

A Causal Analysis of the Promotion of Abstract Expressionism: On the Foreign Policy of the United States

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that during the Cold War the United States focused on the promotion of Abstract Expressionism and regarded it as a powerful weapon for the improvement of its cultural status and capacity to compete with the USSR. An analysis of this phenomenon – its causes, characteristics, and effects – would be incomplete without studying the foreign policy efforts of that time and the special traits of Abstract Expressionism's artistic influence. It can be concluded that the rise of Abstract Expressionism after the Second World War was aligned with the goals of American policy instructions and outward cultural promotion during the Cold War. In turn, the powerful implementation of foreign policy actively enhanced the international influence of American Abstract Expressionism during that historical period. This paper undertakes an analysis of the causes for Abstract Expressionism's successful promotion, through the study of abundant first-hand literature and documents, historical analysis as well as complex analysis. The use of case studies is also applied to further explain the phenomenon from the perspective of American foreign policy in the Cold War.

Keywords: Abstract Expressionism; America; Cause Analysis; Cold War; Foreign Policy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Studies of the cultural Cold War and the promotion of Abstract Expressionism have been undertaken in the fields of art history, international relations and related disciplines. Yet it is still valuable to dig deeper into that historical period to cast light on contemporary contexts. Deeper and more thorough research into the history and causes behind the promotion of Abstract Expressionism as well as behind-the-scenes machinations of that era can, to a large extent, prompt and enrich theoretical studies into the Cold War and its cultural impact.

Systemic research on the promotion of this movement would provide a better understanding of the roots of America's outward and even global promotion of art and culture, alongside its strategy in elevating national influence in the contemporary world. This study will generate fresh insights into the issue.

“Awe at its triumphs is long gone; but so is laughter at its cheap philosophy, or distaste for its heavy breathing, or boredom with its sublimity, or resentment at the part it played in the Cold War...ever since Hegel put the basic proposition of modernism into words in the 1820s—that ‘art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past’—art’s being able to continue has depended on its success in making that dictum specific and punctual.” (Clark, 1994, pp. 23-48)

The style and traits of Abstract Expressionism are generally integrated on the basis of an absorption of Abstract Art and Surrealist Art. It also signalled an opening up in visual arts, ushering in a novel and authentic American art movement. Nowadays, in judging the characteristics and impact of the Abstract Expressionist movement, it is recognized that Abstract Expressionism stands for the peak of the exploitation of abstract approaches during that time span, and resulted in developments in which the evolution of aesthetic value and art ontology are involved in depth. In comparison with foreign policy as a cause, more researchers center on aesthetics and characters. This includes Dore Ashton's examination of the artistic movement and its political and studies of background aesthetics, or Irving Sandler's collection of the publications and reports of their art proposals, etcetera.¹

¹ Critics written by Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg vary in subjectivism, the latter advocates the connection between Abstract Expressionism and Impressionism, Cubism and Surrealism. Other scholars pay much attention to systemic documenting of the literature of the movement like Clifford Ross, David and Cecile Shapiro, David Thistlewood, Michael Auping and April Kingsley etc.

