

ART AND CULTURE FOR ATTRACTIVE TERRITORIES: CHINESE PARTICIPATION IN THE KIP PAVILION AT EXPO 2015

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Introduction

The 2015 Milan Universal Exposition successfully concluded on 31 October 2015. During the six-month exposition around the central theme “Feeding the Planet: Energy for Life”, the participating institutions and organizations put sustainability at the centre of their programmes and increased the awareness of citizens about the main themes developed. In the KIP Pavilion, participants from various continents and different sectors expressed their ideas and presented their efforts for the realization of “attractive territories”, among which China had an important presence, as the main contributor to the construction of the Pavilion and with various exhibitions. Chinese participants - including public institutions, the private sector, associations, universities and research centres - displayed different cultural aspects of this ancient civilization and explored sustainable development solutions and practices in enhancing and promoting territorial resources. From art to agriculture, from technological advances to political innovations, Chinese participants contributed to enriching the activities of the Pavilion and to establishing a wider integrated network for the future.

Art as the messenger of attractive territories

Art, vehicle of knowledge and bearer of cultural heritage, is an essential factor of sustainable development. Five millennia of history and culture endow modern Chinese society with an incredibly abundant artistic patrimony: that’s why numerous Chinese partners of the KIP Pavilion chose “Arts” as the keyword of their presence at Expo and used art and beauty to articulate the theme of the Pavilion – “Attractive Territories for a Sustainable World”.

With the theme of ancient wisdom - oriental aesthetics, “The Spirit of Chinese Brushwork and Crafts” art exhibition, held in the KIP Pavilion during July and August, was a living history of a thousand-year old civilization, which interpreted the theme of the Pavilion in its own way – that promoting traditional art and the wisdom of the people, combining tradition and innovation, is a fundamental way of making a territory attractive. Centering on the “harmony between Heaven and Man”, a traditional Chinese philosophical principle, this amazing art exhibition consisted of three parts: “The Spirit of Chinese Brushwork” – the contemporary Chinese brush-and-ink painting and calligraphy art; “The Spirit of Chinese Crafts and Folk Art”; and “Chinese Mineral Colour Painting” – the traditional fresco and mineral color painting, presenting the unique aesthetic ideal and sublime creativity of Chinese wisdom.

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Among them, “The Spirit of Chinese Brushwork” displayed the calligraphic works and paintings of six highly renowned Chinese contemporary artists - Pan Gongkai, Zhang Lichen, Jiang Baolin, He Jiaying, Liu Han and Wang Dongling – by means of a comprehensive interpretation of philosophical thought as well as their passion for art and disseminating the oriental aesthetic values that have existed for thousands of years. “The Chinese Mineral Colour Painting” featured the heritage of ancient Chinese fresco methods and innovative modern mineral colours, demonstrating how to rejuvenate an ancient art in a modern context. “The Spirit of Chinese Crafts” offered a comprehensive exhibition of traditional crafts and artistry with the principle of “conveying the *dao* - the primordial essence of the Universe - through objects”. All the items were collected and selected from works of national masters and inheritors of traditional knowledge in order to popularize the essence of this intangible heritage and carry forward the living spirit of the works of art themselves. Instead of adopting a traditional static model of an art exhibition, “The Spirit of Chinese Brushwork and Crafts” took the form of a virtual theatre that featured modern technology and sensory art. Besides, it provided a comprehensive interpretation of the exquisite works, cultural and philosophical ideas, as well as of the creative spirit and artistic life of the artists. In this way, the exhibition offered visitors an opportunity to appreciate the charm and essence of the Chinese culture in a more profound way. The materials were collected from all around China and realized by Guangzhou Ihavebao Culture Communication Co. Ltd.



The Chinese Spirit of Brushwork and Crafts

During the months of August and October, the China Association of Zen Tea, in collaboration with the China Association of Milan and the Silk Road Culture Journey Committee and with the support of the Consulate of China in Milan, organized an exhibition of Chinese traditional art. Prestigious Chinese contemporary artists such as Chen Chuanxi, Xu Han, Ma Zikai, Wu Xuebin, Luo Sangui, Xie Bingjun were present at the opening of the exhibition with their works. Calligraphy, classic painting and ceramic art, the China Association of Zen Tea offered the visitors of Expo a comprehensive exhibition around the culture of tea - beverage as well as cultural symbol - presenting the heritage it carries: the unification between the art of tea and the philosophy of zen and the relationship between food and spirit.

