

Chongqing University of Science and Arts, Institute of Arts (China),

Yao Ning

## KHARKIV STATE ACADEMY OF DESIGN AND ARTS

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### The Art of Ukraine in the Art History of China: the Problem of "Vision"

**Yao Ning. The Art of Ukraine in the Art History of China: the Problem of "Vision".** The article explores the problem of the scientific "vision" of the panorama of Ukrainian art by contemporary art historians of China who work on the problems of the Eastern European art (Belarus, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and other countries). It is determined that in the history of art of China information about Ukrainian art is not always represented correctly due to the already existing stereotypes which have come from the Soviet (now Russian) art history that has influenced the development of the art science in China. The tradition of studying Ukrainian art as part of Russian or Polish one is connected with the historical circumstances of the existence of these Empires, which comprised Ukrainian lands. The authors look for points of support in historical events, often not quite correctly interpreting the complex nature of Ukrainian relations within the imperial art (at the time of XVIII – XIXth centuries) and Ukrainian within the Soviet one (within the XX century).

**Keywords:** Ukrainian art, Chinese art history, text verification.

**Яо Нін. Мистецтво України у мистецтвознавстві Китаю: проблема «бачення».** У статті досліджується проблема наукового «бачення» панорами українського мистецтва сучасними мистецтвознавцями Китаю, які працюють над проблемами мистецтва Східної Європи (Білорусі, Польщі, Росії, України та інших країн). Установлено, що в мистецтвознавстві Китаю інформація про українське мистецтво подається не завжди коректно, оскільки своєрідною точкою відліку виступають вже існуючі стереотипи, які прийшли з радянського мистецтвознавства, яке у XX ст. значно вплинуло на розвиток мистецтвознавчої науки Китаю. Традиція дослідження українського мистецтва як частини російського або польського пов'язана з історичними обставинами існування самих Імперій, куди входили українські землі. Автори шукають точки опори в історичних подіях, часто не зовсім коректно інтерпретуючи складний характер взаємин українського в рамках імперського (для XVIII–XIX ст.), і українського в рамках радянського (в межах XX ст.) мистецтва.

**Ключові слова:** українське мистецтво, китайське мистецтвознавство, верифікація тексту.

**Яо Нін. Искусство Украины в искусствоведении Китая: проблема «видения».** В статье исследуется проблема научного «видения» панорамы украинского искусства современными искусствоведами Китая, работающих над проблемами искусства Восточной Европы (Белоруссии, Польши, России, Украины и других стран). Установлено, что в искусствоведении Китая информация про украинское искусство подается не всегда корректно, поскольку своеобразной «точкой отсчета» выступают уже существующие стереотипы, пришедшие из советского (сейчас российского) искусствоведения, повлиявшего на развитие искусствоведческой науки Китая. Традиция исследования украинского искусства как части российского или польского связана с историческими обстоятельствами существования самих Империй, куда входили украинские земли. Авторы ищут точки опоры в исторических событиях, часто не совсем корректно интерпретируя сложный характер взаимоотношений украинского в рамках имперского (для XVIII–XIX вв.), и украинского в рамках советского (в пределах XX в.) искусства.

**Ключевые слова:** украинское искусство, китайское искусствоведение, верификация текста.

**Statement of the problem and relevance of the topic.** In the modern Chinese art history tradition, the study of Chinese-Ukrainian relations in the field of art, as well as of Ukrainian art itself, does not form an independent area. In addition to the obvious

reasons for this state of affairs, the stereotyped perception of Ukraine by Chinese researchers as part of global Russian history makes central importance. For the overwhelming majority of Chinese authors, the history of art in Ukraine is influenced by the Soviet (and modern Russian) myth about its imperial past where art on the territory of Ukraine (as well as on the territories of Belarus or Kazakhstan) is a way of justifying its imperial ambitions.