The period between 1947 and 1960 witnessed the first wave of the most intense and acute confrontation following the start of the Cold War, when Abstract Expressionism arose as an art movement by the United States. First recognized by the domestic market, it later entered the international art market, increasing in reputation and gaining a dominant position globally. “In the early years of the Cold War this was a view shared by a constituency that extended well beyond the membership of Western Europe’s communist parties, and it is this which helps to explain American and British concern to bolster and develop the intellectual case against communism in Europe alongside the economic assistance provided by the Marshall Plan. A ‘Marshall Plan in the field of ideas’ was what was needed, according to Senator William Benton, and recognition ‘that the heart of the present conflict is a struggle for the minds and loyalties of mankind.’” (Hixson, 1998, p. 15) However, it is worthy of attention that the American government did not pay much attention to the advantages and potential of Abstract Expressionism as a strong cultural weapon in the very first phase. It was even boycotted by conservatives in the United States in some situations, although the rise of the artistic movement overlapped with the timeline of the first acutely confrontational period of both sides in the Cold War. After the establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency (Abbr. CIA hereinafter) in the 1950s, support for the rapid and all-round development of American Abstract Expressionism by the Department of State and relevant organizations was ensured. This represented the unfashionable trait of anti-communism in ideology and emergence all at once. Regarding this, many scholars have analyzed the causes and motives for the United States to promote Abstract Expressionism in correlation to the cultural Cold War. Some argue that the success of Abstract Expressionism should be credited to the success of artistic exploration itself rather than the pushing of political forces behind the scenes. Others refute these arguments, holding that the global influence of this movement could not have been guaranteed and continuously increased without the intentional planning and tremendous support of American foreign policy and the actions of some departments, even if the aesthetic value of Abstract Expressionism itself did help the movement become a major vanguard of American art and spiritual leadership in the cultural Cold War, since the latter just served secondary role. “It was one thing to answer the question, ‘What are the circumstances in which a certain national bourgeoisie, in the pride of its victory, comes to want something as odd and exotic as an avant-garde of its own?’ It is another to speak to the implications of that encounter for the avant-garde itself, and answer the question, ‘To what extent was the meeting of class and art practice in the later 1940s more than just contingent? To what extent does Abstract Expressionism really belong, at the deepest level—the level of language, of procedure, of presuppositions about world—making—to the bourgeoisie who paid for it and took it on their travels?’” (Clark, 1994, pp. 23-48). In Jackson Pollock’s *Phosphorescence* or Clyfford Still’s 1949, we are looking at far more than scanning discovery for the umpteenth time, perceiving instead their sensory realities which are made to impede the impulse to create and construct imaginary objects. This paper mainly studies America’s support and promotion of Abstract Expressionism from the perspective of foreign policy and American ideology. These can be concluded from a wide array of Abstract Expressionist artworks, where assertion of American ideology guided by America’s internationalism-oriented foreign policy in the Cold War matched perfectly the characteristics of the artworks, making the artworks suitable and valuable for use by officials and the CIA.

On the basis of literature review, we have made a slight detour and introduced the art movement, organs involved in promotion and the foreign policy of the time. The author is generally in favor of the idea that thorough and systemic study of the cultural Cold War as well as research into cultural diplomacy is necessary to place the promotion of Abstract Expressionism in its periodic context. Part of the academic field now regards the United States as having launched a massive and effective cultural Cold War and cultural diplomacy effort² during the Cold War, and that this was, in essence, no different from the strategy of utilizing America’s soft power, one of the most important research questions in academic circles today. The power of American cultural diplomacy still plays an important role after the end of the Cold War. Literature indicates reasons on two levels – a change in international environment and internal factors – explaining why America’s cultural diplomacy was altered into tools for the Cold War during that time. The term cultural Cold War was raised by Frances Stonor Saunders but was not clearly defined then. Accordingly, questions including America’s motive for launching the cultural Cold War, the process of waging cultural warfare, its historical impact, as well as real significance have always been heated topics in research (refer to Dizard Jr., 1961; Cull, 2008; Bogart, 1995; Stonor Saunders, 1999; Bostdroff, 1994). It is also necessary to comb through American cultural diplomacy and its policies to understand its relation to this promotion. In 1948 Bevin claimed that if Britain were “to give a moral lead to the forces of anti-Communism in Europe and Asia, we must be prepared to pass over to the offensive” (Johnston, 2010). The government of the United States held that it was necessary to reorganize in all aspects the institutions leading the charge in international information, culture, and educational exchange programs, which were facing the “peaceful offense” of the USSR in order to build international confidence in America’s resolution

² There are overlapping parts in the two terms, but the author mainly discussed the former and it has no impact on results given evidence is cautiously prescribed.

