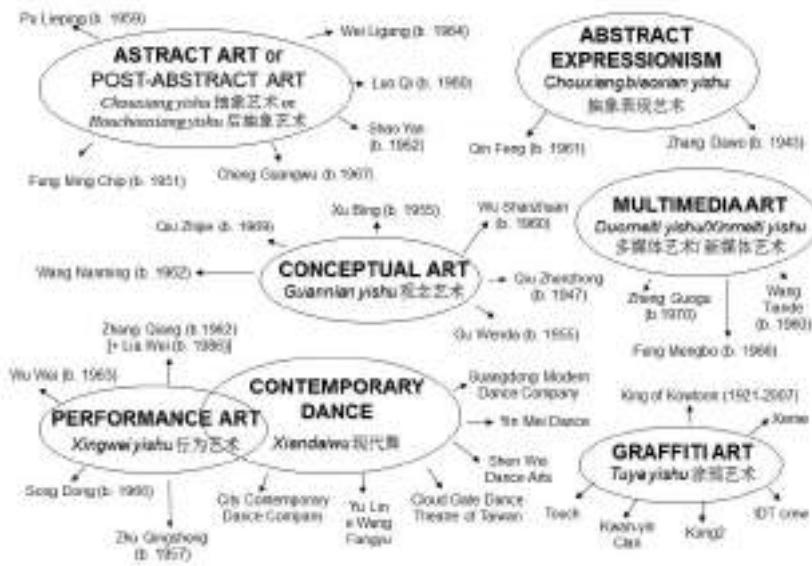


Figure 7. A schematic model of the main tendencies of the Avant-garde movement arranged by the author.

¹⁴¹ See Iezzi, “Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy between Tradition and Innovation”: 169.

¹⁴² For a deeper analysis of this position of the authorities, see Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, 273-278.

¹⁴³ Among them, the most important are Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, Wu Shanzhuan, Zhu Qingsheng, and Yang Jiechang.

phase of the evolution of the avant-garde movement (from the mid-80s until the end of the 90s), conceptual and abstract currents represented its main trends, later followed by performance currents. In this period, the development of the movement depended to a great extent on the private initiative of the single artists.¹⁴⁴

As we know, avant-garde artists want to go beyond fixed schemes, and remove ancient structures, in order to get a complete palingenesis of calligraphic art, opening firstly to experimentation and secondly to globalization. As a matter of fact, after the deconstructive fury of the 80s and of the 90s, in the last fifteen years the avant-garde artists are focusing on the opening to international market,¹⁴⁵ in order to be more comprehensible also outside China and to override the opposition of the government.¹⁴⁶ This phase is characterized by the emergence of new currents, such as multimedia art, contemporary dance, and graffiti art, and to an attenuation of the subversive contents of conceptual works. Now avant-garde artists aim at a real reconciliation between local and global cultures. They are using calligraphic forms or concepts in order to create universal works of art, that are “recognizably” made by Chinese artists but that should concern all of us.¹⁴⁷ *New English Calligraphy: Hui Neng the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen (Xin Yingwen shufa: Hui Neng dashi zhi Chanzong Liuzu 新英文书法：慧能大师之禅宗六祖*, 2003, Figure 8) by Xu Bing is an exemplary work of this kind of approach.

Xu Bing is an international acclaimed artist, who usually lives in New York and Beijing. In 1990 he moved to the United States and he went back to China only in 2008, when he was appointed as vice-director of the China Central Academy in Beijing.¹⁴⁸ In this specific work, he has adopted an innovative writing system called “New English Calligraphy” (*Xin Yingwen shufa* 新英文书法) or “Square Word Calligraphy” (*Yingwen fangkuaizi shufa* 英文方块字书法) that he created in 1994.¹⁴⁹ This system represents the most comprehensive attempt to demystify Chinese calligraphy never implemented before:¹⁵⁰ it is a totally new writing system based on

¹⁴⁴ For more details on the conceptual current, see Adriana Iezzi, “Calligrafia d’avanguardia e arte concettuale nella Cina contemporanea. Il caso di Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, Wu Shanzhuan, Qiu Zhijie e Wang Nanming,” *Quaderni Asiatici* 106 (2014): 68-76. For more details on the abstract current, see Iezzi, “Calligrafia d’avanguardia e arte astratta nella Cina contemporanea”: 57-104.

¹⁴⁵ It is not a case that the work by Xu Bing analyzed below was sold by Sotheby’s, one of the most famous auction houses in the world.

¹⁴⁶ For this part and for the question of “Markets, capital, and change against the background of globalization”, see Lü Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art* (Milan: Charta, 2010), 646-655.

¹⁴⁷ For more details, see Iezzi, “Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy between Tradition and Innovation”: 171-177.

¹⁴⁸ For this part and for more details about the biography of Xu Bing, see the section entitled “Bio” in the official website of the artist: “Xu Bing,” accessed March 4, 2012, <http://www.xubing.com/>.

¹⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis of this work, see among the others: Britta Erickson, *Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words, The Art of Xu Bing*, 54-55.

¹⁵⁰ Britta Erickson says that: “Xu Bing’s efforts to bring Square Word Calligraphy to a wide public audience so as to demystify Chinese culture and to share the pleasures of calligraphy have become a keystone on his growing drive to ‘serve the people’”: *Ivi*, 55.

English alphabet and Chinese characters (their shapes and rules). While Chinese characters are made up of several strokes written in the same imaginary square, here each word is made up of several letters written in the same imaginary square: in this way, each word becomes the equivalent of a character. Then, while in Chinese writing it is necessary to follow strict rules and a proper strokes order to write characters correctly, in Xu Bing's method it is necessary to follow strict rules and a proper letters order invented by the artist himself to write English words correctly. Also the training method is similar to the traditional calligraphy: Xu Bing published "New English Calligraphy Exercise Books",¹⁵¹ explaining calligraphic rules and methods, proper letters order, and giving exercises for new English calligraphy practice just as it is in calligraphy training.¹⁵²



Figure 8. Xu Bing, "New English Calligraphy: Hui Neng the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen" (Xin Yingwen shufa: Hui Neng dashi zhi Chanzong Liuzu 新英文书法: 慧能大师之禅宗六祖), 2003, ink on paper, two vertical scrolls, 135.9 x 137.2 cm, private collection (sold at Sotheby's Hong Kong, 07.10.2010, lot. 288, ¥ 593,640). Source: "Auction.artxun.com," accessed September 10, 2012, <http://auction.artxun.com/pic-218643579-0.html>.

¹⁵¹ Britta Erickson explains that: "Xu Bing created a series of books, *Introduction to Square World Calligraphy* and *Square World Calligraphy Read Lin Tracing Book* to teach his new form of writing": Ivi, 56-57.

¹⁵² Valerie C. Doran explains that Square World Calligraphy "has been the basis for a series of interactive 'calligraphy classroom' installations. [...] Often Xu will appear at the exhibition site for a few days to teach in the 'classroom', after which an instructional video is shown on computer monitors.": Valerie C. Doran, "Xu Bing: A Logos for the Genuine Experience": 85.

If we consider the English text written by Xu Bing in this work, we can also notice that it should be read from left to right, as it is in the West and not in Chinese tradition, and from top to bottom, as it is in Chinese tradition and not in the West. From this apparently insignificant observation, we can just easily understand what the author means with this work. In this “calligraphy”, Xu Bing aims at simultaneously bringing about the overturning and the conciliation of both Western (reading direction from left to right) and Chinese (reading direction from top to bottom) cultural practices.¹⁵³ He tries to produce a kind of bewilderment in the viewer (“Which is the right direction to read this text? The Western one or the Chinese one?”), who immediately may rejoin and recombine both the universes in a subverted but reconciled frame (the right reading direction is from left to right and from top to bottom).¹⁵⁴

The text is composed of three main parts:

1. The title of the work written in the first column on the left: *Poem by Hui-neng “The Sixth Patriarch of the Zen”*;
2. The main text: the poem by Hui Neng 慧能 (638-713), written in four columns of seven “alphabetic characters” each:
*The Bodhi is not like the tree;
 The mirror bright is now-here shining;
 As there is nothing from the first,
 Where does the dust it-self collect?*
3. The colophon of the work in the last column on the right composed by the artist’s name, the date, and the artist’s seal (*Calligraphy by Xu Bing Two Thousand and Three + seal*).

Like in Wang Dongling’s work (see above), the quoted text is a Buddhist scripture, and it is a translation, but there is an important difference between Wang Dongling’s and Xu Bing’s works: Wang Dongling’s Heart Sutra is a text originally composed in Sanskrit and then translated into Chinese, while the poem written by Xu Bing was originally composed in Chinese¹⁵⁵ and then translated into English. In the first case, Chinese language is the *target language*, while in the sec-

¹⁵³ It is the same process enlightened by Britta Erickson about Square Word Calligraphy installations that “demystify the Chinese language, initiate Westerners into the joys of Chinese calligraphy, and generally proclaim the possibility of unexpected rewards for those who make effort to communicate across cultures.”: Erickson, *Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words*, 68.

¹⁵⁴ As Wang Nanming points out: “From the standpoint of cultural studies, the reality that underline works comprising ‘New English Calligraphy’ or even ‘Calligraphy’ is that such works are inevitably the product of overseas Chinese who, completely removed from the linguistic framework of contemporary China, resort to working with concepts and materials defined as ‘Chinese’ by Western egemonism”: Wang Nanming in Doran, “Xu Bing: A Logos for the Genuine Experience”: 85.

¹⁵⁵ The original text in Chinese is: *Puti ben wu shu* 菩提本無樹 / *mingjing yi fei tai* 明鏡亦非臺 / *benlai wu yi wu* 本來無一物 / *hechu re chen'ai* 何處惹塵埃.

ond case Chinese language is the *source language*. For these two artists (and also for the currents they belong to) the starting point and the finishing line of their creative works are diametrically opposite: for Wang Dongling (and the Modernists), Chinese language is the “bull’s eye” of the aesthetic effort (see above),¹⁵⁶ on the contrary, for Xu Bing (and the Avant-garde) it represents only the “conceptual source” of the work of art.¹⁵⁷ Thus, Wang Dongling has chosen his “local language”, spoken and written only in Mainland China, while Xu Bing has chosen the “global language”,¹⁵⁸ spoken and written all over the world, that today represents the vehicular language for international communication. The utmost goal of these two artists is poles apart.

Moreover, even if Xu Bing is an international artist who focused on global art panorama, in this work he does not completely give up his local and original culture. If we consider the structure of the whole composition and of each of its elements, we can easily identify a reminiscence of Chinese calligraphy compositions because: i) the work is composed of two vertical scrolls, ii) it is divided into five columns, iii) the title and the colophon at the beginning and at the end of the script are written in small characters, iv) and each linguistic unit is inserted in an imaginary square, exactly like in every calligraphic work from ancient times until now. But it is important to point out that the reference to Chinese tradition in Xu Bing’s works is more visible in their formal aspects than in the substance of the works. In this specific case, indeed, the text he selected was originally written by a Chinese monk (another reference to his original culture), but it brings about a universal message. In this poem, Hui Neng encourages to go beyond the sensible and phenomenal realm of experience into the spiritual realm of “emptiness” to experiment what he called the “real” existence. For him, the essential meaning lies just beneath – or through – the material world embodied in the “dust” image (see above).¹⁵⁹

Another important element to understand the meaning of this poem (and then

¹⁵⁶ In all Wang Dongling’s works Chinese characters have always the leading role in the composition: see Wang Dongling, *The Way of Calligraphy: Wang Dongling’s Work*, 104-365.

¹⁵⁷ This is what Qiu Zhenzhong calls “Art from calligraphy”: see Qiu Zhenzhong, *Yuanzi shufa – Dui yilei yishu de mingming yu qita*: 276-287. Xu Bing used Chinese language as a “conceptual source” of his art in many of his works. For a detailed analysis of these works, see Adriana Iezzi, “Calligrafia d’avanguardia e arte concettuale nella Cina contemporanea. Il caso di Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, Wu Shanzhuan, Qiu Zhijie e Wang Nanming”: 68-76.

¹⁵⁸ As Doran points out: “His system of square-word calligraphy can be described as a postmodern, global-village version of [...] the attempts of early Chinese diviners and thinkers to ‘encapsulate in miniature the articulated structure (the *wen* or pattern) of knowledge and of reality depended on the organization of written signs into the spatial matrix””: Doran, “Xu Bing: A Logos for the Genuine Experience”: 85.

¹⁵⁹ For this interpretation, see Andrew Horwitz, “Absence, Presence and Xu Bing,” in *Xu Bing: “Where Does the Dust Itself Collect?”*, ed. Sam Miller, exhibition catalogue (New York, Spinning Wheel Building, 8th September – 9th October 2011) (New York: Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, 2011), 2-3.

the content of Xu Bing's work) is its source of inspiration. This poem is taken from an argument in poetry between Hui Neng and another seventh-century monk, Shen Xiu 神秀 (606?-706), the first patriarch of *chan* Buddhism.¹⁶⁰ In his poem, Shen Xiu affirmed that:

*The body is the Bodhi tree;
The soul is like the mirror bright,
Take heed to keep it always clean,
And let no dust collect upon it.*¹⁶¹

In these lines, Shen Xiu described how a soul collects dust and must be continually wiped clean, and he explained his “gradualist” approach to enlightenment that can be reached only through constant and unremitting practice. Hui Neng, the last patriarch of *chan* Buddhism, didn't agree with Shen Xiu's vision, so in his poem he replied that the soul is innately pure and therefore immune to dust, because he believed in “sudden enlightenment” and in a “pure and unattached mind” that “comes and goes freely and functions fluently without any hindrance.”¹⁶² Displaying these two opposite points of view, Xu Bing aims at comparing two antithetical ways of thinking, acting, and being, linking a connection between theoretical-philosophical and practical-creative fields. From an artistic point of view, Shen Xiu's poem recalls the diligent and constant practice of a traditional calligrapher that gradually reaches the aesthetic perfection, continually wiping away the dust from his harmonic compositions; on the other hand, Hui Neng's poem suggests the sudden intuition of the artistic genius based on an understandable concept that can easily infect any viewer's mind. Xu Bing's choice to quote only the second of these poems reflects his own way of thinking, acting, and creating art. His extremely intuitive and opened art conception stands in stark contrast to that of the exclusive and closed calligraphic circles.¹⁶³ The two contrastive positions presented by Xu Bing finally reflects the two contrastive positions of the Avant-garde and the Modernist movements: the words written by Hui Neng and the work shaped by

¹⁶⁰ For more details on this theoretical important argument, see John McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, the “dust” image (see above). rew Horwitz, “described as a postmodern, global-village version of such an attempt. work of cont1986); John McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁶¹ The original text in Chinese is: *Shen shi putishu* 身是菩提樹/ *xin ru mingjing tai* 心如明鏡臺/ *Shshi qin fushi* 時時勤拂拭/ *wu shi re chen'ai* 勿使惹塵埃. The translation is taken from Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 48.

¹⁶² See John C. H. Wu, *The Golden Age of Zen: Zen Masters of the T'ang Dynasty* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 73.

¹⁶³ This contrast emerged also between Xu Bing and some contemporary art circles of mainland China engaged in the postmodern discourse, which denounced Xu Bing and his “New English Calligraphy” in particular as “making increasingly evident his neo-colonialist status of an overseas Chinese artist”: Doran, “Xu Bing: A Logos for the Genuine Experience”: 85.

Xu Bing convey an ecumenical message in consonance with the Avant-garde purpose, while Shen Xiu's words recall the Modernist approach focused on a more smoothed work directed toward a selected audience.

The international appeal of Xu Bing's work is also visible in its source of inspiration. He himself has claimed¹⁶⁴ it was the event of September 11, 2001 in New York that inspired his work. It embodies both the local and global aspect of that tragic event, which still influences international politics, as well as common people's daily life. The reference to the Twin Towers collapse and to the 9/11 dust that settled that month in Manhattan is even more explicit in a later work by Xu Bing, entitled *Where Does the Dust Itself Collect?* (*Hechu ruochen'ai* 何处若尘埃, 2004),¹⁶⁵ inspired by this calligraphic work, but reshaped in a different form: this site-specific installation, first exhibited at the National Museum & Gallery of Cardiff, consists of the last two lines of Hui Neng's poem written using the dust that the artist meticulously had collected from the streets of Lower Manhattan after 9/11 and settled on the floor. Like in all his works, also in this specific case, Xu Bing proved to be deeply influenced by current events and totally absorbed in global dynamics.

In *New English Calligraphy: Hui Neng the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen*, the artist finally succeeded in combining and intermingling: i) tradition (Hui Neng's poem) and modernity¹⁶⁶ (reference to the Twin Tower collapse), ii) the East (poem originally written in Chinese, "calligraphy" structures) and the West (English translation, source of inspiration by an event occurred in the West),¹⁶⁷ and iii) local culture (Chinese and Buddhist traditional text) and global cultures (universality of the message written in English). Even if he still uses Chinese calligraphy traditional tools (ink, paper, and brush), its reference system is no longer Chinese writing system: he resets the concept of *wen* through the implementation of another writing system and of another language. Like in Wang Dongling's work, Xu Bing refers to Chinese tradition, but differently from Wang Dongling's work, his message is conveyed in such a way that it is readable and understandable all over the world. In Xu Bing's works, we can easily recognize the origin of the artistic concept but this is not an obstacle to their worldwide comprehension. In this sense, Xu Bing invented a new type of writing, a new font, and a new language that allow the connection between

¹⁶⁴ See Andrew Salomon, "Zen and the Art of Xu Bing," in *Xu Bing: Where Does the Dust Itself Collect?*, ed. Sam Miller, 6.

¹⁶⁵ For more details on this work, see the exhibition catalogue: Sam Miller, ed., *Xu Bing: "Where Does the Dust Itself Collect?"*.

¹⁶⁶ In an interview, Xu Bing says: "In my pieces, traditional crafts, techniques, and materials co-exist with contemporary conceptualism": Gleen Harper, "Exterior Form – Interior Substance: A Conversation with Xu Bing," *Sculpture* 22, 1 (2003): 46.

¹⁶⁷ As Xu Bing points out: "Square Word Calligraphy [...] exists on the borderline between two complete different cultures. To viewers of these two cultures, the characters present equal points of familiarity and strangeness. A Chinese person recognizes the characters as familiar faces but cannot figure out exactly who they are. For a Westerner, they first appear as mysterious glyphs from Asian culture, yet ultimately they can be read and understood": *Ivi*, 47.

different languages and distant cultures. Unlike Wang Dongling, who needed to use another code (the visual code of figurative images) to make his work readable for a non-Chinese audience, Xu Bing did not need any code changes: he still used linguistic code, even if he shifted from Chinese to English, and he also maintained the appearance of Chinese calligraphic forms. Then, the result is the creation of something completely new that no longer belongs to only one culture, but that simultaneously participates in Chinese and Western as well. Xu Bing finally creates a new language that is a well-balanced mix of different languages, which fundamentally does not completely belong to anyone so it could belong to everyone.

Conclusions

The analysis of two representative works by two important artists like Wang Dongling and Xu Bing has clearly showed how differently the Modernist and the Avant-garde movements approach calligraphic art in China nowadays. This difference is fundamental to distinguish two contrasting positions within the cultural debate in contemporary China. While in the Modernist approach, in spite of the appearance, it is always the “local” culture that prevails on the “global” one; in the Avant-garde instead it is always the “global” culture that tends to prevail on the “local” one. It has been clearly demonstrated that the Modernists still remain deeply rooted in a “Chinese” vision and they still need to refer to a code in which their own identity is recognizable, despite their attempt to assimilate some foreigner elements; while the avant-garde artists tend to produce a real integration and interaction among different cultures and to open their art to the rest of the world as well. In both cases, we can undoubtedly recognize an evident alteration of the traditional system of calligraphic art. The art critics have called this phenomenon “Chinese modern calligraphy” (*Zhongguo xiandai shufa*),¹⁶⁸ but we can also distinguish a substantial difference between them: while the modernists focus only on the formal aspects, which means the use of different media or types of frame, and the reshaping of the structure of the whole composition, the avant-garde artists instead aims at a “conceptual” and “substantial” metamorphosis of the calligraphic art as a whole which means the use or the creation of different codes alternative to calligraphy. Therefore, for the Modernists the cultural hegemonic system still remains the Chinese one, while for the Avant-gardists, who succeeded in merging with the Western counterpart, the cultural reference becomes the entire world system.

Two are the main reasons for these different approaches: i) the first one depends on the different composition of the two movements, ii) the second one on the different attitude of the central government, and of the official and academic

¹⁶⁸ See note 48.

institutions towards both of them. With regard to the first aspect, it is important to point out that the Modernists are for the most part out-and-out calligraphers (or at most calligraphy-painters) who are still living in China, and with a traditional background, while most of the Avant-gardists are visual artists (not exactly and not always calligraphers) who lived or are still living abroad and with a fine arts background. So, if for the first ones it is very difficult to totally detach from traditional concepts and especially from the *wen* concept, for the second ones it is much easier to do that, because the Avant-garde artists feel free from any forms of authoritarianism, both in art and in culture. With regard to the second aspect, it is important to underline that the Modernist movement has always been appreciated and supported by the Chinese government and the academic institutions. Most of its members are professors in the major academies of the country. Public museums contribute to their promotion, their initiatives are supported and funded by public institutions, calligraphy and art magazines publish their articles and works, and their activities constantly increase and spread all over the national territory. The Avant-garde movement instead has never found fertile ground and good conditions to develop and widespread. During the late 80s and early 90s, most of the avant-garde artists (e.g. Xu Bing and Gu Wenda) moved abroad because of the harsh critiques received in China. Today the government and the cultural institutions have changed their approach and try to gain a dual-purpose: on one hand, they tend to absorb or at least to co-opt the avant-garde drifts (for example, this is evident in the recent decision to designate Xu Bing as the vice-director of the China Academy of Fine Arts); on the other hand, they are pushing the Modernist movement towards internationalization. In order to do this, Chinese authorities are used to organize and support more and more activities, exhibitions, and conferences, which mutually involve Modernist and foreigner artists in China and they promote Modernist artists abroad. They aim at letting the world know that in China there are artistic realities definitely “Chinese” but also readable for a Western audience. In this sense, the attempt to promote Chinese culture abroad through the Modernists’ production is more and more successful, but as to the Avant-garde, that is now fully embedded in the global art mechanisms, this attempt is less and less successful because the Avant-garde production is increasingly moving away from the art of calligraphy, that is still totally interdependent and deeply rooted in Chinese culture.

The analysis of the different approaches of the Modernist and the Avant-garde movements to the art of calligraphy has finally revealed the existence of two different orientations in contemporary Chinese art and culture. Both the movements reflect the main aim of Chinese contemporary society at dialectically facing the past tradition and at opening at a new one as well. Reflecting new social realities in China and new perspectives in global art world, they recompose the variegated cultural framework of today’s China that however is still intimately connected to the brushstroke.

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ELENA MACRÍ

BEYOND TRADITION. THE PRACTICE OF ARTISTIC
INTERACTION (RONGHE 融合) AND ITS EFFECT
ON MODERN CHINESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Introduction

Between 1850 and 1949, Chinese society underwent radical political and socio-cultural changes that led up to significant turning points in Chinese modern art history.¹ The issue of Chinese modernity has been widely debated and, in general, it has been seen as a process in which “tradition” and “modernity” were considered as polar opposites, the former accepted as a reaction against Westernization and the latter considered as a total Westernization of Chinese culture. This interpretative tradition that treats the two categories as distinct and opposed has gone unquestioned for a long time, although different scholarly studies have critically reviewed the conventional dichotomy of tradition versus modernity, introducing a new organization of knowledge. Benjamin Schwartz was one of the first scholars to provide a new frame of reference for thinking about this issue, highlighting the limits of an established division into binary oppositions that has always privileged the positive quality of new in opposition to the negative quality of old.²

The antagonism in these binary terms was essentially based on the Western-derived ideology of linear progress in which “present and past became polarized as contrasting values, and new emphasis was placed on the present moment,”³ seen as “the pivotal point marking a rupture with the past and forming a progressive continuum toward a glorious future,” as Leo Lee Ou-fan has explained.⁴ According to the

¹ In her study, Furth provides an overview of the intellectual history of the late Qing to the early Republican periods. See Charlotte Furth, “Intellectual Change: From the Reform Movement to the May Fourth Movement, 1895-1920,” in *An Intellectual History of Modern China*, eds. Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-fan Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13-96.

² Benjamin I. Schwartz, “The Limits of ‘Tradition versus Modernity’: the Case of the Chinese Intellectuals,” in *China and Other Matters*, ed. Benjamin I. Schwartz (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 45-64.

³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, “The Cultural Construction of Modernity in Urban Shanghai: Some Preliminary Explorations,” in *Becoming Chinese. Passages to Modernity and Beyond*, ed. Yeh Wen -Hsin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 31.

⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee, “In Search of Modernity: Reflections on a New Mode of Consciousness in Modern Chinese Literature and Thought,” in *Ideas Across Cultures: Essays on Chinese Thought in Honor of*

literary historian Shih Shu-mei's opinion, "the ideology of linear temporality produced "tradition" in order to repudiated it as old and outdated, and celebrated "modernity" as discontinuity from the past, in order to create a new subjectivity that prioritized the present and the future."⁵

The meaning of "modern" in relation to Chinese art has been, and still remains, a problem of central importance for art historians. Much has been written about the impact of Western art on conceptions of Chinese painting⁶ and there is a wide literature analyzing how the categories of "tradition" and "modernity" have been transplanted into Chinese modern art, becoming a subject of interest to several art historians.⁷ There is no denying that Chinese art, searching for a modern artistic identity, felt the urge of exploring new painterly values during a period of cultural interchange with the West and, as has been pointed out by Julia Andrews, "a key issue for modern Chinese art is the degree to which Chinese artists have chosen to adopt or reject Western conventions."⁸

However, Andrew's perspective raises the fundamental question about what is considered to be traditional and modern during a period of artistic transition, when Chinese painting was stimulated and enhanced by the dynamics of interaction with Western art. We find a new way to conceptualize these two seemingly antithetical terms in David Clarke's work *Modern Chinese Art*, as well as in Wen C. Fong's study *Between Two Cultures*, in which the two scholars explore from a comparative perspective how difficult is to define what is classic and what is new in early twentieth century Chinese painting.⁹ This comparative perspective is particularly interesting because, generally, Western and Chinese studies map China's modern art scene by identifying a distinctly Chinese sphere in both stylistic criteria and medium (Traditionalists), a distinctly Western one (Modernists) and a new artistic movement combining the two different pictorial traditions in terms of stylistic

Benjamin I. Schwartz, eds. Paul A. Cohen and Merle Goldman (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1990), 110-111.

⁵ Shih Shu-mei, *The Lure of the Modern. Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China: 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 50.

⁶ See Li Chao 李超, *Zhongguo zaoqi youhuashi* 中国早期油画史 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2004). For a very similar argument see also Chen Ruilin 陈瑞林, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo meishu jiaoyi lishi yanjiu* 二十世纪中国美术教育历史研究 (Beijing, Qinghua University Press, 2006).

⁷ On the importance of this perspective see John Clark, "Problems of Modernity in Chinese Painting," *Oriental Art*, 32/3 (1986): 270-283. See also Maxwell Hearn and Judith Smith, eds., *Chinese Art: Modern Expressions* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001).

⁸ Julia F. Andrews, "A Century in Crisis: Tradition and Modernity in the Art of Twentieth-century China," in *A Century in Crisis. Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-century China*, eds. Julia F. Andrews and Shen Kuiyi (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998), 2.

⁹ David Clarke, *Modern Chinese Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Wen C. Fong, *Between Two Cultures. Late-Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Chinese Paintings from Robert H. Ellsworth Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001).

language (Reformists).¹⁰ However, the modern Chinese painting system is an extremely variegated and stratified phenomenon and the use of strict demarcation lines between these three seemingly antithetical artistic groups ends up to reduce their activity in a too simplistic way.

A wider analysis of the different artistic practices proves that, beyond the theoretical and stylistic differences, there is a common element belonging to the pictorial repertoire of artists from different groups, known as the practice of “artistic interaction” (*ronghe* 融合). With this term I refer to a new kind of pictorial structure conceived as one of the most interesting solution in response to the Chinese art world’s demand for modernity and constituting a central feature in the making process of several ink works produced during the first half of the twentieth century, when many artists from different movements shared the common goal of turning ink painting into a new form of artistic expression. This pictorial practice was based on the assumption that the innovation of ink painting was equivalent to the reexamination of Chinese artistic standards, as well as to the reinterpretation of their values in order to promote a new symbol of modern national identity. In terms of Chinese perception of the problem, some painters reworked classical stylistic features and translated them into a modern visual form, some others created a synthesis between autochthonous and not autochthonous pictorial traditions by merging classical elements with elements borrowed from Western artistic repertoire. According to this research framework, the renewing of tradition proved itself to be an essential factor for the development and legitimization of a modern ink painting language, debunking the binary opposition between the categories of “tradition/old/bad” and “modernity/new/god”.

By providing an analysis of textual and visual sources which support this specific perspective, this paper aims to explore the practice of artistic interaction intended as a conscious and explicit act, perceived as a necessary strategy for the innovation of traditional painting and shared by artists of varied backgrounds, experiences and theoretical perspectives, all critically engaged with this deeply problematic issue. Firstly, I will provide an analysis of the cultural and intellectual settings in which the concept of “interaction” has been shaped, and then I will try to critically examine and problematize the commonly accepted tripartition of modern Chinese painting system, in order to highlight the limits of conventionalized definitions for the study of artistic interaction. The discussion of definitions, as well as the short survey on the cultural perspective that highlights the origin of the term *ronghe*, serve as background for the study of landscape painting

¹⁰ See Wan Qingli, “Traditionalism, Reform and Modernism in Twentieth Century Chinese Painting,” *Orientalism* 23/7 (1992): 22. See also Lang Shaojun 郎绍君, *Ershi shiji Zhongguohua tancong* 二十世纪中国画谈丛 (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2001), 10-13; Ruan Rongchun 阮荣春 and Hu Guanghua 胡光华, “San zu dingzhi de minchu huatan” 三足鼎峙的民初画坛, *Zhongguo meishu yanjiu* 中国美术研究 2 (2007): 1-14. These articles include representative examples of the conventional tripartition of the Chinese art world during the early twentieth century.

(*shanshuihua* 山水画), one of the highest category of Chinese art and a particularly revealing subject for analyzing the process of artistic interaction.

Through the lens of ink works realized from the 1910s to the 1960s by the main pioneers of this innovative practice, here examined in chronological order and in relation to two different theoretical positions, I will interpret how some Chinese artists were able to rediscover classic painting by synthesizing tradition and modernism, as well as by merging Eastern and Western pictorial languages, in order to construct a new knowledge about a modernity that did not necessarily constitute a disjuncture with the past.

The concept of artistic interaction and its cultural environment

Artistic interaction as a modern practice was introduced to Chinese art circles at the beginning of the twentieth century, when traditional art started to reconsider the validity of its premises in the light of Western artistic influence.

The spread of this concept was not an isolated phenomenon, but was closely linked to the practice of cultural interaction and exchange between China and the West, started in the late sixteenth century as a result of their trade and economic relations and of Jesuits' missionary work. A conscious attitude toward learning from the West was first launched during the 1860s by the Self-Strengthening Movement (*Ziqiang yundong* 自强运动), a political movement advocating the adoption of Western technology, science and knowledge in order to modernize China's economic and military sectors, later developed by the leading intellectuals of the 1898 Reform Movement (*Wuxu bianfa* 戊戌变法) into an effort at institutional change based on a strong admiration of Western political and social institutions.

While in the late Qing period intellectuals intended to merge the best elements of Chinese and Western culture only for practical purposes, trying to make China an industrialized and economically developed country able to free itself from the yoke of colonialism without questioning the fundamentals of its own cultural identity, during the first decades of the twentieth century, intellectuals' approach to learning from the West became much more radical. The leaders of the New Cultural Movement (*Xin wenhua yundong* 新文化运动) advocated the total Westernization of Chinese culture in order to redress the structural deficiencies of the traditional system, pursuing a totally new culture, ethics, literature and art.¹¹ Their attitude worried many traditionalist intellectuals who found it a threat to Chinese cultural heritage and divided themselves into those who strongly opposed and criticized the radical cultural revolution, and those who tried to merge into the Chinese socio-cultural system some relevant elements of Western civilization.

¹¹ See Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment. Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 6-8.

Together with the economic and cultural exchange between East and the West, foreign art was also introduced in China, first through the mediation of Jesuits and later through the contribution of Chinese students returned from overseas study in Japan or in Europe. The discovery of a different artistic system can be dated back to the late sixteenth century, when Jesuits used religious paintings and prints as a medium for the importation of Catholic religion to China, presenting to Chinese audience Western drawing and oil painting techniques.¹² During this early stage, Western art exerted an influence only on some professional and court painters who were able to define a more objective way in approaching forms, paying more attention to elements clearly derived from the study of Western painting such as shading techniques and linear perspective.

It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the process of modernization really started, that the influence of Western art developed into a real comparative impulse. Chinese artists who had studied Western-style painting in Japanese or European art academies started to actively promote oil painting practice through exhibitions, art associations and writings, arousing the reaction of conservatives artists who launched in response the revival of traditional painting that, in a period of political and cultural turmoil, was considered more generally a defense of Chinese cultural identity.¹³ The term used to identify this new approach to Chinese ink painting was *guohua*, a Japanese-derived neologism introduced in art debate during the 1910s and described by Aida Yuen Wong as a “nationalist symbol,”¹⁴ theoretically connected to the late Qing National Essence Movement’s effort in restoring the cultural importance of Chinese tradition.

However, in adapting Chinese ink painting to modern art world’s conditions, “tradition” and “modernity” were not considered as distinct and opposed categories and the practice of artistic interaction was fundamental for the evolution of Chinese painting system. The term *ronghe* literally means to merge Chinese and Western elements (*Zhongxi ronghe* 中西融合), but its use is quite problematic because it is difficult to find a proper translation. Moreover, there are a range of synonyms linked to this word, such as *Zhongxi hebi* 中西合璧 (to combine Chinese and Western elements), *tiaohe dongxi* 调和东西 (to harmonize Eastern and Western elements), *Zhongxi jiaorong* 中西交融 (to blend Chinese and Western elements), all related to an idea of combination, fusion and mixing. Although translating the

¹² For an overview of the earliest reception of Western art in China, see Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 41-87. See also Xiang Da 向达, “Ming Qing zhiji Zhongguo meishu suoshou xiyang zhi yingxiang” 明清之际中国美术所受西洋之影响, *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志, 27/1 (1930): 19-38.