According to the Chinese researcher Xie Yong Hui, "to learn to perceive Chinese art it is necessary ... to learn to understand the specificity of Chinese and Western one" [9, p. 78]. Similar should be the tasks of Chinese researchers in the practice of studying Ukrainian art, which for many of them today remains "under the cover" of the Soviet humanitarian heritage. And this is not surprising, because, for Chinese science an important feature of the theoretical understanding of the development of the general history of art, was the rapprochement with the Soviet art history in the middle of the twentieth century. It is interesting to note that over the 1952 to 1962 period the Chinese Culture Committee recruited and sent a group of Chinese students to the best educational institutions of the RSFSR to study not only the practice of European fine arts, but also its history. In this regard, PRC adopted a "clear course on reforming art education and popularizing Russian art in China", for which a specialized magazine "Art" was established, in which "almost every issue ... contained material on the theory or history of Russian art" [2, p. 208]. Actually, this explains the deep "immersion" of Chinese art history in Russian art.

However, it should be emphasized that "the process of acquaintance with Ukrainian art and its comprehension by Chinese researchers took place earlier and occurs today on the basis of key backgrounds, important for Chinese scientific knowledge, among which we distinguish: 1) the perception of the Ukrainian art as part of Russian one; 2) the formation of a dialogue between the values and meanings of Chinese traditional painting and the European pictorial tradition, and the identification of the place of the Ukrainian art in this process; 3) the desire to rethink the features of the art language, means of expressiveness and descriptive structure of Ukrainian art from the standpoint of Chinese science" [16, p. 176].

Today, China and Ukraine are on the path of political and cultural convergence, which implies an autotelic "vision" of Ukrainian art by contemporary Chinese art historians. One of the important tasks for them is to raise the problem of verification of existing knowledge about the Ukrainian art and the formation of a new picture of its history which is relevant to modern scientific knowledge. The constructing and

understanding of a consistent line of development of the Ukrainian art should become one of the important priorities of art historians engaged in the study of Eastern European art.

**Analysis of publications published in China** on the history of art in Eastern Europe allows us to state that the study of Ukrainian art by Chinese scientists has not been purposefully carried out. But Chinese researchers are familiar with the outstanding art monuments of ancient Kiev [14], in their works they periodically note the connection of V. Borovikovsky (1737 – 1825), D. Levitsky (1735 – 1822), I. Repin (1844 – 1930) with Ukraine [3; 10; 13; 16]. However, the context in which these episodes of Ukrainian art exist in their understanding allows one to speak about the attention of Chinese scientists to the art of Ukraine exclusively as part of the Russian Empire. The synonymous use of the concepts “Russia’s” / “Russian” and “Soviet” / “Russian” not only provided confusion in the perception of the history of art, but also did not allow associating, for example, “Old Russian” art (the 10th – 13th c.) or the process of the XVIII – XIX centuries on the so-called lands of “Malorossiya”, with Ukrainian culture. The difficulties of the relationship between Ukraine and Russia are incomprehensible for Chinese researchers so far [14], and that explains the perception by Chinese scientists of general forms of art history as ones that belong to the state (in this case “Power”), not the nation. Given a fairly general idea of the essence of the historical collisions of Ukrainian history, there is the cultural and political situation which is beyond the understanding of Chinese art historians, in which Ukrainian artists worked in different periods.

The perception of the development of Ukrainian art by Chinese scientists has its stages of development and its sequence logic, connected with the history of the study of art in China as an independent scientific discipline. In general, Chinese researchers discovered the Eastern European cultural and art space not in chronological order, but rather asynchronously. The latter depended on the surge of interest, the political aspects of certain topics in the history of culture and art, and also on the personal situational interests of researchers. In this process, three main problems were especially acute: *the problem of historical and cultural perception by the Chinese art historians of the past of Ukraine and its region* (in a deeper sense we are talking about the nature of the representation of Ukrainian art as a kind of cultural and historical phenomenon that, in separate segments, is compatible with the global pan-European historical area, and in other cases acts as its independent component); *the problem of the compatibility of art forms, their artistic paradigms and ways of perceiving the aesthetics of the artwork* (a special role belongs to the analysis of the work of art as the bearer of the cultural code, the understanding of Ukrainian art, its history and general cultural problems arises on the basis of Chinese ideas about art itself and its forms, ways of expressiveness, painting canons, etc.); *the problem of coexistence within the general concept of the art of various academic and didactic systems of training specialists* (directly determines the nature

of the perception of the genesis of art, its evaluation and research focus).