to maintain peace and its capacity to lead the world by confronting the challenge of the Soviets in culture, psychology and politics. In 1953, President Eisenhower announced the establishment of the Committee of International Information Activities, later the United States Information Agency (Abbr. USIA), which was independent from the Department of State. This act brought American cultural diplomacy into the realm of the Cold War. President John Kennedy, elected in 1960, endorsed significant measures to strengthen the offensive function of cultural diplomacy under the excuse of national security, including the improvement of the laws on educational and cultural exchanges³, boosting government management as well as establishing the Peace Corps. The measures effectively increased the government's leverage on and the executive agency's control of cultural diplomacy. Then President Carter made the best of the approach of cultural diplomacy to promote human rights diplomacy in the globe, which was quite stealthy of US foreign relations. As for Reagan, he had no fear of unveiling his hatred towards communism and deemed the role of cultural diplomacy a weapon of the Cold War. Even though subsequently the Bush Administration did not reorganize the actuators of cultural diplomacy, Henry Catto, the director-general of the United States Information Agency appointed by Bush, tried to reshape the image of the agency under Ronald Reagan's administration. Analyses of George Herbert Walker Bush suggest that his adjustment of emphasis in cultural diplomacy mainly relied on the protection of the fruits of the victory in the Cold War (Wentao, 2007). In the promotion of the artworks classified as Abstract Expressionist, the role of the CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom (Abbr. CCF hereinafter) is of utmost significance as well.

Reviewing history and pertinent declassified documents, the author finds that the phenomenon of the "CIAing" of American diplomacy can not only be detected in the Cold War, resulting in the increasing difficulty of foreseeing America's foreign policy, but also the problem has arisen presently. During the Cold War, the CCF was established in Berlin by the CIA in 1950, which marked the beginning of the cultural Cold War between the United States and the USSR. There are plenty of materials focusing on the discussion of the promotion of Abstract Expressionism and its artworks from the perspective of the CIA and the CCF, but there are fewer case studies researching the causes behind the formation of America's policy and tactics in the cultural Cold War or shedding light on its foreign policy in academic debates. Apart from that, there is also a school of academicians exploring the process of how Abstract Expressionism became a hit in the United States as well as the way it was promoted to the globe from the perspective of international communication. In this sense, this group of researchers actually encapsulates the concept of cultural diplomacy in their vision of communication. As a matter of fact, America's weighing on politics and strategies beneath cultural diplomacy and culture policy has always been of primary importance in the discussion of this academic problem.⁴

Based on the analysis above, the author argues that in academic circles, a majority of literature and documents aim at parsing of the promotion of the Abstract Expressionism and its causes through perspective of comparatively conventional visions, such as the study of art history and correlating social political reasons. However, literature specifically on international relations and foreign policy are scarcely found in the analysis of this historical movement and its causes. Hence the core research question of this paper comes to the this – cause analysis of America's promotion of Abstract Expressionism from the perspective of its foreign policy in the Cold War, with reflections on the relations between art, politics, and aesthetics. There are several limitations in the conclusions owing to restricted literature and documents, and the reasons for Americans to launch the act are not adequately accounted for in this paper. Nevertheless, this work can be expected to make some contributions to interdisciplinary study of the theme given its proficient historical analysis.

II. THE HISTORY OF AMERICA'S PROMOTION OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

Abstract Expressionism as an artistic movement first sprung up in the United States, first developing in New York in the 1940s and later prospering in the 1950s before finally going into decline in the 60s.⁵ The abstract artists had no universal style in common, but they did have unparalleled pursuit and creed in showing and delivering messages in art, which contained the inner passions of the artists, diversely

³ The Congress of the United States passed the Fulbright—Hays Act on 21st September, 1961.

⁴ It should be noted that the cultural Cold War takes culture as the major means of the war in order to achieve national strategy and goals, which is the first time to be implemented in the world history. It can be concluded that for the USA the Cultural Cold War is the main form of cultural diplomacy in the Cold War.

