Animalistic style in creative practices of contemporary artists and creative industries

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Abstract. The beginning of the 21st century is marked by the global demand for innovative (creative) industries, based on unique authorship, experience and personal talent. Cultural industries are systematically transformed into the main factor of the socio-economic transformation on the basis of updating the industrial culture of production, creation and cultivation of artistic geniuses. The new challenges of the global art development transform the infrastructure of intellectual and creative entrepreneurship, production and export of artistic works. This article explores the author's style formation on the basis of the creative interpretation of Old Turkic (Scythian, Central Asian) menagerie, widely represented in the artistic heritage of the region. The incorporation of the animalistic style of ancient civilizations in the creative practices of contemporary artists is accompanied by a deep philosophical, artistic, technical and technological reworking of the traditional code of the artistic culture. The article conceptualizes three types of the artistic continuity: the craftsmen type that reproduces the Mongolian craftsmen canon; the cultural institutions that convert the craft heritage into the contemporary creative industries and the rare type of craftsmen-artists who synthesize both approaches, rethinking the canon, traditional techniques and technology of working with traditional materials. All three types are represented by different systems of styling, the core of which is the animalistic style. Contemporary artisans Zhigzhit Bayaskhalanov and Dashi Namdakov create unique artistic images and metaphors, use innovative ways of shaping, and apply illogical, provocative and asymmetrical compositional solutions, transforming regional artistic traditions into leading global trends. The success of this experience is caused by socio-cultural, institutional factors (education, ethnicity, social origin from the rural handicrafts circle), ethno-cultural backgrounds (craft heritage, the presence of the family art collaboration). The empirical basis of the research consisted of 6 in-depth interviews and dozens of case studies from the participant observation.

Key words: stylistic development type, animalistic style as a code of artistic culture, artistic paradigm of animalistic style, ethnic artistic tradition

1 Introduction

Scholars have discussed the problems associated with the concept of «style» in the art history for a long time. The art style is understood in different ways and characterizes phenomena of different scales, ranging from original creative works of an individual artist to the art of the whole historical period. The style as a complex and flexible system, which can hardly be formalized and detailed despite the methodological diversity of research approaches and the structural and functional dissection.

The style is a determining factor in the selection of the vital material for creative synthesis of the artist, a bearer of the work’s sense and its aesthetic value. An artistic style transforms the tradition, contributes to the renewal of cultural paradigms and interpretative techniques. A tradition in the art is a special type of the relationship between the past and present in the sphere of artistic creation, carried out at different levels in accordance with the patterns of the art historical development. The main stages of this development are traditional art and modern professional individual creativity, which interact with the tradition in opposite ways.

The traditional art determined the aesthetic significance of a work of art by its conformity with traditional norms and models, which had been preserved for thousands of years. A cosmological image structure, timeless values and a significance for the social community imparted an artistic tradition a rigid structure and turned it into a canon, an unambiguous matrix for subsequent activities. The novelty of the author's solution did not play the decisive role in that process.

During the development of art, the normativity of creativity weakens, including a refusal of the direct reproduction of prototypes and an orientation towards the reflection of a living, changing reality. Contemporary art is constantly renewing itself; the artist is departing from readymade schemes and looking for a unique solution reflecting his or her own perception of the world. The attitude to the artistic tradition becomes ambiguous and more creative. There are new ways of mastering the past culture: quoting, defamiliarisation, irony, collage, etc. Creative appropriation

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of the tradition forces the artist to comprehend the harmony, expressed in the values of the past, and to recreate it at a new technological and semantic level. The general rule of the art process is that the structure of the artwork becomes more complex and the stylistic layers increase in it. Styles in art have no clear boundaries and are in constant development, while mixing and counteracting. The notion of the style has a special status and role in the art history: in the contemporary philosophy of art and the scientific methodology it is equated with the artistic paradigm. The modern level of cognition aims at an in-depth study of the stylistic elements in their modifications, in their new links and complexes. The dynamics of artistic styles is characterised by the paradox of revivalism: an appeal to antiquity in search of novelty, the actualisation of the neglected.