**The objective of this article** is to consider the first of the mentioned problems, which is the problem of historical and cultural perception by the Chinese art historians of the past of Ukraine and its region.

**Connection of the work with the scientific programmes.** The research has been carried out in accordance with the plans of the research work of the Department of Ukrainian Studies of Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Fine Arts and the Institute of Arts of Chongqing University of Science and Arts.

**Statement of the main material of the study.** The data of sociological surveys on which Chinese researchers rely in their attempts to determine the relevance of the art of Eastern Europe in China, indicate a certain tendency of sporadic, undulating attention to the art and culture of the region. In this case, the tendency of “russocentrism” is clearly traced, which in many respects distorts the true state of affairs [15, p. 135].

In general, relying on the researches of Chinese scientists (examined by us) studying the art of Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, and also on individual works of scientists on the interrelationships of both art history areas, we allocate general trends in the contemporary study of Ukrainian art “through the eyes of China,” among which special significance have: 1) comprehension of cultural and historical features and phasing of the development of Ukrainian art; 2) analysis of style methods and art techniques that characterize a particular period in the history of Ukrainian art; 3) study the activities of individual authors, who are the most significant for understanding the general structure of the genesis of Ukrainian art. In singling out the above tendencies, we used two mutually complementary criteria: 1) the religious and philosophical basis of Ukrainian art, which we see as a common denominator for the Chinese and Eastern European art process, and 2) consideration the work of art as an independent form of art thinking, which is expressed through the author’s, often subjective, vision of the beautiful.

For the Chinese scientists in this aspect titular interpretation of processes is the main concept, where phenomena in the history of the development of art are viewed through their compatibility with the main and the most common content. As an example of such an approach, let us cite Ne Zi’s reflections on the phasing of development of Chinese fine arts, which is clearly oriented toward the dynastic principle for this scientist: “In the history of China’s development, fine arts have passed the stages of genesis, formation and development. It should be noted that the development of ancient Chinese civilization during the Qin dynasties (221 – 207 BC) and Han (202 BC – 220 AD) is a key period, considering the Qin in Chinese history is the first feudal dynasty, and in the Han times, the feudal system was strengthened and further developed. The Age of Wei-Jin (220 – 420) is important in the development of Chinese traditional painting, because during this period characteristic for this age artistic style, aesthetic features and basic theoretical system were formed. ... Since the XVI century, the

fine arts of China began to experience the influence of Western art, which was typical for each and every subsequent periods of development and became especially active against the background of modern globalization [6, p. 16]. At the same time, the author does not develop the idea of any other principle of periodization, not only because of the impossibility or illogicality of such. His position is based on the traditional understanding of the historical process as a linear phenomenon, which can not and should not go beyond the “title” marker [6, p. 6].

Let us note that in the context of the existing tradition of the post-Soviet understanding of the proximity of the Ukrainian and Russian (for the western regions – Polish) art development ways, it is easier for Chinese researchers to find a common one, which enlarges the vision and gives grounds for a broader territorial or stylistic gradation. It is in this case where the particular Ukrainian art, in fact, often becomes an all-Russian one, which, from the position of the traditions of Chinese human sciences, is justified as a deliberate generalization.

In this context, Sun Yan’s reflections can be quite interesting, which explore forms of understanding the problems of Russian culture in the works of Chinese scholars. In his opinion, the study of this issue by Chinese scientists should be considered in two main directions. The first is connected with the attempts of researchers to determine the features (national specificity) of culture through analysis of history, geography, language and so on [12, p. 138]. In our opinion, this issuance brings Chinese scholars (who are often not directly related to the analysis of art) to a discussion about the actual historical context. In addition, it is not always possible to trace the direct causal link between historical events and the evolution of art forms, especially of the fine arts. In this regard, we believe this direction is not entirely correct for studying the history of art on the territory of Ukraine.

