CHINA/AVANT-GARDE: EXPLORING MODERN CHINA THROUGH ART

CURRICULUM COMPONENT
HISTORICAL ERAS IN CHINA

960-1279

Imperial China: Song Dynasty
Classical era of increased urbanization, agricultural production, commerce and trade, industrial technology, and flourishing civil service system.

1949-1978

Communist China
Mao Zedong-led state take-over of private land and wealth with a series of five-year plans that starved millions of Chinese to death, despite increased agricultural production and industrialization.

1978-1989

Avant-Garde China
With the economic and political reforms by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China began to open itself to western influences and capitalist growth. Privatization of property and wealth ushered in the expectations of other individual freedoms.

1989-present

Political Capitalist China
After the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, Chinese citizens re-directed their efforts toward greater individual wealth and productivity. China’s economy, despite authoritarian political measures, would surge to become the largest in the world in the 21st century.
TERMS

Middle Kingdom
Song Dynasty
Shan shui
Taoism (Daoism)
Confucianism
Qingming Scroll
civil service system
Rainbow Bridge

Communist Revolution
Mao Zedong
Five Year Plan
Great Leap Forward
Cultural Revolution
Deng Xiaoping
Special Economic Zones
China-Avant-Garde Art
Exhibition

Democracy Movement
April 26 Editorial
Tiananmen Square Massacre
Political Capitalism
One Belt One Road Initiative
## CONTEXT: ART IN CHINA

|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| **STYLE; THEMES; INFLUENCES** | Landscapes (*shan shui* or “mountain river”) style painting
Influenced by Taoist and Confucian philosophy, which emphasized humanity’s smallness within the great cosmos; social and natural phenomena caused by larger patterns and principles. | “Socialist in content, Chinese in style”; folk art, or *nianhua* (traditional Spring festival art).
Its role was to be “the artistic crystallization of the political aspirations of the Chinese Communist Party.” (Mao) and to serve the propagandistic needs of the state. | Challenges to Maoist ideology, philosophical and cultural debates on humanism and individual freedom due to influx of western aesthetic under Deng Xiaoping’s economic and political reforms.
Themes of hope, terror, loneliness, exploration of the human figure and face; classical imagery overlaid with rationalist, geometric patterns.
Culminated in Avant-Garde exhibition at China’s National Art Gallery | Acceptance of China’s political capitalist model of economic freedoms held politically and culturally in check by an authoritarian state after the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.
Art is now an international commodity, produced for market-driven consumption and financial gain.
Use of technology, new mediums such as 3D glass, but combined with re-interpretation of traditional themes such as Chinese landscapes. |
Landscapes, known as *shan shui* or “mountain river”-style painting

Influenced by Taoist and Confucian philosophy, which emphasized humanity’s smallness within the great cosmos; social and natural phenomena caused by larger patterns and principles.
Communist China

“Socialist in content, Chinese in style” folk art, or nianhua (traditional Spring festival art).

Its role was to be “the artistic crystallization of the political aspirations of the Chinese Communist Party.” (Mao) and to serve the propagandistic needs of the state.
Challenges to Maoist ideology, philosophical and cultural debates on humanism and individual freedom due to influx of western aesthetic under Deng Xiaoping’s economic and political reforms.

Themes of hope, terror, loneliness, exploration of the human figure and face; classical imagery overlaid with rationalist, geometric patterns.

Culminated in Avant-Garde exhibition at China’s National Art Gallery
Acceptance of China’s political capitalist model of economic freedoms held politically and culturally in check by an authoritarian state after the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

Art is now an international commodity, produced for market-driven consumption and financial gain.

Use of technology, new mediums such as 3D glass, but combined with re-interpretation of traditional themes such as Chinese landscapes.
### Chinese Art Analysis Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE &amp; ARTIST</th>
<th>Scholar by a Waterfall by Ma Yuan</th>
<th>Grow Strongly Under the Broad Sky</th>
<th>Sleeping Man, Departing Horses by Su Xinping</th>
<th>Mao Zedong No.1 by Wang Guanyi</th>
<th>Sea of Desire by Su Xinping</th>
<th>Portrait of You by Chen Hui</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE’S MEANING/PURPOSE?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW DOES IT SPEAK TO ERA?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scholar by a Waterfall by Ma Yuan
Grow Strongly
Under the Broad Sky
and Earth
Sleeping Man,
Departing Horses,
1991, by Su Xinping
Sea of Desire by Su Xinping
Portrait of You
by Chen Hui
Xiao Xiaowan, artist:

“During Deng Xiaoping’s time, we were talking about wanting to develop. Mainly the economy had to go up. Don’t probe into whether things are rational or not, right or wrong. Everyone go do it. Feeling the stones to cross the river.”
Xiao Xiaowan, artist, on 1991:

“The world at that time was simply about validating one’s existence. We didn’t consider what the world was like in reality, what the western system and people are like, what the Chinese are like. The most powerful instinct was to validate oneself, one’s individual existence, its value.”
Cui Cancan, curator, on Tiananmen Square Massacre:

“I had no idea about 1989 when I was a child. When I really knew what happened in 1989, it was…2006. I was in college, a friend showed me a videotape. Among my generation, 80% I’m sure, don’t know about 1989.”
Su Xinping on Tiananmen Square Massacre

“1989. Because of the incidents followed by a high-pressured atmosphere, so we had a feeling of losing our way. That is...ideals perhaps are expansive, or imagined beautifully, but reality is not that smooth.”
Su Xinping, artist:

“China is busy with things in this country, every person is busy with things. Because ever since 1992 we couldn’t stop. Just going forward in the dark blindly. That’s what’s frightening.”
Resources:

Asia for Educators, East Asian Institute at Columbia University
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/song-scroll/song.html

University Art Gallery, University of Pittsburgh
https://uag.pitt.edu/index.php/Detail/occurrences/397