From 1 to 4 October, five Chinese women artists interpreted their reflections on the multifaceted relation between human beings and nature in the Theatre of the KIP Pavilion. In response to the theme of the Pavilion, the exhibition remarked how human beings, especially women, interact with the natural world and how nature reflects and redefines ontological nature – the becoming and the existence of human beings. Using different artistic expressive languages, from installations, photos and videos to performance, the five artists based in Beijing - Han Shuying, He Chengyao, Mo Di, Sun Shaokun and Tao Aimin - expressed their sensibility and creativity with pieces of art and on- site creations. As suggested by the title of the project itself, “Naturally Women”, or better, by the Chinese title “天然奇瑰” (literally, amazing treasures of Nature), the Exhibition was an exploration of the intimate reflection and gender vision on the world. Women, being actual or potential mothers are endowed with a particular sensitivity and innate attitude to protection that allows them to shed a new light on the theme. The exhibition was curated by Alice Cazzaniga and carried out through the collaboration between the Italian Embassy in Beijing, the Confucius Institute of the University of Milan, Ever-Beijing Limited and the KIP International School, with special support from Ambassador Alberto Bradanini, Famiano Crucianelli, co-president of the KIP International School, Professors Jin Zhigang, Alessandra Lavagnino and Marta Valentini of the Confucius Institute of the University of Milan and Dr. Paul Jun Dong of Ever-Beijing Limited.

From 24 to 29 October, in an exhibition titled “Silk Road Bronze and Stone Paper Exhibition”, China Jiuding Environmental Paper Co. Ltd in collaboration with the World Health Common Association and Shanghai Jia Feng Special Arts&Crafts Company presented a China between tradition and technology. Among the exhibits, two bronze sacrificial tripods located in the Garden of the KIP Pavilion immediately captured the attention of Expo visitors. They were the Milan Expo Golden Sacrificial Tripod of 2.8 meters high and the Venice Water Sacrificial Tripod of 2.6 meters high. The creator of these pieces, Lu Yintao, is regarded as the “King of Chinese Sacrificial tripods”, whose works are exhibited in the Garden of the United Nations Headquarters in New York and on a 4093-meter-high icecap in the Antarctica. In addition to the bronze, the exhibition also presented 14 model ships of 100:1 scale of the ships of the legendary Chinese traveller Zheng He, who wrote a page on the history of the Silk Road on the Sea and the lost technique of “transparent bronze mirror”, which remained secret for over 1000 years and was not rediscovered until 1975. Other important art works exhibited included the *Silk Road Song* large sculpture group realized by the artist Chen Xiulin, iced gem jewelry paintings realized by the children of the Chagall Art Education Centre and the “China Harmony & Prosperity Painting” realized over two years with the participation of sixty Chinese painters.

Other important Chinese art exhibitions that took place in the KIP Pavilion included: the photography exhibition “Under the same sky – a journey into Xinjiang”, the *Thangka* exhibition “Colours of Tibe”, the “double-hook” calligraphy exhibition and the vedic music concert by Three-time world group organized by the Silk Road Culture Journey Committee; “The Odyssey of Chinese Culture”, organized by the MGK Multimedia Limited in collaboration with Silk Road, featuring an astonishing short film that recapitulates the history of cinema in China from traditional opera to the contemporary film industry; the painting and sculpture exhibition of Shandong artists organized by the Shandong Film and TV Group; “Light of the Silk Road” – the personal show of Dai Lezhong, with his patent-protected unique oil painting on gold. On 14 October, thanks to the collaboration between KIP, Maylink Group, the Province of Shanxi, China and the Chinese community of Milan, calligraphic works and paintings by celebrities were awarded and exhibited in the KIP Pavilion, together with reading of Buddhist sutras from the largest stone sutra library.



Calligrapher performing “double-hook” calligraphy

The legacy of the Silk Road

The Silk Road, the ancient network of trade routes that connected the West and East from China to the Mediterranean Sea, continues today as an important meeting point of the different Eurasian regions linked by it. Numerous events were carried out in the KIP Pavilion under the theme of revitalization of the Silk Road as the center of cultural interaction.