¹³ See Michael Sullivan, *Art and artists of twentieth-century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 24-26. See also Julia F. Andrews and Shen Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 47-55.

¹⁴ Aida Yuen Wong, *Parting the Mists. Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style Painting in Modern China*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), XXIII.

word *ronghe* as “combination” or “fusion” is semantically correct, this rendering is an oversimplification in conceptual terms because it does not completely convey the full theoretical meaning of the term.

Generally speaking, *ronghe* – or its synonyms – are terms widely used by intellectuals and artists in the early twentieth century to describe an attitude towards the modernization of traditional ink painting that developed into two different approaches: a synthesis between traditional and modernist aesthetics, as well as a combination of Eastern and Western stylistic elements. However, the act of merging different sources to create a new artistic language presupposes the willingness, and also the tactical capability, to (inter)act on and in relation to “the other”, problematising its own cultural matrixes, as well as those ones imported from the outside. In this sense, the term *ronghe* holds the implication of interaction and is strictly related to the specific context of Chinese painting practice of the first half of the twentieth century.

Concerning the evolution of the term *ronghe*, there were the thinkers who pronounced the theory and the artists who gave evidence and proved the theory by inventing techniques that made the stylistic interaction a possible practice. Xue Fucheng 薛福成 (1838-1899), a Qing official sent to Europe in the late nineteenth century, was one of the first to think about a stylistic comparison between Chinese and Western painting. In his *Diary of a Diplomat to Four Countries* (*Chushi siguo riji* 出使四国日记), Xue noted:

The tradition of Chinese painting has continued for several thousand years, its emphasis being on mood rather than shape. [...] For example Ni Yunlin’s [Ni Zan] and Tang Bohu’s [Tang Ying] monochrome ink paintings only concentrate on the expression of the mood. Therefore, their works are rated as “possessing great elegance”. [...] These paintings are mostly based on the use of void, [whereas] Western oil painting excels in expressing substance. The techniques used in the earliest oil paintings were not particularly remarkable, but about four hundred years ago Raphael, an Italian artist, formulated the method of perspective and scale which divided everything precisely into light and dark, close and distant, light and shade, concave and convex. This method also created a sense of space. When I saw one of his paintings from a certain distance all the mountains, rivers, figures, buildings and trees looked real. Each direction – front, side, or back of the subject – was painted clearly and properly. [The result] was spectacular. Furthermore, the light of the sun, the color of the rosy clouds and the water and fire were all depicted in a lively manner. Only when I took a close look did I realize it was a huge oil painting. This is a level that Chinese artists have not reached. Western painters really opened up a new method.¹⁵

¹⁵ Quoted in Lawrence Wu, “Kang Youwei and the Westernization of Modern Chinese Art,” *Orientations*, 21/3 (1990): 47. For an English translation of Xue’s diary see Helen Hsieh, *The European Diary of Hsieh Fucheng: Envoy Extraordinary of Imperial China (1890-94)* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

Xue Fucheng raised the important matter of artistic exchange between East and West. However, his idea was more about a generalized need of studying a new perspective to develop Chinese painting and it was later reviewed – and better reformulated – by intellectuals such as Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927), Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942), Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940) and Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), the progressive Western-educated élite who strongly believed in the role that art could and should play in creating a modern society. Their approach was heavily influenced by the cultural challenges launched in the beginning of the twentieth century and, although aware that Chinese painting needed to learn from Western artistic knowledge to improve itself, they never rejected the roots of traditional art, trying to profile a new theoretical and technical background in order to elevate ink painting.

Kang Youwei, the leader of the 1898 Reform Movement, wrote extensively on painting. After his journey/exile in Europe occurred between 1904 and 1908, he pointed out that Chinese art had to “correct the false pictorial doctrine of the past five hundred years” (庶救五百年来偏谬之画论).¹⁶ In his *Travels in Eleven European Countries* (*Ouzhou shiyiguo youji* 欧洲十一国游记), Kang relates the opportunity he had to discover Western classical art, especially Italian Renaissance art, to his admiration for European realism and explains how this led him to develop his thinking concerning the adoption of Western drawing techniques in order to develop traditional Chinese painting. In his preface to “The Catalogue of Paintings Collected in the Wanmu Caotang” (*Wanmu caotang cang Zhongguo hua mu* 万木草堂藏中国画目), written in 1917, he claimed:

如仍守旧不变，则中国画学应遂灭绝。国人岂无英绝之士应运而兴，合中西画而为画学新纪元者。

If we adhere to the old way without change it, Chinese painting will fade away. Now, at this historic moment, it is up to those who are up to the challenge to arise. They must begin a new era and combine Chinese and Western art.¹⁷

In his perspective, the merging of different artistic tradition was the only way for artists to prevent the decline of traditional painting. This led Chen Duxiu, one of the leader of New Cultural Movement, to call for a revolution in art (*yishu geming* 艺术革命), using undoubtedly harsher words. In 1918, he used the pages of *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 to criticize the “despicable Chinese painting” (*Zhongguo ehua* 中国恶画), defining its compositional techniques as totally irrational and advocating a synthesis of Western and Chinese art in order to correct those that were commonly identified as the structural limits of pictorial orthodoxy.¹⁸ Both Kang Youwei

¹⁶ Quoted in Lang Shaojun 郎少君 and Shui Tianzhong 水天中, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo meishu wenxuan* 二十世纪中国美术文选 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1999), 22.

¹⁷ Quoted in Ivi, 25.

¹⁸ Cf. Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, *Meishu geming* 美术革命, *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 6/1 (1918): 85.

and Chen Duxiu sharply criticized the idealized simplicity of literati painting and supported the idea that the structural similarity between the realistic style of Tang and Song court painting and Western realistic art could be the starting point for a reform of Chinese painting. The core of their discussions was the problematisation of the literati approach to painting and they identified in the Western scientific method a powerful tool for learning how to represent images avoiding philosophical attitudes.

Together with those thinkers who focused their attention in determining a new methodology for Chinese painting, there were also some cultural leaders who thought that “reform meant not the elimination of elite traditional culture but instead the sharing of this privileged knowledge with the public,” as rightly pointed out by Julia Andrews and Shen Kuiyi.¹⁹ Art education and art popularization were central issue for Cai Yuanpei and Lu Xun, whose research focused more on the social function of art, understood as an instrument to enhance the aesthetic and moral level of modern China.

Cai Yuanpei, the first minister of education in the new Republican China, in his “Speech at the Peking University Painting Techniques Research Society” (*Zai Beida huafa yanjiuhui shang de yanshuo* 在北大画法研究会上的演说) given in 1918, declared that “in this era of cultural interaction between East and West, China must adopt the strengths of the West” (今世为东西文化融和时代, 西洋之所长, 吾国自当采用).²⁰ Cai studied philosophy in Germany between 1907 and 1913 and was strongly impressed by Kant’s and Schiller’s aesthetic thought, as well as by Dewey’s theories on education systems.²¹ His efforts to synthesize Chinese and Western ideas led him to formulate a plan to reform traditional education systems in order to turn art into an essential pedagogical tool for the creation of a modern society.²² Lu Xun as well was in agreement with Cai Yuanpei’s theories and in his article titled “My Opinion on How to Popularize Art” (*Yi bobu meishu yijian shu* 以播布美术意见书), written in 1913, he expressed the need to create places such as galleries, theaters and associations suited to “reveal the essence of art, stimulate the sense of beauty and the birth of artists” (以发美术之真谛, 起国人之美感, 更

¹⁹ Julia F. Andrews and Shen Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, 55.

²⁰ Quoted in Pan Yaochang 潘耀昌, “Cai Yuanpei Beida shiqi de Zhongxi meishuguan: 1916-1922” 蔡元培北大时期的中西美术观: 1916-1922, in *Yishu: shixiang yu houxiandai sichao* 艺术: 视像与后现代思潮, ed. Wei Hui 委会, (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2005), 226-227.

²¹ For more details on this topic, see Yang Kun 杨坤, “Cai Yuanpei zhuyao jiaoyu sixiang de xingcheng ji fazhan” 蔡元培主要教育思想的形成及发展, in *Yishu de lishi yu shishi. Ershi shiji Zhongguo yishushi de ruogan wenti yanjiu: 1900-1949* 艺术的历史与事实. 20世纪中国艺术史的若干课题研究: 1900-1949, ed. Lü Peng 吕澎 (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 2006), 284-291. Cai Yuanpei’s essays are collected in Nie Zhenbin 聂振斌, *Wenming de huhuan. Cai Yuanpei wenxuan* 文明的呼唤. 蔡元培文选 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2002).

²² See Cai Yuanpei, “Yi meiyu dai zongjiao shuo” 以美育代宗教说, *Xin qingnian* 新青年, 3/6 (1917): 509-513.

以冀艺术家之出世也).²³ In his eyes, the cultural exchange between East and West was a necessary resource to revitalize Chinese art and it represented a process that Chinese people would have been able to undertake in full awareness, as a wise teacher who freely chooses to open up to new ideas without fearing to lose his own traditions.²⁴

All these positions, although at different levels, moved beyond the conventional dichotomy of tradition versus modernity because in thinkers' perspective "tradition", through the medium of artistic or cultural interaction, had an unquestionable influence on modern painting practice.

The phenomenon of artistic interaction and the limits of conventionalized definitions

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Chinese painting's traditional structure underwent some important reforms introduced by three different groups of painters, generally known as Traditionalists (*chuantongxing* 传统型), Modernists (*fei chuantongxing* 非传统型), and Reformists (*fan chuantongxing* 泛传统型). The Traditionalists, with their guiding motto 'Chinese spirit' (*Zhongguo jingshen* 中国精神), cultivated classical learning and were animated by the purpose of reevaluating Chinese traditional painting theories, techniques and expressive languages. In diametric contrast to the Traditionalists, the Modernists of the western-style painting movement (*yanghua yundong* 洋画运动) favoured the 'total westernization' (*quanpan xihua* 全盘西化) of Chinese art by adopting western painting tools and stylistic languages. Halfway between the two groups there were the Reformists with their eclectic theory of combining different pictorial traditions (*Zhongxi ronghe* 中西融合) in order to reform Chinese traditional painting.²⁵

However, both Western and Chinese sources do not univocally define the different artistic groups and there is no agreement on how to collocate an artist into a specific classification, as shown in the tables below:

²³ Quoted in Lang Shaojun and Shui Tianzhong, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo meishu wenxuan*, 13.

²⁴ Cf. Shih Shu-mei, *The Lure of the Modern. Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China: 1917-1937*, 86.

²⁵ Yu Yang 于洋, "Zuwei celüe yu ziyuan de 'ronghe' fangan" 作为策略与资源的"融合"方案, *Meishu yanjiu* 美术研究 4 (2008): 17.

WESTERN AUTHOR AND BOOK/ESSAY TITLE	CLASSIFICATION	ARTISTS
Michael Sullivan (1996), <i>Art and artists of twentieth-century China</i>	Guohua revival	Jin Cheng, Chen Hengque, Huang Binhong, Qi Baishi, Pan Tianshou
	Modern art	Lin Fengmian, Liu Haisu, Xu Beihong
	Lingnan School	Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng
Shen Kuiyi (1998), "Traditional painting in a transitional era, 1900-1950"	New art/ Western-style art	Pang Xunqin, Ni Yide, Qiu Ti, Chen Baoyi, Guan Liang, Ni Yide, Pan Yuliang
	Traditionalists	Jin Cheng, Huang Binhong, Qi Baishi, Pan Tianshou
	Reformists	Lin Fengmian, Liu Haisu, Xu Beihong, Gao Jianfu
Lü Peng (2010), <i>A History of Art in 20th-century China</i>	Modernists	Pang Xunqin, Guan Liang, Guan Zilan, Pan Yuliang, Ni Yide
	Traditionalists	Jin Cheng, Chen Hengque
	Guohua and New guohua	Huang Binhong, Qi Baishi, Gao Jianfu
	Realism	Xu Beihong
Julia Andrews, Kuiyi Shen (2012), <i>The Art of Modern China</i>	Modern art	Liu Haisu, Lin Fengmian, Pan Yuliang, Chen Baoyi, Guan Liang, Guan Zilan, Pang Xunqin
	New learning	Gao Jianfu, Chen Hengque
	Traditional painting	Chen Hengque, Qi Baishi, Jin Cheng, Huang Binhong, Pan Tianshou
The 1920s generation return from abroad		Lin Fengmian, Liu Haisu, Xu Beihong
	Avant-garde oil painting of the 1930s	Chen Baoyi, Guan Zilan, Pang Xunqin, Ni Yide, Qiu Ti

CHINESE AUTHOR AND BOOK/ ESSAY TITLE	CLASSIFICATION	ARTISTS
Chen Zhuaxi 陈传席 (1998), <i>Zhongguo huihua meixue shi</i> 中国绘画美学史	Traditionalists (国粹论)	Jin Cheng, Chen Hengque
	Reformists (改良论)	Xu Beihong
	Blending theory (调合论结合论)	Gao Jianfu, Lin Fengmian, Pan Tianshou
	“Between likeness and non-likeness” (“在似与不似之 间”)	Qi Baishi, Huang Binhong
Lü Peng 吕澎 (2010), <i>Meishu de gushi. Cong wan Qing dao jintian</i> 美术的故事. 从晚清到今天	Traditionalism (传统主义)	Jin Cheng, Chen Hengque, Huang Binhong, Qi Baishi
	New <i>guohua</i> (新国画)	Gao Jianfu
	Realism (写实主义)	Xu Beihong
	Modern art (现代艺术)	Lin Fengmian

Such examples, provided from some of the most important Chinese art history studies, shed much light on the nature and on the context of Chinese modern art. In considering the application of this paradigm, there are some necessary considerations regarding the different kind of classifications adopted by art historians to determine a theoretical organization of knowledge. Generally, artists are divided or grouped together in broad categories according to the main focus of their research: reevaluation/innovation of ink painting or adoption of oil painting.²⁶ More often, the same research subject is seen in multiple ways, allowing different kind of classifications and analysis. For example, the group of traditional painters include classicists – also known as revivalists – such as Jin Cheng 金城 (1878-1926) and Chen Hengque 陈衡恪 (1876-1923), the purists of the literati tradition who opposed Western painting influence and promoted traditional pictorial aesthetic with its emphasis on brush and ink techniques. But the same group also includes much more moderate artists, painters such as Qi Baishi 齐白石 (1864-1957), Huang Binhong 黄宾虹 (1865-1955) and Pan Tianshou 潘天寿 (1898-1971), who recognized the value of traditional painting but aimed to modernize it in stylistic

²⁶ See Shen Kuiyi, “Traditional Painting in a Transitional Era, 1900-1950,” in *A Century in Crisis. Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-century China*, 80-131.

terms, providing more choices for the evolution of the literati artistic tradition.²⁷

Similarly, the group of the Modernists includes the Chinese pioneers of Western painting, painters such as Chen Baoyi 陈抱一 (1893-1945), Guan Liang 关良 (1900-1986), Pan Yuliang 潘玉良 (1902-1977), Guan Zilan 关紫兰 (1903-1986), Ni Yide 倪貽德 (1901-1970) and Pang Xunqin 庞勋琴 (1906-1985), who walked the path of *xihua* 西画 in its entirety. However, some art historians extend the appellation of modernist also to Lin Fengmian, Liu Haisu and Xu Beihong, artists who underlined the importance of balancing the new stylistic experimentations with a dose of traditionalism and, during their artistic career, they firstly chose to express themselves through oil painting and only later through ink painting.²⁸ In the same way, among the so-called Reformists who pursued a stylistic compromise to encompass the best of the two different pictorial traditions, there are artists such as Lin Fengmian 林风眠 (1900-1991) and Liu Haisu 刘海粟 (1896-1994) who tried to integrate the aesthetic quality of the *xieyi* 写意 style with the expressive power of new formalist languages, but there are also painters such as Xu Beihong 徐悲鸿 (1895-1953) and Gao Jianfu 高剑父 (1879-1951) who were oriented towards more scientific figurative solutions inspired by Western Realism.²⁹

However, the rigid demarcation lines drawn by definitions are not valid when painters experiment with new techniques and new stylistic or compositional language, but still using traditional painting media. If we approach the ink painting system from a comparative perspective, we see that the practice of artistic interaction appears as the common stylistic element for painters from different groups, translated as a synthesis between classical and modern visual languages, or as an exchange between autochthonous and not autochthonous pictorial traditions. Reformist and conservative positions, although focused in different aspects and at different levels, were both animated by the common aim to modernize the stylistic features of ink painting. Classic painting theory had the chance to trigger a critical consideration about its well-established expressive languages in relation to the development of a modern artistic thought, while this one elaborated its own stylistic requisites in relation to the knowledge of traditional painting, accentuating the idea of interaction as a stylistic resource for Chinese modern art. As Gao Minglu has stated in a recent study, the attempt to synthesize tradition and modernism, as well as East and West, was “a common point of view for the first generation of artists in the early twentieth century, and it reveals a pursuit of a scientific revolution in art.”³⁰

²⁷ See Michael Sullivan, *Art and artists of twentieth-century China*; Lü Peng 吕澎, *A History of Art in 20th-century China* (Milan: Charta, 2010); Julia F. Andrews and Shen Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*.

²⁸ See Michael Sullivan, *Art and artists of twentieth-century China* and Lü Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-century China*.

²⁹ See Shen Kuiyi, “Traditional Painting in a Transitional Era, 1900-1950” and Chen Zhuaxi 陈传席, *Zhongguo huihua meixue shi* 中国绘画美学史 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998).

³⁰ Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge: The

This new approach offers a new frame of reference for thinking about the cultural shift occurred in the ink painting system in the first half of the twentieth century. First, it allowed artists to respond to the modernization process by interweaving ideas such as modern and traditional, or Chinese and Western. Second, by constructing the renewing of tradition as the basis of a modern artistic identity, artist could invent their personal way to create something new, but in order to strengthen the old.

Continuity and innovation: synthesizing tradition and modernism

At this point, it is interesting to analyze how the theory becomes visual language, how the notion of artistic interaction has been translated into works of art. Landscape painting, the highest and most representative category of Chinese art, is a revealing subject for analyzing this process. Particularly, it is interesting to see in a chronological order what kind of landscape depiction artists develop in the shifting cultural context of the first half of the twentieth century, starting from two different theoretical perspectives.

The perplexity of Chinese artists concerning the validity of *shanshuihua*'s principles was so deep that, in 1935, the Chinese Painting Society (*Zhongguo huahui* 中国画会) – the most important association involved in the promotion of Chinese traditional painting – conducted an important comparative research on the aesthetics of Chinese and Western landscape painting and published two special issues of its Chinese Painting Monthly (*Guohua yuekan* 国画月刊). The main goal of this study was to establish a dialogue between these two different artistic genres by examining their history, stylistic languages, techniques and main differences, in order to find new resources useful for the evolution of *shanshuihua*.³¹

However, in the framework of early twentieth century fragmented culture, the efforts made by artists to produce new forms of artistic expression started even before 1935. For those who conceived artistic interaction as a synthesis of traditional and modern visual languages, pictorial renewal meant to extrapolate from *wenrenhua*, or from traditional painting, new stylistic possibilities. A formal analysis of works executed by Chen Hengque, Jin Cheng, Qi Baishi, Huang Binhong and Pan Tianshou proves that their theoretical perspective on stylistic synthesis between classical and modern visual languages led these conservative painters to elaborate a new form of landscape painting by introducing new compositional structures and a new approach to ink or color techniques.

MIT Press, 2011), 38.

³¹ See Li Weiming 李伟铭, "Jindai yujing zhong de 'shanshui' yu 'fengjing': yi «Guohua yekan» 'Zhongxi shanshuihua sixiang zhuanhao' wei zhongxin" 近代语境中的'山水'与'风景'. 以«国画月刊» '中西山水画思想专号' 为中心, *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 1 (2006): 107-120.

Jin Cheng and Chen Hengque were Beijing-based painters and founders of the Chinese Painting Research Society (*Zhongguohua xue yanjiuhui* 中国画学会), whose mission was to strongly defend Chinese art forms and artistic heritage through exhibitions of antiquities and paintings. Chen Hengque, also known as Chen Shizeng, was a Japan-trained artist who firstly studied oil painting and Western drawing techniques, and later developed into the famous scholar who, praising the value of traditional literati painting, aimed to promote it as a symbol of Chinese culture. Arguments for his defense of traditional painting are found in his *Studies of Chinese Literati Painting* (*Zhongguo wenrenhua zhi yanjiu* 中国文人画之研究), dated 1922 and consisting of two texts, the first one entitled *The Value of Literati Painting* (*Wenrenhua zhi jiazhi* 文人画之价值) and written by Chen Hengque, while the second one is the translation of a text written in 1921 by the Japanese art historian Ōmura Seigai and translated by Chen Hengque with the title *Renaissance of Literati Painting* (*Wenrenhua zhi fuxing* 文人画之复兴).

In this study, Chen explains that it is a mistake to equate literati painting with the Four Wang style, the symbol of orthodox court painting harshly criticised by the New Culture Movement's thinkers.³² He emphasizes the philosophical and aesthetic value of *wenrenhua*, underlining that, in the twentieth century, modernist Western painting was moving towards a more introspective figurative direction, free from the yoke of formal likeness. Therefore, the high degree of subjectivity and abstraction that characterized Chinese painting, commonly indicated as the main causes of its impasse, could now be considered as an original sign of modernity. A modernity already announced in the works of Shitao 石涛 (1630-1707) and Bada Shanren 八大山人 (1626-1705), the two individualists of the Qing dynasty that Chen Hengque considered to be the Chinese equivalent of Western avant-garde artists, two painters able to innovate traditional stylistic features by revisiting them in the light of a more original artistic sensibility.

The idea of a stylistically progressive *wenrenhua* is already embodied by a 1908 landscape painting in which Chen takes inspiration from Shitao's pictorial material (fig. 1). The artist proposes an unusual compositional scheme in which the foreground and the background of the painting appear as two nearly symmetrical units. The rocks are the undisputed pictorial subject, portrayed by a refined re-visitation of the *zhedaicun* 折带皴 (broken bands stroke) and deprived of their natural texture in order to become conceptually and substantially related to the rock formations often portrayed by Shitao.

A slightly different perspective was supported by Jin Cheng. Although emphasizing the importance of studying ancient masters, he did not particularly appreciate the ideal of literati painting, preferring – like many reformist thinkers – the realistic style of Tang and Song court painting. His whole pictorial production followed this aesthetic dogma and, few years before his death, the artist created

³² See Julia F. Andrews and Shen Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, 48.

one of his last antique-looking landscapes, making use of the ancient blue-and-green style with “a little adjustment to the method of ancient masters” (小变古法), as he recorded in the colophon (fig. 2). In this painting, the compositional structure, the use of shaping lines and brush strokes remain traditional, while the use of color becomes much more vivid and there is an accurate depiction of light, obtained by emphasizing the features of traditional blue-and-green style of painting.

In his essay titled “Lecture Notes for the Study of Painting” (*Huaxue jiangyi* 画学讲义), Jin Cheng clarifies the concept of adjusting the old method and affirms:

世间事务，皆可作新旧之论，独于绘画事业，无新旧之论。我国自唐迄今，名手何代蔑有？各名人之所以成为名人者，何尝鄙前人之画为旧画。亦谨守古人之门径，推广古人之意。深知无旧无新，新即是旧，化其旧虽旧亦新，泥其新虽新亦旧。

All affairs in the world can be discussed as old or new, but the painting is different, for its works cannot be simply characterized as old or new. In our country, from the Tang dynasty until now, what period has been without its eminent masters? These famous people did not become famous by denigrating their predecessors' paintings as outdated. Rather, they kept faith with the path of the ancients and perpetuated their intentions. They were well aware that there is neither old nor new, that what is new is also old, because when the old is transformed, its oldness is also new, and if one sticks to mere novelty, then what is new will also be old.³³

Old and new, two antonyms that englobe the intense debate between tradition and modernity occurred in China during the first half of the twentieth century. The painter chooses these two terms to point up that the old is not necessarily synonymous with backwardness, with outdated and outmoded styles, as well as the new is not necessarily synonymous with originality and innovation, in contrast with the traditional repertoire.

The importance of combining old and new was fundamental also in the artistic research of Qi Baishi.³⁴ Qi was an humble Hunan craftsman who did not receive a classical education. He started to study painting by coping from the famous Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting (*Jieziyuan huapu* 芥子园画谱, 1882), acquiring skill in the detailed *gongbi* 工笔 technique, as well as in calligraphy and seal carving. During the 1920s, the fifty-year-old painter moved to Beijing, the centre of the National Essence movement, where he was introduced to local art circles by Chen Hengque. In this period, his style underwent a radical transformation. The artist discovered the works of Shitao and Bada Shanren and, once again, tradition was the starting point to conceive innovation, leading the painter to a new pictorial

³³ Quoted in Chen Zhuanxi, *Zhongguo huihua meixue shi*, 589.

³⁴ For a biography of the artist see Lin Haoji 林浩基, *Qi Baishi zhuan* 齐白石传 (Beijing: Xuefan chubanshe, 2005). See also Britta Erickson and J. May Lee Barrett J. May, *Modern Ink. The Art of Qi Baishi* (Berkeley: Mozhai Foundation, 2014).

form based on a much more abstract and spontaneous style. This stylistic variation is clearly observable in artist's landscape paintings.³⁵ From the detailed landscapes painted during the 1910s and unusually depicted in *gongbi* style, he turns to the sceneries of the 1920s characterized by a marked naïf sensitivity and defined by a greater simplification of form, to finally arrive to the views of the 1930s in which the form appears reduced to a minimum, but enhanced by intense and lively colors. Typical of Qi Baishi's new style of painting is *Mount Yun after Rain* (fig. 3), in which a renewed literati style coexists with the imprint of the ancient masters. Qi paints a landscape reminiscent of Mi Fu 米芾 (1051-1107) style and composed by a well-thought overlapping of rounded brush strokes, with two river banks bulge with lush vegetation and rendered through light washes of grey tones ink. The compositional scheme remains unaltered compared with the traditional canons of pictorial composition, retaining the tripartite division of space and the rhythmic alternation of the composite units, while the replacement of tradition is achieved through a painting technique that defines the transition from the structured form to the structure of the form. In line with artist's theory according to which "the beauty of a painting consists in achieving the balance between resemblance and non resemblance" (作画在似与不似之间为妙),³⁶ the depiction of form tends towards a greater degree of precision, while the variegated chromatic density of the brushstroke depicts the constitutive components of the painting through multiple layers and tones of ink.

Another prominent figure in the development and popularization of traditional painting was Huang Binhong.³⁷ Born into a wealthy merchant family of Anhui, where he received a classical education, Huang lived between Shanghai, Beijing and Hangzhou, the most important centres of Chinese modern art. He was an art teacher, an editor of the journal *Guohua yuekan* and a painter who devoted his whole life to study and promote Chinese traditional art, writing a large number of essays and editing various thematic publications.³⁸ Among the so-called Traditionalists, Huang was for sure one of the most orthodox in his stylistic choices, as proved by his many landscapes realized during the late 1920s and early 1930s and conceived as a fusion of pictorial and compositional techniques developed by the

³⁵ For a complete collection of Qi Baishi's paintings see Lang Shaojun 郎绍群 and Guo Tianmin 郭天民, *Qi Baishi quanji* 齐白石全集 (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1996).

³⁶ Quoted in Chen Zhuanxi, *Zhongguo huihua meixue shi*, 612

³⁷ For a biography of the artist, see Wang Zhongxiu 王中秀, *Huang Binhong huazhuan* 黄宾虹画传 (Shanghai: Shanghai huabao chubanshe, 2006). For a complete collection of Huang Binhong's paintings, see Wei Yuanhui 委员会, *Huang Binhong quanji* 黄宾虹全集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 2006).

³⁸ For an overview of Huang Binhong's research activity, see Chen Chiyu 陈池瑜, "Huang Binhong dui Zhongguo meishu shixue yanjiu de gongxian" 黄宾虹对中国美术史学研究的贡献, *Duoyun* 朵云 67/1 (2008): 59-79. See also Wan Qingli 万青力, "Huang Binhong yu 'Daoxian huaxue zhongxing' shuo" 黄宾虹与'道咸画学中兴'说, *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 6 (2004): 100-107.

old masters such as Ju Ran 巨然 (ca. 975-993), Huang Gongwang 黄公望 (1269-1354) and Wang Meng (ca. 1308-1385) (fig. 4).³⁹

However, Huang Binhong's painting never turned out to mere copy. In his essay "The Essentials of Chinese Painting" (*Huafa yaozhi* 画法要旨), published in 1934, Huang affirmed that "learning from the old masters is not the slavish copying of works of art" (鉴古非为复古),⁴⁰ but it means to study carefully their technical knowledge, revisiting their pictorial repertoire in search of an innovative visual language. In this way, it is possible to elaborate new stylistic languages without learning from Western modern art, but simply analyzing the numberless expressive possibilities of Chinese ink painting technique.⁴¹ Huang Binhong clearly explains his idea of interaction between classical stylistic features and modern visual forms in a letter dated 1948 and addressed to Su Qianying 苏乾英 (1910-1996), where he wrote:

画无中西之分，有笔有墨，纯任自然，由形似进于神似，即西法之印象抽象。近言野兽派，又如明吴小仙，张平山，郭清狂，蒋三松等学马远，夏圭，而笔墨不趋于正轨，世谓野狐禅。

In painting, there is no need to distinguish between Chinese and Western tradition. With brushwork and inkwork, it is possible to be in accordance with nature and move from formal resemblance to expressive likeness, that is to move from Impressionism to Abstract art of Western tradition. The Fauves are like the Ming dynasty painters Wu Xiaoxian, Zhang Pingshan, Guo Qingkuang, Jiang Sansong and the others who, studying the work of Ma Yuan and Xia Gui and using an unconventional painting technique, created the so-called "wild fox" style of Chan painting.⁴²

Like Chen Hengque, also Huang identifies in traditional ink painting's aesthetic an highly modernist potential, and the right way to develop this intrinsic potential was to "return to origins" (*fanben* 返本), in other words, to revisit old content in order to promote the new form. In the light of revisiting the ancients, Huang Binhong developed his distinctive style and created his most representative landscapes, mostly realized during the 1940s, when the artist was eighty years old and became almost blind because of a serious illness that weakened his sight. This situation led him to elaborate a new painting technique visible in his dense and dark

³⁹ Cf. Wen C. Fong, *Between Two Cultures. Late-Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Chinese Paintings from Robert H. Ellsworth Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 163-164.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Wang Zhongxiu, *Huang Binhong huazhuan*, 436.

⁴¹ For a good analysis of Huang Binhong's theory of modern painting, see Jason C. Kuo, *Transforming Traditions in Modern Chinese Painting. Huang Pin-hung's Late Work* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004).

⁴² Quoted in Shang Hui 尚辉, "Lun Huang Binhong yishu de Haipai wenhua tezheng: 20 shijichu Haishang wenhua duiyu queli Huang Binhong yishu sixiang de yingxiang" 论黄宾虹艺术的海派文化特征: 20世纪初上海文化对于确立黄宾虹艺术思想的影响, *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 6 (2004): 110.

landscapes, characterized by an expressive brushwork, an highly chromatic density and a rhythmic alternation between full and empty spaces (fig. 5). These landscapes, realized through an irregular contour line and overlapped layers of ink, become the result of an instinctive painting that tap into the memories of a distant visual and sensory memory.

The importance of rediscovering the origin of Chinese painting, as well as its value and its possible development, was a central issue also in the artistic research of Pan Tianshou,⁴³ whose most famous landscapes were realized during the spreading of a politically oriented artistic production. Born in Zhejiang province in a cultured family, Pan Tianshou studied ink painting from an early age and became a famous *guohua* painter and instructor, working at some of the most important art institutions. In 1926, the year in which Lin Fengmian enunciated his theory of combining Eastern and Western pictorial tradition, Pan Tianshou published his *History of Chinese Painting* (*Zhongguo huihua shi* 中国绘画史), in which he showed himself highly dubious about the principle of stylistic fusion, opting for the compresence (*bingcun* 并存) of the two different artistic traditions. Even if he studied Western drawing under Li Shutong 李叔同 (1881-1942) and recognized the value of Western art, Pan believed that each artistic tradition is the visual transposition of a specific cultural heritage, with its own uniqueness, and the attempt to combine Eastern and Western painting involves the risk of run down their value, betraying their peculiarities.

For Pan, who in 1932 established the White Society (*Baishhe* 白社) to promote Chinese ink painting, the renewing of pictorial language meant to turn the same content into new form by refreshing old technique. In this perspective, he conceived an innovative organization of the compositional scheme in which the elements are deliberately arranged according to criteria that, generally, would compromise the visual balance. However, this effect is neutralized by a well-thought balancing of full and empty spaces that determines a dynamic and harmonious composition, dominated by the dialectic interaction between opposite but complementary units.⁴⁴ This compositional principle, defined by Chinese critics as “creating danger and annulling danger” (*zaoxian poxian* 造险破险),⁴⁵ is clearly visible in the whole pictorial production of the artist, also in his most significant landscape

⁴³ For a biography of the artist, see Xu Hong 徐虹, *Pan Tianshou zhuan* 潘天寿传 (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 1997). For an overview of Pan Tianshou's theory of art, see Lu Xinxuan 卢忻选, *Pan Tianshou lunyi* 潘天寿论艺 (Shanghai: shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2010).

⁴⁴ Cf. Pan Gongkai 潘公凯, *Pan Tianshou huihua jifa jianxi* 潘天寿绘画技法简析 (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 1995). This work, edited by Pan Tianshou's son, collects various studies and compositional schemes realized by the artist during his long-lasting painting activity. For a collection of Pan Tianshou's paintings, see Pan Gongkai, *Pan Tianshou shuhuaji* 潘天寿书画集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 1996).

⁴⁵ Cf. Claire Roberts, “Tradition and Modernity: the Life and Art of Pan Tianshou (1897-1971),” *East Asian History* 15/16 (1998): 76-77.

paintings, realized during the 1950s and 1960s, when the political influence of Marxism deeply influenced Chinese art theory and ink painting became an instrument of Communist Party's political propaganda. An interesting example of this new politically oriented *guohua* is a landscape realized in 1955 and entitled *A nook of Lingyan gully* (fig. 6).