An example is the currently observed revival of the so-called animal style, typical of the ancient and medieval decorative art of the wide Eurasian forest-steppe area. Archaeologists and art historians regard the animalistic style as linearly stylised and ornamented representations of real and imaginary animals or their body parts. The animalistic art forms a part of the broad worldview within cultural and historical communities of that era. Despite the inevitable differences of images of the artifacts of local cultures, researchers speak of a common qualitative specificity and convincing similarity of the images, which allows one to qualify the animalistic style as archetypal. The Scythian-Siberian animal style is characteristic of the entire nomadic world in the Eurasian subcontinent in the Scythian and Hun-Sarmatian times. "The set of images, their combination with each other and with the objects on which they are depicted, was shaped by certain ritual and mythological representations, originally totemistic and magical in character. It was the idea of "kinship" with animals, which had first biological and then socio-psychological grounds, that was a red thread in the animalistic art ... "totemic kinship" was a consciously realized factor of the unity of nomadic communities" [1]. The comparativist analysis of numerous monuments of the animal style of the vast steppe territory allows one to reconstruct directions of migrations and interaction of its constituent peoples.

2 Materials and Methods

The animal style, spread over vast territories over long periods of the history, becomes a cultural code. These are "identity components in the worldview of a people, nation or civilization, which express themselves in different historical situations, under different regimes, in different cultural contexts" [2]. It is a marker of a certain cultural paradigm, reflecting the real phenomenon of the integrity of socio-cultural units in their style synchronicity. A cultural paradigm is understood as "a pattern and a scheme reflexively used by people to solve life tasks within a particular culture. ... the cultural paradigm has a fundamentally historical character, it is consistent with the historicity of human consciousness, it provides the connection of generations, and then the connection within a generation" [3].

3 Results and Discussion

Within the Eurasian animal style, the images of animals decorate metal (bronze, gold), wooden and leather utensils and household items. The stylized images of animals on the ammunition of the nomadic warrior evolved into associative emblems, metaphorical zoomorphic and ornithomorphic symbols that recorded the belonging to a particular ethnic and social group.

Plane or relief images had the following features common to the animalistic style: canonic compositional solutions and animal poses, brevity and expressiveness of the images, achieved by deforming and stylizing them, accentuation of typical features, cutting the body shape with contrasting planes and subjecting the images to the object's form. At the same time, the number of plot devices was insignificant, which corresponds to the canonical stage of the traditional art development.

"The Scythian-Siberian animal style of the 7th to the early 3rd century B.C., constituting, along with weapons and horse harness, the famous "Scythian triad", is a particular artistic movement in the ancient applied zoomorphic art, characterized by a stable set of animal characters displayed in strictly defined poses and compositions and the use of special techniques for modelling details. One of the most important components of the repertoire are syncretic images: griffins and other zoomorphic creatures formed from various elements of real animals in fantastic combinations" [4].

On the basis of the analysis of more than two thousand original zoomorphic images, A. Kantorovich notes "the absolute dominance in the visual system of the Scythian-Siberian animal style of four mega-images, a kind of ideograms, namely: predators, ungulates, birds and syncretic animals" [5]. Criteria of the animal style according to A. Kantorovich are as follows. "The first is specific animal proportions: exaggeration of certain body parts (to the detriment of the rest)..., hypertrophied horns and hooves in ungulates, teeth and claws in raptors, beak and wings in birds, all the above details (if present) in syncretic animals. The second is the emphasis on certain anatomical details... through relief, linear framing, elaborate geometrization and/or "zoomorphic transformation" of this detail, i.e., transformation into another zoomorphic motif. The third is a specific pose of the animal, corresponding to a limited set of poses strictly defined for a particular group of images. In this case, for a full-figured image, all three features should be present; for a deliberately reduced one, the first two are sufficient" [6].