On 14 October, the Silk Road Culture Journey Committee from Beijing held a press conference in the KIP Pavilion upon the arrival of the Silk Road Caravan, which traveled from Beijing to Milan via Russia, along one of the ancient Silk Routes. The event was realized by the Silk Road Culture Journey Committee, in collaboration with the Automobile Sector Association of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade. Numerous independent Chinese automobile manufacturers actively participated in the initiative, offering their newly developed cars for the adventure. The pilots and the journalists who participated in the trip realized a beautiful documentary on their 40 days on the road. This trip was a mission with multiple objectives: to test the functions of the new cars through a tough journey, to link the starting and the arrival point of the Silk Road, to retrace the passage of cultural, economic and politic exchanges, to send messages of peace and understanding.

On 20 October, a series of seminars entitled “The Silk Road and Religions” held by the Confucius Institute of the Catholic University of Milan “Sacred Heart”, in collaboration with the Department of History, Archeology and Art History of the same university and the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, further demonstrated the long-standing legacy of this remarkable network. Prestigious scholars and experts offered historical analysis on the role of the Silk Road in the cultural interaction between the ancient empires and in the diffusion and exchanges of religions. Some of the countries crossed by the Silk Road, today as in the past, have become the stage of war with religion as background, causing threats to regional stability and international security. The history of the Silk Road, as always marked by peace and non-violence advocates like autocratic and belligerent groups, can bring much inspiration for our present and future. During the conference, the role of religion in peace and communication was highlighted.

Agri-Culture as the basis of people’s livelihood

The “Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) in China Exhibition”, coordinated by the World Agricultural Heritage Foundation and the Ministry of Agriculture of China, presented the wisdom, charm and philosophy of traditional farming in China. Agricultural pilot sites of great economic, ecological and cultural value, such as Qingtian Rice-Fish Culture in Zhejiang, Hani Rice Terraces in Honghe of Yunnan, Dong's Rice-Fish-Duck System in Guizhou, etc. were introduced to visitors through images, products, brochures and beautiful videos. Conserving and developing such agricultural treasure will be conducive to increasing agricultural productivity, farmer’s income and prosperity of rural community. This international initiative and the participating experiences work all over the world to preserve traditional farming methods and adapt them with the modern times, in order to ensure food sovereignty of local populations in the future.

In addition, private actors who are conducting concrete practices in the sector, such as the Sinew Corp., presented their products and projects under way in the suburbs of Beijing. Their activities are concentrated in the practice and promotion of biological agriculture, vegetarian culture in China. In the areas where they work, they are practicing a village-company co-development model in collaboration with local governments.

Innovation and green economy

With the intention of presenting a different China, one that cares about innovation and a harmonious and sustainable development, partners and socially responsible companies collected innovative experiences of Chinese actors in supporting territorial development processes in China: they illustrated their contribution in promoting a green economy and valorising local natural resources, in promoting technological and methodological innovations, and, in general, expressed the soul of the Chinese culture in a new light.

China Jiuding Environmental Paper Co. Ltd, in collaboration with the World Health Common Association and Shanghai Jia Feng Special Arts&Crafts Company, organized in the KIP Pavilion an exhibition dedicated to discovering a China between tradition and technology. The event was titled “Silk Road Bronze and Stone Paper Exhibition”. During the five-day exhibition, Jiuding Environmental Paper Co. Ltd displayed their revolutionary paper material made of ore powder and non-toxic resin, colloquially called “*stone paper*”. Their unique technology allows for the production of paper without wood, significantly reducing the dependence of current paper production on wood and contributing to the protection of the environment. Moreover, the general cost of stone paper is even lower than normal paper, and stone paper is water resistant, flexible and invulnerable in terms of physical characteristics. The material of rich mineral paper maintains a sufficient supply and a stable cost. This technology, unique in the world, consents paper production without cellulose, contributing to the protection of the environment.