The second issuance covers the ways of the influence of Russian culture on the northeastern Chinese culture [12, p. 138]. In other words, on those border areas and regions where contacts between the East (China) and the West (Russia) were geographically close. In this case, the scientist does not take into account all other forms of contexts, including the extremely strong vectors of influence of the Western world on China and vice versa, which occurred indirectly.

The obvious narrowness and generality of both approaches often lead researchers to erroneous interpretations and incorrect conclusions about the past and its role in determining the vectors of the development of art. For example, the Chinese scientist Lei Liping, mentioned in the context of the first approach, in the work “Formation, development and basic features of Russian culture,” applies to the Eastern European cultural area the dynastic principle of understanding Chinese history. This does not give him the slightest chance to “grasp” the Ukrainian vector of development of art as an autochthonous, which has its own aesthetic roots [5]. Thus, pointing to a rather late (in comparison with the

Chinese) period of the formation of Russian culture, the scientist does not consider any form of art until the 9th century, and further refers to three “main periods” (the Middle Ages, New Times, the second half of the XIX – XX century), which he shows as a single complex. However, it is well known that in Ukrainian science the art of 9 – 18 centuries is customary divided into the following periods: 9th – the beginning of the 14th century – the *princely* epoch (the pre-Mongol and post-Mongol periods are singled out); 14th – the beginning of the 16th century – *the era of the late Middle Ages*; 16th – first half of the 17th century – time of the *Renaissance principles* influence; middle 17th – the last third of the 18th century – the *Baroque* era.

The understanding of the “Kievorussian” context is significant in this sense, and Sun Yan presents it how “the first period, namely the Middle Ages, covers the IX – XVII centuries of the history of Russian culture, the times of Kiev Rus, the Tatar-Mongol yoke and the principality of Moscow. The main cultural sign of the Kiev Rus period is spoken word poetry, ‘birch bark manuscripts’, chronicles, Byzantine style in architecture and painting” [12, p. 138]. Such a mishmash in the perception of separate fragments of the whole is typical for understanding the historical and cultural process which is often done simplistically, in a general way and without understanding the issues of identity.

In addition to the periodization of the history of Eastern European art, the tradition of the “titular” sample of artists and works of art (“designated” masterpieces) that has developed over the long years of the Soviet and post-Soviet era has an important influence on the perception of the historical and cultural framework. In a certain sense, to the present day there is a certain priority towards a genre-stylistic understanding of the evolution of the Eastern European art. For instance, more close attention is paid to oil painting in general, realism and “style” architecture. For example, Yang Chunlei, the teacher at Qingdong University of Technology, describes the principles of selecting fine arts material to familiarize Chinese students with the culture of Russia: 1) paintings by artists that are known all over the world and especially in China (for example paintings of I. Repin, V. Serov, V. Surikov, V. Vasinov, P. Korin, I. Glazunov); 2) historical paintings with a subject that reflects important historical events in Russia (for example, pictures reflecting the struggle of the Russian people with foreigners; the christening of Rus, reforms, labor, public holidays, the construction of a new city, the flight of the first cosmonaut); 3) paintings reflecting important subjects of Russian history: the era of Kiev Rus, the Moscow State, Alexander Nevsky, Ivan the Terrible, Peter I, Catherine II, Alexander II, the October Revolution, the Soviet period; 4) paintings, which cause interest and are intelligible for Chinese students [15, p. 136–137]. Further the author notes that “works of Russian painting on the historical subject reflect mythological, biblical, evangelical plots as real historical events or historical myths. Russian historical painting promotes the assimilation of history, national culture (religion, na-

tional traditions, art, moral and ethical values) in the process of getting acquainted with the artist's work. For example, V. M. Vasnetsov in his painting 'The Baptism of Saint Prince Vladimir' reflected baptism, which is an important event in the history of Russia" [15, p. 136]. Even though the scholar points out that "the traditionally strong interest among students is caused by V. M. Vasnetsov's picture 'The Baptism of Saint Prince Vladimir'" [15, p. 137], the context of its examination and analysis with Chinese students (in the case of a lesson held at the Qingdong University of Technology) shows a clear misunderstanding of the peculiarities of the cultural and historical situation and the complexity of the evaluation of V. Vasnetsov's work outside the narrow fine arts review like formal-style, compositional or iconographic.