The painting depicts a real place near Hangzhou and is perfectly in line with the party's new artistic directives on painting from nature in a realistic and popular style. The accurate depiction of flowers, grass and rocks, enhanced by a skilful balance between the color appeal and the lyrical quality of ink, grants the realistic effect without neglecting the decorative quality of the image. In regard to the idea of bringing original insight on tradition, Pan renounces the depth of field given by the tripartition of compositional scheme and opts for a foreground that makes the watcher an integral part of the scene, let him observing all the details from a very reduced distance. However, this renewed structure of pictorial space, as well as his focus on small details of the landscape, are reminiscent of stylistic innovations introduced by Shitao and Bada Shanren, two artists deeply admired by Pan Tianshou.

In a period of great cultural and political change, during which traditional painting faced fundamental questions about its position and its role in a renewed art world challenged by western-derived concept of art, all these conservative artists stated that ink painting did not have to be synonymous with backwardness. In terms of artistic research, they made significant contributions to the development of Chinese landscape painting, promoting their idea of stylistic interaction. Jin Cheng turned the same content into a new form in the way of a little adjustment to the orthodox style of the old masters, Chen Hengque and Qi Baishi were more stylistically involved in matter of *wenrenhua* aesthetics and enhanced the importance of a subjective style based on painter's own personal feelings and sensations, while Huang Binhong and Pan Tianshou shared a more scholarly approach toward innovation.

Continuity and innovation: synthesizing East and West

For those who conceived artistic interaction as an exchange between autochthonous and not autochthonous pictorial traditions, innovation meant to find out a stylistic compromise between Chinese and Western painting requirements. A formal analysis of works executed by Gao Jianfu, Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian proves that these progressive painters needed a more radical approach to the artistic interaction and tried to introduce drawing techniques and formalist languages into traditional landscape painting.

Gao Jianfu⁴⁶ was a Cantonese painter and one of the founder of Lingnan Scho-

⁴⁶ For a biography of the painter, see Pan Zhibiao 潘智彪, *Gao Jianfu zhuan* 高剑父传 (Guangzhou:

ol (*Lingnan huapai* 岭南画派), which held a central role in the development of a new pictorial method based on the fusion of traditional painting with figurative styles and techniques borrowed from Western realistic approach to depiction.⁴⁷ Gao's naturalistic manner of painting derived from his apprenticeship conducted in Guangzhou – one of the southern centres under Western control for long time and one of the most influenced by Western art techniques – where he studied ink painting for eleven years under the famous local bird and flower painter Ju Lian 居廉. In 1906, he went to Japan for few years and there he discovered and studied *nihonga* (日本画), the modern version of Japanese traditional painting in which the classic repertoire was combined with elements borrowed from the nineteenth-century European Naturalism. After returning from Japan, Gao tried to apply this formula to traditional Chinese art, incorporating some Western techniques, such as chiaroscuro, linear perspective and drawing, into Chinese-style painting. In his view, this was the only way to render Chinese painting more realistic, realizing a perfect synthesis between two different artistic traditions in order to obtain the highest level of expressiveness.

In early twentieth century China, realism was a new aesthetic canon deeply related to the establishment of new social ideas, as clearly stated in Gao Jianfu's study titled "My Views on Modern National Painting" (*Wo de xiandai Guohua guan* 我的现代国画观). In this essay, based on a series of lectures held by the artist between 1936 and 1937 at the Nanjing Arts Institute and posthumously published,⁴⁸ Gao Jianfu exposed his programmatic guidelines to implement an artistic revolution (*yishu geming* 艺术革命) that, in an era marked by political instability, modernist pressures and imperialist interferences as was during the first half of the twentieth century, was equivalent to innovate traditional painting in order to legitimate it as an expression of national cultural power. Gao expressed this attitude after he followed, during his staying in Japan, the revolutionary organization *Tongmenhui* (同盟会), translating his political involvement in revolutionary movements into a kind of theoretical manifesto claiming the need to revolutionize Chinese painting, just as Chen Duxiu did.

Gao's purpose was to promote a new style of Chinese painting (*xin guohua* 新国画) endowed with a good balance between Chinese and Western elements. However, the pictorial transformation did not imply the whole westernization of Chinese artistic nature, but it consisted on borrowing from the outside all those elements useful to renew its own expressive languages. In other words, it was necessary "to

Guandong lüyou chubanshe, 2003).

⁴⁷ For a detailed study about the Lingnan School, see Ralph Croizier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906-1951* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). See also Mayching Kao, *The Art of the Gao Brothers of the Lingnan School* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1995).

⁴⁸ See Ralph Croizier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906-1951*, 110.

find a compromise between China and the West, to merge the past with the present” (折衷中西, 融合古今).⁴⁹ In his “My Views on Modern National Painting”, Gao explained what he meant for “compromise between China and the West”:

旧国画之好处, 注重笔墨与气韵。[...] 用笔, 用墨, 用色是绘画构成条件之一部耳。有以哲理入画, 诗意入画, 书法入画, 这是表现我们东方精神的高超处。[...] 新国画除保留旧国画之形象技法与精神外, 更重于气候, 空气与物质之表现。

Among the merits of old Chinese painting, great attention has been put to brushwork and spirit. [...] The use of brush, ink and color are essential components of pictorial structure. Moreover, philosophy, poetry and calligraphy that permeate painting, represent the most sublime form of our Eastern essence. [...] The new Chinese painting, besides preserving the figurative technique and the spirit typical of the old painting tradition, had to concentrate more on rendering climatic condition, atmosphere and matter.⁵⁰

The landscape painted by Gao in 1935 is exemplificative of his “new guohua” style (fig. 7). In this work, the use of perspective enhances the detailed *gongbi* style and connotes a more realistic depiction of landscape, while the use of traditional painting media such as brush and ink preserves the lyrical quality of *guohua*. The result is a landscape in which formal resemblance and the spirit of the old painting tradition coexist in a harmonic way.

Xu Beihong⁵¹ also was an advocate of European realism. Born in Jiangsu province, he began to study painting at an early age and in 1919 moved to France, where he studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, receiving a considerable academic training. During his stay in Paris, Xu was much influenced by the French Realist painters and their attempt to represent reality truthfully, detaching himself from the creative requirements of Chinese painting, a perspective already expressed in his “Methods of Reforming Chinese Painting” (*Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa* 中国画改良之方法), a lecture gave in 1918 to the Peking University Painting Techniques Research Society.

According to the painter’s conception, the only way to modernize Chinese painting was to apply drawing techniques into ink painting practice, combining Western realism with traditional Chinese brushwork. Throughout his artistic ca-

⁴⁹ Quoted in Song Huisu 宋会苏, “Geming huashi Gao Jianfu” 革命画师高剑父, in *Yishu de lishi yu shishi. Ershi shiji Zhongguo yishushi de ruogan wenti yanjiu: 1900-1949* 艺术的历史与事实. 20世纪中国艺术史的若干课题研究: 1900-1949, ed. Lü Peng 吕澎 (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 2006), 142.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Wang Jia 王嘉, “Gao Jianfu yishu geming lun” 高剑父艺术革命论, *Zhongguo meishu yanjiu* 中国美术研究 2 (2008): 34.

⁵¹ For a biography of the painter, see Wang Zhen 王震, *Xu Beihong nianpu changbian* 徐悲鸿年谱长编 (Shanghai: Shanghai huabao chubanshe, 2006). For a collection of Xu Beihong’s works, see Xu Qingping 徐庆平, *Xu Beihong canghua xuanji* 徐悲鸿藏画选集, (Beijing: Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, 1992).

reer, he tried to understand how to apply these art criteria to landscape painting and, in 1937, he developed a much more naturalistic form of landscape depiction (fig. 8). In this painting, the composition is dictated by what the artist sees around him: a row of mountains whose size decreases as distance increases, enveloped with a thick fog that pervades the entire scene. Xu divides the composition in half by placing the horizon across the middle of the painting and uses a realistic style of drawing to enhance the beautiful natural scenery of the Guangxi countryside.

According to Xu Beihong's opinion, drawing was the foundation of all plastic and visual arts, as he wrote in another essay dated 1947 and titled "The Problem of Art in Today's China" (*Dangqian Zhongguo zhi yishu wenti* 当前中国之艺术问题),⁵² and this rule was valid also for *shanshuihua*. In his article "Random Talks on Landscape Painting" (*Mantan shanshuihua* 漫谈山水画), written in 1950, Xu Beihong stated that *shanshuihua* should follow the same figurative principles of Western landscape painting, paying attention to spatial disposal and formal resemblance.⁵³

The stylistic choices made by Lin Fengmian⁵⁴ were completely different, based on the integration of ink painting with figurative solutions inspired by Western formalist languages. Born in Guandong province, Lin began his artistic career in 1919, when he won a scholarship to Europe and became a French-trained artist. He firstly studied oil painting at the Dijon Art College and, in 1921 he started to study at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts of Paris. In 1926 he returned to China and published his first essay in which he enunciated his theory of combining Eastern and Western pictorial tradition (*tiaohe dongxi yishu* 调和东西艺术):

西方艺术是以模仿自然为中心，结果倾向于写实一方面。东方艺术是以描写想象为主，结果倾向于写意一方面。[...] 前一种寻求表现的形式在自身之外，后一种寻求表现的形式在自身之内。[...] 东方艺术之所以应沟通而调和便是这个缘故。 Western art is based on imitating nature and it tends to realistic depiction. Oriental art is based on imaginative depiction and it tends to abstract portrayal. [...] The form of expression sought by Western art lies in the outward appearance, that one sought by Oriental art lies in the inward component. [...] For these reasons, the Eastern and Western art had to combine and to harmonize each other.⁵⁵

⁵² Cf. Wang Zhen 王震, *Xu Beihong lunyi* 徐悲鸿论艺 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2010), 181.

⁵³ Cf. Wang Zhen, *Xu Beihong lunyi*, 206.

⁵⁴ For a biography of the artist, see Zheng Zhong 郑重, *Lin Fengmian zhuan* 林风眠传 (Nanchang: Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 1999). See also Lang Shaojun 郎绍君, *Zhongguo ming huajia quanji: Lin Fengmian* 中国名画家全集. 林风眠 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyi chubanshe, 2002). For a complete collection of Lin Fengmian's works, see Du Ziling 杜滋龄, *Lin Fengmian quanji* 林风眠全集 (Tianjin: Tianjin meishu chubanshe, 1994). For an overview of Lin Fengmian's theory of art, see Zhu Pu 朱朴, *Lin Fengmian lunyi* 林风眠论艺 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2010).

⁵⁵ Lin Fengmian, "Dongxi yishu zhi qiantu" 东西艺术之前途, *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志 23/10 (1926): 102.

Although attracted by the expressive power of Impressionism, Fauvism and German Expressionism, Lin believed that Chinese art could rescue itself only by combining in harmonious proportion the subjectivity of Chinese ink painting together with Western objective theory of depiction. However, his idea of objective depiction was not the same one claimed by Gao Jianfu and Xu Beihong, it was a stylistic advice to avoid losing sight of the properties of the visual objects while working in a more expressive style. In his essay titled “The New Chinese Painting Theory” (*Zhongguo huihua xinlun* 中国绘画新论) and written in 1929, the artist highlights the importance of what he calls the ‘simplified form’, that means to represent the main features of visual objects, in order to turn the viewer’s attention to the iconic element.⁵⁶

Landscape paintings realized by Lin Fengmian represent a clear example of this conceptual evolution of *xieyi* style. Although Lin began to portray sceneries between 1939 and the mid-1970s, his most indicative landscapes were realized during the 1960s and represent an example of a perfect osmosis between traditional aesthetics and stylistic innovations.⁵⁷ The chromatics is, undoubtedly, the most representative feature of Lin’s *shanshuihua*. In his *Mountain Wood* (fig. 9), the simplified form of visual objects is combined with a bold use of color, clearly derived from the Fauve style, and a strong interest in water reflection, clearly derived from the Impressionist style. His careful attention to soften colors and mix warm and cold colors highlights the stylistic fusion between different pictorial traditions.⁵⁸ In his view, the combination of Eastern and Western painting requirements can solve the gap between a figurative solution tending towards subjective reality and the other one oriented towards objective reality, getting the best out of both processes. According to Lin Fengmian’s opinion, the notion of stylistic synthesis should be understood as a means to internalize a different aesthetic thought in order to gain a new subjective stylistic language.⁵⁹

These progressive artists stated the necessity of transforming ink painting into a modern stylistic compromise between Eastern and Western painting traditions, making in this way their contribution to the evolution of *shanshuihua*. Gao Jianfu and Xu Beihong focused their attention on the structured style of realistic approach to depiction, while Lin Fengmian stressed the idea of an expressive style

⁵⁶ Cf. Lin Fengmian, *Yishu cong lun* 艺术丛论 (Zhengzhong: Zhengzhong shuju, 1935), 133.

⁵⁷ For a detailed study about the neo-traditional style of Lin Fengmian’s painting, see Zhao Xinge 赵欣歌, *Lin Fengmian yu Zhongguohua xin chuantong* 林风眠与中国画新传统 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyi chubanshe, 2009).

⁵⁸ For an account of Western components in Lin Fengmian’s art, see David Clarke, “Exile from Tradition. Chinese and Western Traits in the Art of Lin Fengmian,” *Oriental Art* 39/4 (1993/1994): 22-29.

⁵⁹ Cf. Lang Shaojun, “Chuangzao xin de shenmei jigou. Lin Fengmian dui huihua xingshi de tansuo” 创造新的审美机构. 林风眠对绘画形式的探索, in *Lin Fengmian yanjiu wenji* 林风眠研究文集, ed. Zheng Chao 郑朝 (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 1995), 188-218.

based on the interrelation between color and shape. Their idea of stylistic interaction was based on the right compromise between the assimilation of Western visual languages and the full understanding of traditional Chinese aesthetics.

Conclusions

In the early twentieth century China, some artists of varied backgrounds, experiences and theoretical perspectives, developed a new kind of pictorial structure based on the practice of artistic interaction (*ronghe* 融合), in order to turn ink painting into a new form of artistic expression.

My analysis of textual sources and landscape paintings realized from the 1910s to the 1960s by the main pioneers of this innovative approach shows that, in a period of great cultural and political change, artistic interaction was understood as an indispensable practice, essential to the actualization of Chinese painting on the basis of the Chinese traditional culture. However, artistic interaction was not a fixed concept and I have identified two different approaches towards the establishment of new aesthetic criteria in relation to Chinese ink painting: one side was the synthesis between tradition and modernism in order to translate classical stylistic features into a modern visual form, while the other side was the merging of Eastern and Western pictorial languages in order to create a synthesis between classical features and elements borrowed from Western artistic repertoire.

The ways in which artists innovated the figurative repertoire of landscape painting can be divided as follows: to extrapolate from *wenrenhua* and from traditional painting new stylistic possibilities such as new compositional structures and new approach to ink and color techniques; to combine traditional Chinese brushwork with Western Realism or Formalism. Despite the obvious stylistic differences between their work, tradition was seen as an integral part of innovation, while innovation was constructed in relation to traditional heritage by painters who made their contribution to Chinese modern art world in three main dimensions: artistic creation, theoretical research and promotion of art knowledge through art associations and writings. Moreover, modern ink painting was also related to the idea of a modern nation state and helped to restore a strong Chinese identity through the importance of its culture.

As may be concluded from the landscape paintings presented in this paper and analyzed in relation to artists' theoretical perspective, the practice of artistic interaction helps to overcome the idea of three general and opposing stylistic trends and emerges as their common stylistic element, reshaping the identity of modern Chinese painting and representing a valid interpretative key to investigate its process of modernization. Artistic interaction maintains a subtle balance between traditional ideology and modernist impulse and this perspective raises the fundamental question about what is supposed to be traditional or modern in the shifting

cultural context of the first half of the twentieth century, with its important political changes, new social conditions and new relationships with Western cultural and artistic system.

Artistic practices reveal a lot about the perception of the world and, in order to better understand the dynamics of artistic exchanges between China and the West, the concept of artistic interaction should be further explored.

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Fig. 1: Chen Hengque, *Landscape (Shanshui 山水)*, 1908, ink and color on paper, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.



Fig. 2: Jin Cheng, *Autumn Mountains after Rain* (*Qiushan yuhou* 秋山雨后), 1924, ink and color on paper, National Art Museum of China, Beijing.



Fig. 3: Qi Baishi, *Mount Yun after Rain* (Yuhou Yunshan 雨后云山), 1920s, ink on paper, private collection.



Fig. 4: Huang Binhong, *Ten Thousand Valleys in Deep Shade* (Wan shenyin shangu 万深影山谷), 1933, ink and color on paper, private collection.



Fig. 5: Huang Binhong, *Landscape in the Style of Dong Qichang* (*Fang Dong Qichang shanshui* 仿董其昌山水), late 1940s, ink and color on paper, private collection.

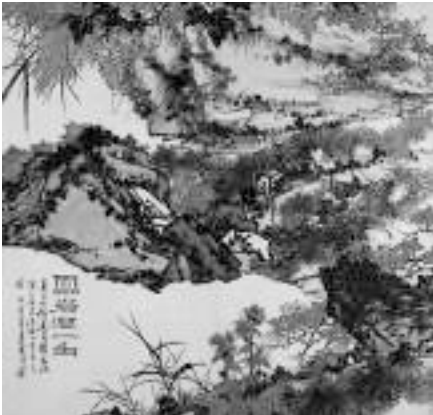


Fig. 6: Pan Tianshou, *A nook of Lingyan gully* (*Lingyan jian yijiao* 灵岩涧一角), 1955, ink and color on paper, National Art Museum of China, Beijing.



Fig. 7: Gao Jianfu, *The Fishing Harbor in Rain* (*Yugang yuse 渔港雨色*), 1935, ink and color on paper, National Art Museum of China, Beijing.



Fig. 8: Xu Beihong, *Spring Rain on the Li River* (*Lijiang chunyu 漓江春雨*), 1937, ink on paper, Xu Beihong Museum, Beijing.



Fig. 9: Lin Fengmian, *Mountain wood* (*Shanlin 山林*), 1960s, ink and color on paper, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai.

GIANLUIGI NEGRO

FROM WEB 2.0 TO SOLOMO
(FROM SINA WEIBO TO WEIXIN)

Intro

This contribution aims to present the first years of Weixin (also known as We Chat), a multi-platform mobile application originated in China – a development by Tencent Holdings Limited of its already successful QQ messaging app. The present article provides a historical framework highlighting the main competitors of Wechat, investigating the causes of its impressive growth. The central focus will be dedicated to 2013, considered the “year of Wechat” and the first steps aiming to promote the service outside of Chinese borders. In July 2013 the China Internet Network Information Center published its 32nd statistical report on Internet development in China. At the end of June 2013 China confirmed its status as the most populated nation in terms of Internet users with 591 million online citizens. The Internet penetration index has grown constantly in recent years: from 31.8% registered users in June 2010 - 420 million – to the more recent 44.1%.¹

One of the most important trends of the last decade was the boom in the number of mobile Internet users, which rose from 233 million in December 2009 to 463 million in July 2013. The importance of mobile is also highlighted by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) which in January 2013 confirmed that in China there were 1.1 billion mobile users; that is, 82.6% of the population.² Moreover, the link between the Internet and mobile has a significant economic value; indeed, the three main Telco operators (China Telecom, China Unicom and China Mobile) together accounted for 309.5 million clients using 3G standard.³

¹ CNNIC, “32nd Statistical Report on Internet Development in China”, *Di 32 Ci Zhongguo Hulianwangluo Fazhan Zhuankuang Tongji Baogao*, 《第32次中国互联网络发展状况统计报告》, June 17, 2013. Accessed March 11, 2016, http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzjy/hlwzxbg/hlwtjbg/201307/t20130717_40664.htm, p. 11

² “MIIT Coordinates Telco Plans to Charge for WeChat”, *Beijing Times*, January 4, 2013. Accessed March 11, 2016, http://www.marbridgeconsulting.com/marbridgedaily/archive/article/64735/miit_coordinates_telco_plans_to_charge_for_wechat.

³ At the end of May 2013 China Mobile counted 129.4 million clients using TD-SCDMA standards (a similar 3G standard but not supported by some Apple devices such as iPhone and iPad), China

The number of Chinese Internet mobile users grew by 70% in the first semester of 2013. This result is even more remarkable when compared to growth of PC usage (35.4%) and laptop usage (12.7%) (CNNIC 2013). Another interesting aspect is the balanced growth of mobile Internet in rural and urban areas, 78.4% and 78.9%, respectively. This is a new trend considering that there is a PC usage gap between rural (58.8%) and urban areas (73.6%).⁴

Looking at the most popular activities on the Internet in China, the CNNIC report states that the most popular applications are: instant messaging (84.2%; 497 million users), search engines (79.6%; 470 million users), online news (78%; 460 million users), microblogs (56%; 330 million users) and social networks (48%; 288 million users).

2013 - *The year of Weixin (Wechat)*

One of the most commonly discussed topics in the Chinese media in 2013 was the success of Weixin, a Tencent designed multi-platform mobile application with instant text, voice, and video messaging service. It is worth noting that Tencent is considered one of the 'three kings' of the Chinese Internet along with the e-commerce platform Alibaba and the Chinese search engine Baidu.

Weixin's popularity is based on the fact that it can be used on most of the mobile platforms worldwide such as Android, iPhone, Black Berry, Windows Phone and Symbian. Its functions include texting, asynchronous one-to-one or one-to-many voice broadcasting, file, photo and video sharing. Other more original features differentiate Weixin from its competitors. Some examples include the 'shake' feature, which localizes new users all around the world who would like to interact in that moment with other new users. 'Look around' is another feature aimed at finding new users located nearby and who would like to get in touch with other users, a service provided by a GPS integrated in the smartphones. 'Drift bottle' is another new feature: a text or voice message is broadcast and sent to unknown users who want to start a conversation with new users.

Another aspect, which can explain the success of Weixin, is its social oriented structure. Indeed, it incorporates options that allow new users to subscribe to the service. One of the most popular is to connect a Facebook account, a particularly original option considering that Facebook is blocked in China. An alternative is to use the Tencent QQ account, the most popular social network in China as confirmed by its 798.2 million subscribed users and its peak of 176.4 million users online simultaneously.⁵

Unicom had 95.9 million users, China Telecom 88 million users.

⁴ See note 1, p. 14

⁵ "Tencent Announces 2012 Fourth Quarter and Annual Results", *PR Newswire*, March 20, 2013. Accessed March 11, 2016, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/tencent-announces-2012-fourth-quarter-and-annual-results-199130711.html>.

The growth of Weixin

The growth of Weixin has been steady and at the same time remarkable. After January 2011, when the service was officially launched, Weixin began to increase its user base. Indeed, after 24 months Weixin's growth was already twenty times more than that of Facebook, the most used social network in the world but blocked in China. After its first 12 months, Facebook had 9 million subscribed users while Weixin counted 180 million.⁶

The success of Weixin can be explained not only by the number of users registered in mainland China but also those outside its national borders. In April 2012 Tencent released the English version of Weixin, called 'We Chat', to promote the brand internationally. Another successful decision was to translate the application into several languages. Weixin can be used in Chinese (simplified and traditional characters), English, Indonesian, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, Malaysian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Italian, Thai, Vietnamese, Hindi and Russian. It is possible to argue that that strategy has been successful since, at the time of publication of this article, Weixin had 400 million subscribers with 100 million of these located outside of China. For the first time in China's Internet history, a Chinese Internet service successfully entered the foreign market. This result is particularly important for Tencent because it enhances the credibility of the company as a whole around the world compared to its main competitors: the search engine Baidu and the news portal Sina.

Baidu has tried to challenge Google in the international search engine market. In 2007 they launched Baidu Japan and in 2011 they entered into a partnership with Orange, a major French mobile telecommunication company, to create a new browser for the Arab and African markets. In the same year Baidu also launched its 'knowledge market' (Baidu Zhidao) service in Egypt and the web directory Hao123 was translated into Thai for the Thai market. Nevertheless, none of the above-mentioned investments have been successful so far.

Sina Weibo was launched in August 2009 and grew to become the most popular microblogging platform in China. Sina Weibo has also had several unsuccessful attempts to join the international market, including the translation of its service into English in January 2013. Another attempt was in August 2011 when the microblog platform topped 200 million subscribers. To celebrate this event they purchased an advertising space on the NASDAQ screen in Times Square, which said 'share happiness with 200 million people here'. However, the growth of non-Chinese users was not relevant. Nevertheless, in the same month Alexa.com, the famous commercial

⁶ "User Base Growth: WeChat doing better than Facebook", *VALUE2020 - Internet Market*, posted on October 26, 2012. Accessed March 11, 2016, <http://value2020.wordpress.com/2012/10/26/user-base-growth-comparing-with-facebook-wechat-doing-better/>.

web traffic service, communicated that Sina Weibo ranked seventh in the list of the most visited Chinese websites.

Sina Weibo's success was built differently than that of Weixin, which can be considered the first Chinese Internet service truly successful outside Chinese borders. Aside from the abovementioned features, it is important to note that Weixin was promoted also in the traditional media, television in particular. An original choice which differentiates Weixin from other Chinese and Western social networks. For instance, in July 2013 in Italy, the most popular Italian television channels began to broadcast a spot in which the famous football player Lionel Messi provides a celebrity endorsement for Weixin. Messi is not only the celebrity endorser but his role is important for another marketing strategy: all of Messi's fans can follow his updates seeing all the texts, messages and videos shared by the player on his profile.⁷ This promotional activity may sound new to the European and American markets but it has been a fairly common strategy in China since 2005 when the blog was branded the 'Chinese Internet phenomenon' of the year. Sina, which also provides one of the most popular blogging platforms, began to forge partnerships with Chinese sports celebrities, famous actors and journalists to promote its on-line platform. Some years later, Tencent and Sina adopted the same strategy to promote their microblog platforms. During an interview in Beijing in August 2013, Lu Jia, Tencent Weibo's content manager, confirmed that "in order to promote microblogs Tencent enters into contracts with popular Chinese journalists who are required to update their profile at least once a day against reimbursement of 5-7 Yuan (0.6 Euro) for each character posted" (personal communication, 17 August 2013).⁸

According to the statistics provided by TechinAsia, the Asian competitors took longer to reach their first 50 million users. For instance, the Japanese rival Lite reached that milestone after 13 months while for the Korean Kakaitalk it took more than 27 months. Weixin had more than 50 million subscribed users in less than one year. Moreover, Lite had to wait a semester to double its users and then another six months to reach 150 million users. Weixin reached the 100 million users milestone in eighteen months and 150 users in twenty-one months. Moreover, six months after its launch, the international marketing strategy reached 200 million subscribers. A GlobalWebIndex report published in August 2013 ranked Weixin fifth of the ten most widely used mobile applications in the world. In this respect, it is also important to note that Weixin is the only non-American application in the ranking.

⁷ Antonio Caffo, "Messi e WeChat, sfida aperta a WhatsApp", *La Stampa*, July 18, 2013. Accessed March 11, 2016, <http://www.lastampa.it/2013/07/18/tecnologia/messi-e-wechat-sfida-aperta-a-whatsapp-yTH2mkemXLh4dKcTPQjQKP/pagina.htm>.

⁸ Like Twitter, the most popular microblog platform in USA and Europe, Sina and Tencent Weibo has a limit of 140 characters.

Nevertheless, despite the Weixin user base, it does not have the same usage index as its international competitors like Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp.⁹ The only country where Weixin holds first place is China with 82% usage. The second highest user count is in Vietnam, where 53% of mobile application users have Weixin. However, as 96% of Vietnamese mobile application users have Whatsapp, it can be argued that the popularity of the American competitor Whatsapp is greater. In the UK the gap between the two services is even wider; in fact, Weixin is used by just 1% of British mobile application users while Whatsapp is used by 49% and Facebook Messenger by 15%.

In the long-term, Weixin will increase its user base because it has a more sound business model. First of all, Weixin is free of charge. Furthermore, in September 2012 it signed a partnership agreement with Tenpay, the online payment system provided by Tencent, one of the three Chinese firms with the highest revenue.¹⁰ Tenpay supports the e-commerce function on Weixin using QR codes, two-dimensional barcodes, which can be translated into information related to the item using a smartphone. It is important to note that Weixin first used the QR code to find new users – each user is assigned a QR code after subscription – while its economic purpose only arrived afterwards.¹¹ The Weixin business model also includes other forms of revenue promoted in summer 2013 such as: online gaming, purchasing emoticons online to personalize text messages, the possibility of opening corporate accounts which allow users to purchase the items using the mobile application. McDonald's was one of the first companies to test the Weixin online channel, offering its followers a discounted price of three yuan for afternoon tea. Of course, all of the online transactions would take place within the Weixin framework.¹² Lastly, while Weixin and Whatsapp are in competition with each other, a notable upgrade to the Whatsapp service was the August 2013 introduction of the function of recording and broadcasting voice messages. Meanwhile, this option was actually inspired by its Chinese competitor's function.¹³

⁹ Kaylene Hong, "WhatsApp's biggest rival WeChat is now being used by over 235 million people per month", *The Next Web*, 2014, Accessed March 11, 2016, <http://thenextweb.com/asia/2013/08/14/whatsapps-biggest-rival-wechat-is-now-being-used-by-over-235-million-people-per-month/#gref>.

¹⁰ The other two companies are Baidu and Alibaba.

¹¹ There are several ways to subscribe to Weixin, one of them is to use the QR code. Other ways are through a mobile number (also outside Chinese borders), email address, QQ account, or a nickname.

¹² He Wei, "Tencent on the Hunt for Online Revenue with WeChat Service", *China Daily Usa*, June 18, 2013. Accessed March 11, 2016, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-06/18/content_16634081.htm.

¹³ Parmy Olson, "WhatsApp Launches Voice Messaging, Hits 300M Monthly Active Users", *Forbes*, August 6, 2013. Accessed March 11, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/parmyolson/2013/08/06/whatsapp-launches-voice-messaging-hits-300m-monthly-active-users/>.

Historic cycles

Although Weixin set impressive records, it is not the first time that a Chinese Internet service has developed so rapidly. While 2013 can be considered ‘Weixin’s year’, 2005 was referred to as ‘the year of the blog’, with a reported 500,000 bloggers in China in January 2005.¹⁴ According to a report in the *South China Morning Post*, in July there were 5 million Chinese bloggers out of 103 million users.¹⁵ At the end of 2005 (October 17) Technorati, one of the most reliable Internet statistics websites, registered 227 million bloggers throughout the world, highlighting the importance of the Chinese market, MSN Spaces and Blogcn.com in particular. Throughout 2005 blogging in China developed at an impressive speed, with one new blogger joining every five seconds.¹⁶

The Internet phenomenon of 2010 was the microblog; indeed the most famous platform in that sector, Sina Weibo, was considered the ‘Chinese Internet Phenomenon of 2010’ in the 2010 Annual Report on China Microblogging published by the Public Opinion Research Laboratory of Shanghai Jiaotong University. Like Weixin, Sina Weibo also reached important milestones in a very short time; 66 days following its inauguration Sina Weibo reached a one million users milestone and eight months after its launch it counted ten million subscribers.¹⁷ On October 20th, Sina announced its first 50 million users, just fourteen months after its launch. Although in July 2013 Sina Weibo announced an 8.3% growth of active users, official data provided by WeiboReach showed a 30% decrease in terms of content. The same research shows that the peak of generated content dates back to October 2012 when they reached 500 million registered users, 46.3 million of them active ones.¹⁸

¹⁴ CNNIC, 17th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China”, *Di 17 Ci Zhongguo Hulianwangluo Fazhan Zhuankuang Tongji Baogao*, 《第17次中国互联网络发展状况统计报告》, July 21, 2005. Accessed March 11, 2016 <http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxyzbg/200906/P020120709345358064145.pdf>

¹⁵ Jamil Anderlini, “Blog founder seeks success writ large”, *South China Morning Post*, May 28, 2007. Accessed March 11, 2016. http://www.govivc.com/attachments/news/89_en.pdf.

¹⁶ Sara Bigatti, “Il Grande Blog”, *Tuttocina - Il portale sulla Cina*, *Mondo Cinese* N. 126, Gennaio-Marzo 2006. Accessed March 11, 2016, http://www.tuttocina.it/Mondo_cinese/126/126_biga.htm#.Vx-9QeHrXpsD.

¹⁷ Shane Farley, “Sina: Great numbers for ‘Chinese Twitter’ service Weibo”, *Seeking Alpha*, January 7, 2011, last accessed March 11, 2016, <http://seekingalpha.com/article/245456-sina-great-numbers-for-chinese-twitter-service-weibo>.

¹⁸ The research had a benchmark of 4500 Da V users (micro bloggers subscribed to the service using their personal identity and who have more than 10000 fans – followers and who update their profile at least once a day). The research highlights a steady growth in the number of messages posted on the platform between 2009 and 2010 with several peaks registered between 2011 and 2012. The slowdown in terms of published posts dates to the end of 2012.

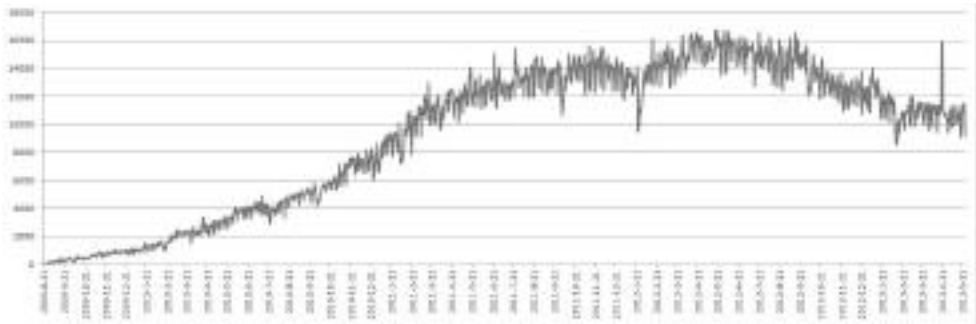


Figure 1. Huxiu.com, Users generated content on Sina Weibo.¹⁹

The most recent Sina Weibo user data, at the time of publication of this article, show that it has more than 503 million subscribers but only 54 million of them can be considered ‘active users’ that upload content to their microblog space at least once a day.²⁰

SoLoMo

SoLoMo is an acronym referring to online services that simultaneously offer social and localized activities on mobile devices. John Doerr, CEO of the venture capital firm Kleiner Parkins coined term in 2010.²¹

According to Doerr, three different periods must be taken into consideration in order to contextualize the SoLoMo trend. The first period highlights the importance of the Personal Computer, the second acknowledges the importance of the Internet, and the third identifies a series of joint opportunities provided by mobile platforms like iOS, social network services like Facebook and localized commerce services like Groupon. To better understand the SoLoMo phenomenon it is important to recall some historical steps. One of the most important is the marked growth in sales of smartphones and tablets with integrated GPS systems. GPS services can offer more detailed results than ‘IP mapping’ services provided by Personal Computers. Another important step that needs to be considered is the growth of localized search engines. In the beginning the quality of the service was not considered to be very reliable as there was no user generated content. How-

¹⁹ In July 2013 the microblog platform registered a monthly decrease of 30% in terms of content: *Huxiu*, July 9, 2013, last access March 28, 2016, <http://www.huxiu.com/article/16983/1.html>

²⁰ “Sina Weibo valued at \$6 billion: \$30 million in ad revenues, user activity climbing”, *TechWeb*, August 13, 2013. Accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.techweb.com.cn/internet/2013-08-13/1316353.shtml>.