⁵ The art movement was originally underrated in the 1940s. With the support of Peggy Guggenheim, select publications, art collectors, and famous critics like Clement Greenberg, artists like Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Gorky, etc. had more and more opportunities to hold controversial exhibitions that made them more famous than could be imagined, and also increasingly influential. The participation of civilian and non-governmental galleries in exhibiting and advertising the abstract artworks also called upon the people to pay attention to the artistic movement, gradually making it commonly accepted as a cultural brand of the United States.

individual experiences for the outburst of the livelihood of the art per se⁶. “Abstract Expressionism does not go elsewhere for its language, and at its best (its most appalling) it seems in search of the false underlying the vehement, where the point values, the only forms of individuality, that it can stage without faking.” (Clark, 1994, pp. 23-48) To describe some reputable works, “It represents a triumph of art over factitious vulgarity. Yet because the picture is so clearly an act of will in a field of artifice, the victory seems Pyrrhic.” (Barr, 1951, p. 214) It was beyond a doubt that the bloom and rise of the movement were closely related to the traits and charm of the art movement itself on the one hand, and the impetus of ideology and politics on the other. Among them, the CIA was one of the key departments of the United States, administered directly even by the presidents, which urged its promotion under calculated tactics. By the time Abstract Expressionism was on the ascent, the CIA and the CCF had already noted the artistic movement and its huge potential in spreading the artistic influence of American culture and values. From released documents and public memories, the CIA, CCF, and many a famous foundation together with art museums as well as famous individuals all cooperated in active participation to enhance the movement, their open exhibitions improving recognition of the artistic phenomenon. In the 1970s, with the cultural intrusion and invasion of the third world by the CCF, Abstract Expressionism and its representative artworks enjoyed an unprecedented artistic impact all over the world alongside numerous important exhibitions.

When we recall and reexamine the historical context, McCarthyism’s hysterical attack on the non-mainstream had all but trapped the government in an embarrassing dilemma. Nearly simultaneously, the appearance of Soviet works of art and literature appeared to show up the United States as a less “democratic nation with extensive and profound culture”. In 1946, “Advancing American Art”, organized by the newly established Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs (OIICA) by the US government attempted to display and demonstrate the openness and inclusion of American culture. Works of art by some artists were preferred, as raised by Barnett Newman – “There is an answer in these works to all those who assume that modern abstract art is the esoteric exercise of a snobbish elite, for among these simple peoples, abstract art was the normal, well-understood dominant tradition. Shall we say that modern man has lost the ability to think on so high a level?” (Newman, 1946) However, the exhibit was bitterly criticised by the American Artists Professional League (AAPL), claiming that the artworks chosen were tilted with the tense radicalism embedded in European art and were not rooted in American national culture. Moreover, a few of the artists taking part were communists. Marshall canceled the exhibit and ordered that taxpayers’ money could not be used on modern art. Even those who were doubted to be communists or pro-communists had no qualifications to hold an exhibition under the sponsorship of the government.⁷ It was becoming increasingly difficult for the United States to strengthen cultural supremacy even though the artistic centre of the world had nearly completely shifted from Paris to New York by that time.

That was where the CIA could fill the gap and where it stepped in, in their own words, to protect the free world. The CIA were encouraged to launch a cultural Cold War against the USSR (Weiben, 1996), i.e., the colosseum of socialist realism, by exploiting Abstract art and visual art in particular.

“An artwork is not a unified whole, but rather an open-ended site of contestation wherein various cultural practices from different classes and ethnic groups are temporarily combined. Any visual language in the arts is thus understood as a locus for competing cultural traditions along with conflicting ideological values. Hence, any artwork, regardless of how much it is publicly identified with one class or society, signifies not only for the dominant sectors but also for the dominated classes and different class fractions. Consequently, artwork such as that by the Abstract Expressionists should be approached as an uneasy synthesis—more or less stable but not conclusively resolved of hegemonic values with subordinate ideological tendencies, out of which broader signification is constructed.” (Craven, 1991, pp. 44-66)