It is important that "the set of images, their combination with each other and with the objects on which they are depicted, was formed as a result of certain ritual and mythological beliefs, which originally had totemistic and magical overtones. It was the idea of "kinship" with animals, which had first a biological and then socio-psychological rationale, being a cross-cutting theme in the animalistic art... At the same time, the "totemic kinship" was a consciously realized factor of the unity of nomadic communities" [7]. The animalistic style recorded not only the historical transformation of the nomadic worldview, but also the interregional cultural diffusion and the mutual influence of nomadic and sedentary cultures. The Scythian animal style arose not only from a direct observation of real animals, but also through the familiarity with the works of fore Asian, ancient Greek, Thracian, and other foreign cultural masters, from which images, subjects, and motifs
were often borrowed. As the Scythian and Siberian art progressed from the depths of Central Asia to the East and West, it was enriched by new images and stylistic solutions, accumulating syncretism and moving further and further away from its initial state.

![Fig. 1. Syncretic images of the floor stone tile in the Basilica of St Lawrence. Vyšehrad, Prague, Czech Republic. ca. 1100–1150. The photo by Yu. Ivanova.](image)

### 3.1 The animalistic style in the works of Zhigzhit Bayaskhalanov and Dashi Namdakov

Nowadays, the animalistic style has acquired a new meaning as a resource for the development of creative industries from traditional folk culture and arts and crafts, thus bringing contemporary artisanal art to a new level of development, facilitating the artist's creative potential and self-actualization.

One of the brightest artists working in this artistic paradigm is a young gunsmith, sculptor and jeweller, Zhigzhit Bayaskhalanov (born in 1985). The master's work is based on the animalistic style that is characteristic of Buryat national art culture. His works (knives, sculptural compositions, etc) comprise a broad range of technological operations performed manually and using the specialised equipment (preparation of models, casting, polishing, patination, silvering, etching, etc). The used materials are an intricate combination of bronze, damascened steel, noble metals, precious and semi-precious stones.

The main artistic device used by Bayaskhalanov in all his works is a clear linear silhouette. When depicting an animal, the author reveals his character through expressive brevity of the image and varying the line thickness. The pulsation of the outline creates a feeling of strength, confidence, grace and purposefulness. The linearity of the artistic solution, which brings the image style to lapidary, creates the precision of the master's intentionality.

Bayaskhalanov's creative credo is reflected in his most famous work, the jewelled knife "The Crow". The lapidary-style ring depicts a bird's head. And the techniques of the mirror-polished blade, jewel-toned hilt elements, and the ethno-fantasy decoration reinforce the main stylistic element. The handle of the knife is finished with a silhouette of a raven as a symbol of a fatidic bird, as well as an allegory of dexterity and trickiness. The artist's website reveals the artistic image embedded in the piece: "The streamlined shape of the knife gives an impression of movement, flying on waves of air currents. The textured surface of the bird's head tends to simplify the detailing inherent in Bayaskhalanov's signature style. Instead of drawing feathers there are short strokes. Conditionality does not limit the imagery, but reveals it in a characteristic artistic manner" [8].

The sculptures from the "Animalistics" collection are made in the author's style, where the image of the animal is presented by flexible silhouette lines, revealing the nature and essence of the animal. The space between these lines adds to the sculptures' lightness. The images of the animals "fascinate and attract; the viewer can feel the story behind them, soaked in the heat of the battle and the spice of the steppe grass" [9]. Bayaskhalanov's unique style of linear lapidarity can be traced in many of his works: the author's knives, tabletop compositions and bronze sculptures.