²¹ Seth Fiegerman, “Why ‘SoLoMo’ Isn’t Going Anywhere”, *Mashable*, April 30, 2013. Accessed March 28, 2016, <http://mashable.com/2013/04/30/solomo/#W4Cui4tt2Zq3>.

ever, the implementation and success of a wide range of applications created a flow of detailed information provided by end users that helped to improve the quality of the service.²²

One of the first occasions in which SoLoMo was discussed in China was in 2011 during the third Global Mobile Internet conference held in Beijing. During the conference Cao Guowei, president of Sina, said that Sina had to follow the guidelines provided by SoLoMo. Indeed, at that time the PC was the most commonly used device to access Sina Weibo, used by 69.1% of its subscribers, while smartphones and other mobile devices were utilized by only 7.6% of users. Further, only 23.4% of microbloggers used both PC and mobile devices.²³ During the same conference, the president of Sina also stated that “in 2010 the purchase of smartphones and tablets reached 200 million units. Our forecasts show that by the end of 2012 purchases will reach 600 million in the Chinese market alone and by the end of 2013 there will be more mobile Internet users than PC ones”.²⁴ These forecasts have since come to fruition and Sina’s 2012 financial report noted that in the third quarter 74.5% of microbloggers accessed Sina Weibo through a mobile device.

The growth of Weixin challenged the supremacy of Sina Weibo. In February 2012, during Sina Weibo’s conference for the fourth financial quarter, the president Cao Guowei confirmed an ‘inevitable’ slowdown in terms of content produced on Sina Weibo. Furthermore, he considered the success of Weixin as one of the reasons for this slowdown.

Tools to monitor public opinion

Sina Weibo was one of the most important platforms for public expression between 2011 and 2012. It hosted several debates about Chinese civil society and became the third online source of information for Chinese citizens.²⁵ The famous Chinese Internet analyst, Bill Bishop, noted that Weibo had and still has some features that are useful both for the Chinese Communist Party and for the Chinese citizens. First of all, Chinese Internet users need a space where they can express their ideas and

²² See Carlo Formenti, *Felici e Sfruttati, Capitalismo Digitale ed Eclissi del Lavoro*, Milano, Egea, 2011; and Christian Fuchs, “Labor in Informational Capitalism and on the Internet”, *The Information Society*, Taylor & Francis Group, May 11, 2012. Accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01972243.2012.669449>.

²³ “Weibo’s Media Attribute and Users Applied Situation”, *Dratio & Beijing Association*, August 16, 2010. Accessed March 28, 2016, www.dratio.com/report/2010-08-16/1281949804d419086.shtml.

²⁴ President Cao Guowei discusses on the six business models of Sina Weibo, SoLoMo is the development trend (Cao Guowei Shoutan Weibo Liu Da Shangye Moshi: SoLoMo Shi Fazhan Qushi)曹国伟首谈微博六大商业模式：SOLOMO是发展趋势, May 7, 2011. Accessed March 29, 2016, http://tech.gmw.cn/2011-05/07/content_1931378.htm.

²⁵ Cheng Yingqi, “Micro blogs now No 3 online source of info”, *China Daily*, March 26, 2011, last accessed March 29, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-03/26/content_12230674.htm.

opinions and official authorities are inclined to keep this space open and visible. Sina Weibo is run and managed by employees who are trusted by the central authorities. Furthermore, the “Party can use Sina Weibo to its own advantage”.²⁶ This last characteristic was confirmed in August 2011 when Liu Qi, who was at that time a member of the Party Politburo, visited the Sina Weibo headquarters and invited its employees to do their best to improve technologies and to stop the spread of online rumors and false information.²⁷

Since Sina Weibo empowered the need to open online public opinion, observatories have grown in numbers. One of the most important is the People’s Daily Online Public Opinion Center, an observatory that involves public press agencies and universities in order to analyze a range of issues that are important to Chinese society. In this respect, an anonymous professor from Renmin University in Beijing reported that “the government used to have more power to control the agenda. But now there is a new approach, identifying hot spots and trying to control crises”.²⁸

The success of Weixin and the simultaneous slowdown of content production registered by Sina Weibo represent a potential problem for the Chinese government. In fact, People’s Daily Online Public Opinion Center includes a section entirely dedicated to public opinion expressed on microblogs. It utilizes an updated classification based on the most discussed topics and has the possibility of running specific localized searches based on different cities. Presently, the study of public opinion expressed on Weixin is not particularly well developed. An online article published by two researchers at the monitoring center confirmed the need for government departments to “use Weixin, establishing loyal relationships with users, avoiding a reduction in the exchange of information and limiting the spread of fake and uncertain news”.²⁹

Weixin’s success represents a threat for the government’s public opinion monitoring activity but also for the supremacy of Sina Weibo. This alarm has been played down by Lee Kaifu, former president of Google China, and prominent micrologger

²⁶ Bill Bishop, “Three Reasons the Government Is Unlikely to Shutdown Sina Weibo”, *Sinocism*, March 26, 2011, Accessed March 2016, <http://digicha.com/index.php/2011/03/three-reasons-the-government-is-unlikely-to-shutdown-sina-weibo>.

²⁷ Josh Chin and Loretta Chao, “Beijing Communist Party Chief issues veiled warning to Chinese Web Portal”, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 24, 2011, last accessed March 11, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424053111904279004576526293276595886>.

²⁸ Simon Denyer, “In China, Communist Party takes unprecedented Step: it is listening”, *The Washington Post*, August 2, 2013, last accessed March 11, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-china-government-mines-public-opinion/2013/08/02/33358026-f2b5-11e2-ae43-b31dc363c3bf_story.html.

²⁹ Hurui Pang, Wechat government account opens a new layout for public opinion in society (*Zhengwu Weixin Qiaodong Shehui Yulun Xing*) 政务微信撬动社会舆论新格局, *Renminwang Yuqing Jiaceshi*, August 2, 2013. Accessed March 11, 2016, http://opinion.china.com.cn/opinion_9_77909.html?utm_source=Sinocism+Newsletter&utm_campaign=c5a9ac67f4-Sinocism08_05_13&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_171f237867-c5a9ac67f4-3627837.

on Sina Weibo with more than 51 million fans. Mr Lee rejects the idea advanced by other microbloggers that Sina Weibo would fail, he argued:

Sina Weibo recorded a reduction in terms of the number of messages posted online but such pessimistic forecasts are exaggerated: 1) the fact that Sina Weibo is still heavily monitored and controlled implies that the service is still alive; 2) Sina Weibo has never been the right platform for private communication, so that [Weixin's success] is not such a great loss; 3) Sina [can] deal with users' resistance to deal with advertising. [In fact] Sina can try to implement user behavioral analysis along with targeted advertisements and ecommerce integration. Naturally whether or not that strategy will be successful depends on how it will be implemented.³⁰

It should also be noted that Sina Weibo and Weixin have two different communication models. As mentioned above, the former is a microblog platform, which has texts of 140 characters. Another main characteristic of the microblog service is the possibility of publicly accessing, commenting and eventually reposting the content of other users. From a technical point of view it is important to remember that Sina Weibo is divided in two groups: following (*guanzhu* 关注) and followers (*fensi* 粉丝). The first category refers to profiles a user decides to follow because he considers them interesting; the follower *fensi* group comprises users who decide to follow the updates of a single user.

When considering the different communication modes of Weixin and Sina Weibo, experts have offered important insights. Previously, Deaux claimed that

[...] the ability of individuals to share their ideas, opinions, knowledge, inner thoughts and perhaps an idealized self-image in an uninhibited manner, due to the anonymous nature of these [Sina Weibo] newsgroups, provides these individuals with a safe outlet to feel socially connected and to establish themselves as part of a meaningful community in society.³¹

Referring to Deaux's interpretation, Lin argues that participation on Sina Weibo allows users to identify with a group and improve their self-confidence.³² Deaux's model is limited because the content produced by a single user is accessible and modifiable not only for closed 'newsgroups'. As long as Sina Weibo users have their follower groups there is always a possibility to share content with users outside of their groups. In fact, all the users in the follower group can re-share a message originally posted by a user they are following to a new group of following users.

³⁰ Lee Kaifu, Sina Weibo personal account, April 16, 2013 (9:14 a.m.). Accessed March 28, 2016. <http://www.weibo.com/1197161814/zsolZzkKf?type=comment>.

³¹ Zhan Zhang and Gianluigi Negro, "Weibo in China: Understanding its development through communication analysis and cultural studies", *Communication, Politics & Culture*, 46, 2013.

³² Carolyn Lin, "Effects of the Internet", in Jennings Bryant and Mary Beth Oliver, *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, ed. Jennings Bryant and Mary Beth Oliver NY Routledge, Taylor Francis Group, New York, 2009, p. 571.

Users in this latter group can share the same message with a new group of followers, creating a cascade of message sharing.³³

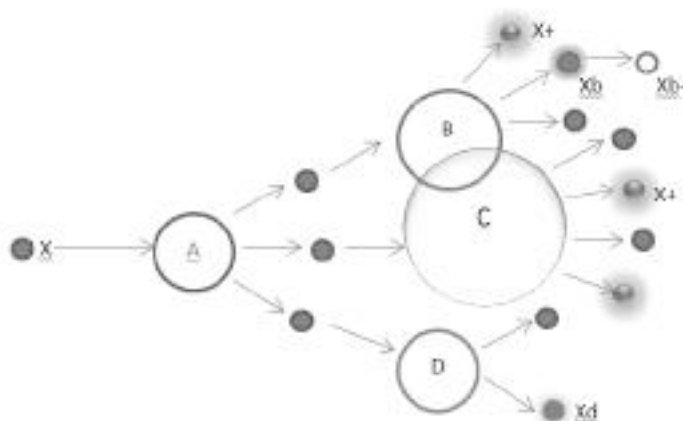


Figure 2. Weibo's communication model.³⁴

Weixin is based on a different model of communication. The main way of communicating can be a text, a two minute (maximum) voice message or a video. This communication has three different forms:

1. involving at least two users (sender / receiver);
2. involving a specifically created group comprising a maximum of 50 people;
3. a single user posting a picture or a short text to all his/her contacts in the 'moments' sections.

For these reasons Weixin differs from Sina Weibo, the communication model is social but as open as the microblog platform. Weixin is a semi-closed community and is basically useful for communicating with people who are known to the user.

Similarities with Sina Weibo and future perspectives

Different communication models apart, like Sina Weibo and many other Chinese social networks, Weixin is subject to close control and monitoring of its content.

³³ Zhang, Zhan, and Gianluigi Negro. "Weibo in China: Understanding its development through communication analysis and cultural studies." *Communication, Politics & Culture* 46, no. 2 (2013): 199.

³⁴ Ibid.

In December 2012 the activist Hu Jia accused Guobao (an arm of China's Public Security Bureau) officials of monitoring his conversations on Weixin. In an interview for the Guardian Hu Jia said:

I took a chance and assumed WeChat was relatively safe," and continued, "It's a new product and not developed by China Mobile or China Unicom, [two of China's main telecoms companies], which have been monitoring my calls and text messages for over 10 years. But the *guobao* surprised me with their ability to repeat my words or voice messages verbatim, though I'm sure I only sent them to some friends through WeChat.³⁵

Tencent answered Hu Jia in the South China Morning Post specifying that the

have taken user data protection seriously in [their] product development and daily operations and, at the same time, like other international peers, [they] comply with relevant laws in the countries where they have operations.³⁶

Summing up, Weixin is a mobile application which emerged in China and has branched into foreign markets, becoming the first Chinese Internet service to be successful outside China. If on one hand Weixin will have to satisfy all the requirements of the government regarding censorship, control and monitoring of the content, on the other it will have to respect all the transparency issues and rights of free expression of Chinese and non-Chinese users.

A final consideration is the economic relationship between Tencent and the main Chinese telecommunication operators. In March 2013, Miao Wei, director of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said that the Ministry has been involved in a project promoted by the main telecommunication operators. The project requested for Weixin to pay for their consumption of the broadband as the diffuse use of Weixin had started to erode the revenues of the big telecommunication companies. Indeed, the success of Weixin, which allows users to send text and voice messages using the Internet, is associated with the decline of the short messages services (SMS) market. It is rather naïve to think that Weixin could become a paying service, accepting the requests of the telecommunication companies. However, it is reasonable to say that Tencent will have to modify its business model to find a compromise with Chinese (and in the future, Western) operators. Faced with these unexplored scenarios, the evolution of Weixin deserves to be carefully studied and analyzed also outside China.

³⁵ Nicola Davison, "WeChat: the Chinese Social Media App That Has Dissidents Worried", *The Guardian*, December 7, 2012, last accessed March 11, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/07/wechat-chinese-social-media-app>.

³⁶ John Kennedy, "Hu Jia Explains Why Mobile App Make Activism Spooky", *South China Morning Post*, November 15, 2012. Accessed March 11, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/comment/blogs/article/1083025/hu-jia-explains-why-mobile-apps-make-activism-spooky>

LUISA M. PATERNICÒ

CHINESE LANGUAGE LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT IN EUROPE: THE NEED FOR STANDARDIZATION

Every year in Europe, Chinese language courses are increasingly becoming part of the curricula in universities and schools. For European languages, an officially accredited reference framework already exists. The Council of Europe created this framework with the aim to establish definitions of linguistic competences divided into levels together with the criteria to assess them. The landscape of Chinese language teaching in Europe, on the other hand, is inconsistent. It is, however, unthinkable that each single institution of each single European country proceeds independently from the others in Chinese language evaluation; this can have many disadvantages and can negatively affect student mobility.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a descriptive system used to scale the abilities acquired by those who study a European foreign language.¹ It was developed by the Council of Europe as the main part of the project *Language Learning for European Citizenship* between 1989 and 1996. As stated in the very first page, its main objective is to provide

“a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. The Framework also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners’ progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis.”

In November 2001, a resolution of the Council of Europe recommended using the CEFR to create assessment systems of language abilities. Today, the validity and usefulness of the CEFR is unquestionable and is widely used for European languages. Several institutions have begun applying it to Chinese language but the CEFR

¹ The “Common European Framework of Reference” can be download from: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_en.pdf (Accessed 01/16)

has some limitations when applied to the case of Chinese since it was developed for alphabetical languages.

The European project *European Benchmarking Chinese Language* (EBCL) has recently proposed a definition of the competence levels for Chinese language based on the Common European Framework of Reference.²

The following pages present the research work carried out by the project members, the challenges faced and the results achieved. Finally, this paper envisions the necessary developments that such a project should have to reach the final goal of standardizing the competence scales for Chinese language in Europe. For a quick overview, please refer to Table 1, at the end of the paper.³

The EBCL Project: background and objectives

The project was carried out by experts belonging to four European universities: London School of Oriental and African Studies, London (UK); Université Rennes 2, Rennes (FR), Freie Universität, Berlin (GE) and “Sapienza” University of Rome (IT). Each university was associated with a partner high school chosen among those that have the most experience in teaching Chinese in their country: Kingsford Community School (UK); Collège Lycée Emile Zola de Rennes (FR); Geschwister Scholl Gesamtschule, Dortmund (GE); Convitto Nazionale di Roma “Vittorio Emanuele II” (IT).

Under the encouragement of colleagues and institutions, the idea of such a project was inspired by and grounded on the following factors:

- The increasing of cooperation between China and the European countries.
- The rising demand for and provision of Chinese language courses in Europe (and beyond).
- The need for consistency in Chinese language learning, teaching and assessment across Europe.⁴

Another driving force was connecting the new HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) levels with those of the CEFR in 2010, which have left several European teachers of

² The “European Benchmark Framework for Chinese – Final Report” submitted by the researchers of the EBCL project can be found here: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/projects/public_parts/documents/languages/lan_mp_511644_EBCLfinal.pdf (Accessed 01/16)

³ A shorter and slightly different Italian version of this paper has been published by the author: Luisa M. Paternicò, “La didattica del cinese in Europa: la necessità di uno standard”, in *Proceedings of the XIV AISC Conference, Procida, September 19-21, 2013*, edited by Paola Paderni (Napoli: Il Torcoliere, 2014) 361-377.

⁴ The need for the standardization of the didactics and the assessment of foreign language within Europe has been felt for several years. See: John H.A.L. de Jong, “The need for standards in language education”, *System* 23, 4 (1995): 441-144.

Chinese perplexed. Some of them, particularly the German Association of Chinese language teachers, wrote a letter to the authorities of Hanban (汉办, The Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Second Language) to state how the association of levels was arbitrary.⁵

Under these premises, the EBCL project, taking the CEFR as a master framework, aims to:

- Propose a framework of competence descriptors for Chinese language.
- Raise the awareness of social and linguistic differences between Chinese and European languages.
- Create a network of concerned European and foreign universities, schools and institutions.
- Enhance the internationalization process of European Universities.⁶
- Encourage and facilitate student mobility.
- Break away from the old tradition of a knowledge & structure-based approach in teaching Chinese in Europe in favour of a communicative approach.⁷
- Provide a tool for the production of a new generation of curricula/syllabi, textbooks etc. for the European context.

By proposing a definition of the levels of competence for Chinese language on the base of the CEFR, the EBCL project has laid the foundations for the creation of a framework of reference to scale the competence of Chinese that will inevitably lead to a reform of today's textbooks and teaching approach in general.

⁵ FaCh/Fachverband Chinesisch, 德语区汉语教学协会对新汉语水平考试的几项说明 / *Statement of the Fachverband Chinesisch e.V. (Association of Chinese Teachers in German Speaking Countries) on the new HSK Chinese Proficiency Test*, 2010, http://www.fachverbandchinesisch.de/sites/default/files/FaCh2010_ErklarungHSK.pdf (Accessed 01/16). See also: Andreas Guder, "Orientierungsstufen im Wortschatzdschungel: Der neu erschienene Wort- und Zeichenschatz-Standard für Chinesisch als Fremdsprache der VR China", *CHUN / Chinesischunterricht* 27 (2012): 101-107. It might be needed to point out that what is called into question is not the definition of the levels for the HSK exam but only their association with the CEFR.

⁶ It is one of the key points of the Bologna Process. See the "Bologna Process Implementation Report" [http://www.ehea.info/uploads/\(1\)/bologna%20process%20implementation%20report.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/uploads/(1)/bologna%20process%20implementation%20report.pdf) (Accessed 01/16)

⁷ The CEFR highlights the communicative needs of the learner and encourages a functional/notional method in teaching and communicative didactic approach against the old approach emphasizing the formal aspects (grammar, translation etc.). See also "University of Cambridge-Using CEFR": <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/126011-using-cefr-principles-of-good-practice.pdf> (Accessed 01/16)

Implementation of the EBCL project

The project was launched in London in November 2010 and ended with the Brussels Symposium in October 2012.

The four university teams, despite the distance, worked in close cooperation through weekly online meetings (mainly on web conferencing platform) where they shared, commented on and discussed the work done. EBCL also held four international seminars (in Rome, Paris, Berlin and London) with a double aim. The first was to let the members closely discuss the key issues under the guidance of the advisory board. The second was to share the outcomes of the project with the associated partner schools representatives and other Chinese language teachers during open seminar sessions, in order to get relevant feedback.

The first months (January-April 2011) were dedicated to the creation and circulation of a questionnaire among European universities where Chinese was taught. The survey revealed that different countries, universities or institutions throughout Europe use different criteria for Chinese language learning, teaching and assessment. This has many disadvantages and negatively affects student mobility. Even those institutions claiming to refer to the CEFR framework, showed different interpretations of what a learner ‘can do’ at each level of language proficiency. More confusion was added by the ‘arbitrary’ connection between the CEFR and the HSK levels. The results of the survey reinforced the EBCL team’s belief that a standardized framework of reference was needed.

The next phase was devoted to deciding the methodological approach. The first main challenges of the project were answering the following questions:

1. Would it be possible to use the existing CEFR for Chinese language, regardless of Chinese being quite distant from other European languages?
2. If the first answer is affirmative, how can the CEFR be implemented in order to meet the needs of European learners of Chinese?

An attentive evaluation of authoritative studies on scaling language competence,⁸ of all the resources available through the Council of Europe⁹ was carried out re-

⁸ See for example: Brian North and Gunther Schneider, “Scaling descriptors for language proficiency scales”, *Language Testing*, 15.2(1998): 217-263; Brian North, *The development of descriptors on scales of language proficiency* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1993); Brian North, “The Development of a Common Framework Scale of Descriptors of Language Proficiency Based on a Theory of Measurement”, *System* 23, 4(1995): 445-465; Brian North, “Perspectives on language proficiency and aspects of competence”, *Language Teaching* 30(1997): 93-100.

⁹ See the followings: CoE Language Policy Division, *Reference Supplement to the Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment*, <http://www.coe.int/lang> (Accessed 01/16); CoE Language Policy Division,

garding the works previously developed to link the didactics of the partner countries' national languages to the CEFR and those to link the didactics of Chinese to the CEFR made upon the initiative of single institutions.¹⁰ After this analysis, the teams concluded that the answer to the first question was positive, since the CEFR framework and its description of proficiency levels are still open to amendment and contextualization (as it has been done for most European languages through national projects). The project's efforts were then devoted to 'how' the benchmarking of Chinese language against the CEFR could be carried out, without altering the latter's main structure.

Through fruitful discussions and seminars, despite several challenges, the EBCL project has completed its proposal for the A1 and A2 levels of descriptors for Chinese, also providing lists of vocabulary, themes, functions and grammar accompanied by a wide range of practical examples. The final work was presented during the International Symposium held in Brussels in October 2012.

The main challenges of the EBCL project

1. *The definition of the competence levels*

The CEFR has developed six levels of language competence: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2. The A Levels are the basic user levels (A1: breakthrough or beginner level, A2: way-

European Language Portfolio Descriptors, http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/main_pages/introduction.html (Accessed 01/14); CoE Language Policy Division, "EAQUALS Bank", http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/documents_intro/Data_bank_descriptors.html (Accessed 01/16); Brian North, "The CEFR common reference levels: validated reference points and local strategies, European Council", Intergovernmental Forum report, 2007, <www.coe.int/lang> (Accessed 01/16); Peter Lenz and Gunther Schneider, *A bank of descriptors for self-assessment in European Language Portfolios* (Council of Europe, Language Policy Division, 2004) http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/documents_intro/Data_bank_descriptors.html (Accessed 01/16).

¹⁰ Debora Marzi and Lilo Wong, *Lingua cinese* (Ufficio scolastico per la Lombardia, 2008) <http://www.progettolingue.net/orientali/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/lingua-cinese.pdf> (Accessed 01/16); Oxford Cambridge and RSA (OCR) Examinations, *Asset Languages (Languages Ladder Can-do Statements)*, <http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/asset/languages/mandarin/documents/> (Accessed 01/16); Oxford Cambridge and RSA (OCR) Examinations, *Asset Languages Mandarin (Breakthrough, Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced)*, <http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/asset/languages/mandarin/documents/> (Accessed 01/16); Ministère de l'éducation nationale, *Programme du chinois - Palier 1 (Syllabus of Chinese - Step 1)*, 2007, http://media.eduscol.education.fr/file/LV/72/5/Programme_chinois_palier1_123725.pdf (Accessed 01/16); Ministère de l'éducation nationale, *Programme du chinois - Palier 1 (Syllabus of Chinese - Step 2)*, 2007, http://media.eduscol.education.fr/file/LV/21/7/Programme_chinois_palier2_120217.pdf (Accessed 01/16); Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, *Kernlehrplan für die Gesamtschule - Sekundarstufe I in Nordrhein-Westfalen/Chinesisch*, Ritterbach Verlag, Frechen/Düsseldorf, 2009 http://www.standardsicherung.schulministerium.nrw.de/lehrplaene/upload/lehrplaene_download/gesamtschule/gs_chinesisch.pdf (Accessed 01/16)

stage or elementary level). Upon reaching level A, the learner is able to carry out simple language activities to satisfy practical needs. He/she can understand and use everyday expressions and basic phrases on familiar topics. The B Levels are the independent user levels (B1: threshold or intermediate level, B2: vantage or upper intermediate level). Reaching level B, the learner can easily travel the country in which the foreign language is spoken, can interact fluently on concrete and abstract topics, can produce clear and detailed texts on several topics expressing the pros and cons. The C Levels are the proficient user levels (C1: effective operational or advanced level, C2: mastery or proficiency level). Upon reaching level C, the learner can easily understand anything he/she hears or read, can use the language in an effective way in all kinds of contexts: social, professional, academic etc., can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.¹¹

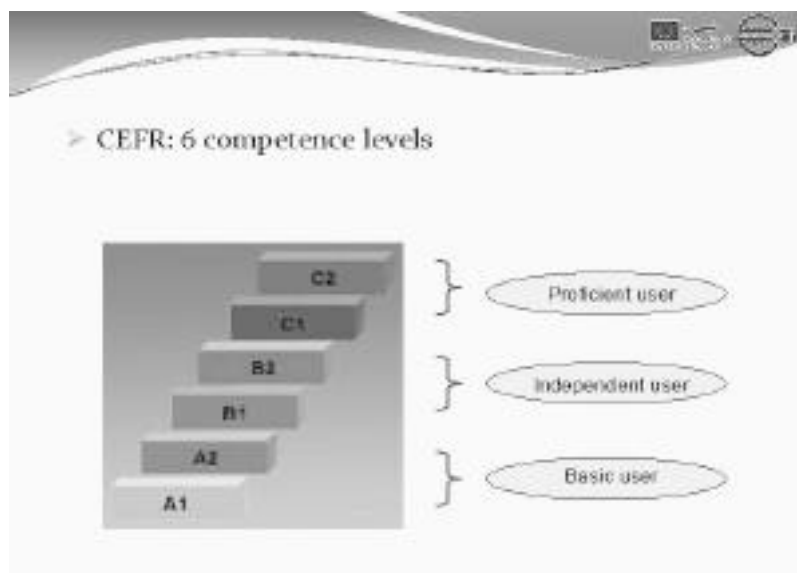


Fig. 1 Division of the levels according to the CEFR

The EBCL project's members, on the base of their experience in teaching and research, also taking into consideration the flexibility of the CEFR, found immediate agreement on two issues: 1. The different learning and teaching process for Chinese compared to other European languages, especially at the initial stage (that is at the A level); 2. The need to split each of the 6 CEFR levels into sublevels (with the exception of C2). Regarding the initial levels, a European learner of Chinese, espe-

¹¹ See "CEFR", 24. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_en.pdf (Accessed 01/16)

cially at the very beginning, would need to master more prerequisite knowledge in order to perform even the most simple language activities. The main difficulty is represented by the need to learn Chinese characters and concerns the abilities of written production, reception and interaction. Unlike alphabetical languages, characters are learned through the entire life of a learner of Chinese; however, their rules of compositions – the so called ‘graphemic knowledge’ – must be acquired at the earliest stage. After several studies and discussions, the teams agreed in creating a special sublevel called A1.1 to allocate the graphemic competence as a fundamental prerequisite to be able to perform the language activities described in the upper levels. The work on the graphemic competence was ground breaking as this was unprecedented. In this case, it was necessary to create new specific descriptors for Chinese which previously did not exist.¹²

Furthermore, since a European student of Chinese would probably take longer to reach the language competence required by the CEFR levels, upon suggestion of the advisory board, it was agreed to create intermediate levels in order to avoid discouraging the learners. Only level C2 was not subdivided because it is presumable that at such an advanced level the difference between a learner of Chinese and a learner of other languages is not so significant. The proposed EBCL levels are twelve: A1.1, A1, A1+, A2, A2+, B1, B1+, B2, B2+, C1, C1+, C2.

2. *The creation of descriptors for Chinese: sources and methodology*

The other major challenge of the project was to adapt the CEFR descriptors, the so called ‘*Can do*’ Statements, to the needs of a learner of Chinese. In order to do so, a division of work was needed: the French team worked on the written production and interaction; the German team worked on the written reception; the UK team worked on oral interaction; the Italian team worked on the spoken reception and production.

After consulting several works on this topic that were, however, developed for other European languages¹³ and facing a totally new challenge, given the peculiarity of the Chinese language, the project members selected a circumscribed pool of usable sources. Most of them derived from the *Banks of Descriptors* officially recog-

¹² The work on the graphemic competence was developed by the German team and has been presented at several conferences. See “Graphemic-Ortographic Control”: <http://ebcl.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/D2-S2-GC-Presentation-AGuder.pdf> (Accessed 01/16)

¹³ For example: Jean-Claude Beacco et al, *Niveau A1.1 pour le français* (Paris: Didier, 2005); Jean-Claude Beacco et al, *Niveau A1 pour le français* (Paris: Didier, 2007); Jean-Claude Beacco and Porquier, Rémy, *Niveau A2 pour le français* (Paris: Didier, 2008); Manuela Glaboniat et al, *Profilo deutsch* (Munich: Langenscheidt, 2005); Barbara Spinelli and Francesca Parizzi, *Profilo della lingua italiana, livelli di riferimento del QCER A1, A2, B1, B2* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 2010).

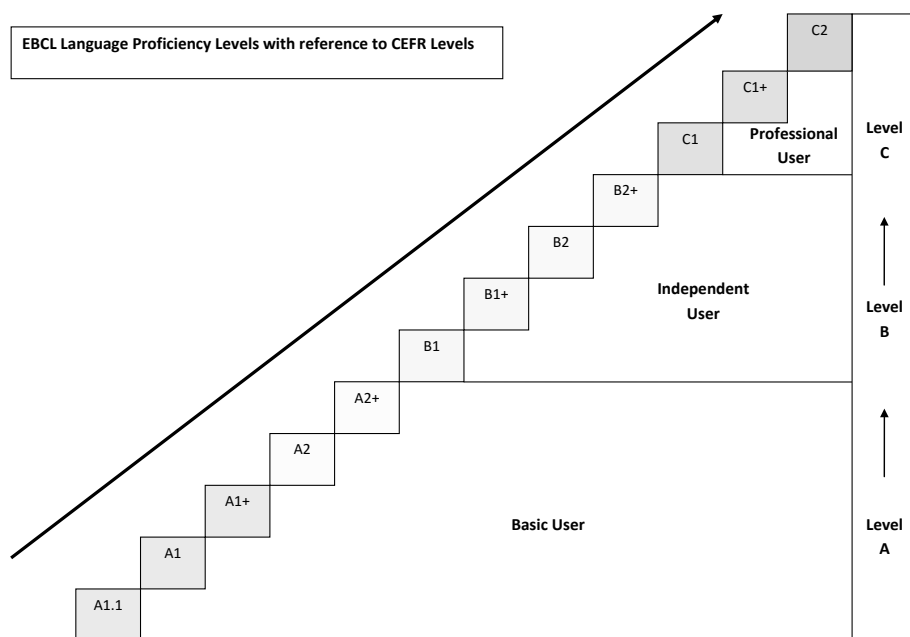


Fig. 2 Division of the levels proposed by the EBCL project

nized by the Council of Europe.¹⁴ To these, the ‘Can do’ statements created by the Japanese Foundation were added, since they are the only other existing attempt to relate the teaching of a non-European language to the CEFR.¹⁵

Once the sources were selected, a common methodology was approved in order to create descriptors for Chinese language. The approach was aimed to be intuitive and qualitative. The quantitative approach had already been used to validate the CEFR descriptors.¹⁶ The EBCL framework is fundamentally based on the CEFR descriptors and its related products, such as the ELP (European Learner Portfo-

¹⁴ See the Council of Europe’s “Bank of Descriptors” http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/documents_intro/Data_bank_descriptors.html (Accessed 01/16)

¹⁵ See the Japanese Foundation’s “Can Do Category List” http://jfstandard.jp/pdf/JF_Cando_Category_list.pdf (Accessed 01/16)

¹⁶ The methodology used is described in CEFR, 22: “A systematic combination of intuitive, qualitative and quantitative methods was employed. First, the content of existing scales was analyzed in relation to categories of description used in the Framework. Then, in an intuitive phase, this material was edited, new descriptors were formulated, and the set discussed by experts. Next a variety of qualitative methods were used to check that teachers could relate to the descriptive categories selected, and that descriptors actually described the categories they were intended to describe. Finally, the best descriptors in the set were scaled using quantitative methods. The accuracy of this scaling has since been checked in replication studies”.

lio) descriptors.¹⁷ In order to obtain a formative evaluation of the relevance and the validity of the ‘*Can do*’ statements, the EBCL descriptors were internally cross-examined by the members, externally discussed through the seminars, and finally modified according to the pedagogical knowledge and practical experience of the people involved.

In order to keep the CEFR main structure unaltered, the members had to impose the following restrictions:

- Keep the CEFR unchanged whenever possible.
- Do not remove descriptors.
- Do not move existing descriptors to a higher or lower level.

Given these premises, the accommodation of the CEFR descriptors was made in the following way:

- In some cases the CEFR descriptors proved valid for Chinese language and did not undergo any changes.
- In other cases, descriptors coming from the *Banks* were added to better specify and contextualise the original descriptor or to provide a descriptor for a sub-level.
- In a few cases, the CEFR descriptors or those coming from the *Banks* were slightly modified in order to better suit Chinese language learners’ linguistic competence.
- At times, splitting one CEFR descriptor into two sub-levels appeared the best solution.

