

Negotiating histories: Traditions in Modern and Contemporary

painting, mixed media, installations and performances – in critical discourse, in museum exhibitions and in the art market. This study will explore the origins of 'ink' (shuimo) as a statement of difference, tracing backwards to the 'New Literati' movement in the 1980s and 1990s; post-Cultural Revolution seeds in the work of artists' groups such as Caocao (Grass Society); its demonisation and later propagandistic repurposing from the 1942 Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art forward to the New China; and finally its elevation as 'national painting' (guohua) in the Republican era. How has the focus turned towards the medium of ink as modal marker, as opposed to the other constituent materials of brush or paper? How does 'ink' relate to received frameworks of analysis, such as chronological periodisation (e.g. tradition v. modernity) or social structure (e.g. literati v. professional)? Comparison to the debates around 'ink painting' (sumi-e

and dominant figures and above all, a singular value based on success and power. This kind of history asserts its concreteness and authority by emphasising the objectiveness of history, its rationality and thus its undisputable nature. Instead, I propose a model of art history writing and practice as a complex humane process that takes emotions, anxiety, setbacks, and failures into consideration and constantly unfolds and recognises its own uncertainty and complexity.

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Somewhere (and Nowhere) Between Modernity and Tradition: Towards a Discursive Polylogue between Differing Interpretative Perspectives on Contemporary Chinese Art

China's relationship with modernity has always been a complex and conflicting one. Since the late nineteenth century, China has actively embraced modernising influences from outside while constantly fearing an uprooting of its own long established civilisation-specific identity/identities. As a consequence, progressive forms of Chinese art have shuttled inconclusively between an open pursuit of modernity and a resistant adherence to tradition. In the case of contemporary Chinese art produced since the late 1970s this inconclusive shuttling has resulted in often conspicuous hybridisations of images, attitudes and practices appropriated from Western(ised) modernist and postmodernist art with aspects of traditional Chinese cultural thought and practice. Within the context of the international art world, contemporary Chinese art's conspicuous cultural hybridity has been interpreted widely as a locus for the deconstruction of supposedly authoritative meanings; not least those associated with orientalising conceptions of cultural difference and associated colonialist/imperialist relations of dominance. In contrast, within the People's Republic of China (PRC) dominant discourses have tended to emphasise the essential 'Chineseness' of contemporary Chinese art as a resistance to the perceived dominance of Westernised modes of cultural thinking and practice.

As Craig Clunas has indicated with reference to the work of the film and video installation artist Yang Fudong, the question of whether we choose to emphasise the 'Chineseness' or the uncertainly hybrid nature of contemporary Chinese art is a 'fundamentally political' one that 'has no easy or definitive answer'. Although Clunas does not choose to elaborate further upon this statement, he can be understood to imply that while Chinese national-cultural exceptionalis?