It is worth noting that almost all modern researches of Chinese scientists, which were made in the Russian-speaking space, recall the peculiar "system of rejection" of the Ukrainian towards the Russian, which leads to the replacement of one by another. Such logic of statement also influences the perception of the Chinese art history tradition by the Russian researchers who often prefer the "imperial" exposition of events in the culture of Eastern Europe and examine the peculiarities of Chinese art through this prism. Let us give as an example the fragment of a study by V. Puzyreva and I. Lychkovskaya, which exemplifies this approach.

The authors emphasize that "traditional Chinese painting reflects the worldview of the nation of the Celestial Empire," while noting that the development of painting as such, "is always inextricably linked with the historical changes that left an indelible mark on the minds of people of this or that era" [7, p. 343]. According to the authors, a significant influence on the ancient Russian culture was exerted by Byzantium, "... specialized mainly in religious paintings adorning the churches' ceilings" [7, p. 343]. Thus, "the first Russian mosaics did not differ much from the Byzantine ones, but later certain features began to appear that later formed an original Russian style" [7, p. 343]. It is not difficult to see that for the researchers the convergence of the Chinese and Russian cultural and historical foundations is seen as the main tool for justifying the "commonality" of Old Russian culture: "Since the end of the XVII century, particularly from the beginning of XVIII, the establishment of portrait painting is taking place. ... the first parsuns ... were replaced by really full-fledged portraits ... by D. G. Levitsky" [7, p. 343]. However, in one of our publications [16], we pointed out that such a position regarding the artwork of D. Levitsky (as well as A. Losenko, V. Borovikovsky and other artists who come from Ukraine) was formed in Soviet art history and it was broadcast through the works of Russian scientists and in consequence introduced to China. But the very fact that D. Levitsky, who raised the portrait genre in Russian painting to the European level, was born and "grown up" in the Ukrainian lands is very significant. One should realize that in the absence of an art center in Ukraine in XVIII century, the moving of young people to the capital was inevitable. As the presence of the Italian

artist A. Modigliani in France (as well as many other outstanding masters who had no French origin) did not make him a French artist, so D. Levitsky, and V. Borovikovsky, I. Repin and others by birthright are Ukrainians, who enriched the treasury of painting of the Russian Empire of that time [See: 16].

The analysis allows us to draw the subsequent **conclusions**. 1) Information about the Ukrainian art (its history, achievements, traditions) in modern art history of China is quite limited. The reason for that lies in the fact that modern Chinese art history inherits in many respects the Soviet, and with it the Russian version of the development of culture in the Eastern European region. The main methodological mistake in understanding the history of Ukrainian art by Chinese researchers is obtaining facts about Ukrainian art of different periods using Russian-language studies, which are not always objective and in many ways tendentious. 2) The scientists of China are aimed at solving a range of problems that look relevant and modern on the basis of their subject-object tasks. In this sense, it is important to emphasize the features that occur in attempts to understand the history of Ukrainian art. Among them: a) the formation of the idea of Ukrainian art alongside the transformation of Chinese art and art history; b) willingness of Chinese scientists to understand different points of view and substantial evolution; c) conceptualization of the features of Ukrainian art in comparison with the history of Chinese one and vice versa. 3) Chinese authors, being influenced by the already established stereotypes of perception of the Ukrainian art, do not consider a number of features in the art practice of that time. Refusing the problem of national identification, they simplify the nature of the evolution of Ukrainian (and Eastern European!) Art in general.

**Prospects for further researches** are determined by studying the "presence" of Ukrainian art (facts, artists, artworks) in the works of Chinese art historians, as well as in comprehension of the general line of development of Ukrainian art within modern humanitarian knowledge.

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