Overview of the results

Despite the original purpose of creating a complete framework of reference, adapting the CEFR descriptors to Chinese language for all the levels and the work on the basic competences required more time than expected. The team members

¹⁷ In detail:

- 1) “Bank of CEFR related Descriptors”: http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/documents_intro/Data_bank_descriptors.html (Accessed 01/16)
 - CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) descriptors
 - ELP (European Language Portfolio) self assessment descriptors, developed by the Swiss project *LINGUALEVEL* and including the outcomes of the Bergen *CAN DO* project.
 - EAQUALS (European Association for Quality Language Services) bank of descriptors, which has provided descriptors for “plus levels”, has filled the gaps on the original EAQUALS/ALTE ELP checklists, has provided systematic coverage of a specific number of categories, and has developed further the descriptors for strategies.
- 2) “Japanese Foundation ‘Can do’ statements”: http://jfstandard.jp/pdf/jfs2010_all_en.pdf; http://jfstandard.jp/pdf/JF_Cando_Category_list.pdf (Accessed 01/16)
 - Japanese Standard for Japanese Language education based on CEFR

unanimously decided to concentrate the efforts on this early stage of the framework (which is, where the difference between European languages and Chinese is wider), integrating it with supporting documents (lists of themes, functions, vocabulary etc.) that could make the proposed framework of descriptors clearer and ready to use.

In the span of time of the project, the descriptors prepared by the EBCL project concern levels A1 and A2 of the CEFR (five EBCL levels: A1.1, A1, A1+, A2, A2+). The work for level B1 has already been drafted with the hope that further funding will make it possible to complete the work. A total of 243 descriptors were prepared for the categories listed in the figure below:¹⁸

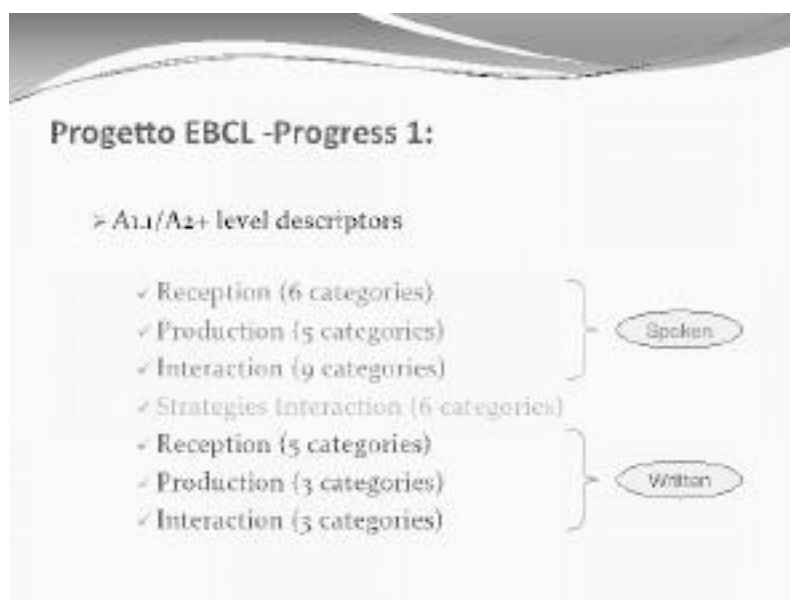


Fig. 3 Synthesis of the descriptors created by the EBCL project

The initial project proposal did not include the creation of other documents. However, the project members agreed in placing extreme importance on the production of a series of supporting documents which belong to the CEFR competence range; a list of themes and topics, a list of language functions and lists of Chinese characters and lexical units for the proposed levels.¹⁹ The creation of vocabulary

¹⁸ The completed framework of “EBCL Aq-A2+ Can do Statements” can be found at the following link: <http://ebcl.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/EBCL-A1-A2+-Can-do-Statements-Oct-2012.pdf> (Accessed 01/16)

¹⁹ The “EBCL Supporting Documents for Can do Statements” can be consulted at the following

lists was strongly requested by all the participants in the seminars and by most of the audience of the international conferences where the project was presented. The definition of these lists required time consuming research work because of the peculiar mono-morphemic nature of the Chinese language. After a series of debates with field experts and after a collection and analysis of previous studies on this subject,²⁰ it was decided to create two separate lists: a list of characters and a list of lexical units. The lists were subdivided for each level and differentiated for the oral and written production.²¹ Furthermore, they were intended as open lists that learners could adapt to their situation and background (for example, a student might not need to learn the word for ‘lawyer’ at a very basic level, unless this was the job they would like to do in the future or that their parents do, etc.). Finally, examples

link: <http://ebcl.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/EBCL-Supporting-Documents-for-CDS-Oct-2012.pdf> (Accessed 01/16)

²⁰ Many of which were carried out by members of the university teams or of the *Advisory board*: Bernard Allanic, Andreas Guder and Joel Bellasen. See: J. Charles Alderson, *Assessing Reading*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Bernard Allanic, “Tan duiwai ‘lixing shizifa’ de gouzao tan对外理性识字法的构造”. *Shijie Hanyu Jiaoxue* 2(2003): 87-93; Bernard Allanic, “The ‘Missing link’ in the Teaching of Chinese Characters as a Foreign Language.” In *The Cognition, Learning and Teaching of Chinese Characters*, edited by Andreas Guder, Jiang Xin, Wan Yesheng, 279-300. Beijing: Editions de l’Université de Pékin, 2007; Bernard Allanic, “Gouzao duiwai lixing hanzi jiaoxue fangfa de jichu yanjiu 构造对外理性汉字教学法的基础研究.” In *Dui wai hanyu jiaoxue lunwen xuanping - 1990 - 2004 对外汉语教学论文选平*, edited by Liu Xun, 215-232. Beijing: Editions de l’Université des langues de Pékin, 2008; Bernard Allanic, *Le chinois... comme en Chine - Méthode de langue et d’écriture chinoises*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009.

Lyle F. Bachman and Sandra J. Savignon, “The evaluation of communicative language proficiency”. *The Modern language journal* 70, 4(1986): 380-390; Joel Bellasen and Arnaud Arslangul, *Le Chinois pour tous*. Paris: Bescherelle-Hatier, 2010; Joel Bellasen and Liu Jialing, *Gunxueqiu xue hanyu 滚雪球学汉语 - Snowballing Chinese - Le Chinois par boules de neige*. Beijing: Sinolingua, 2008; Joel Bellasen, *Méthode d’initiation à la langue et à l’écriture chinoises*. Paris: La Compagnie, 2008; Joel Bellasen, *Zhongwen Xi yong - yi Hanyu wei li - Kan CEFR jiagou xia de shuyuan yuyan zhi jiaoxue pingliang 「中」文「西」用 - 以汉语为例 - 看CEFR架构下的疏远语言之教学与评量*. 10th World Conference on Teaching Chinese as a second Language, Taiwan, 2011; Andreas Guder, *Sinographemdidaktik - Aspekte einer systematischen Vermittlung der chinesischen Schrift im Unterricht Chinesisch als Fremdsprache. Mit einer Komponentenanalyse der häufigsten 3867 Schriftzeichen* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Julius Groos, 1999); Andreas Guder, “The Chinese Writing System as Third Dimension of Foreign Language Teaching.” In *Hanzi de renshiyujiaoxue 汉字的认知与教学 - The Cognition, Learning and Teaching of Chinese characters*, edited by Andreas Guder et al., (Beijing: Beijing Language and Culture University Press, 2007) 17-32; Andreas Guder, “Orientierungsstufen im Wortschatzdschungel: Der neu erschienene Wort- und Zeichenschatz-Standard für Chinesisch als Fremdsprache der VR China”, *CHUN/ Chinesischunterricht* 27(2012): 101-107; Andreas Guder et al. (eds.), *Hanzi de renshiyujiaoxue 汉字的认知与教学 - The Cognition, Learning and Teaching of Chinese Characters* (Beijing: Beijing Language and Culture University Press, 2007).

²¹ This hard task was carried out by the French team after comparing different lists of lexical items developed by other European projects on Western languages, frequency lists, and list of words created for the HSK exam. The “EBCL Vocabulary Methodology” can be accessed in detail through the following link: <http://ebcl.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/EBCL-Vocabulary-Methodology.pdf> (Accessed 01/16)

were added to the proposed framework in order to clearly show the applicability of the descriptors and their link with the themes, language functions and vocabulary. See the figure below for an example.

Level	CEFR	Level	EBCL			
A1-A2	CDS Codes	A1-A2	Coded CDS	Themes/Topics	Functions	Lexical Examples
<i>RSI: Overall Listening Comprehension</i>						
A1.1	C-RS1-A1.1-1 Can follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.	A1	E-RS1-A1-1 Can understand words and simple short expressions on familiar topics (e.g. Self-introduction, Contact information), which are very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.	T1.1-5 个人信息 住址籍贯国籍 工作职业 联系方式 教育背景/学校经历 T7.1 家庭情况	F1.4 介绍 F2.8-9 询问 回复	1) 我叫马克。 2) 我的电话号码是0086..... 3) 你的手机号码是多少? 4) 我上大学一年级。 5) 我家有四口人: 爸爸、妈妈、弟弟和我。 6) 我的地址是..... 7) 你家在哪儿?

Fig. 4 Example of framework proposed by the EBCL project: on the left, the CEFR levels and descriptors are followed by the equivalent EBCL Levels, Descriptors, Themes, Functions, Examples with codes to identify them.

The possible ways to approach the ‘intercultural dimension’ were also explored. However, whether the intercultural dimension can be scaled is still an issue under discussion in many contexts outside the project. There are very few existing models, despite several studies having been carried out on the subject,²² and there are no programs clearly establishing the links between the linguistic and the intercultural elements. Even though, at an initial stage, an attempt was made at creating some descriptors for the intercultural competence required at each level, the idea was put aside for the numerous variants to be considered, together with acknowledgment that the intercultural competence might go at a different pace than the language competence.

²² Among the many studies on the topic, we recommend: Michael Biram et al., *Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2002) http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/guide_dimintercult_en.pdf (Accessed 01/16); Alvino E. Fantini, “A Central Concern: Developing Intercultural Competence”, *SIT Occasional Papers Series* (Brattleboro: The School for International Training, 2000): 25-42.

The project's achievements and documents are available for free consultation online on the dedicated website and in a recent publication in English and German languages, also available online, including: *Can Do* Descriptors and tasks, topics, word and character lists for the levels A1-A2.²³

Other challenges and issues

Aside from the two main challenges, the EBCL project has faced a series of new issues that had never been faced in other projects related to European languages learning. Two of these have been already quoted: 1 the study on the *graphemic competence*, to which great importance has been attached and for which not only a special sub-level was created, but also a whole new set of descriptors. 2. The need to add a list of characters to the list of lexical units, given the peculiarity of the Chinese language.

Another issue was establishing the role of *Hanyu Pinyin*, namely whether to consider it just a transcription, an input method or also a means used for communication. It was acknowledged that the technological development using *Pinyin* to write Chinese characters was useful in language learning and communication; therefore, the EBCL framework should take it into account. The members agreed that *Pinyin* is not just one of the many transcription methods but also a valid tool to perform language activities (e.g. when we do not remember the characters or when the PC does not allow us to insert characters, we write, send text messages and emails using *Pinyin*). For this reason, the competence in *Pinyin* has been included in the descriptors framework among the abilities of written reception and production. *Pinyin* is also included as a subset of the 'communicative language competence'-'linguistic control'. Finally, the official *Hanyu Pinyin* has been defined as 'suggested input/transcription method', while acknowledging that other valid methods exist as well, even though are less used.

Another internally and externally debated issue concerned the use of electronic devices to write in Chinese. The team members tried to answer the following questions: "Is being able to write in Chinese using electronics devices equivalent to being able to write in Chinese?" The scholars consulted on this subject had different points of view and a definitive answer still looks hard to formulate. The matter had been previously discussed at a seminar held during the *Amsterdam International*

²³ Andreas Guder and Fachverband Chinesisch e.V. (FaCh) (Eds.), *European Benchmarks for the Chinese Language (EBCL) / Europäischer Referenzrahmen für Chinesisch als Fremdsprache* (欧洲汉语能力基准项目) (Version 1.1) (München: Iudicium, 2015). Online version here: http://edocs.fu-berlin.de/docs/receive/FUDocs_document_00000022875 (Accessed 01/16).

Panel Discussion, on June 8, 2012, entitled: ‘Learning to write Chinese by hand, a healthy practice or a waste of time?’ Different points of view coexist and they are all supported by reasonable motivations. On one hand, it is undeniably true that, due to the difficulty in memorizing large amounts of characters, learners seem to achieve better results writing with the support of electronic devices. On the other hand, it was highlighted that learning to write characters also improves reading and stimulates memorization.²⁴ During the EBCL Berlin Seminar, the same question was addressed to the audience. A variety of opinions were expressed but the majority of the teachers who were present agreed to consider writing Chinese with electronic devices equivalent to writing Chinese. The EBCL members did not take a definitive position on this matter, even though they agreed that learning to write characters by hand, especially at the early stage of Chinese language acquisition, was advisable.

Possible developments of the EBCL project

The EBCL project has paved the way to further studies that might be able to complete the process of scaling the competence for Chinese language in Europe in the future. First of all, the creation/adaptation work of the descriptors should be carried out for the upper levels (B1, B1+, B2, B2+, C1, C1+ e C2). This should be a relatively easy task, taking into consideration that the selection of the sources has already been made and the methodology already established.

Furthermore, on the basis of a complete reference framework, it could be possible to develop other tools that would be useful for the teaching, learning and assessment of Chinese in Europe: a *Language Portfolio*, for instance, which could help self-evaluation for learners, and a *Syllabus*. Using a formally recognized *Syllabus*, it would be possible, first of all, to efficiently programme future Chinese language courses at high-school and university levels, and secondly to compile new and modern manuals for Chinese language teaching following the European standard of the CEFR, satisfying its priorities and needs, in particular the communicative need.

²⁴ A document with the results of the debate on “Learning to write Chinese by hand” is available at the following link: http://chineesopschool.slo.nl/actueel/verslag070612/Learning_to_write_Chinese_by_hand.pdf (Accessed 01/16)

Table 1. Schematic overview of the EBCL project

Premises	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The boosting of cooperation between China and the European countries. 2. The increasing demand for and provision of Chinese language courses in Europe (and beyond). 3. The need for consistency in Chinese language learning, teaching and assessment across Europe
Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Propose a framework of competence descriptors for Chinese language. 2. Raise the awareness of social and linguistic differences between Chinese and European languages. 3. Create a network of concerned European and foreign universities, schools and institutions. 4. Enhance the internationalization process European Universities. 5. Encourage and facilitate student mobility. 6. Break away from the old tradition of a knowledge & structure-based approach in teaching Chinese in Europe in favour of a communicative approach. 7. Provide a tool for the production of a new generation of curricula/syllabi, textbooks etc. for the European context.
Research questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can the CEFR be used for Chinese language, since Chinese is quite distant from other European languages? 2. How can the CEFR be implemented in order to meet the needs of European learners of Chinese? 3. Can the 6 levels of the CEFR be kept or are sublevels needed? 4. How can we adapt the existing 'Can do' statements to the case of Chinese? 5. Should the 'graphemic competence' be included in the EBCL framework? 6. Should a vocabulary list be provided? Should a list of Chinese characters be provided as well, given the peculiarity of the language? 7. Is <i>Hanyu Pinyin</i> just a transcription/input method or also a mean of communication? Should it be inserted in the framework? Where? 8. Should the 'intercultural competence' be added to the language scale? 9. Is writing Chinese with the support of electronic devices equivalent to writing Chinese?
Answers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. Adjusting the levels, accommodating the descriptors 3. Sub-levels are needed in order to avoid discouraging the learner: learning Chinese undoubtedly requires more time than other European languages to be learnt. The EBCL levels are 12: A1.1, A1, A1+, A2, A2+, B1, B1+, B2, B2+, C1, C1+, C2. 4. Using a wide pool of existing descriptors, examining and validating them among project partners and through open seminars with field experts. 5. Yes. A special sub-level must be created for it and new descriptors must be made.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Yes, the creation of both lists is strongly advocated by the European Chinese teachers community. 7. <i>Hanyu Pinyin</i> is also used to perform language activities and should be included in the framework, in the written production and reception. 8. The project partners eventually decided to drop this research question 9. The project partners eventually decided that a final answer was far from being reached due to the still on-going debate on the topic.
Sources used for the descriptors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CEFR 2001 2. Previous studies on the topic, concerning Chinese and other European languages 3. Banks of Descriptors 4. Existing ELPs 5. Japanese Foundation's <i>Can do Statements</i>
Methodology to adapt the descriptors	<p>Premises</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep the CEFR unchanged whenever possible. 2. Do not remove descriptors. 3. Do not move existing descriptors to a higher or lower level. <p>Actual methodology</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In some cases, the CEFR descriptors proved valid for Chinese language and did not undergo any changes. 2. In other cases, descriptors coming from the <i>Banks</i> were added to better specify and contextualise the original descriptor or to provide a descriptor for a sub-level. 3. In a few cases, the CEFR descriptors or those coming from the <i>Banks</i> were slightly modified in order to better suit the linguistic competence of Chinese language learners. 4. At times, splitting one CEFR descriptor into two sub-levels appeared the best solution.
Outputs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Descriptors for levels: A1.1, A1, A1+, A2, A2+ 2. Supporting documents: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. List of themes and topics b. List of Language Functions c. List of Chinese characters d. List of Lexical units
Future developments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Descriptors for levels: B1, B1+, B2, B2+, C1, C1+, C2. 2. Vocabulary for levels: B1, B1+, B2, B2+, C1, C1+, C2. 3. Production of a <i>European Language Portfolio</i> for European learners of Chinese. 4. Creation of an official <i>Syllabus</i>.

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MONICA ROMANO

ISSUES, TRENDS AND CULTURAL ADJUSTMENTS
IN TRANSLATING THE BIBLE INTO CHINESE

Background

The first Christian missionaries who arrived in China (Nestorians in the 7th century; Franciscans, Dominicans, and the Jesuits in 16th-17th centuries) had not dedicated themselves to Bible translation into Chinese. The reasons were many, namely the linguistic barrier, the emphasis that they rather placed on pastoral works, and the lack of such a tradition in the Catholic Church, which actually used to discourage individual Bible reading and Bible translation in vernacular languages up to the 20th century, promoting the use of the Latin *Vulgata* both for liturgical purposes and, at a later stage, as a textual basis for Bible translation.¹ Produced by St. Jerome in the 5th century, the Latin *Vulgata* became the standard Bible used by the Christians, later on the Roman Catholic Church, particularly priests and religious people and in community liturgical contexts such as during Mass, for over a thousand years. In the Catholic Church, the Latin *Vulgata de facto* superseded in authority the original texts and later on was used as the main textual basis for Bible translations in vernacular languages.

By contrast, as soon as they arrived to China in the 19th century, Protestant missionaries engaged in Bible translation, as they considered this as a priority of their missionary activity. While the Catholic Church only had partial translations (largely the Gospels or the New Testament) by the end of the 19th century, Protestant denominations engaged in the translation of the whole Bible from the very beginning, using the original texts. A number of different Bible editions were published from that time on within the Protestant community in China, with first translations being completed as early as in the 1820s. The Catholic Church published its first complete Bible translation from the original texts only in 1968.²

The issue of terminology, in particular translation of terms such as “God”, “Holy

¹ For an analysis of this issue see Nicolas Standaert, “The Bible in Early Seventeenth-Century China,” in *Bible in Modern China. The Literary and Intellectual Impact*, eds. Irene Eber et al. (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XLIII, 1999).

² For recent studies related to Bible translation into Chinese see: Toshikazu. S. Foley, *Biblical Translation in Chinese and Greek. Verbal Aspect in Theory and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); *Shengjingde Zhong-*

Spirit”, and “*Logos*”, posed a number of problems to the translators, as they found themselves in a dilemma: how to render Christian concepts which did not exist in the Chinese language or were difficult to express through Chinese philosophical and religious terms as these often had different connotations? The translators had to choose between using local religious and philosophical terminology (with the idea that a certain term, over time, would have acquired a Christian meaning) and avoiding it through the use of phonetic transcriptions or creation of neologisms. The first option presented the advantage of using a well-known terminology to the Chinese, which in some cases was also taken into high consideration by the readers as it was rooted in the ancient Chinese cultural background. On the other side, however, this solution could present risks of syncretism or misunderstandings among the Christian converts. The Catholic and Protestant missionaries in China showed different attitudes towards this issue, as evidenced from the well-known “*Quaestio de Ritibus Sinensibus*” – a bitter debate that divided Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans in China. While this controversy was not around Bible translation issues, one of the debated issues was on the best term to use for “God” in Chinese, hence influencing later translation works. Later on, the Protestant denominations that were present in China were also involved in a similar debate – the so called “Term Question” – specifically on how to translate the terms for “God” and “Holy Spirit” in the context of Bible translation. In dealing with terminology issues, the translators had a great concern for making a faithful, accurate and rigorous translation of the “Word of God”, while rendering it in a language that could make understandable the Christian message in the Chinese cultural context.

This paper makes a comparative analysis of selected modern Bible translations, both Protestant and Catholic ones, focusing on a few passages of Chapter 1 of the Gospel according to St. John. These Bible editions have been selected for the analysis as they present different characteristics, hence being “representative” of different trends in contemporary Chinese Bible translation. Specifically, the selected translations are: i) both Protestant and Catholic translations; ii) made by Chinese and foreigner translators; iii) made by individual translators or groups/commissions; iv) commissioned by church institutions or the outcome of individual initiatives; v) based on different principles of translation and a different textual basis; vi) reliant on different previous authoritative translations (e.g. *Vulgata* or the English Authorized Version) and/or previous authoritative Chinese translations.

The analysis will cover the following main issues: i) attitudes of the translations to the Greek text (GT); ii) influence of translations in other languages or earlier Chinese translations that became authoritative over time; iii) reliance on authoritative Bible versions (such as the English Authorized Version – EAV; the English

wen Fanyi 聖經的中文翻譯, *Tianzhujiao Yanjiu Xuebao* 天主教研究學報 ed. Centre for Catholic Studies (Hong Kong: Journal of Catholic Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2, 2011); Cloe Starr, ed., *Reading Christian Scriptures in China* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

Revised Version – ERV; and the *Vulgata*) or critical editions of the GT for translating ambiguous or unclear passages; iv) language and style of the translation; v) principles of translation, namely formal correspondence and functional or dynamic equivalence, according to the definitions of Eugene Nida.³

The Bible editions analyzed and their main characteristics are summarized in the following table:

	Chinese name	Abbreviation	Year of publication	Textual basis of New Testament (NT)	Influence from other Bible translation	Frequent reliance on previous Chinese translations	Main translator(s)/ initiator(s)
Protestant translations							
Catholic translations							
Bible translation by the <i>Studium Biblicum Franciscanum</i>	<i>Sigao Shengjing</i> 思高圣经	SBF	1968	GT (mostly critical edition by Merk)	<i>Vulgata Latina</i> (VG); possibly <i>Bible de Jérusalem</i> ⁴	NT by Xiao Jingshan 蕭靜山 (XIAO)	Foreign missionary (with help of Chinese scholars)
Union Version (Mandarin edition)	<i>Heheben</i> 和合本	UV	1919 (revision: 1988)	Greek text (GT)/ <i>Textus Receptus</i> (TR)	English Authorized Version (EAV) and English Revised Version (ERV)	Peking Version (PV)	Foreign missionaries (American, British, etc.) with Chinese help
Bible translation by Lü Zhenzhong 吕振中	<i>Shengjing</i> 圣经	LÜ	1970 (NT: 1946 and 1952)	GT (critical edition by Souter)	ERV	None in particular	Chinese
Today's Chinese Version ⁵	<i>Xiandai Zhongwen Yiben</i> 现代中文译本	TCV	1980 (revision: 1995)	GT by United Bible Societies (UBS) and <i>Good News Bible: the Bible in Today's English Version</i> (TEV)	TEV	None in particular	Chinese
New Bible Translation	<i>Shengjing Xinyiben</i> 圣经新译本	NBT	1992 (NT: 1976)	GT	-	UV	Chinese
Pastoral Bible	<i>Muling Shengjing</i> 牧灵圣经	PB	1998	<i>Christian Community Bible</i> (CCB) ⁶		SBF, Chinese Jerusalem Bible (GB)	Foreign missionary (with help of Chinese people)

³ According to Nida's translation theory, the principle of formal correspondence focuses on formal fidelity and attempts to match as closely as possible the formal elements of the original language, such as the lexical details, grammatical structure, consistency in word usage, meanings in terms of the source cultural context. As opposed to formal correspondence, the principle of functional or dynamic equivalence is to reproduce "in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source-language message". This principle emphasizes more the transmission of the message or the content of the original text, as well as a more natural rendering in the receptor language, than the preservation of the original grammatical structure and formal reproduction of the original text.

⁴ Thor Strandenaes, *Principles of Chinese Bible Translation: As Expressed in Five Selected Versions of the New Testament by Mt 5:1-12 and Col 1* (Hong Kong: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), 104

⁵ A Catholic edition of this Bible version was published in 1984, with the only difference in the translation of the terms for "God" and "Holy Spirit" – see below.

⁶ The initiator of this translation project claimed that the translation was based on the original text, but it appears that it is reliant on its version(s) in other vernacular languages, such as the English version (the CCB).

Comparative analysis of selected Bible translations of Chapter 1 of St. John's Gospel

Jn 1:1

GT: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.⁷ET: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.⁸

UV: 太初有道、道與 神同在、道就是 神。

LÜ: 起初有道，道与上帝同在，道是上帝之真体。

TCV: 宇宙被造以前，道已经存在。道与上帝同在；道是上帝。

NBT: 太初有道，道与 神同在，道就是上帝。

SBF: 在起初已有圣言，圣言与天主同在，圣言就是天主。

PB: 元始之初就有“道”，“道”与天主同在，“道”即是天主。

Terminology

The translation of the Greek expression “in the beginning” raised issues to the translators, as shown from the variety of translations made by the different Chinese Bible editions. Amongst the Protestant translations, UV and NBT are the only ones to opt for a term of the Daoist tradition, *taichu* 太初, which had previously been used in the *Peking Version* (PV) – a Bible translation published within the Protestant community before UV. There are other earlier Protestant translations that adopted a terminology with a Daoist connotation, including the first complete Chinese Bible translation made by Marshman (1822), which uses the term *yuanshi* 原始, literally “the original beginning”. The others are the *Delegates' Version* (DV) – an authoritative translation in classical language –, and the classical and semi-classical editions of UV,⁹ both using the term *yuanshi* 元始, literally “the first beginning”. LÜ and SBF, on the contrary, opt for a more neutral term, *qichu* 起初. Previous Catholic translations, such as that by Jean Basset, MEP, and Joseph Hsiao Ching-shan (*pinyin*: Xiao Jingshan) S.J. (XIAO) also do not make use of Daoist terms, according to a general tendency of Catholic translations to avoid terms deriving from the Chinese philosophical and religious tradition. Basset and XIAO respectively choose *dangshi* 當始 and *qichu* 起初, the former being probably inherited by the Morrison's Protestant Bible translation published in 1823 and the latter by SBF. Other Catholic translations opt for the same solution as UV, such as the translation

⁷ The Greek text used as a reference is that edited by the United Bible Societies (UBS), which is the most reliable and respected Greek edition of the New Testament.

⁸ As an aid to the reader, the English translation (ET) of the Greek text is provided for reference. The English Bible edition used for that is the *New American Bible*.

⁹ UV was initially published in three different editions – classical, semi-classical and in 1919 Mandarin. Published in conjunction with the May-4 Movement, the latter prevailed on the others and has now become the most popular Chinese Bible translation.

by John Wu Ching-hsiung (*pinyin*: Wu Jingxiong) 吳經熊 (WU)¹⁰ and the Chinese translation of the Jerusalem Bible (JB).¹¹ PB also differs from SBF and chooses the Daoist term *yuanshi* 元始.

The terminology used to refer to God is different not only between Catholic and Protestant translations, but also between the Protestant translations themselves.¹² As mentioned above, the issue was largely debated among the Protestant denominations in China. Concerning the term for “God”, the debate was largely around the terms *shangdi* 上帝 and *shen* 神, with a minority of missionaries proposing alternative terms.¹³ The UV is published in two different editions - *shen* 神, “god”, “spirit”, and *shangdi* 上帝, “Supreme Ruler” or “Sovereign on High”. The following translations - LÜ, TCV and NBT - use the term *shangdi* 上帝, although the term *shen* can also be found in the online versions of TCV and NBT. To note, UV leaves a space before the word *shen* 神 (or *shangdi* 上帝 in *shangdi* editions) as a form of reverence to God and to mark when the term refers to God and not to “any” or a generic god. There is also a more practical reason for leaving the space, which is that the same text can be used for printing the editions with the disyllabic term *shangdi* 上帝.¹⁴

To translate “God”, the Catholic translations adopt the term *tianzhu* 天主 literally “Lord of Heaven”, a word introduced by the Jesuit missionaries in the 16th century. It was officially adopted by the Catholic community after the Question of

¹⁰ This is a particular translation of the New Testament and the Psalms that is produced as an individual initiative, without any church connection or pastoral objective. Wu translated the Scripture into classical Chinese verses. The translation was financed by Chiang Kai-shek, who was a Protestant believer, and this probably explains the influence of the Protestant terminology in the translation. The Psalms were published in 1946 and revised in 1975, and the New Testament was published in 1949.

¹¹ This translation - in Chinese *Xinjing Quanji* 新经全集 - is also known as the *Yelusaleng Shengjing* 耶路撒冷聖經. It was made by the Sheshan Seminary (Shanghai) under the leadership of Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian 金鲁贤 of Shanghai and published in 1994 (revised in 2004). It is based on the well-known French edition and a Chinese NT version, which had been published earlier in 1953.

¹² For an overview of the issue of biblical translation of the term “God” in Chinese see Monica Romano, “The Reception of Christianity in China: Terminological Issues in Bible translation”, in *Talking Literature. Essay on Chinese and Biblical Writings and Their Interaction*, eds. Raoul David Findelsen et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013), 86-89. Some more original and detailed insights on the various translation for terms related to “god” in the Bible can be found in François Barriquand, “Biblical Names of God in Chinese: A Catholic Point of View with Ecumenical Perspectives”, in *Shengjingde Zhongwen Fanyi* 聖經的中文翻譯, *Tianzhujiao Yanjiu Xuebao* 天主教研究學報, ed. Centre for Catholic Studies (Hong Kong: Journal of Catholic Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2, 2011), 456-562.

¹³ On the “Term Question”, see: Irene Eber, “The Interminable Term Question”, in *Bible in Modern China. The Literary and Intellectual Impact*, eds. Irene Eber et al. (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XLIII, 1999).

¹⁴ Jost Oliver Zetzsche, *The Bible in China. The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China* (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XLV, 1999), 275.

Rites, upon a papal decision.¹⁵ Notably, the Question of Rites was around the appropriateness for Chinese converts to honour Confucius and practise the ancestors' worship. However, there was also a third question related to the most appropriate way to translate "God" in Chinese. The Jesuits were in favour of a local religious term, such as *shangdi* 上帝 or *tian* 天, whereas Franciscan and Dominican missionaries strongly opposed to these options and proposed the neologism *tianzhu* 天主. The debate was put to an end in 1742, when the papal decree *Ex quo singulari* prohibited the terms preferred by the Jesuits in favour of the term *tianzhu* 天主. Following the Question of Rites, the Catholic translators will generally be very concerned about using indigenous philosophical and religious terminology, tending to avoid it and opting for alternative solutions, including phonetic transcriptions in the very beginning. An exemplification of this attitude can be seen in the context of translating the word *logos*. While the Protestant translations adopt the term *dao* 道 playing on the meaning that the word had in classical Chinese ("way", but also "say"), SBF borrows from XIAO a neologism, *shengyan* 圣言, literally "sacred word", thus avoiding a term with a clear and strong Daoist connotation. Interestingly, both JB and PB keep the word *dao* 道, but placing it between quotation marks, that is to say: this is not the usual meaning associated with *dao* 道. The translators of JB were Chinese and therefore may have felt less reluctant to adopt the local terminology. They also followed an earlier Catholic translation of the New Testament by Wu Ching-hsiung (Wu Jingxiong) 吳經熊 who firstly opted for the term *dao* 道. The PB was translated with the main aim of closing the gap between the Jewish-Christian worldview and the Chinese culture, hence the choice of the term *dao* 道.

It is worth mentioning how the Protestant and Catholic translators had come to their different solutions on the translation of the word *logos*. The first Protestant translators - Marshman and Morrison - used the simple term *yan* 言, "word", which several missionaries judged inadequate. It was considered "weak" as unlike the term *logos* that derived from the Greek philosophy, it did not already have originally a philosophical connotation. Some translators proposed to have the term be preceded by a space, to differentiate when the term had the common meaning of "word" and when, instead, it referred to the Word of God. Medhurst, a Protestant translator who greatly contributed to the development of a Christian vocabulary and revised Morrison's translation, for the first time translated *logos* with *dao* 道, a choice that was subsequently maintained in nearly all the Protestant translations.

With respect to the Catholic editions, the translations by Li Wenyu 李问渔 (1897), Xiao Jingshan 萧静山 (1922) and Ma Xiangbo 马相伯 (1937), which used VG as a textual basis, opted for the transliteration of the Latin word *Verbum*, *wuERPENG* 物爾朋.¹⁶ However, Ma Xiangbo combined the phonetic transcription with a tran-

¹⁵ For a recent original research study on the Question of Rites, see Nicolas Standaert, *Chinese Voices in the Rites Controversy*, (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2012).

¹⁶ Lloyd Haft, "Perspectives on John C.H. Wu's Translation of the New Testament", in *Reading Chris-*

slation using the term *zhenyan* 真言, literally “true word”. *Zhenyan* 真言, however, also indicates the Japanese *Shingon* Buddhism and could also refer to the truth of Buddha in Chinese Buddhism.¹⁷ It is probably because of this Buddhist connotation that this option combining transliteration and translation has never been taken up in subsequent translations. The revised version of XIAO (1956) made on the GT, replaces the transliteration *wu'erpeng* 物爾朋 with the translation *shengyan* 圣言, which represents a compromise between choosing a local term with a philosophical/religious connotation (such as *dao* 道) and opting for a neutral phonetic transcription that may sound unclear to the Chinese reader. Unlike the previous Catholic translations, WU adopts the term *dao* 道 as done by the Protestant translations. This shows again on one side his relative freedom due to the fact that his translation was not commissioned by any church for pastoral use and on the other side the influence of the Protestant vocabulary. Finally, it is meaningful that the Catholic edition of TCV, which differs from the Protestant edition only in the translations of the terms “God” and “Holy Spirit”, keeps the term *dao* 道 for translating *logos*.