Another contemporary interpreter of the animal style is the Russian sculptor, artist and jeweller, Dashi Namdakov (born 1967). The artistic works and principles of Namdakov and his family do not conform to the usual forms of the traditional folk art. The conceptual and stylistic basis of Namdakov's work is more diverse and ambiguous. While in his early easel sculpture he worked in the genre of animalism, which goes back to the nature of the archetypal canon of the Siberian animal style. At the current stage he is verified as an artist working in polysemy, synthesising the image in the natural, architectural and social space. The cardinal direction of his work is directed towards the search for a universal, extra-ethnic and extra-cultural metaphor. The works of the wooden sculpture in the Land Art Park "Tuzhi" are on the same page as Henry Moore's are, but Dashi Namdakov's work can be said to be more syncretic. In his contemporary works ("Transformation", "Energy", "Movement") the author creates a new language of the form, a philosophically enriched compositional phenomenon that meets the challenges of a more subtle interaction between genres, the evolution of forms and stylisation techniques. The artistic image is synthesized in a postmodern spirit and combined from the entirely traditional material into a new compositional and semantic integral image of the world. The synthesis of artistic images, mythological subjects, modern and traditional materials and techniques, enriched with associations of real and magical images, the elegance of the artistic perception and the compositional integrity of each work, the harmonisation of associative links with the ancient art of Eastern peoples and with the semantic context structures of contemporary art creates the expressiveness of
Namdakov's unique art. This is the kind of work to which Namdakov's reflection belongs. Bychkov writes that "spirituality in art is a special property of an artwork to induce in the recipient ... a contemplative and meditative state, to turn off his ratio and bring his spirit to the level of super consciousness, when the direct contact with the metaphysical reality, the Universe in general, its spiritual foundations is established... It is accompanied by spiritual pleasure, catharsis, that is, it can be understood as a state of aesthetic experience of completeness of being and harmony with the Universe" [10].

![Fig. 2. Zhigzhit Bayaskhalanov at the exhibition of his works. The photo by M. Gomboeva.](https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202316400067, 00067 (2023) SHS Web of Conferences 164, 00067 (2023) CILDIAH-2022)

Dashi Namdakov's phenomenon as an artist lies in the fact that he has preserved national traditions, but presented them in a completely new, avant-garde style. His handwriting cannot be replicated: his sense of the form, plasticity, movement, sense of the proportion and harmony are academic, but it is filled with an original character and meaning. The reunification of the classical, traditional East with the familiar European civilisation adds a unique individuality, style and originality to Dashi Namdakov's works [11].

3.2 Inner Mongolia Art Workshops on the PRC Art Market

In the city of Halut (海流图), in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR), PRC, being a part of the Bayan-Nur Urban District, the traditional World Festival of Mongolian Handicrafts was held in Urad-Zhunzi or Uurat-Houzi Khoshun in the period from the 6th to 11th of January 2019. This Khoshun, Urat-Khoutsi, is one of the historically most important staging posts on the ancient Silk Road and the Great Tea Road. The area is famous for two cultural treasures and has been called the "Home of the Red Camels" and the skilled artisans "Urat". "It is these industries that position our region to serve the great silk and tea routes. That is why renowned artisans from Russia, Mongolia and Inner Mongolia of the People's Republic of China have been invited to the festival. We hope that the greatest masters of the modern Mongolian world will create a permanent platform for the development of handicraft high-industrial art".

Due to the initiation of the «Belt and Road Initiative" national project by the PRC leadership in the last two decades, the Urat handicraft industry has become the main focus of the economic development in Khoshun. The handicraft production is represented in the region by the traditional Mongolian applied crafts of the high artistic level, such as the jewellery, skinning, monumental and easel sculpture, painting and production of ritual religious utensils (iconostases, vessels for offerings to deities), musical wind and drum instruments, interior items, structural elements, decoration and yurt decorations).

The high development of the decorative art and national crafts in Inner Mongolia determined the stable spread and expansion of the famous Kara-Suk style (local name for the animal style) in the Mongolian art, which is characterized by grotesque images of sculptured animal heads with long ears, big eyes and huge horns on thin legs. This style is complementary to the Central Asian and Siberian animal styles. Mongologists believe that it was through the Urat regions of Inner Mongolia that the wares of this style reached Yin China, southern and eastern Siberia.

The achievements of this region's handicrafts created a number of social and cultural institutions, supporting the specifics and main branches of handicraft production, the system of educational institutions for reproduction, network of art workshops and professional unions.

As part of the development of traditional craft industries and implementation of the Programme for the inclusion of artists from this region into the national initiative «Belt and Road Initiative", special cultural institutions were created by the Government of the People's Republic of China.
The international exhibition of the works of applied art from the modern Mongolian world included:

- a scientific and practical conference on "Contemporary Mongolian Craftsmanship" organised by the ARIM Artists' Union,
- an auction of works of art organised by the Union of Artists of the ARIM PRC.