That partly illustrates the reason the CIA chose Abstract Expressionism to be its weapon. A former official admitted that Abstract Expressionism made socialist realism more stylized, more inflexible and more closed. There was also the significance of supporting the things the Soviets bitterly opposed (Zhang, 2009). Clement Greenberg began a review of an exhibition of Courbet at Wildenstein’s in January 1949 by saying that “Bosch, Brueghel, and Courbet are unique in that they are great artists who express what may be called a petty bourgeois attitude.” (Greenberg, 1949, p. 275) It is not because “the petty bourgeoisie in America has power, but that its voice has become, in the years after 1945, the only one in which power can be spoken; in it, and only in it, can be heard the last echoes of what the bourgeoisie had once aspired to be

⁶ The artworks of Abstract Expressionism share common thoughts and theories and are especially influenced by Freud’s theory of the unconscious and its philosophical significance, representing the American spirit of freedom, independence, individualism and rebellion as gradually and commonly recognized domestically and worldwide.

⁷ The recent second version of *Advancing American Art: Painting, Politics, and Cultural Confrontation at Mid-Century* by Taylor D. Littleton and Maltby Sykes is an amusing and sharp description of this situation.

—’ the echo of its slogans, the need to realize them, the cry for that totality in which freedom [no longer reason] is to have its warrant.”(Clark, 1949, pp. 23-48) Economically, the CIA had invested over millions of dollars in the CCF from 1950-1967 that were all funded by the Marshall Plan, with the cooperation of groups of foundations. There was no doubt that the secret campaign in the name of “liberty” was in fact a “cultural crusade” with “God to be a means of carrying out national policy.” (Stonor Saunders, 2002, p. 318) One of the main goals of the Cold War strategy of the United States was challenging the base of neutralism. Now, it had been changed into the official “approach” of the congress (Stonor Saunders, 2002, p. 96). Hence Coleman’s somewhat hyperbolic statement, that “with the gradual disintegration of the Soviet mythos, [the CCF] felt itself in the avant-garde, at the very centre of a redefinition of civilization” (Scott-Smith, 2002, pp. 437-455).

With the backing of former officials in the evidence that the practice of supporting Abstract Expressionism facilitated art makers’ political censorship, it could be proved that the CCF provided a powerful platform for critics of the abstract painters and were also official sponsors for the itinerant exhibitions. It was also true that many artists knew nothing of this, for the acts were covert. This indirect manner made it convenient for the CIA to employ those considering themselves to be close to Moscow instead of Washington, viz. the Long Belt Policy. Coincidentally, George Kennan consented to the idea of “free art”, arguing that the American must demonstrate their own cultural life to the outer world and export it to the world; if it worked well he would even like to obsolete the dully politicized propaganda (George Kennan, 1956). Abstract Art is the “art of that moment when the petty bourgeoisie thinks it can speak (and its masters allow it to speak) the aristocrat’s claim to individuality. Vulgarity is the form of that aspiration” (Clark, 1994, pp. 23-48). Under these circumstances, the role of the CIA in the promotion of Abstract Expressionism was so dynamic and indispensable with concrete facts, for instance, Nicolas Nabokov instantly planned the following acts after the exhibits themed young artists in 1955-1965 which was permitted to be held in 1959. Alongside this there were notable members of the CCF (Saunders, 2002, p. 307) and Museum of Modern Art in the United States who assisted the art movement relentlessly and firmly with agreements from both sides. The Museum of Modern Art alone held over 33 international exhibitions to advertise Abstract Expressionism from 1952 to 1959, spreading the art to Basel in Switzerland, Milan in Italy, Madrid in Spain, Berlin in Germany, Amsterdam in Netherlands, Brussels in Belgium, Paris in France and London in the United Kingdom etc. (refer to Elderfield, 1995; Times Herald, 1950). As put by the reflections of the critics of Abstract Expressionism:

“The deep ludicrousness of lyric is Abstract Expressionism’s subject, to which it returns like a tongue to a loosening tooth. This subject, of course, is far from being the petty bourgeoisie’s exclusive property. That is not what I have been arguing. Anyone who cares for the painting of Delacroix or the poetry of Victor Hugo will be in no doubt that the ludicrousness of lyric has had its haut bourgeois avatars. But sometimes it falls to a class to offer or suffer the absurdities of individualism in pure form-unbreathably pure, almost, a last gasp of oxygen as the plane goes down. That was the case, I think, with American painting after 1945.”(Clark, 1994, pp. 23-48)