Principles of translation

An exemplification of the adoption of the principle of formal correspondence can be seen in SBF's translation of the Greek $\epsilon\nu\ \alpha\rho\chi\eta\iota$, as the translators add to the text the preposition *zai* 在, which is omitted in all the other translations. A similar approach was adopted earlier in the translations by Basset and Morrison, which choose the term *dangshi* 当始, where *dang* 当 has the meaning of “just in”.¹⁸ By applying the opposite principle of translation (functional or dynamic equivalence), TCV and PB opt for more explanatory paraphrases - respectively 宇宙被造以前, “before the universe was created,” and 元始之初, “before the beginning”.

Resorting to previous authoritative translations

The choice of the term *tongzai* 同在, “to stay with”, reveals an interpretation of GT on the part of the translators. In fact, the preposition *prós* can indicate either

tian Scriptures in China, ed. Cloe Starr (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 193.

¹⁷ Jost Oliver Zetzsche, “Bibel in China (3): Terminologische Einflüsse von Denksystemen nicht-christlichen Ursprungs auf das chinesische Vokabular“, in *China Heute XIV* (1995), 2 (78): 51; William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (Taipei: Chung-kuo fo-chiao yueh-k'an, 1968), 332.

¹⁸ See J. Tomlin, *Critical Remarks on Dr Medhurst's or Delegates' Chinese Version of the first Chapter of St John's Gospel* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh and Hunt, 1859), 5; Zetzsche, *The Bible in China. The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China*, 50.

proximity (“near to”) or company (“together with”).¹⁹ Typically, in such cases of ambiguity, the translators revert to previous translations that are considered authoritative, EAV and ERV (used as reference by Protestant translations) and VG (used as reference by Catholic translations). Translators often also resort to previously translated Chinese Bible editions that have acquired authority over time (such as DV, PV, XIAO, UV, SBF). The English translations used as reference and the Chinese versions prior to UV all agree with interpreting the preposition *prós* with the meaning of “with”: EAV, ERV and TEV (translation: “with”); DV (translation: *gongzai* 共在, “be together with”); PV (*tongzai* 同在). All modern Protestant translations (UV, LÜ, NBT, and TCV) follow this interpretation. SBF and PB do the same, thus deviating from the translation of VG (“*apud*”, “at”), denoting a location.²⁰ It is possible that this is a case when SBF follows UV and the French edition of the Jerusalem Bible (translation: “*avec*”).²¹ VG was instead followed by XIAO (圣言在天主) and JB (“道”在天主), whose translations reproduce a typical Chinese sentence feature with the location complement. The same solution is later adopted by BP, which also follows its English textual basis (CCB). It is worth noting that most of the earlier translations, both Catholic and Protestant ones (e.g. by Morrison, Marshman, the UV editions in classical and semi-classical language, and WU), had interpreted *prós* with the meaning of “with”, but chose the more classical term *xie* 偕, “in the company of”. An exception is constituted by the translation by Basset, which originally and freely translates with the figurative expression 在...懷裡, “in the bosom of”, which is found in the Gospel of John, but in a different passage (1:18).

Reliance on Bible editions in modern languages

In GT the same verb (*eimi*, “be”) is repeated three times, while Chinese translations (except for TCV) translate with three different verbs, as the Chinese language is more specialized than ancient Greek and English in rendering the verbs of existence, not only from a lexical point of view, but also syntactical and grammatical.²² This passage shows that TCV is clearly dependent on TEV, as TCV is the only Chinese translation choosing the verb *cunzai* 存在, “exist”, reproducing TEV’s translation.

¹⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *Giovanni, Commento al Vangelo Spirituale* (original title: The Gospel According to John) (Assisi: Cittadella, 1986), 5; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Il Vangelo di Giovanni, parte prima* (original title: *Das Johannesevangelium*), (Brescia: Paideia, 1973), 295.

²⁰ CCB, which is the textual basis of PB, also translates with the word “with”.

²¹ Regarding such a possible influence, which is not fully demonstrated, see Thor Strandenaes, *Principles of Chinese Bible Translation: As Expressed in Five Selected Versions of the New Testament by Mt 5:1-12 and Col 1* (Hong Kong: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), 104.

²² Regarding the translation of the verbs of existence in Chinese Bible editions, in particular in the Old Testament, see Yariv-Laor, “Linguistic Aspects of Translating the Bible into Chinese”, in Irene Eber et al. eds, (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XLIII, 1999), 50.

Translating problem passages

None of the Chinese translations follows GT's sequence of the words (καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος), and also earlier influential versions (e.g. EAV, ERV, DV, PV, XIAO, TEV, CCB). The only exception is VG (translation: *et Deus erat Verbum*). This is probably due to the interpretation of this passage, which was debated for long time. In this passage, in fact, there is no article before the word *Theós*, which is a predicative noun not requiring any article, but not in the sense that the *Logos* is divine, but that it is God.²³ Lü's edition dated 1952 used the term *shen* 神 to translate *Theós*, interpreting it as attributive ("divine") and not as a noun ("God").²⁴ Lü's 1970 edition changed the translation, adding a sort of explanatory word to GT (*zhenti* 真 体, "real body"). This original solution shows the greater freedom in introducing innovations by individual translators.

Jn 1:3

- GT: πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν
 ET: All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.
 UV: 万物是借着他造的。凡被造的，没有一样不是借着他造的。
 LÜ: 万物藉着他而被造；凡被造的，没有一物在他以外而被造。
 TCV: 上帝藉着他创造万有；在整个创造中，没有一样不是借着他造的。
 NBT: 万有是借着他造的；凡被造的，没有一样不是借着他造的。
 SBF: 万有是藉着他而造成的；凡受造的，没有一样不是由他而造成的。
 PB: 万物由“道”而成，没有“道”就没有一切。

Language and style of the translation

All translations preserve the passive sentences of GT, with some emphasizing the passive tense through the preposition *bei* 被. Exceptions are TCV, which turns the first part of the sentence into the active tense, and PB, which avoids the passive tense and make it an implicit part of GT. In both cases, the dependence on TEV and CCB is evident.²⁵ It is also possible that PB followed JB, which also has a shortened and simplified translation more in line with the features of the Chinese language (万物由“道”而成, 万物非“道”不成).

²³ Brown, *Giovanni, Commento al Vangelo Spirituale*, 6; Enrico Ghezzi, *Come Abbiamo Ascoltato Giovanni* (Bologna: Digi Graf, 2006), 115

²⁴ Jia Baoluo 賈保羅 (R. P. Kramers), Ping Lü Zhenzhong Mushi Xinyue Xinyi Xiugao 評呂振中牧師新約新譯修稿 (On Lü Zhenzhong's Revision of the New Testament's Translation), in *Shengjing Hanyi Lunwenji* 聖經漢譯論文集, ed. Jia Baoluo 賈保羅 (Hong Kong: Jidujiao Fuqiao, 1964), 138-139. There were a few other translations rendering in translation this interpretation of TG, see Zetzsche, *The Bible in China. The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China*, 245.

²⁵ TEV reads: "Through him God made all things [...]" and CCB reads: "[...] without him nothing came to be".

Terminology

All translations do not translate literally the Greek *panta*, “all things”, but use indigenous terms: *wanwu* 万物, “the ten thousand things”, and *wanyou* 万有, “the ten thousand existing beings”.²⁶ These words are synonyms and designate the whole of creation. *Wanwu* 万物 in particular emphasizes the sense of “completeness”.²⁷ Among other Bible editions, *wanwu* 万物 was also employed by Morrison and Marshman, DV, PV, XIAO and JB, whereas *wanyou* 万有 in the classical and semi-classical editions of UV. This choice of indigenous terms “shows on one hand the familiarity of the translators with Chinese culture and, on the other hand, the effort to give to the text a Chinese appearance”.²⁸

Jn 1:4

GT: ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων

ET: What came to be through him²⁹ was life, and this life was the light of the human race;

UV: 生命在他里头。这生命就是人的光。

LÜ: 生命在他里面;³⁰ 这生命就是人的光。

TCV: 道就是生命的根源，这生命把光赐给人类。

NBT: 在他里面有生命³¹ 这生命就是人的光。

SBF: 在他内有生命，这生命是人的光。

PB: 万物在“道”内有生命，这生命就是人类的光。

Language and style of the translation, attitudes to GT, reliance on modern language translations

NBT, SBF and PB structure the first sentence of GT according to the syntax of the Greek language. On the contrary, UV and LÜ opt for a sentence structure that is closer to the Chinese language. In fact, NBT, TCV and SBF, following formally GT, place the locative complement at the beginning of the sentence and the term *zoē* (“life”) in post-verbal position. On the contrary, UV and LÜ overturn the sentence

²⁶ Zetzsche, “Bibel in China (3): Terminologische Einflüsse von Denksystemen nichtchristlichen Ursprungs auf das chinesische Vokabular“, 47.

²⁷ Zetzsche, *The Bible in China. The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China*, 254.

²⁸ Zetzsche, “Bibel in China (3): Terminologische Einflüsse von Denksystemen nichtchristlichen Ursprungs auf das chinesische Vokabular“, 47.

²⁹ Literally GT reads: “in Him was life”.

³⁰ Lü also adds an alternative translation: 万物藉着他而被造；没有一物是在他以外而被造的。凡已被造的，有生命在他里面。

³¹ NBT also adds an alternative translation: 万有是借着他造的，没有一样不是借着他造的；凡被造的，都在他里面有生命。

and place the term “life” in pre-verbal position, postponing the locative complement in post-verbal position. The first solution is a more accurate translation, not only formally with respect to GT but also from the point of view of the meaning. In fact, the term “life” is not preceded by any article and therefore “should be a predicate, not a subject”, whereby the correct translation of the Greek text should be: “it was (or is) life”.³²

The second solution makes the sentence clearer and more fluent in Chinese, but conveys a defined connotation to “life”, as the term is placed before the verb. The 1900 edition of the UV had opted for the first option but without the suffix *litou* 裡頭 (在他有生命). However, starting from the 1907 edition, the translation was changed,³³ freeing itself from the syntax of the Greek and perhaps following PV (生命在道中). It is therefore clear that both SBF and NBT did not follow the earlier Chinese translations they generally refer to in problematic passages - respectively XIAO³⁴ and UV. However, some of the main Catholic translations after SBF opt for a similar solution as that adopted by SBF or even follow it, such as JB (“道”内有生命) and PB. The latter also shows some influence from CCB.³⁵ TCV opts for a third different solution, following TEV and adding an explanatory word to the text.³⁶

The translators also adopted different terms to translate the locative preposition, this showing different styles in translation. The “older” translations (UV, SBF) use more formal terms or terms that are more used in the written language, respectively *litou* 里头 and *nei* 内. Translations initiated by Chinese translators (LÜ and NBT) adopt the term *limian* 里面, more informal and colloquial. In this particular case, PB does not follow the usual second approach, but probably follows previous Catholic translations (SBF or JB).

Jn 1:5

- GT: καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.
 ET: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
 UV: 光照在黑暗里，黑暗却不接受光。
 LÜ: 光在黑暗中照耀着，黑暗却没有胜过了(或译：『去领会；或『赶上了』)光。
 TCV: 光照射黑暗，黑暗从没有胜过光。
 NBT: 光照在黑暗中，黑暗不能胜过光。
 SBF: 光在黑暗中照耀，黑暗决不能胜过他。
 PB: 光在黑暗中照耀，黑暗无法胜过它，

³² Brown, *Giovanni, Commento al Vangelo Spirituale*, 8; Schnackenburg, *Il Vangelo di Giovanni*, parte prima, 302-303.

³³ Zetzsche, *The Bible in China. The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China*, 274-275.

³⁴ XIAO had translated freely with respect to VG and GT: 他是生命之所在 (“he is the place of life”).

³⁵ CCB reads: “Whatever has come to be, found life in him...”

³⁶ TEV reads: “The Word was the source of life”.

Attitudes to GT

In this verse, the translators had to decide between translating the GT literally and reformulating the sentence according to the Chinese language. SBF, LÜ and PB follow the sequence of GT inserting the locative complement between the subject (“light”) and the verb (“shine”). This solution is obvious for SBF and LÜ, which are always keen on a formal correspondence with the GT. On the contrary, this is not an obvious choice of PB, which often tends to modify the sentence to make it more “Chinese”. It is likely that in this case PB preferred following previous Chinese translations (SBF and JB) rather than making a new translation.³⁷ The other Protestant translations, as done by ancient translations such as those by Marshman and Morrison and PV, use the typical sentence structure of the Chinese language with the location complement in the post-verbal position.

Resorting to previous authoritative translations

The Greek verb *katalambano* has raised problems of interpretation and translation since early times³⁸ because it can have several meanings: “understand”, “grab”, “welcome”, “receive”, “accept”, “win”, “overcome”.³⁹ This has led to problems of interpretation and translation in Chinese translations as well. Therefore, the Chinese translations in some cases resorted to previous authoritative Bible editions or the critical editions of GT. Unlike DV and PV, which respectively translate with the verbs *shi* 識 and *renshi* 認識, “learn”, “recognize” on the basis of EAV (“comprehend, “understand”), UV translates with *jieshou* 接受, “accept”, on the basis of ERV (“apprehend”, which literally means “take”, “grab”, “grasp”, also “grasp with the mind” therefore also “understand”). Other Protestant and Catholic translations prefer the alternative reading of “win”, “overcome”, according to Origen, most of the Greek Fathers, and some modern Biblical exegesis scholars,⁴⁰ therefore opting for the verb *shengguo* 胜过. LÜ adds in a footnote two other possible translations, namely *linghui* 领会, “understand”, according to the interpretation of the old English versions and UV, and *ganshang* 赶上, “overcome.” The translators of NBT claim that the translation with *shengguo* 胜过 is more accurate than that chosen in UV, as it is supported in “numerous commentaries and more used in recent translations” as opposed to *jieshou* 接受 adopted by UV.⁴¹ By opting for

³⁷ The translation by Xiao does not follow VG and sets the sentence as done by the Protestant translations (那光照在黑暗中).

³⁸ Schnackenburg, *Il Vangelo di Giovanni*, parte prima, 311.

³⁹ Brown, *Giovanni, Commento al Vangelo Spirituale*, 10-11; Henry G. Liddel e Robert Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 897.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Giovanni, Commento al Vangelo Spirituale*, 311.

⁴¹ *Zhongwen Shengjing Xinjiuyiben Candu Xuanji* 中文聖經新舊譯本參讀選輯 [A Selected Compari-

shengguo 胜过, SBF deviates from XIAO, which had followed VG (“*comprehendo*”) and translated the sentence very freely: 黑暗却不受他照. PB probably follows both earlier Chinese translations (SBF and JB) and CCB (“*overcome*”). TCV in this case follows the interpretation of the majority of Chinese translations and does not follow TEV.⁴² It is worth noting that further to this unanimous choice of most translations, the revised UV could have changed the translation accordingly. Probably because of pastoral reasons, it was decided to leave unchanged a passage that over time have become familiar to the faithful.⁴³

Jn 1:12

- GT: ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,
- ET: But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name
- UV: 凡接待他的, 就是信他名的人, 他就赐他们权柄, 作神的儿女。
- LÜ: 凡接待他的, 就是信他名的人, 他就给他们权利成为上帝的儿女。
- TCV: 然而, 凡接受他的, 就是信他的人, 他就赐给他们特权作上帝的儿女。
- NBT: 凡接受他的, 就是信他名的人, 他就赐给他们权利, 成为上帝的儿女。
- SBF: 但是, 凡接受他的, 他给他们, 即给那些信他名字的人权能, 好成为天主的子女。
- PB: 但凡接待他, 信他名的, 他赐他们权能, 成为天主的儿女。

Attitudes to GT

Although the Greek text (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,” to those who believed in his name”) is placed at the end of the verse, Protestant translations anticipate it and coordinate it with the first phrase (ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, “those who did accept it”) by changing the sequence of GT. In fact, GT has a different word sequence and features compared to the Chinese language and the solution adopted by the Protestant translators also aimed at simplifying the text. Actually, the first phrase of GT, like the second one, is an extension of the dative *autois* (“to them”), which is the indirect object of the verb *edoken* (“gave”). However, since the first phrase was

son between New Chinese Bible and Bible in Chinese Union Version], ed. Zhongwen Shengjing xinyihui 中文聖經新譯會 [The New Chinese Bible Centre], (Hong Kong: Tiandao Shulou, 1996), 15.

⁴² TEV translates freely with the verb “put out”, thus playing on the double meaning of the verb, namely „turn off“ and „eject“.

⁴³ Zetzsche, *The Bible in China. The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China*, 358 and footnote 120.

brought forward in accordance with the construction of *casus pendens* (“hanging case”), whereby a word or phrase is removed from its normal place in the sentence and placed first, the pronoun *osoi* is expressed in the nominative case and not in dative.⁴⁴ Although the Protestant translations do not follow the sequence of GT, its original meaning is preserved. SBF too does not place the second phrase at the end of the verse according to the sequence of GT. Unlike the Protestant translations, SBF does not coordinate the two phrases, but moves the second one after 他给他们 (“it gave to them”) to render the Greek “*edoke autois*” and more faithfully reproduce GT. This choice shows once again that SBF is closely bound with the Greek syntax and strictly adheres to the principle of formal correspondence. Furthermore, such a sentence structure was an innovation of SBF and was not taken up by the following Catholic translations,⁴⁵ which instead preferred adopting the same simpler construction as the Protestant versions.

It is striking that TCV is the only translation where the Greek *to onoma autou* (“his name”) is removed. This shows once again close dependence on TEV.⁴⁶

Terminology

The verb *didomi*, “donate”, “give”, is translated by the Protestant translations with the word *ci* 賜, “give”. This term has the meaning of giving by someone with a higher status to someone with a lower status. It was consequently adopted by the translators to express the idea of donation from God to the human beings.⁴⁷ LÜ and SBF on the contrary translate with the simple verb 给 *gei*, with a more generic and neutral connotation.

To translate the Biblical expression “sons of God” (*tekna Teou*) the Greek word *tekna* (“children”, meaning “sons”) is translated as *ernü* 儿女, literally “sons and daughters”, by the Protestant translations and PB, and *zinü* 子女, same meaning, by SBF. Translating this type of expressions caused two main problems to the translators: i) should the two different terms (*tekna* and *uioi*) occurring in GT be translated differently; and ii) should the term “son” be translated differently when it refers to Jesus (such as in the expression “Son of God”) and when it refers to the “sons of God”. A third issue was whether and how the plural (“sons”) could be marked, especially in ambiguous passages. In some ancient Protestant translations, including those in classical language, such as that of Marshman, DV and UV edition in classical language, the translators did not use any device to mark the

⁴⁴ Brown, *Giovanni, Commento al Vangelo Spirituale*, 14-15.

⁴⁵ XIAO, which reads: 凡接待他, 信他的名字的, 他就賜給他們權能, 得成天主的子女, and JB, which reads: 凡接待他, 而信他名的人, 他授以权能, 成为天主的儿女.

⁴⁶ TEV reads: “To all who received him”

⁴⁷ Zetzsche, “Bibel in China (3): Terminologische Einflüsse von Denksystemen nichtchristlichen Ursprungs auf das chinesische Vokabular“, 49.

plural and therefore a distinction between “Son of God” and “sons of God “. Both expressions were translated in the same way: *shenzi* 神子 or *shangdizi* 上帝子 (depending on whether it was a DV’s and UV’s *shen* or *shangdi* edition). A first distinction is found in the translation by Morrison, who added to the Basset’s translation he used as a reference the plural suffix *bei* 辈: *shenzhizi* 神之子 translated “Son of God” and *shenzhizibei* 神之子辈, “sons of God”.⁴⁸ In the UV semi-classical edition, a clearer differentiation was made for the first time through a specific term, *zinü* 子女, literally “son and daughter “, therefore generically “children”, which was later on used by some Catholic translations such as XIAO and SBF.

As mentioned, in the New Testament, two different terms are used interchangeably to mean “children”: *uioi*, which is more specific for “male”, and *tekna*, more neutral. An exception is the Gospel according to John, which reserves *uioi* to Jesus. PV and TCV always use the same term for both *uioi* and *tekna*, respectively *erzi* 兒子/儿子, “(male) son”, and *ernü* 兒女/儿女, “sons and daughters”. SBF too always uses the term *zinü* 子女, regardless of what term occurs in GT, thus avoiding a rigidly formal correspondence as the differentiation would not change the meaning of the original. In contrast, UV (Mandarin edition), LÜ and NBT use two different terms depending on the occurrence of GT: *ernü* 儿女 to translate *tekna* (e.g. Rom 8:16, Rom 8:21, 1 Jn 3:1-2) and *erzi* 儿子 to translate *uioi* (e.g. in Mt 5:9, Gal 3:26, Rom 8:14), the latter also being used to translate “Son of God”. SBF reserves *zi* 子 to Jesus, unlike XIAO, which uses *zi* 子 for both Jesus and to translate “sons”, together with *zinü* 子女. TCV also reserves a term to Jesus (*erzi* 儿子) and in passages where the term “children” has a broader meaning, it translates it with the generic term *ren* 人, “person”, according to the principle of “functional or dynamic equivalence”.⁴⁹ PB alternates the term *ernü* 儿女, used in Protestant translations, WU, and JB (e.g. Mt 5:9; Rom 8:16) with *zinü* 子女, used in SBF (Rom 8:14.21 Gal 3:26, 1 Jn 3:1-2). To translate “Son of God” PB follows SBF using the term *zi* 子. WU’s translation is very original: 天主之聖子 天主之圣子, “the holy Son of God.”

Regarding specifically the plural, it is interesting to show how the translators dealt with the translation of Rom 8:19.21: “for creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children (*uioi*) of God; [...]that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children (*tekna*) of God”. In this passage, only by the context, the phrase is ambiguous in Chinese and could easily be interpreted as attributing the revelation and the glory to the “Son of God” rather than to “the sons of God.” Therefore, in both verses, DV and PV solve the problem by translating with the term *zhongzi* 眾子, literally “the multitude of children”, which is also used in UV (verse 19) and NBT. In verse 19, LÜ adds to the term *erzi* 儿子 the plural suffix *men* 們]. The same solution of marking

⁴⁸ Strandenaes, *Principles of Chinese Bible Translation: As Expressed in Five Selected Versions of the New Testament by Mt 5:1-12 and Col 1*, 33.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

the plural is adopted by TCV with the term *ernü* 儿女, although *ernü* 儿女 is already plural, apparently for fear of possible misunderstandings. On the contrary, SBF and PB do not add to the implicitly plural term *zinü* 子女 any indicator of the plural.

Resorting to previous authoritative translations

The Greek term “*exousia*” could be interpreted in two different ways as it has the meaning of “power”, “authority”, but according to some scholars, also of “right”.⁵⁰ To decide how to translate the term, the Chinese translations refer to the previous authoritative translations (English translations, VG), including Chinese ones (PV and XIAO). The previous translations that interpret the term with the meaning of “power” are EAV (“power”, indicating alternative readings of “right” and “privilege”), VG (“*potestas*”), PV (*quanbing* 權柄) and XIAO (*quanneng* 權能). As done in other ambiguous passages, UV and SBF follow these interpretations and translations - respectively EAV/PV and VG/XIAO. To note, there is uniformity of interpretation among the main Catholic translations, both those made before SBF (e.g. XIAO and WU) and those made afterwards (e.g. JB and PB).

The other Protestant translations are inclined towards the meaning of “right”, following ERV and TEV and in line with most of the more recent English translations.⁵¹ However, the translators choose different terms: *quanli* 权利 (LÜ and NBT) and *tequan* 特权 (TCV), the latter having the connotation of “privilege”. While once again LÜ depends on ERV, in this case NBT does not follow UV.⁵²

It is meaningful and perhaps not coincidental that the term *quan* 权 combines the meanings of “power”, “competence” and “right”, thus allowing the translators to “play” on the double meaning of the term as occurring in GT and as often done in the Gospel according to John.

Jn 1:13

GT: οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

ET: who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Giovanni, Commento al Vangelo Spirituale*, 15.

⁵¹ American Standard Version, New American Standard Version, New International Version, New King James Version

⁵² According to a scholar of Chinese Bible translation, Liu Yiling 劉翼凌, the translation by UV (*quanbing* 權柄) is better than that of NBT (*quanli*, 權利). See Liu Yiling 劉翼凌, *Lun Yijing de Chengdu, Xiongnu, yu Fengdu*, 論譯經的程度態度, 與風度 (On the level, style and elegance of Bible translation), in *Yijing Luncong* 譯經論叢, ed. Liu Yiling 劉翼凌 (Hong Kong: Fuyin Wenxuan, 1979), 113.

- UV: 这等人不是从血气生的，不是从情欲生的，也不是从人意生的，乃是从神生的。
- LÜ: 这种人不是由于血而生的，不是由于肉欲，也不是由于人欲，乃是由于上帝，而生的。
- TCV: 这样的人不是由血统关系，不是由人的性欲，也不是由男人的意愿生的，而是由上帝生的。
- NBT: 他们不是从血统生的，不是从肉身的意思生的，也不是从人意生的，而是从上帝生的。
- SBF: 他们不是由血气，也不是由肉欲，也不是由男欲，而是由天主生的。
- PB: 他不是由血气，不是由情欲，也不是随人的意愿而生，而是由天主所生。

Terminology

The various translations choose different terms to render the term *aima*, “blood”. Older translations (UV and SBF) adopt a term from the Chinese classical literature, *xueqi* 血气, literally “blood and breath”, which has the meaning of “life energy”.⁵³ Both versions translate in line with earlier Chinese translations (respectively DV/PV and XIAO/WU). TCV and NBT use a more recent term, *xuetong* 血统, “lineage”.⁵⁴ In contrast, LÜ uses the monosyllabic term *xue* 血, “blood”, thus avoiding to deal with interpretation issues of GT.

The translation of the term “blood” may be problematic in Chinese. Passages of the NT such as “according to the law almost everything is purified by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22) and “I said to him, ‘My lord, you are the one who knows.’ He said to me, ‘These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’” (Rev 7:14) could sound difficult to understand by the Chinese reader that is not familiar with the biblical language, as the idea of the blood that cleanses/purifies is absent in the Chinese culture.⁵⁵ The translators opt for a literal translation with the simple term *xue* 血. In passages such as “how much more then, since we are now justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath” (Rom. 5:9) and “and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross (through him), whether those on earth or those in heaven” (Col 1:20), all Bible versions translate by formal correspondence with the term *xue* 血. An exception is TCV, replacing the word “blood” with *si* 死, “death”, in accordance with the principle of functional equiva-

⁵³ Zetzsche, “Bibel in China (3): Terminologische Einflüsse von Denksystemen nichtchristlichen Ursprungs auf das chinesische Vokabular“, 47.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Bertram Wolferstan, *The Catholic Church in China from 1860 to 1907* (London: Sands, 1909), 76.

lence and to help the reader who is not familiar with the figurative use of the term blood in the sense of “death”.⁵⁶ The translators avoiding the literal translation and replacing the term “blood” with “death” were often accused of “taking the blood out of the Bible”.⁵⁷ From their point of view, these translators felt that clearer and more fluent translation outweigh some translation losses like in this specific case.⁵⁸

The figurative expression “blood of his cross” is also problematic and could in fact be associated with some form of magic.⁵⁹ Probably driven by these concerns, UV, LÜ, NBT, and PB preferred to the literal translation of the figurative expression (adopted by Morrison) a free translation reading: “he shed his blood on the cross”, which is more understandable.⁶⁰ Conversely, the older and more authoritative Catholic translations (XIAO and SBF) render literally the figurative expression. The most recent translations, instead, replace “blood” with the term *siwang* 死亡 (“death”) adopting the same approach as TCV.

In Matthew 23:30, “and you say, ‘if we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets’ blood”, the figurative expression “shed blood” is translated literally by all translations, apart from TCV and PB, which make it explicit with the term *shahai* 杀害, “kill”, by functional or dynamic equivalence. A passage that must have created problems to the translators, given the different solutions and adaptations that are adopted in the different translations, is: “keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock of which the holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, in which you tend the church of God that he acquired with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). This passage in fact could be interpreted literally.⁶¹ While most of the translations keep the term *xue* 血, they all avoid to translate literally the verb “buy” (except for UV), which is rendered with different verbs: *gou* 贖/赎 *shu*, “redeem” (DV and NBT); *jiushu* 救贖, “save and redeem” (PV); *qude* 取得, “obtain” (LU and SBF); *huan* 换, “exchange” (TCV and JB), and *de* 得, “get” (PB).

To translate the expression “*telematos sarkos*” (literally “desire of the flesh”), and in particular the Semitic term “*sarx*”, some translators borrowed from Buddhist terminology. Following DV and PV, UV translates with the Buddhist term *qingyu* 情欲, “sexual desire”, “passion”, “lust”. The same term is taken up by PB, which therefore differs from the Catholic translations. LÜ and SBF (like XIAO) use another term,

⁵⁶ Strandenaes, *Principles of Chinese Bible Translation: As Expressed in Five Selected Versions of the New Testament by Mt 5:1-12 and Col 1*, 86. To note that TEV in both passages translates literally with “blood”, but includes in a footnote the alternative translation “by his sacrificial death”.

⁵⁷ William A. Smalley, *Translation as Mission. Bible Translation in the Modern Missionary Movement* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1991), 98.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Wolferstan, *The Catholic Church in China from 1860 to 1907*, 58, 86, 109.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶¹ Xu Mushi (Hui Muk-sai) 許牧世, *Jing yu Yijing* 經與譯經 [The Scripture and its Translation] (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1983), 200.

rouyu 肉欲, literally “carnal desire”.⁶² NBT uses another Buddhist term, *roushen* 肉身 (“physical body”), which simply refers to “the body made of flesh and blood”, has a less negative connotation, and does not involve the idea of sin.⁶³

Jn 1:14

GT: Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

ET: And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.

UV: 道成了肉身住在我们中间，充充满满的有恩典有真理。我们也见过他的荣光，正是父独生子的荣光。

LÜ: 道成了肉身，住在我们中间 [我们见过他的荣光，正是个独生者由父而来的荣光]，丰丰满满地有恩典有『真实』。

TCV: 道成为人，住在我们当中，充满着恩典和真理。我们看见了他的荣耀，这荣耀正是父亲的独子所当得的。

NBT: 道成了肉身，住在我们中间，满有恩典和真理。我们见过他的荣光，正是从父而来的独生子的荣光。SBF: 于是，圣言成了血肉，寄居在我们中间；我们见了他的光荣，正如父独生者的光荣，满溢恩宠和真理。PB: 道”成为人，住在我们中，充满恩宠和真理。我们见到了他的光荣：父赐予唯一圣子特享的光荣。

Terminology and principles of translation

After the first Protestant translators (Marshman and Morrison) had literally translated “sarx” with the term *rou* 肉, which however means “meat” and not “flesh”, in the well-known passage “the Word was made flesh”, the modern translators opt for different solutions – an indication that this was also a problematic translation. UV chooses the term *roushen* 肉身, literally “body of flesh”, which has no negative connotation, moving away from previous translation (*renshen* 人身, literally “the human body”) by DV and PV while choosing a word without the character *rou* 肉. Subsequent translators, both Protestant (LÜ and NBT) and Catholic (SBF) return to terms including the character *rou* 肉 – respectively *roushen* 肉身 and *xuerou* 血肉, the latter literally meaning “flesh and blood, a term without Buddhist connotation that indicates the human body with his emotions and weaknesses.⁶⁴ The more recent translations – TCV and PB⁶⁵ – but

⁶² The previous NT translation (1952) by Lü Zhenzhong adopted the term *routi* 肉體, “body of meat/flesh”, which had a more negative connotation. See Jia Baoluo 賈保羅 (R. P. Kramers), Ping Lü Zhenzhong Mushi Xinyue Xinyi Xiugao 評呂振中牧師新約新譯修稿, 142.

⁶³ Zetzsche, “Bibel in China (3): Terminologische Einflüsse von Denksystemen nichtchristlichen Ursprungs auf das chinesische Vokabular“, 79.

⁶⁴ *Oxford Advanced Learner’s English Chinese Dictionary*, 1997, 558.

⁶⁵ To note that TEV and CCB respectively translate “human being” and “flesh”.

also the Catholic translations made prior to SBF (XIAO and WU)⁶⁶ avoid the Semitism and simply translate with *ren* 人, “person”, by functional or dynamic equivalence.⁶⁷

Similar problems and solutions in translating Semitisms such as “flesh” and “blood” can be found when translating the term “*soma*” (“body”), which is identified with the person according to the Semitic tradition. In Rom 12:1, the passage that reads “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice” could be misunderstood by the Chinese reader.⁶⁸ UV, LÜ, NBT, and SBF preserve the source text by translating it literally with the term *shenti* 身体, “body.” TCV and PB, on the other hand, simplify the sentence by replacing the term “body” with the term “自己” (“yourself”), also following English versions they frequently refer to (TEV and CCB).⁶⁹

To translate the Greek term *karis* (grace), Protestant and Catholic translations choose two different terms - respectively *endian* 恩典 and *enchong* 恩宠 - with *en* 恩 meaning “favour”, “kindness”. Morrison had already used the term *en* 恩, which will be used later in all Bible translations, but in disyllable words. These translations include Medhurst’s, which introduced for the first time the term *endian* 恩典 that was later borrowed by PV and most recent Protestant translations. The term *endian* 恩典 originally meant the favor and benevolence of the king or the emperor towards the people.⁷⁰ Subsequently it became part of the Chinese Christian vocabulary with the meaning of “grace”.⁷¹ On the contrary, DV translated with the term *enchong* 恩寵, which has a very similar meaning as *endian* 恩典, but maybe with a more positive connotation. In fact, the character *chong* 宠 means “favor”, “prefer” and indicates the special treatment, the favor of the king or emperor by virtue of a personal preference.⁷² However, Morrison was against the use of the character *chong* 寵 to translate the divine grace because it also has negative meanings, i.e. “pride” and “concubine”.⁷³ As in Protestant circles, even among Catholic ones, there is a kind of continuity in the choice of the term to use for translating the word “grace”. In the beginning of the Christian mission (and outside the context of Bible translation), the Catholic missionaries could not find any Chinese term that could fully render the Christian idea of “grace”. As a result of this, they initially opted for phonetic transcriptions of the Latin word “*gratia*”, such as *elajiya* 額辣濟亞

⁶⁶ JB, which is published after SBF, does not follow the previous Catholic translations and adopts the term *renshen* 人身, used in the Protestant editions before UV.