An exhibition of the contemporary Mongolian handicraft art featured works was presented by:

- Russian artists and artisans: Dashi Namdakov (2 easel sculptures "Lama", "Steppe Melodies"), Zhigzhit Bayaskhalanov (8 author knives and 4 sculptures), Bato Merdygeev (6 knives in traditional Buryat style) and the "Ulger" family workshop of collection dolls of Dashi Namdakov family (12 author dolls);
- Mongolian artists, craftsmen and sculptors: painter Garamhand Munk Tsetseg, sculptor Tog Magnai, who showed 10 prototypes of monumental horse sculptures placed in various cities of Mongolia; "Khadyn ger", a craft workshop producing Hunnish yurts, who displayed a yurt with all its decorations, furniture and utensils;
- Chinese artists: Bao Cio Ging (Tur Bair), the chairman of the Union of Artists of the ARIM; Urgal Hangal, an artist, dean of the faculty of traditional applied arts of the National University of Huhhot; jewellry artist Li Zhan Xin.

The exhibition organiser and leading art dealer, professional mediator in business community of Mongolia, Russia, PRC is Huhe Ullah. He has earned his main assets in the art business and has been one of the many Chinese millionaires working to promote the Mongolian contemporary art in the island Chinese markets.

Fig. 3. From left to right in the photo: Russian artist: Zhigzhit Bayaskhalanov; Liao: Deputy Chairman of the Hoshun; professional mediator between Inner Mongolia and Mongolian business structures: Huhe Ullah; interpreter (Mongolian, Russian and Chinese languages): Donir Bata-Munketen. The photo by M. Gomboeva.
The author collected and processed the narratives of three Chinese artists, craftsmen of Inner Mongolia: Bao Cio Ging (Tur Bair), Chairman of ARIM Artists Union, Urgal Hangal, Dean of the Faculty of Traditional Applied Arts at National Hohhot University; and artist Li Zhangxiang (Li Zhangxiang) during her visit to these events.

The programme included an interview with Bao Cio Ging (Thor Bair), the Chairman of the ARIM Artists’ Union, about the history of the local art. In essence, he talked about the current state of art and craftsmanship in the PRC and the problems hampering its promotion in the European markets.

“The art of the ARIM handicraft development has a centuries-old cultural stratum. In the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (North China), in the Yingshan Mountains, Chinese archaeologists have discovered a large number of rock art paintings aged over 1000 years old.

Art historians believe that high art should be pure and exist for the art’s sake. However, we believe that this path of development is characterised by low survival rates. We should therefore develop arts and crafts that have aesthetic values and are functional in everyday life (14). In ancient times, porcelain and bronze works of art were actively used in everyday life.

One of the challenges in the modern development of local art is the adaptation of this cultural heritage to the demands of the modern world.

There is a major problem relevant to the contemporary art of local artisans. We hold such events in every khoshun, and one can state that there are many traditional pieces and few pioneering works. There is a problem of uniformity and monotony. We have entire districts specializing in one area of handicrafts. And at the same time there are very few people with artistic ideas. The fact that traditions have existed since archaeological times is valuable. But we need a new language, new ways of the artistic expression, new ideas and new directions to which the local and national, and what is more, the international markets will respond. This problem can be solved if you communicate with professionally established artists who have transcended the level of provincial art, promote and study their strategies for success. We have to learn how to package stories and ideas, to infect young people with fresh ideas and technologies.”

Urgal Hangal is the dean of one of the brightest faculties at Hohhot University [16], the traditional Mongolian applied arts department. In the interview it was important for him to talk about one profession to which he is directly related as an artist. It is the profession of a craftsman-artist. In Mongolian it is called ‘darhan huun’. “Every year we hold
conferences to study the state of folk arts and crafts and have invested 300,000 yuan each since 2008. I give my own opinion on the applied arts of ARIM. But financial support makes no sense if there are not worthy things, a new format to comprehend. Since the time of the great Zanabazar, the Mongolian art has had the peculiarity, which can be labelled as the guiding principles of craftsmanship:

- the products must be of high quality,
- their ideas must be moral,
- the price must be commensurate with the quality and life orientation of the Mongolian people’s world.