Arts and crafts as the driving force of local development

Traditional craft skills can become the driving force and represent important opportunities of local development, as is the case of Jingdezhen, the capital of Chinese porcelain. In occasion of the Ceramic Cultural Week at Expo 2015, the municipality of Jingdezhen, together with the Greenland Group (Jiangxi Division), Maylink Group and Ma.Design International, held an exhibition of porcelain artworks entitled “New china from China”. The exhibition was inaugurated on 18 July, 2015 in the Chinese Pavilion, celebrating the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Italy. After its time in the KIP Pavilion, it continued its journey to Milan, Shanghai, Beijing, Jingdezhen and other cities, retracing the ancient Silk Road.

Jingdezhen is where the art of china production was born thousands of years ago and many crafts are handed down from one generation to another. For instance, one of the characteristic techniques of Jingdezhen is that of openwork, with which artisans pierce rice grain-shaped holes on the vase body, fill them with special glaze and then fire the body at high temperature; finally, the holes turn out to be semitransparent, lustrous and delicate. Porcelain is the soul of Jingdezhen city and its opportunity to develop and rejuvenate itself. Many renowned artists come to settle down in this small city, giving up their status, honour and title to pursue their dream of china and perfect their artistic techniques. Refined ceramic treasures, representing the highest artistic and technical achievement of new Chinese ceramics, were presented during the exhibition. The works on display were unique pieces made by the artists and artisans from the

Jiangxi Ceramic Research Institute, Jingdezhen Official Kiln Enamel Institute, Jingdezhen Color Glaze Ceramic Art Research Institute and local small-medium porcelain producers of Jingdezhen. All of the exhibited pieces are a combination between tradition and innovation, where traditional techniques, attitudes and artistic elements – such as the blue and white motif (*qing-hua*), flower and bird pattern, enamel jewellery techniques and high-temperature underglaze colours, are innovated with new elements, new techniques and international aesthetics.



Exhibition of Jingdezhen porcelain artworks

Similar to Jingdezhen, the city of Yixing in the eastern Chinese province of Jiangsu, in collaboration with the China Association of Zen Tea, has presented to the public of Expo 2015 another traditional know-how with centuries of history – the Yixing clay teapots. Yixing clay teapots, or Purple Sand teapots, are a traditional style used to brew tea dating back to the 15th century. Artists like Wu Ming, Fan Yongliang, Gao Jun, Tang Jie, Zhao Mingming exhibited artworks and teapots realized with Yixing clay, combining traditional style and modern cultural elements.

A small county in the Southeast of China, instead, is conducting an experimental culture village based on the traditional instrument *guqin*, where every villager will be granted a piece of land to plant and produce their own food and exchange among them when the food exceeds personal needs. The architectural characteristics of this village imitate ancient Chinese architecture; also the lifestyle is an imitation to that of ancient Chinese intellectuals. With this initiative the Group intends to turn the ancient instrument into a key element for local development, creating

employment for local people, promoting a slow and high quality lifestyle and attracting tourists who are interested in cultural journeys as a way to stimulate the development of local economy.

Culture as a tool for an inclusive society

The Chinese community of Milan, coordinated by the Diamocilamano Social Promotion Association, actively participated in the activities of the Pavilion, organizing thematic tours to the Pavilion with the students of the Chinese school of Longjia. The experience of the Association demonstrated how they are working in the local community, using arts and cultural expression to promote mutual understanding between different cultural groups and to shape shared identities and a common sense of belonging. On the first of June, to celebrate International Children's Day, more than 40 Chinese children living in Milan were invited to show their talents in the KIP Pavilion. Children from different schools of Milan animated the external spaces of the Pavilion, singing songs in different languages, dancing classic and ethnic dances, playing traditional Chinese instruments like the *guzheng*, *pipa*, *guqin*. The same association organized other events, from the final of a singing contest and celebrations of the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival, bringing together Italians and Chinese residing in the same city and contributing to the construction of a harmonious and inclusive society.



Celebration of International Children's Day

Future prospects

The Pavilion of the KIP International School was a stage where Chinese participants showcased their precious cultural and artistic heritage, a meeting place where they had the

opportunity to dialogue with other experiences that are seeking similar goals and a starting point, where new possibilities have opened up their doors. Since Expo, many Chinese actors, including universities, institutions, associations and the private sector, continue to work in collaboration with the KIP International School and other experiences that emerged from the Pavilion, in different ways, for the realization of a sustainable and harmonious world, from education, to social welfare, from art to the production and consumption of food. The building of attractive territories continues everywhere.