⁶⁷ In this case, TCV follows TEV, but BP is different from CCB, which translates with the word “flesh”.

⁶⁸ Xu Mushi (Hui Muk-sai) 許牧世, *Jing yu Yijing* 經與譯經, 145.

⁶⁹ TEV e CCB respectively translate: “Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God” e “...give yourselves as a living and holy sacrifice...”.

⁷⁰ *Far East Chinese-English Dictionary*, 479.

⁷¹ Zetzsche, “Bibel in China (3): Terminologische Einflüsse von Denksystemen nichtchristlichen Ursprungs auf das chinesische Vokabular“, in *China Heute XIV* (1995), 2 (78): 49.

⁷² *Far East Chinese-English Dictionary* (Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe, 1995), 478.

⁷³ Zetzsche, “Bibel in China (3): Terminologische Einflüsse von Denksystemen nichtchristlichen Ursprungs auf das chinesische Vokabular“, 49, footnote 22.

⁷⁴ or *gelajiya* 格拉濟亞。⁷⁵ Later on, the transliterations were replaced by terms such as *chongyou* 寵佑 (you 佑, “help”, “protect”, “blessing”) and *chongai* 寵愛, “prefer”, to love with predilection”.⁷⁶ Bible translations always chose terms including the character *chong* 宠: *shengchong* 聖寵/圣宠 - *sheng* 圣, “holy” - (XIAO and JB) and *enchong* 恩寵, later changed to *miaochong* 妙寵, “mysterious grace” (WU).⁷⁷

The term *aletheia*, “truth”, is translated in all translations with the Buddhist term *zhenli* 真理, “truth”, which also has the meaning of “true doctrine,” “orthodoxy”.⁷⁸ The only exception is LÜ, which chooses an original term - *zhenshi* 真实, “truthful”, “real”, even if it has only an attributive function. This choice is due to the concern that the character *li* 理, which is also a neo-Confucian term, could lead to misunderstandings among the readers.⁷⁹ In order to mark the special use and meaning of the term *zhenshi* 真实, LÜ puts it in brackets. In his earlier edition (1952), he had included in the footnotes the alternative translation *zhenli* 真理 to help the reader,⁸⁰ but the footnote was removed in the following edition (1970). As done by LÜ, WU also opts for a different term and chooses the Buddhist term, *zhendi* 真谛, “the true principle”.⁸¹ This choice shows once again WU’s tendency to use an original terminology. As individual translations, LU and WU have greater flexibility in creating or choosing the terminology or in opting for innovative solutions.

Jn 1:21

GT: καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτόν, τί οὖν; Σὺ Ἠλίας εἶ; καὶ λέγει, Οὐκ εἰμί. Ὁ προφήτης εἶ σύ; καὶ ἀπεκρίθη, Οὐ.

ET: So they asked him, “What are you then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.”

UV: 他们又问他说：「这样你是谁呢？是以利亚吗？」他说：「我不是。是那先知吗？他回答说「不是」。

LÜ: 他们又诘问他说：「那么，是什么呢？你是以利亚吗？」他说：「我不是。」「你是那位神言人吗？」他回答说：「不是。」

TCV: 他们问：“那么，你是谁？是以利亚吗？”约翰回答：“我不是。”他们又问：“是那位先知吗？”他再答：“不是。”

⁷⁴ Pasquale M. D’Elia, ed., *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2 (Roma: Libreria dello Stato, 1949), 290.

⁷⁵ Jozef Jennes, *Zhongguo jiaoli jiangshou shi* 中國教理講授史 (Taipei: Taiwan Pastoral Center, 1975) (Chinese/English translation of the original *Het Godsdiensonderricht in China*, De Bièvre, Branschaaat, 1942), 57.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 27, 57.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Zetzsche, “Bibel in China (3): Terminologische Einflüsse von Denksystemen nichtchristlichen Ursprungs auf das chinesische Vokabular“, 47.

⁷⁹ Jia Baoluo 賈保羅 (R. P. Kramers), *Ping Lü Zhenzhong Mushi Xinyue Xinyi Xiugao* 評呂振中牧師新約新譯修稿, 144.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Soothill and Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 333.

- NBT: 他们又问：“那么你是谁？是以利亚吗？”他说：“我不是。”“是那位先知吗？”他回答：“不是。”
- SBF 他们又问他说：「那么你是谁？你是厄里亚吗？」他说：「我不是。」
「你是那位先知吗？」他回答说：「不是。」
- PB: 他们问他：“那么你是谁？是厄里亚吗？”他说：“我不是。”“你是先知吗”他又回答：“不是！”

Attitudes to GT

The direct question of GT, literally “what then?” is translated literally only by LÜ. The other translations prefer making explicit the meaning of the sentence with the simple and clear translation: “who are you?”. UV and LÜ add at the end of the sentence the modal particle *ne* 呢, showing the concern by the translators of rendering the sense of the sentence through all the linguistic instruments of the Chinese language.⁸²

Terminology

Bible translators found it difficult to find a Chinese term that was suitable to translate the word “prophet”. This was due to the fact that they could not find a term that could render the characteristics of the biblical prophets,⁸³ which are very different from those associated with the Chinese ancient divination practice of knowing the future, which is deep-rooted in China. Most of the translations, including the older ones, opt for the term *xianzhi* 先知 (literally “know before”, or “fore-see”). This term, however, does not fully render the meaning of the term prophecy as it excludes the dimension related to “saying before”.⁸⁴ Considering this term not an adequate one, LÜ created a new term, *shenyanren* 神言人, literally “the man with the divine word”.⁸⁵ This is another example of the originality of this translation and his freedom to introduce innovations compared to other commissioned or missionary society-led translations.

⁸² Zetzsche, “Bibel in China (3): Terminologische Einflüsse von Denksystemen nichtchristlichen Ursprungs auf das chinesische Vokabular“, 49, footnote 13. Liu Yiling 劉翼凌 praises the use of *ne* 呢 in UV, while blaming NBT for not using it, highlighting the importance of these linguistic instruments to render the language alive and understandable.

⁸³ William E. Soothill, *A Mission in China* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1907), 203.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Jia Baoluo 賈保羅 (R. P. Kramers), Ping Lü Zhenzhong Mushi Xinyue Xinyi Xiugao 評呂振中牧師新約新譯修稿, 141; A. H. Jowett Murray, “A Review of Lü Chenchung’s Revised Draft of New Translation of the New Testament”, in *The Bible Translator*, 4 (1953): 167

Phonetic transcriptions of proper names

The transcription of the name Elijah (Greek: *Helias*; Latin: *Elias*) is different between Protestant and Catholic translations – respectively *yiliya* 以利亚 and *eliya* 厄里亚. In the case of Protestant translations, this transcription had already been used in DV and PV, at a time when the translation work was led by foreign missionaries, mostly Americans and British. In fact, in this transliteration, the influence of the English language is evident from the choice of the first character, which is influenced by the English pronunciation of “e”.⁸⁶ In fact, the Catholic transliteration does not present this characteristic as these were not influenced by the English language of both translators and the Bible editions used as a reference. In general, Catholic transliterations are more accurate in reproducing the sounds of the Latin and Greek, compared to Protestant translations which are often affected by the English pronunciation.

Unlike the Protestant translations, there is greater discontinuity in the choice of the phonetic transcriptions of the name Elijah in the various Catholic translations: *eliya* 厄利亞 (XIAO) and *yiliali* 伊理蒺 (WU). None of these was adopted by SBF, probably because XIAO’s included the character *li* 利, “profit”, traditionally not a positive concept in the Confucian ethics. In fact, SBF transliteration - *eliya* 厄里亚 - was the same as XIAO’s but removing the character *li* 利. SBF’s transliteration is the same as the following translations (JB and PB). WU’s transliteration is probably influenced by the English Bible version from which the translation was made or by the Protestant translations. It also uses very original characters.

Regarding the different trends in the transliterations, it is interesting to look at transliterations of the name “Isaiah” (Greek: *Hsaias*; Latin: *Isaias*), as shown in verse 23. The phonetic transcription adopted by the Protestant translations (including DV and PV) is *yisaiya* 以赛亚 and that of the Catholic translations is *yisaiyiya* 依撒意亚 (including XIAO and JB).⁸⁷ It is interesting to note that, although different, both phonetic transcriptions (as well as transcriptions of other names such as “Mary”, “Zacharias”, etc.) include the character *ya* 亚. This character is chosen not only for phonetic reasons, but also because it is considered the abbreviation of *yehehua* 耶和華 - the Chinese transliteration of “*Yahweh*”.⁸⁸ The transliteration of Isaiah is an example showing that the Catholic translators tend to make longer phonetic transcriptions.⁸⁹ Protestant translators, also due to the influence of the English pronunciation, tend to make shorter transliterations, which have the advantage of being closer to the Chinese names, consisting of two or maximum three characters.

⁸⁶ R. H. Graves, “Chinese Equivalents for Hebrew Proper Names”, in *Chinese Recorder*, 25 (1894): 479.

⁸⁷ Different phonetic transcriptions can be found in Basset (依賽) and again WU (*yisaiya* 意灑雅).

⁸⁸ Li Rui 李銳, *Shengjingyi Mingkao* 聖經譯名攷 (On the translation of the names in the Bible), in *Shengjing Hanyi Lunwenji* 聖經漢譯論文集, ed. Jia Baoluo 賈保羅 (Hong Kong: Jidujiao Fuqiao, 1964), 89.

⁸⁹ Xu Mushi (Hui Muk-sai) 許牧世, *Jingyu Yijing* 經與譯經, 131.

Jn 1:42

- GT: ἤγαγεν αὐτὸν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν. ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν, Σὺ εἶ Σίμων ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωάννου, σὺ κληθήσῃ Κηφᾶς, ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται Πέτρος.
- ET: Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John;⁹⁰ you will be called Kephas” (which is translated Peter).
- UV: 于是领他去见耶稣。耶稣看着他说，你是约翰的儿子西门，（约翰马太十六章十七节称约拿）你要称为矶法。（矶法翻出来，就是彼得。）
- LU: 就带他到耶稣跟前。耶稣定睛看着他，就说：「你是约翰的儿子西门；你要称为矶法」；『矶法』才出来就是『彼得』，即系石头。
- TCV: 于是他带西门去见耶稣。耶稣注视着他，说：“你是约翰的儿子西门，你的名要叫矶法。”（矶法和彼得同义，意思是“磐石”。）
- NBT: 安得烈就带他到耶稣那里。耶稣定睛看着他，说：“你是约翰的儿子西门，你要称为矶法。”（“矶法”翻译出来就是“彼得”。）
- SBF: 遂领他到耶稣跟前，耶稣注视着他，说：「你是若望的儿子西满，你要叫『刻法』」－意即伯多禄。
- PB: 耶稣注视着西满说：“你是若望的儿子西满，你将叫‘刻法’（即磐石的意思）。”

Another example showing these different trends and innovative solutions adopted by the translators is the phonetic transcription of the name “Simon Peter” (Greek: *Simon Petros*; Latin: *Simon Petrus*) and Chephas or Kephas⁹⁰ (Greek: *Kefas*; Latin: *Cephas*). The Catholic phonetic transcription of Simon Peter (*Ximan* 西滿, *Boduolu* 伯多祿)⁹¹ is longer compared to that made by the Protestants (*ximen* 西門, *bide* 彼得). The Protestant transliteration is influenced by the English language: the length of the name Peter and the sound of the English “o” of Simon. The phonetic transcription *bodulu* 伯多祿 shows the Catholic tendency to make longer transliterations to reproduce more accurately the sound of Greek or Latin.

Phonetic transcriptions of Chephas/Kephas are *Jifa* 磯法 (Protestant translations) and *Kefa* 刻法 (Catholic translations). Catholic translations made prior to SBF have different transliterations, namely *Sefa* 瑟法 (Basset) e *Zefa* 則法 (XIAO), without the guttural sound of the Greek pronunciation as these translations were made from Latin. WU’s transliteration (*jifa* 基法) was probably influenced by the English as the same translation is based on an English edition. The Protestant phonetic transcription *Jifa* 磯法 is meaningful as it renders both the sound and the original meaning of “rock”. Interestingly, it does not seem to be casual that all translations include the same character (*fa* 法, “law”) in their phonetic transcriptions and that the first character of all phonetic transcriptions is some how associated with the role of Peter or to the word “rock”: *ze* 則, “norm”; *ke* 刻, “carve”, “sculpt”; and *ji* 基, “foundation”, “base”.

⁹⁰ Most of the English Bible editions (EAV, ERV, TEC) use the transliteration Cephas, without the guttural sound

⁹¹ Transliteration of WU is again original (*boduolu* 伯鐸祿).

Conclusions

This comparative analysis illustrates how complex Bible translation is, especially in a language that is so distant from that of the source texts and *vis à vis* a rich and ancient cultural context of the target text and whose worldview and concepts differ so much from those of the Jewish-Christian world. The variety of options and adaptations pursued by the translators is another indication of such a complexity; of the different trends associated with different situations in which the translators found themselves and the translation work was carried out; and also of the great concerns of the translators with the arduous task they embarked upon. The latter factor is perhaps common among all translators. “The Bible constitutes a peculiar case of translation, in which the perceived sanctity of the text plays a significant role in motivating the devotion and the conscientiousness of the translator. The factor of treating a sacred text naturally adds to the complicated task of translation”.⁹² This highest concern and even fear of the great responsibility to be “touching” upon and translating the “Word of God” was with many, if not all, the translators, and it is evident in some Chinese translations too, especially those that in one way or another were “pioneers” and could not rely much on authoritative predecessors. It is worth quoting from the blessed Fr. Gabriele Maria Allegra, the Italian Franciscan friar who translated the *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* version (SBF). In one of his letters, when referring to the translation of the Books of the Minor Prophets, he writes:

Sono così difficili nella interpretazione, per tanti annessi e connessi storici, letterali, teologici, che mi fanno tremare per la responsabilità, che mi assumo davanti alla Chiesa di Dio, la Chiesa del martirio e del silenzio”.⁹³

⁹² L. Yariv-Laor, “Are You My Brother? Cultural Intricacies in the Chinese Bible”, in eds. R.D. Findeisen and M. Slobodnik, *Talking Literature. Essays on Chinese and Biblical Writings and their Interaction*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013), 75.

⁹³ Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum, *Canonizationis S.D. Gabrielis M. Allegra, Sacerdotis Professi o.f.m. (1907-1976)*, *Positio Super Virtutibus*, 1989, 125. The quotation is originally in Italian. Follows is our English translation: “They are so difficult to interpret due to many historical, literary, and theological annexes and connections that cause me to tremble due to the responsibility that i take up in front of God’s Church, the Church of martyrdom and silence”.

TANINA ZAPPONE

SOFT LANGUAGE: CHINA'S POLITICAL DISCOURSE
AS A TOOL FOR SOFT POWER

The political propaganda of contemporary China is the result of a complex blending process of old methods with modern techniques.

Soon after the events of 1989, the Party realized the political urgency to adopt methods of persuasion similar to those used in modern democratic States, in response to the necessity of a gradual transition from the identity of a “revolutionary Party” to that of a “ruling Party” (执政党 *zhizhengdang*), whose power is based on consent. Reason, persuasion and appeal to emotions are some of the ways that the Party has borrowed from psychology, public relations, advertising, political communication, mass communication and other fields of Western sciences, merging them together with traditional tools of Chinese political propaganda.¹

In the last decade, the drive for innovation of China's propaganda has widened its scope to include foreign affairs, in response to the need of a more harmonious growth of the “comprehensive national power” (综合国力 *zonghe guoli*). In January 2006, during a meeting with the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (中央外事工作领导小组 *zhongyang waishi gongzuo lingdao xiaozu*), Hu Jintao observed:

The enhancement of China's international status and of its international influence must be manifested in [the fields of] hard power such as economy, science, technology and defense, as well as [those of] soft power, such as culture
我国国际地位和国际影响力的提高，既要表现在经济、科技和国防等硬实力上，也要表现在文化等软实力²

A year later, on the occasion of the 17th Communist Party Congress, the strategy of “national cultural soft power (国家文化软实力 *guojia wenhua ruan shili*)” was of-

¹ Anne-Marie Brady, “Guiding Hand: The Role of the CCP Central Propaganda Department in the Current Era”, *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 3, 1, (2006): 58-77; Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship. Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008); Anne-Marie Brady - Wang Juntao, “China's Strengthened New Order and the Role of Propaganda,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 18 (2009): 62-74.

² Quoted in Ma Lisi 马丽丝, “Guanyu woguo jiaqiang ruan shili jianshe de chubu sikao 关于我国加强软实力建设的初步思考 (Preliminary thoughts on strengthening the building of the soft power of

ficially launched. This original theory, which assesses China's growth not only in terms of a more balanced domestic development, but also in terms of a renewed ability to conquer the international scene, "targeted two distinct audiences: the Chinese population at home and the global audience".³

The new goals lead Chinese leadership to face new challenges. As Chu Yingchi argues, "China must learn foreign cultural discourses and media consumption habits, and transform her cultural industry into a 'prosperous cultural market'".⁴

The hypothesis underlying this paper is that the effort of innovation, required by the new political goals, is affecting the linguistic practice of the Chinese leadership in international contexts. The literature on soft power defines the political discourse as an intangible asset and a language of persuasion.⁵ But to what extent is the old "bureaucratic Chinese" making use of its "new" communication tools?

The following sections attempt to provide insights on this question. In particular, the analysis aims to identify some of the main characteristics of Chinese international political discourse, as it is represented in speeches made by representatives of China's government and addressed to foreign audiences. Through a preliminary analysis of the transcriptions of political speeches, published from 2003⁶ to 2011 in the section "Important Speeches" (*zhongyao jianghua*) of the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China⁷ and

our country)," *Dang de wenxian* 党的文献 (*Literature of the Party*) 5 (2007): 35-38.

³ David Scott, "Soft language, soft imagery and soft power in China's diplomatic lexicon," in *China's Soft Power and International Relations*, ed. Lai Hongyi and Lu Yiyi (New York: Routledge, 2012), 39.

⁴ Chu Yingchi, "China's Fourth Rise: Soft Power Communication, Impediments, and Success" (paper presented at the 22nd International Conference for the Asian Media Information and Communication Center, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, July 4-7, 2013).

⁵ See, for instance, Bonnie S. Glaser and Melissa E. Murphy, "Soft power with Chinese Characteristics. The Ongoing Debate," in *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States. Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World*, ed. Carola Mc Giffert (Washington: Center for strategic and international Studies - CSIS, 2009) and Joel Wuthnow, "The Concept of Soft power in China's Strategic Discourse," *Issues & Studies* 44, 2 (2008): 1-28.

⁶ Since the study aims to analyze the language used in international contexts as the main communication tool for an innovative approach to foreign policy, it seemed appropriate to draw attention to the period which opens in 2003 with the launch of the theory of "peaceful rise" (和平崛起 *heping jueqi*), on the occasion of the Bo'ao Forum in November 2003. The slogan could be considered as the emblem of the new way of Chinese diplomacy. Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of 'peaceful rise'," *The China Quarterly* 190 (2007): 291-310.

⁷ Full-texts of the speeches are available at the following link: "首页 *shouye* (homepage) > 资料 *zilio* (materials) > 重要讲话 *zhongyao jianghua* (Important Speeches)", accessed March 15, 2013, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_chn/ziliao_611306/zyjh_611308/.

It should be mentioned that in a period subsequent to the phase of monitoring, carried out for this research (2010-2011), the Chinese version of the website has undergone some changes. Particularly the homepage - now much more graphically appealing with dynamic slideshows and other flash tools - has been added with a section entitled "Voice of Diplomacy", which includes speeches held by career diplomats, during their work in Chinese embassies over the world. These changes seem to confirm the impression that the website wants to project the image of a com-

in the chapters titled “Important contributions of Chinese diplomacy” (*Zhongguo waijiao zhongyao wenxian*) of the book *Zhongguo waijiao* (Foreign Affairs of China, also known as the White Paper on China's foreign policy),⁸ the study attempts to provide some insights into major types of speeches, structural organization and recurring methods of argument. Furthermore, in order to identify elements of continuity and changes from the political language of the past, the paper tries to detect the presence of the so-called ‘discursive pillars of Chinese rhetoric’ (modernism, nationalism, anti-foreigner sentiment and culturalism) in the speeches.

For the purposes of this study, international political discourse refers to the diaphasic variety of the Chinese language used in the oral⁹ communication of representatives of the government of the People's Republic of China in international contexts. In particular, the selected speeches meet the following criteria:

- Involve at least two countries, between countries and organizations.
- Relate closely to international politics and only marginally to domestic politics.
- Are issued by a specific actor, a representative of a political institution.
- Addresses an international audience.

The White Papers and the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: reviewing materials and comparing sources

The linguistic corpus consists of 123 speeches, selected from a database of more than one thousand texts. During the process of cataloging material from the website - between autumn 2010 and spring 2011 -, 813 transcripts of speeches were gathered, while only 66, out of the 91 texts published in the section “Important contributions” of the *White Paper's* editions for the years 2003 to 2011, are statements made in public.¹⁰

The number of speeches published in the two sources varies on an annual basis. The sections of the *White Paper* appear, year after year, rather homogeneous, with an average contribution of about 10 texts per issue, and a tendency to a gradual increase of the speeches, compared to other kinds of diplomatic document; this

pact, integrated and cooperative diplomatic corps, composed of personalities not only active on the international stage, but also professional, charming, original and modern. The basic structure of the site, however, remained unchanged, as well as the section “Important speeches”.

⁸ Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaobu zhengce yanjiusi 中华人民共和国外交部政策研究司 (Policy Research Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China), ed., *Zhongguo waijiao (China's Foreign Affairs)* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1998-2011)

⁹ The employ of written sources has been widely supported by the relative audiovisual materials, which are available for reference on main Chinese news websites. Multimedia sources confirmed that the speeches, given in front of the international audience, are held in Chinese, with simultaneous translation.

¹⁰ Elsewhere, the *White Papers* report the content of joint declarations, declarations of intent or other strategic documents.

tendency culminates in 2011, with the publication of 13 speeches (out of 17 texts).¹¹ This could be related to a growing interest of China's leadership in the discursive dimension of diplomatic practice.

In contrast, contents on the website of the Ministry appear much less uniform. Figure 1 shows how the number of speeches published on the website varied throughout the years: it rose exponentially until 2006, and then scaled down to previous quantitative level.

The increase in the number of speeches is probably due to the fact that in 2006 many important events occurred both domestically (the launch of the eleventh five-year plan) and internationally (participation in the G8+5, the fourteenth APEC Summit, the Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the sixth ASEM conference, the "Year of Russia" etc.). Furthermore, 2006 was the first year in which Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao could outline their own leadership strategies more freely, and implement them through more frequent public appearances abroad, after the (seemingly) complete withdrawal of Jiang Zemin from the public sphere (ratified by his non-attendance in the Fifth Plenum in September 2005).

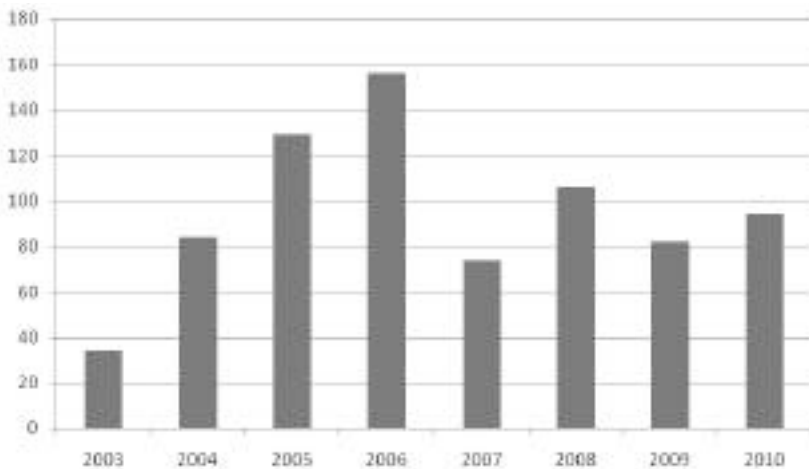


Figure 1 – Numbers of speeches for year. Sources: website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, section Important Speeches (*zhongyao jiangshuo*)”

The speeches, selected for print and digital publishing by the Ministry, mostly cover the field of polity, that is to say that they mainly aim to search for consensus and

¹¹ Compare this figure to that of year 2004, where only 3 public speeches, out of 7 documents, are reported.

political cohesion, and to express common values.¹² Exceptions are the speeches of the representatives to the United Nations, who report China's position on specific technical issues, such as the amendments of international treaties.¹³ This type of discourse appears very often in the archives of the Ministry's website, and rarely in the collection compiled for printed publication.

In general, the online database deals extensively with speeches given by representatives of the Chinese government – often lower-ranking officials – in the context of the United Nations, while the *White Papers* consider only the speeches delivered in the same context by the highest officials of the State bureaucracy.

From this, we may infer that the two catalogues have been compiled with different communicative goals, despite being both representative not only of the language used by Chinese politicians in international contexts, but also of the expectations on its communication effects.

Actually, the speeches included in the *White Papers* and published on the website are selected among the hundreds that are made by representatives of Chinese diplomacy each year. In particular, the section of the Ministry website, taking advantage of the unlimited virtual space, seems to aim to convey, above all, the image of a leadership that is proactive in major multilateral organizations. On the contrary, the *White Paper*, using the much smaller space of print texts, seems to stress on only the most important communicative events, and is programmatically designed to celebrate the achievements of Chinese diplomacy in the year under review. Other than focusing on “*creating an awareness of policy issues (...) and encouraging an exchange of information and analysis*”,¹⁴ the Papers seem to laud the work of the government, by underlining the (ostensible) objectivity of numbers and statistics, so that the white papers are suspected to be edited in the context of promotional marketing, rather than that of politics. All the sections praise the progress made in bilateral and multilateral diplomatic activities. The chapter on important diplomatic documents reports the most significant speeches of high leadership as political-wise, strategic-wise and highly rhetorical examples; they often become teaching materials for Chinese college students.¹⁵

¹² Polito-linguistics identifies the three dimensions of polity, policy and politics. The first is used in institutional and regulatory procedures, to express the common values of a political group and it is especially formulated through the epideictic genre; the second relates to the content of the policy and to the formulation of political programs in specific fields of action; the third is characterized by the ability to support a position contrary to that of political opponents on a discursive level. Martin Reisigl, “Rhetoric of political speeches,” in *Handbook of Communication in the Public Sphere*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Veronika Koller (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 244.

¹³ The conferences for the amendment of international treaties on conventional weapons, small arms, nuclear non-proliferation etc.

¹⁴ Audrey D. Doerr, *The Machinery of Government* (Toronto: Methuen, 1981), 152.

¹⁵ See, for instance, the volume edited by Zeng Zhihua, which collects transcriptions of important press conferences in China and abroad, full of comments on the use of language and its implications. See Zeng Zhihua 曾志花, ed., *Yingxiang Jinzheng de lishi xinwen fabuhui* 影响历史进程的新闻发布会

Preliminary observations on the corpus

As mentioned at the beginning of the previous section, the linguistic analysis has been carried out on a sample of 123 speeches, selected from an extensive database of more than 800 speeches. The resulting corpus contains more than 160,000 units; that ranks the corpus as a medium to large size corpus. The point has become essential, since “the study become more interesting with the widening of the extension of the textual corpus (...)”.¹⁶

The choice of 123 specific speeches, made necessary by the abundance and variety of available texts, is essentially based on “iteration” and prominence.

The analysis has therefore given priority to speeches held in international forums, which are quoted in publications of the Ministry almost annually.¹⁷ The fact that the speeches given in these contexts are so frequently brought to the attention of readers and netizens, comes out in favor of a specific strain of China’s government on these international venues and on their main actors / addressees, with the following being identified as key stakeholders of China’s international discourse: Africa, Latin America, Asia (Pacific, Central Asia, Far East), Europe and Arab countries.

Regarding authoriality, the speaker is China’s former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in 24% of the cases; 26% for the Former President Hu Jintao; and 51% for the lower level government representatives. Thus, all the speakers belong to the same discourse community. Moreover, since the talks are given in the institutional framework of global or regional organizations, the recipients are mostly members

发布会 (*Press conferences which influenced the course of history*) (Arbin: Beijing Wenyi Chubanshe, 2010); and the book *Zhu Rongji da jizhe wen* 朱镕基答记者问 (*Zhu Rongji answers to journalists’ questions*), published in 2009 by the Renmin chubanshe. Even more eloquent examples can be drawn from Chinese manuals on external communication. See, among others, *Fayanren jiaocheng* 发言人教程 (*A manual for spokespersons*), edited by Li Xiguang and Sun Jinwei and *Zhengfu xinwen fayanren jiaocheng* 政府新闻发言人教程 (*A manual for government news spokespersons*) by Gong He, both rich in references to speeches held by government leaders.

¹⁶ “The analysis gets more interesting when extending the size of the textual corpus (*Lo studio assume interesse quanto più ampia è l’estensione del corpus testuale*) (...)” Sergio Bolasco, *Analisi multidimensionale dei dati. Metodi, strategie e criteri d’interpretazione* (Roma: Carocci, 1999), 179.

¹⁷ They are: FOCAC – Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (中非合作论坛 *Zhong-Fei hehuo luntan*), FEALAC – Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation (东亚—拉美合作论坛 *Dongya-La-Mei hezuo luntan*), CICA – The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (亚信论坛 *Ya xin luntan*), Bo’ao Forum for Asia (博鳌亚洲论坛 *Bo’ao Yazhou luntan*) ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations (东盟合作 *Dongmeng hezuo*), ARF – Regional ASEAN Forum (东盟地区论坛 *Dongmeng diqu luntan*), ASEAN+1 (China) (中国-东盟 *Zhongguo-Dongmeng*), ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, South Korea) (东盟与中日韩 *Dongmeng yu Zhong-Ri-Han*), SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (上海合作组织 *Shanghai hezuo zuzhi*), APEC – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (亚太经合组织 *Ya-Tai jinghe zuzhi*), Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum (中阿合作论坛 *Zhong-A hezuo luntan*), ASEM – Asia-Europe Meeting (亚欧会议 *Yazhou huiyi*), World Economic Forum (世界经济论坛 *shijie jingji luntan*), G5, G20+5, G8+5 and United Nations General Assembly (联合国大会 *lianheguo dahui*).

of the same language community. Speeches that are broadcast through the media, in textual or audiovisual format, widen the speeches' target range exponentially: they indirectly reach a potential audience that is much wider than the original recipients.

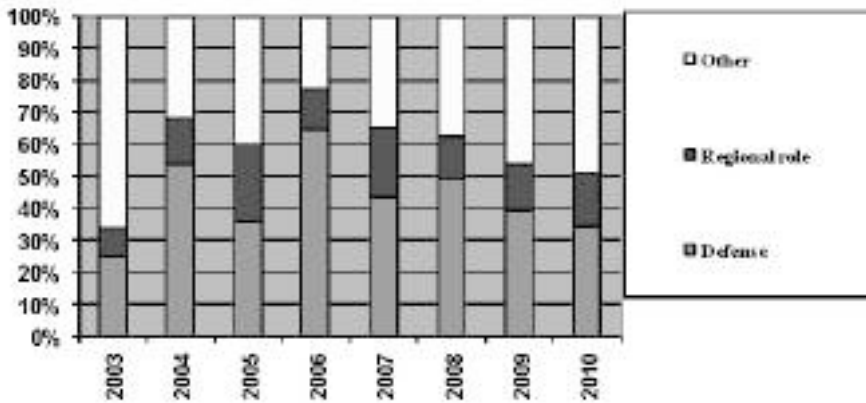


Figure 2 – Thematic analysis of the speeches

The process of source-selection has also allowed the detection of the most common themes in the corpus. The data in figure 2 shows a clear tendency to prioritize issues related to defense and economics, with a particular reference to the regional role of the People's Republic of China. The item “other” refers to the variety of other topics episodically addressed in the examined texts, ranging from social development to internal migration, from environment safeguard to renewable energy, from cooperation to human rights.

In accordance with the directions provided by the editors, it is also possible to distinguish four sub-genres in the corpus. Each speech is classified according to its “type” of linguistics act. For instance, the speech “Towards a common development and a harmonious Asia (推动共同发展，共建和谐亚洲 *tuidong gongtong fazhan, gongjian hexie Yazhou*)”, made by Hu Jintao in Bo’ao Forum on the 15th of April 2011, is categorized as 开幕式上演讲 *kaimushi shang yanjiang* (a speech at the opening ceremony). In accordance with this taxonomy, the majority of the text are defined as “讲话 *jianghua*”, with “发言 *fayan*” at a slightly lower percentage, and “演讲 *yanjiang*” and “致辞 *zhici*” at the lowest. All these expressions could be considered as synonyms of the word “speech”. The labeling of a discourse with one or the other of these terms does not make a clear distinction, but gives a general indication of the style and the context, within which the speech act has been accomplished. This observation has been confirmed by the English editions of the

White Papers, where the terms “*yanjiang*”, “*zhici*” and “*jianghua*” are sometimes indifferently translated into English as “address”, “*jianghua*” being translated as “remarks”, “statement” or “speech”, with “*zhici*” being translated as “special message” and “*yanjiang*” as “speech”. The ambiguity of the rendering of the Chinese terms in a foreign language proves how subtle are the semantic affinity of these expressions. However, different tagging of speeches deserves attention, because it provides preliminary hints on their style and contents.

First of all, the terms “*fayan*” and “*jianghua*”. The venue and the identity of the speaker are the key features to distinguish these two categories: the former is used to refer to speeches made by representatives of the government – probably high-ranking officials, – in the presence of representatives of the same government, often hierarchically higher-ranked. Presumably, therefore, in terms of contents, “*fayan*” could express a passive, subordinate, opinion, respectful of the guidelines laid down by senior leadership.¹⁸ In contrast, “*jianghua*” states a much more authoritative opinion, held in high esteem by the audience.