Students need to understand that there is no such thing as the best, just the best product. They have to constantly improve their art, to become a Michelangelo for yourself. That is the way our countrymen Dashi Namdakov and his junior partner Zhigzhit Bayaskhalanov are going.

Why is there no development of arts and crafts in a similar direction in ARIM? Because we are copying, imitating the handicrafts of southern China. I see the dominance of foreign materials and the lack of efforts to develop the North Mongolian art. Imitation and copying orient our craftsmen towards reproduction of known analogues and the technology of some products. Perhaps this gives our products an improved look or form, but it prevents them from creating their own distinctive and unique products. Why does this happen?

Because in order to have an innovation we have to study deeply the art history of the local culture. Has anyone researched the heritage of Mongolian crafts in a qualitative way? Although this particular region, where we are gathered now, is famous for its craftsmen. It is necessary to know the psychology and history of the people to make something. But I know the craftsmen and artists working on this theme who know the local culture and historical figures well enough. But they do not manage to create works of high art.

So, we talked to them about it. We discussed how Dashi Namdakov’s art differs from our local products. They are also dear to us in the direct (a lot of precious metals and historical contexts) and figurative senses. And I would like to share my thoughts.

Dashi and Zigzhit’s work exudes confidence in its genius. This confidence is evident in the simplicity of forms and compositions, the polysemy of conceptual generalisation. Their breakthrough is that the pieces convey irony, self-irony. These artists live to create. And by creating, as they joke, they employ seemingly incompatible artistic techniques that convey new sensations of the dynamics, speed, and asymmetry. With Zigzhit, for instance, the composition of a Mongolian knife has created a new language of expressiveness for the traditional Buryat cold steel weapons. Let us look at his composition called a "Little Warrior". I am amazed at the origins and depth of the wisdom of the young artist!

Zhigzhit Bayaskhalanov said in his interview at the All-Mongolian Festival of Arts that “it was this large-scale, international and richest in number exhibition of works by the Mongolian craftsmen that provided us, the Russians, with an opportunity to understand all the greatness of the historical past, the wealth of the style, the geographic range and local diversity of the ancient Turkic, Mongolian decorative and applied art based on the animalistic style”. Nowadays in ARIM, it is in Urat that a coup took place in my mind. The Animal Style can be traced back to the earliest history of art, when the first human artist painted such pictures on stone. The local museums in the cities in northern China have collected many originals and created copies of the petroglyphs.

Thus, thousands of animal style samples of Eurasian rock monuments have inspired and continue to inspire contemporary artists; they have found their second incarnation in the form of knives, daggers and bronze jewellery and utensils. These expressive items of folk art are typical of Transbaikalia, Mongolia, Baikal Region, Eastern Kazakhstan, Altai, Central Volga, Northern Caucasus, Ukraine, Eastern Bashkirtia and can also be found in Eastern Europe.

Having local differences, specific pictorial techniques, they represent a single artistic tradition of the Eurasian continental animal style. All over the southern underbelly of Eurasia "linear-silhouette", linear-contour, sometimes realistic drawings of galloping riders, deer and horses have been identified. The International Festival of Mongolian Applied Art demonstrated the dominance of this artistic tradition in the whole diversity of types and genres of contemporary arts and crafts.

4 Conclusion

The animal style is accentuated in three types of the stylistic formation, representing the nature of changes in the animal style in contemporary craftsmanship on the way of its conversion into creative industries. The first type of the stylistic formation manifests itself in the primordial case as a traditional Mongolian national technique of forming and decorating luxury goods and utensils, that is accentuated by us, as a traditionally Mongolian and formed in the places of rooting as a local (home art) style. The second type of the style formation is metaphorical. It was formed in recent years on the fertile ground of authors’ interpretations in the genres of ethnoscience, eco-animalism, eco-formalism and other inversions of the animal style. It is the metaphorical transformations of the animal style that are the systemic tool of Namdakov’s work, a master of reinterpretation. The artistic image is created in the postmodern spirit from the quite recognizable figurative material, but reformed into a new compositional and philosophically relevant artistic image of the world.

The third type of the animal style representation in the contemporary art practices of the applied art artists requires a separate study. It will be considered in the subsequent works.

References