The term “*yanjiang*” is defined as the act “of explaining to the audience facts and reasons, and expressing an opinion on a given issue (就某个问题对听众说明事理, 发表见解 *jiu mou ge wenti dui tingzhong shuoming shili, fabiao jianjie*)”.¹⁹ In this sense, it is a synonym of *jianghua*. It is a form of oral expression, addressed to a group of people (not an individual) and characterized by a variety of content (political, economic, academic, scientific etc.). Its main objectives are: to explain, to persuade, to encourage, to pay homage or to entertain, to mobilize and to promote a message as well. Even the venue can vary widely: from a university class to a large conference or a court, from a banquet to a television lounge, etc. It is usually characterized by a formal tone and it is never an off-the-cuff speech. On a stylistic level, it is generally affected by a previously written formulation of the oral expression; as a result, *yanjiang* employs a sort of “colloquialized” written language or, conversely, a “coded” spoken language. Being always the right lexicon, “*yanjiang*” is characterized by a plain, easy-to-understand style, which is full of vivid imagery, that is able to steal and stir up the attention of the public.

“*Zhici*” is a speech that is more specifically influenced by the formality of the occasion; it is often “held during ceremonies or conferences, to express encouragement, gratitude, congratulations, condolences (在举行某种仪式或会议时说勉励、感谢、祝贺、哀悼的话 *zai juxing mou zhong yishi huo huiyi shi shuo mianli ganxie zhuhe aidao de hua*)”.²⁰

¹⁸ Shu Guo 舒果, “Zhi chang bi zhi: Fayan he jianghua de qubie 职场必知: 发言和讲话的区别 ([What] professionals should know: the difference between *fayan* and *jianghua*)”, *Beihua daxue xuebao* 北华大学学报 (*Journal of Beihua University*) 4, 48 (2009): 4.

¹⁹ “*Baike Baidu* 百度百科”, accessed March 12, 2013, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/425633.htm>.

²⁰ Ling Yuan 凌原, ed., *Xiandai hanyu cidian* 现代汉语词典 (*Dictionary of Modern Chinese*) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2002), 2476.

As to style, “*zhici*” tends to be clearer and more concise than “*jianghua*”. It is often linked to specific diplomatic occasions, in which talks are characterized by the careful choice of a coded vocabulary, which is never colloquial.

The length of the speeches can be significantly different: it varies from a maximum of 5,000 characters, as is the case with Wen Jiabao’s speech at the Bo’ao Forum in 2009 (增强信心, 深化合作, 实现共赢 *zengqiang xinxin, shenhua hezuo, shixian gongying* “Build trust, deepen cooperation to achieve win-win [results]”, 18th April, 2009) to a minimum of 500 characters (take, for example, the speech made by Minister Li Zhaoxing at the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of the China-East Asia Dialogue in Beijing, 13th July, 2006).

In the majority of cases (52% of the examined speeches), the length ranges from 3,000 to 2,000 characters; in approximately 30% of cases, it is between 1,500 and 500 characters (25% of speeches have a count of less than 700 characters) and only 17% exceed 3,000 characters. The context and the nature of a speech are the main determinants of its length. However, as already mentioned, *zhici* tends to be quite short, while *jianghua* can be very long.

It is evident that representatives of the Chinese government tend to favor synthesis and effectiveness by giving short-medium length speeches to capture the attention of the audience and prevent them from getting bored.

China’s international political discourse: a structural analysis

Throughout the analyzed texts, it is possible to detect recurring features and a precise structure of discourse, characterized by recognizable structural sections.

As mentioned, many texts have a title, which often consists of two syntactically unrelated sentences; in the second part of the title, a purpose clause – also suggested by the overall hortatory tone – could be individuated. We consider the following examples:

推进合作共赢 实现持续发展

Tuijin hezuo gongying shixian chixu fazhan

Promote win-win cooperation (to/in order to) achieve sustained development²¹

深化友谊、扩大合作, 建设中阿新型伙伴关系

Shenhua youyi kuoda hezuo jianshe Zhong-A xinxing huoban guanxi

Deepen friendship and expand cooperation, (to/in order to) build a new China-Arab League partnership²²

²¹ From Hu Jintao’s speech at the APEC Leaders Summit for Industry and Trade, Santiago (Chile), 19th November, 2004.

²² From Tang Jiaxuan’s speech at the II Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum Ministerial Meeting, China, 31st May, 2006

In both cases, the second statement, not connected nor introduced by conjunctions, can be read as a purpose clause. In most cases, the two sentences in the title of speeches are composed of the same number of characters, in accordance with the rules of symmetry of classical Chinese prosodia, V (D) O, V (D) O:

加强亚拉合作 促进共同发展

Jiaqiang Ya-La hezuo, cujin gongtong fazhan

Strengthen Asia-Latin America cooperation, (to/in order to) promote common development²³

树立开放思维，实现合作共赢

Shuli kaifang siwei shixian hezuo gongying

Establish an open mind, (to/in order to) achieve a win-win cooperation²⁴

The tendency to lexical reiteration is a main characteristic of titles, where it is possible to identify repeated verb phrases such as 推动发展 *tuidong fazhan* “to promote development”, 加强合作 *jiaqiang hezuo* “to strengthen cooperation”, 深化友谊 *shenhua youyi* “to deepen friendship”, 扩大合作 *kuoda hezuo* “to expand cooperation”, 建设新型伙伴关系 *jianshe xinxing huoban guanxi* “to build a new partnership”. In particular, the choice of predicates demonstrates, at the semantic level, an assertive attitude and a proactive intent, preferring terms that indicate positive changes (推动 *tuidong* “promote”, 加强 *jiaqiang* “strengthen” 深化 *shenhua* “deepen”, 创造 *chuangzao* “create”, 实现 *shixian* “realize”). The capacity of the title to engage and persuade the audience is further supported by the abundant use of expressions, which involve a sense of community and participation (共建 *gongjian* “build together”, 共享 *gongxiang* “share”, 共赢 *gongying* “common benefit / win win”).

All speeches start with initial greetings. In accordance with the ceremonial occasion, the first greeting is always directed to the highest officer in the audience, representatives of the governments that attend or host the event. In this case, salutation is mostly constituted by the verb 尊敬 *zunjing*, employed as a nominal determinant and meaning “honorable, illustrious”, followed by a name and a title (部长 *buzhang* “minister”, 总理 *zongli* “prime minister”, 总统 *zongtong* “president”, 秘书长 *mishu* “secretary”) and any additional honorific title (阁下 *gexia* “excellence”), as in the following example:

尊敬的梅莱斯·泽纳维总理阁下

Zunjing de Meilaisi·Zenawei zongli gexia

His Excellency the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi

²³ From Yang Jiechi’s speech at the IV FEALAC Ministerial Conference, Tokyo (Japan), 18th January, 2010.

²⁴ From Yang Jiechi’s speech at the IV FEALAC Ministerial Conference, Tokyo (Japan), 18th January, 2010.

尊敬的各位国家元首和政府首脑阁下
Zunjing de gewei guojia yuanshou he zhengfu shounao gexia
 Their Excellencies the Heads of State and Government

尊敬的非洲联盟委员会主席阿尔法·乌马尔·科纳雷阁下
Zunjing de Feizhou lianmeng weiyuanhui zhuxi A'erfa-Wuma'er-Kenalei gexia
 His Excellency the President of the African Union Commission Alpha Oumar Konaré

各位代表团团长、部长和大使阁下
Gewei daibiaotuan tuanzhang buzhang he dashi gexia
 Their Excellency the Heads of Delegation, Ministers and Ambassadors

女士们，先生们：
Nüshimen, xianshengmen
 Ladies and Gentlemen

The above case is one of the most complex in the corpus; it is certainly influenced by the solemnity of the context.²⁵ Chinese politicians often choose greetings that are less extended and ceremonious: 阁下 *gexia* is used in only 24 out of 123 speeches, in 40 total occurrences.

Salutations to political counterparts are often summarized in the formula 尊敬的各位同事 *zunjing de gewei tongshi* “distinguished colleagues” (used in 62 texts with a total of 218 occurrences). The use of the generic expression 先生们 *xianshengmen* (“gentlemen”, 301 occurrences in 82 texts) and 女士们 *nüshimen* (“ladies”, 169 occurrences in 52 texts) is even more common.

When the occasion which frames the speech is held in China and hosted by the People's Republic, initial greetings are often composed by the expression “尊敬的各位来宾 *zunjing de gewei laibin*” or by the more deferential formulas “尊敬的各位贵宾/嘉宾 *zunjing de gewei guibin/jiabin*”, which could all be translated as “distinguished guests”.²⁶

In their influential works on the use of pronouns in European languages, Brown and Gilman have demonstrated how the way to address interlocutors is related not only to variables such as formalities, social status and sex, but also encodes different aspects of the speaker's communicative intentions. Specifically, the choice of address forms can be traced back to two criteria: power (in terms of political and

²⁵ From Wen Jiabao's speech at the II FOCAC Ministerial Conference, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), 15th December, 2003.

²⁶ From Wen Jiabao's speech at the II FOCAC Ministerial Conference, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), 15th December, 2003.

来宾 *laibin*, 嘉宾 *jiabin* and 贵宾 *guibin* are essentially synonymous, “guest”. However while 来宾 *laibin* emphasizes the guest approaching to the venue (the first character is the verb 来 *lai* “to come”), 贵宾 *guibin* and 嘉宾 *jiabin* imply a more deferential tone for the presence of the characters 贵 *gui* “honorable, precious” and 嘉 *ji* “fine, excellent.” In the linguistic practice, 来宾 *laibin* refers to a passive audience, while 嘉宾 *jiabin* and 贵宾 *guibin* refer to high-level guests who are expected to intervene actively.

social hierarchy) and solidarity (in terms of intimacy and sharing).²⁷ Transposed into China's cultural and political reality, these two concepts may be referred to those of deference to authority/ social status, and harmony, which are both deeply rooted in Confucian tradition.

Through modifications of formulas of courtesy, the speaker positions itself in the linguistic universe created by the discourse, and can express respect or contempt, distance or intimacy. By choosing different greetings, Chinese politicians appear well-aware of the effectiveness of this linguistic tool in creating new political and discursive spaces.

The Chinese case shows a clear preference to less reverential or obsequious address forms, through which China's representatives attempt to establish solidarity and sympathy with the audience, rather than convey defiance or political attack. In this regard, the abundant use of the expression 朋友们 *pengyoumen* "friends" in salutations (128 occurrences in 46 documents out of 123) is appropriate, as well as the recurrence of vocative forms in the body of the speech. Actually, in the majority of the analyzed cases in the corpus, the above-mentioned formulas not only mark the opening of the speech, but are also used in the body of the speech several times to draw the audience's attention or to introduce new argumentations. In the latter case, only more general and less formal expressions are employed, such as: 女士们 *nüshimen*, 先生们 *xianshengmen*, 朋友们 *pengyoumen*, 各位同事 *ge wei tongshi*. Vocatives, therefore, play an important role, frequently stressing the transition to different structural sections of the speech.

Each speech roughly consists of three parts: an introduction, a body and a conclusion. The initial greetings mark the exordium (proem, opening), whose programmatic purpose is – as known in classical political oratory – to "make the audience benevolent, attentive, docile" (*benevolum, attentum, docilem*).²⁸

In Chinese speeches, greetings are invariably associated to expressions of gratitude to hosts or guests and are frequently combined with words of praise to the taking place event or to the choice which has been made about the theme of the conference. The introduction is followed by a purpose statement, namely the illustration of the main topic of the speech, often preceded in the title. Due to the wide-ranging and assorted nature of contexts in which speeches are performed, conveyed key ideas often refer to abstract concepts, rather than exigent circumstances, such as peace, development, financial crisis, international cooperation etc. This part of the speech, which is similar to the concept of "narration" (statement) in classical oratory, basically responds to the characteristics which a narration is expected to have in order to achieve its purpose, without boring listeners: brevity, clarity and plausibility. In the case of Chinese speeches, it is not uncom-

²⁷ Roger Brown and Albert Gilman, "The Pronoun of Power and Solidarity," in *The Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), 253-276.

²⁸ Bice Mortara Garavelli, *Manuale di retorica (XII edizione)* (Milano: Bompiani, 2010), 62

mon that this first brief part of the speech pins on adversative expressions: the illustration of the general situation, of current achievements and progress already made, echoes the illustration of future challenges and threats, which are often introduced by the conjunctive phrase 与此同时 *yu ci tongshi* “at the same time.” In this way, the speaker paves the way for reaching the purpose of the speech: to propose a solution, elaborated in the Chinese political and cultural context, to solve an international question, thus conveying the perspective of the People’s Republic on main global issues on the world stage. The discursive pattern “question-solution” allows the presentation of a one-sided perspective, only after establishing a relationship with the audience (in this section of the speeches, the use of the pronoun 我们 *women* “us” is quite common). This organizational pattern of speeches meets the need to motivate the audience and to incite it, which is, according to Zhao Linsen, an intrinsic feature of discursive art.²⁹

Actually, after having illustrated the challenges the international community must still face – despite overall progress and developments reached in many fields –, Chinese politicians invariably indicate China’s proposal. This step opens the argument (proof), namely the main part of the persuasive speech, in which valid evidences are presented and other parts’ argumentation are rejected. The opening of this second part of the speech is often emphasized by expressions such as 根据以上考虑 *genju yishang kaolü* “on the basis of the above considerations.”

To illustrate China’s perspective, leaders adopt a very precise narrative buildup, mostly based on enumeration, which is in contrast with the general vagueness of content. Indefiniteness, evident in the following excerpts from the corpus, is not surprising. The ability to transmit clear ideas using soft expressions, not directly revealing the truth, but suggesting it through a vague communication, is a well-known feature of political-diplomatic language:

推动国际关系民主化

Tuidong guoji guanxi minzhuhua

Promote democratization of international relationships

用更宽广的胸襟相互包容，实现和谐共处

Yong geng kuanguang de xiongjin xianghu baorong, shixian hexie gongchu

Adopt an open mind to be more tolerant and to achieve a harmonious coexistence

履行各自责任

Lüxing gezi zeren

Fulfill one’s responsibilities

²⁹ Zhao individuates in the following the main characteristics of an effective speech: hortatoriness (鼓动性 *gudongxing*), argumentation (说理性 *shuolixing*) e popularity (群众性 *qunzhongxing*), namely the capability to mobilize wide and manifold audiences. Zhao Linsen 赵林森, ed., *Kouyu xiuci* 口语修辞 (*Oratory*) (Kaideng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 82-87.

增强政治互信
Zengqiang zhengzhi huxin
 Strengthen mutual political trust

Jin Guihua discusses this type of communication, referring to the concept of “pragmatic vagueness” (语用含糊 *yuyong hanhu*),³⁰ which could be assimilated to the notion of “hedging strategy”, more common in Western literature.³¹

This strategy, which reduces the emphasis on content – which can be indirectly inferred – to point to the tones of the speech, allows diplomats to act in a safety net. The effect is achieved also by adopting approximate, generic, ambiguous and allusive expressions as litotes (弱陈 *ruochen*), hyperbole (夸张 *kuazhang*), characters (反讽 *fanfeng*) or metaphors (比喻 *biyu*), as in the following example:

世界是丰富多彩的，一个音符无法形成旋律，一个字母不能书写语言。
Shijie shi fengfu duocai de, yi ge yinfu wufa xingcheng xuanlü, yi ge zimu bu neng shuxie yuyan.
 The world is rich and varied, a musical note cannot form a melody, nor an alphabet a language.³²

As mentioned, this vagueness is often built through extremely strict syntactic structures, and put forward by the use of bulleted lists. The linearity and regularity of exposition is further emphasized by reiterations and anaphoras. At the beginning of each new item in the list, commonly found expressions, such as “countries must / should” (各国应该 *ge guo yinggai*, 国家应该 *guojia yinggai*, 国家必须 *guojia bixu*, 世界各国要 *shijie geguo yao*), come before the proposal of China’s government. The use of the verb phrase “we need to / we should (我们要 *women yao*/应该 *yinggai*)” is even more common; the first person plural pronoun is used to express a sense of community and commitment to implement collaborative efforts.

China’s willingness to act on the world stage “as a responsible member of the international community” (作为国际社会负责任的成员 *zuowei guoji shehui fu-zeren de chengyuan*) is frequently pointed out, by illustrating data concerning the successful adopted policies and the results achieved by the country in specific fields. Moreover, it is emphasized by the use of past-tense (followed by the aspectual particle 了 *le*) or future-tense (preceded by the particle 将 *jiang*) verbs.

The conclusion is usually very brief and always ends with acknowledgements, where recap or affection can be generally distinguished. In the first case, the conclusion schematically outlines main topics and proposals, stressing key points:

³⁰ Jin Guihua 金桂华, “Zatan waijiao yuyan 杂谈外交语言 (Various aspects of diplomatic language),” *Waijiao pinglun 外交评论 Foreign Affairs Review* 1 (2003): 42-46.

³¹ Maria Rosaria Buri, *Dizionario di diplomazia e relazioni internazionale. Inglese-Italiano. Dictionary of diplomacy and International Relations. English-Italian* (Lecce: Argo, 2005), IX-XIII. In Chinese, *mohu xianzhiyu 模糊限制语*.

³² From Li Zhaoxing’s speech at the General Debate of the LVIII Session of the United Nation Assembly, New York (USA), 25th September, 2003.

我们呼唤和平、稳定、发展，我们追求平等、互利、共赢。中国顺应历史潮流，选择了一条和平发展道路，把自己的发展与地区振兴结合在一起，与大多数国家的利益结合在一起，与人类的和平与发展事业结合在一起，愿为世界的繁荣与进步作出更大贡献。

Women huhuan heping wending fazhan, women zhuiqiu pingdeng huli gongying Zhongguo shunying lishi chaoliu xuanze le yi tiao heping fazhan daolu ba ziji de fazhan yu diqu zhenxing jiehe zai yiqi yuan wei shijie de fanrong yu jinbu zuochu geng da gongxian

We aspire to peace, stability and development; we seek equality, mutual benefit and win-win results. Adapting to the course of historical events, China has chosen a path of peaceful development, has linked its development to the rebirth of the region, to the interests of the majority of countries, and to the cause of peace and development for humanity; [China]wants to give a greater contribution to prosperity and progress of the world.³³

我愿重申，中国将始终不渝走和平发展道路

Wo yuan chongshen Zhongguo jiang shizong bu yu zou heping fazhan daolu

I would like to reiterate that China will firmly follow the path of peaceful development³⁴

Even more often, the epilogue seeks to elicit emotional involvement and appeal to audience's empathy, stressing similarities and collaboration through hortative tones or by simply wishing the success of the ongoing event:

最后，我衷心祝愿第七届亚欧首脑会议圆满成功。

Zuihou wo zhongxin zhuyuan di qi jie Ya-Ou shounao huiyi yuanman chenggong

Finally, I sincerely wish to VII Conference of Heads of State ASEM a complete success.³⁵

女士们，先生们！严冬终将过去，春天就要来临。让我们坚定信心，加强合作，共同推动世界经济新一轮增长！

Nüshimen xianshenmen Yandong zhongjiang guoqu chuntian jiu yao lailin Rang women jiangding xinxin jiaqiang hezuo gongtong tuidong shijie jingji xin yi lun zengzhang

Ladies and gentlemen! The harsh winter is over, spring is approaching. Let's strengthen trust and enhance cooperation to jointly promote a new world economic growth!³⁶

Interestingly, the conclusion tends to be the shortest section of Chinese speeches, consisting of merely a dozen characters. This imbalance, with respect to the much longer argument, seems to confirm what has already been observed by some authors about the nature predominantly indirect of Chinese rhetoric, and the consequent inclination towards both a circular pattern of argument and a redundant style.³⁷

³³ From Hu Jintao's speech at the XVI Informal meeting of APEC States leaders, Lima (Peru), 22th November, 2008.

³⁴ From Wen Jiabao's speech at the General debate of the LXIII Session of the United Nations Assembly, New York (USA), 24th September, 2008.

³⁵ From Hu Jintao's speech at the VII Conference of ASEM States Leaders, Beijing (China), 24th October, 2008.

³⁶ From Wen Jiabao's speech at the World Economic Forum, Davos (Switzerland), 29th January, 2009.

³⁷ See, for instance, Mary Garrett's work on ways of argumentation in classical Chinese, Mary Gar-

The 'discursive pillars of Chinese traditional rhetoric'

In the previous sections it was shown how recurring structural sections of Chinese political speeches, made overseas, roughly correspond to the traditional Aristotelian discourse structure, which distinguishes *exordium* – introduction, *narratio* – narration, *argumentatio* – argument and *peroratio* – conclusion. But to what extent does contemporary Chinese political discourse stick to the typical characteristics of the political language of the past and to what extent do they differ?

Since the Nineties, scholars have devoted great attention to the analysis of linguistic choices made by Chinese leaders. Although each leadership can be certainly distinguished by a unique approach to communication, analysts also identify specific elements of continuity.

For instance, in 1992, Schoenhals noted that, since the launch of the reforms in the late Seventies, the new leadership, though willing to “purify” language from the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, did not abandon stereotyped formulations as a tool of manipulation.³⁸ In 1998, Hodge and Louie argued that Chinese, in contrast with Western languages, is strongly visual and semiotically promiscuous; that makes the political language even richer in implicit meanings and metaphorical references, making it extremely vague and repetitive as well.³⁹

Many authors observe that the use of specific rhetorical *topoi* has characterized the Chinese political discourse through the decades, and that this point has contributed to the building of a distinct political and national identity.⁴⁰ In the analyzed corpus, it is certainly possible to intercept the influence of this so-called ‘discursive pillars of Chinese traditional rhetoric’: modernism, nationalism, anti-foreigner sentiment and culturalism.

Modernism, namely national pride and prestige achieved by learning from the lessons in history, can be traced in the speeches via frequent references to the past:

rett, “Asian Challenge,” in *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, ed. Sonja K. Foss et. al., (Waveland: Prospect Heights, 1991), 295-361 or Kirkpatrick’s observations on the use of inductive argumentation in Chinese classical rhetoric, Andy Kirkpatrick, “Chinese Rhetoric: Methods of Argument,” *Multilingual* 4, 3 (1995): 271-295.

³⁸ Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics. Five Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992)

³⁹ Bob Hodge and Kam Louie, *The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁴⁰ George Q. Xu, “The Role of Rhetorical *topoi* in Constructing the Social Fabric of Contemporary China”, in *Civic Discourse, Civil Society and Chinese Communities*, ed. Randy Kluver and John H. Powers (Stanford: Ablex, 1999), 41-51; Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, ed., *Political Communications in Greater China: The Construction and Reflection of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); D. Ray Heisey, “The Chinese Characteristics of President Hu Jintao’s Rhetoric”, *Intercultural Communication Studies* 16, 2 (2007): 136-144, accessed February 11, 2013. <http://www.uri.edu/iaics/content/2007v%2016n2/11%20Heisey.pdf>.

历史是继续前进的基础，也是开创未来的启示

Lishi shi jixu qianjin de jichu, ye shi kaichuang weilai de qishi

History is the basis for continuous progress, and also a source of inspiration for building the future.⁴¹

历史是一面镜子，人类总是在反思过去中寻求进步，在应对挑战中实现发展。

Lishi shi yi mian jingzi, renlei zongshi zai fansi guoqu zhong xunqiu jinbu zai yingdui tiaozhan zhong shixian fazhan

History is a mirror, by rethinking the past, humanity seeks progress, by facing challenges, it achieves development.⁴²

The word 历史 *lishi* “history” appears 154 times in the whole corpus.

The anti-foreigner sentiment can be tracked down in the emphasis on the need for an independent foreign policy and an autonomous economic model – a point that, to some extent, contradicts the vaunted Chinese aspiration to enhanced international cooperation:

要推进多边主义和国际关系民主化，反对少数国家垄断国际事务。

Yao tuijin duobianzhuyi he guoji guanxi minzhuhua, fandui shaoshu guojia longduan guoji shiwu

It is necessary to promote multilateralism and democratization of international relations, to oppose the monopolies of few countries on the [field] of international affairs.⁴³

尊重主权和互不干涉内政是国与国之间发展关系的前提。

Zunzhong zhuquan he huli bu ganshe neizheng shi guo yu guo zhijian fazhan guanxi de qianti

Respecting sovereignty and mutual non-intervention in internal affairs is a prerequisite for the development of relationships among States.⁴⁴

Nationalism, namely the feelings of loyalty and responsibility to the community, generally leads to the adoption of the language of “comrades-in-arms”. However, in contemporary Chinese lexicon of international relations, this linguistic code tends to refer to theories, formulated by the ruling leadership, rather than the guiding principles and old ideology of the Chinese Communist Party, as was in the past. Thus, the whole corpus contains only one specific reference to the theory of the “Three Represents” (三个代表 *san ge daibiao*) of Jiang Zemin, which entered the preamble of the RPC Constitution in March 2003 on the occasion of the 10th National People’s Congress. It appears only once in the sentence in which Hu Jintao, referring to the objectives of China’s economic and social development, says:

⁴¹ From Hu Jintao’s speech at the Bo’ao Forum, Bo’ao (Hainan, Cina), 12th April, 2008.

⁴² From Li Keqiang’s speech at the World Economic Forum, Davos (Switzerland), 28th January, 2010.

⁴³ From Li Zhaoxing’s speech at the first ministerial meeting of the Sino-Arab Cooperation, Cairo (Egypt), 14th September, 2004

⁴⁴ From Wen Jiabao’s speech at the General Debate of the LXIII Session of the United Nations Assembly, New York (USA), 24th September, 2008.

为了实现这一目标，我们将坚持以邓小平理论和“三个代表”重要思想为指导，认真贯彻落实以人为本，全面、协调、可持续的发展观。

Weile shixian zhe yi mubiao women jiang jianchi yi Deng Xiaoping lilun he “san ge daibiao” zhongyao sixiang wei zhidao renzhen guanchede luoshi yi ren wei ben quanmian xietiao kechixu de fazhanguan

To achieve this goal, we will scrupulously adhere to Deng Xiaoping Theory and the important thought of “Three Represents” as guidance, and we will earnestly implement people-oriented, comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development.⁴⁵

In contrast, references to the more recent theory of China’s peaceful development, for instance, is much more frequent: there are 39 occurrences in the corpus from 2006 to 2010; the frequency increases between 2006 and 2008.

The concept of culturalism could be defined as the tendency to focus on Chinese civilization as a source of legitimacy for political continuity; in Chinese speeches, it could be embodied by quotes or sayings, which are not very common in the corpus yet. Addressing the issue of world hunger and that of increased food prices, Hu Jintao says:

中国有句古话：“民以食为天”

Zhongguo you ju guhua: “min yi shi wei tian”

An old Chinese saying goes: “Food is the first necessity of people”.⁴⁶

Eventually, references to the importance of resolving differences through dialogue, which can be recurrently found in the corpus, could echo the Confucian tendency to subordination of the individual to the community. Not surprisingly, the word “dialogue” 对话 *duihua* is among the 30 most frequent words in the entire corpus. Similarly, the items “stability” 稳定 *wending* ranks at the 38th position in the list of key words, while in the top 70 (out of 500), we find “society” 社会 *shehui* and “harmony” 和谐 *hexie*: traditional attention to social stability and harmony is still prevailing in contemporary Chinese political language used in international contexts.

Conclusions

Basically, the analysis seems to confirm the endurance of traditional features of Chinese political language (vagueness, repetitiveness, and stereotyped formulations, appeal to recurring discursive patterns); however some significant elements of novelty have emerged.

The preferential use of adjectives that indicate positive changes and the employment of expressions that involve community participation denote, at the semantic level, an assertive and cooperative behavior, which is consistent with the

⁴⁵ From Hu Jintao’s speech at the Bo’ao Forum, Bo’ao (Hainan, China), 25th April, 2004

⁴⁶ From Hu Jintao’s speech at the G8+5 Summit, Toyako (Japan), 9th July, 2008.

impression that the country wants to act as a protagonist on the international scene today. The paucity of references to the great political figures of the past or to concepts that are too politically or culturally characterized indicates a propensity towards a more objective and plain style.

In any case, as already observed in previous studies,⁴⁷ factors in continuity with the past still prevail on elements of innovation in contemporary Chinese political language. In the previous sections we noticed how each speech could be classified according to a “type” of linguistics act and how this responds to specific needs of formality. The tendency to lexical reiteration resulted to be the main characteristic of titles, which must echo well-known political slogans. Moreover a general vagueness characterizes the main contents of the speeches. The imbalance among recurring structural sections seems to reflect an inclination towards both a circular pattern of argument and a redundant style. Eventually we observed how the speeches tend to preserve the ‘discursive pillars’ of the political language of the past.

Although nowadays Chinese leadership recognizes the need to “conquer” the global audience as a condition for the achievement of growth and development goals, it still seems to be unwilling to change its language and the representation of power that comes from it, proving to be still unable to employ effectively language as a source of soft power.

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⁴⁷ Tanina Zappone, “Extending beyond customary boundaries: Using words to shape China’s new image abroad,” *Zhongguo Yanjiu-Revista de Estudos Chineses* IX (2013): 175-195.

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Abstracts

ALESSANDRA BREZZI

The paper examines the debate on the birth of the new Chinese drama movement during the 20s and 30s of 20th century through the reading and analysis of some essays written by Song Chunfang (1892-1938). Song was one of the leading theorists in the new Chinese drama movement, and an expert on Western theater. In his essays he showed a certain disagreement with the group of intellectuals who centering around *Xin Qingnian* magazine on how to renovate and create the modern theater. Through the critical reading of his essays and his translations of four Italian futurist plays, the paper highlights the reasons for Song's contention with *Xin Qingnian* group, and puts out his proposals for creating a new modern theater.

DANIELE BROMBAL

The paper analyzes the social and political factors influencing policy oriented research in China, by taking the health care sector as a case study. Results show that, despite the commitment of Chinese authorities towards a decision making model increasingly based on scientific evidence, outcomes of policy oriented research in China remain biased by political concerns and private interests.

NICOLETTA CELLI

The question of Buddhist art's propagation through Central Asia to China has not generated a broad debate such as it did its parallel in the historical field. A long-established model has continued to influence the study of Chinese Buddhist art since the discourse's inception. This master narrative, until recently unquestioned, considers images as items in travellers' baggage that were passively copied and eventually altered only in terms of style. A more thoroughgoing iconological approach to the materials found in China seeks to overcome the idea that early Buddhist art consisted merely of faithful copies of imported models and shows that as a sophisticated system of communication with their own coherent language, these first images, with their subtle but eloquent variations of the original models, are in fact a window into the cultural and historical context of which they are part and as such the repositories of a great deal of invaluable information.

ADRIANA IEZZI

Since the mid-1980s Chinese Calligraphy Art has undergone a radical change and has opened itself to experimentation. Among different currents, the Modernist and the Avant-garde show the modernization process of Chinese calligraphy that aims at turning the art of calligraphy into an internationally comprehensible art form. The paper analyses these two movements by means of the artworks of two representative artists, Wang Dongling and

Xu Bing, which clearly illustrate how “Chinese Modern Calligraphy” could be a reflection of emerging trends in contemporary Chinese culture.

ELENA MACRÌ

Modern Chinese painting system is generally divided into three main and opposing categories: Traditionalists, Modernists, and Reformists. However, a wider analysis of theoretical and pictorial repertoire of artists from different groups proves that the rigid demarcation lines drawn by definitions are not valid when painters use traditional painting media in a different way and experiment with new techniques and styles. Landscape painting, by virtue of its prominent place in Chinese art history, is a particularly important subject for studying this process. By analyzing the synthesis between traditional and modern visual languages in some major ink works produced during the first half of the twentieth century, the present paper intends to investigate how much the notion of stylistic interaction (*ronghe* 融合) had supported artists to put into a new form the traditional figurative canon of *shanshuihua*, playing a key role in the development of a modern style of Chinese ink painting.

GIUANLUIGI NEGRO

According to data provided by China Internet Network Information Center, mobile is overtaking the desktop how device used by Chinese users to access the Internet. At the end of June 2012 there were 463 million Internet mobile users out of 591 million Chinese Internet users.

The Internet mobile development is supporting also in China the SOLOMO trend, sustaining a more social, localized, and mobile based oriented communication. This new trend had also important consequences in the Chinese Internet market in which Weixin (We Chat) is the highest expression. The paper describes the most important stages which characterized the success of Weixin in China but also in other foreign markets. An historical and comparative analysis between Sina Weibo and Weixin is provided in order to contextualize their impact on the nascent and co-evolutionary civil society, their communication model as well as their strategy to set up a business model.

LUISA M. PATERNICÒ

Every year in Europe, Chinese language courses are increasingly becoming part of the curricula in universities and schools. For European languages, an officially accredited reference framework already exists. The Council of Europe created it with the aim to establish definitions of linguistic competences divided into levels. The landscape of Chinese language teaching in Europe, on the other hand, is inconsistent. The European project *European Benchmarking Chinese Language* has recently proposed a definition of the competence levels for Chinese language based on the *Common European Framework of Reference*. This study introduces the research work carried out by the project members, the challenges faced and the results achieved. Finally, this paper envisions the necessary developments that such a project should have to reach the final goal of standardizing the competence scales for Chinese language in Europe.

MONICA ROMANO

The paper illustrates major translation problems encountered, solutions adopted, and adjustments made by translators of the Bible into Chinese, as exemplified in selected passages of the Gospel of St. John, as rendered in some recent editions. The translators, both Chinese and foreigners, often opted for different approaches around: i) adopting formal versus functional translation principles; ii) using local religious terminology to express key Christian concepts; iii) translating Semitic expressions; and iv) resorting to authoritative

translations for ambiguous or controversial passages. The sensitivity of the task and the perception of translating the “Word of God” added to the inherent difficulties and challenges, influencing translation outcomes.

TANINA ZAPPONE

In recent years, China adopted a more assertive approach to the international community. Besides keeping paying attention to issues of national interests, Chinese government has begun to assume a more cooperative and proactive behaviour on the international stage, attentive to the function of external communication in enhancing soft power. The paper analyses the role of lexical and morphosyntactic choices, made by Chinese leaders during attendance of international events, in the formation of China's external representation. The author proposes the methodology of corpora linguistics as a valuable tool for providing an empirical basis for the preliminary assumption of a more mature approach to foreign audiences by today's Chinese leadership.

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