III. THE ANALYSIS OF AMERICA’S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE COLD WAR

Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech in 1946 delivered to an American audience in Fulton, Missouri, provided an early marker for the onset of the Cold War and “peace that is no peace”, as in Orwell’s prescient formulation (Orwell, 2001, p. 321). After the Second World War, the foreign policy of the United States underwent complex and obvious transformations in the specific direction of tactics and the pal of the statecraft. Its most overt and remarkable shift was in the policy of Containment enacted right before the start of the Cold War, which was then in the initial stages of confrontation. Academic circles argue that the proposal of containment, the intentions of the United States’ foreign policy in those days, and the shift from isolationism before the war to the internationalism after it are very much interrelated.

In February 1946, George Kennan clearly unraveled the theoretical basis for the Policy of Containment in his Long Telegram (also X Article), which greatly overwhelmed Washington. In the April of 1950, the United States proposed the Policy of Containment for the first time in its NSC68 document. After the outbreak of crisis in Greece and Turkey, the US deemed it time to openly raise and adopt the Truman Doctrine, which became the founding national policy of postwar America alongside its theoretical foundation, namely the Policy of Containment. However, at the moment it was raised the US government had not yet reached a consensus on the approach and range of containment, though George Kennan was inclined to contain with an emphasis on economy and politics. The advent of the Korean War urged the government to impose the uniform stance of total containment towards the USSR without delay. Nevertheless there was stage of reassurance in tensivity, following Khrushchev’s advocacy of “peaceful coexistence” that was viewed by Eisenhower as a “new type of cold war” characterized by “economic, political and cultural attacks”, the territories for public displays of “high culture” including festivals,

competitions, exhibitions, cultural exchanges and even the use of high profile figures for publicity and propaganda purposes (Osgood, 2006, pp. 70-71).

Shortly afterwards, the Policy of Containment served as a core global strategy of the United States, with the goal of battling the Soviets and “containing the expansion of Communism” over 40 years (Zhu, 2007). Undoubtedly, the proposal and implementation of the Policy of Containment was a critical turning point in America’s foreign policy, certifying that its national security policy had transited from regional policy to global policy, with the old idea of exterior expansion changed into global expansion. It is true that in the early phase of the Cold War, the foreign policy of the United States experienced a shift from isolationism to internationalism. Specifically, it was dominated by realism before the Vietnam War and was then altered into idealism. In the 1960s, when US intervention in Vietnam had become an international issue, Truman Doctrine was at the same time once again being repudiated by the Left. The fact that several Abstract Expressionists, like Ad Reinhardt, Willem de Kooning and Barnett Newman were prominent supporters of the anti-war movement should not be neglected (Craven, 1991). As a matter of fact, the advocates of isolationism argued that Americans should “go back to America”. However, the report of European reality compelled them to acknowledge that the United States could no longer sit by and do nothing as the spheres of culture and information were exposed to the challenge and threats of Communism and the USSR. In brief, the birth of Cold War internationalism and anti-communism come from the same origin. It is also apparent that the two parties collaborated rather than confronted each other, with a gradually emerging trend of close collaboration in anti-communism activities when observed from the perspective of foreign policy (Chilei, 2017).

Taking a panoramic view of the foreign strategies of America’s Cold War presidents, no matter if it was Truman, Eisenhower, Reagan, or the Bush Administration, all sorts of contentions in their diplomacy were run through by the ideology of containment. It can be said without exaggeration that if we want to clearly examine the character of United States foreign policy during the Cold War and in world history, it is necessary and of utmost importance to study the historical facts and pay attention to the origins of the establishment of the Policy of Containment, as well as its evolving tactics. From the angle of international communication and promotion, the feature of internationalism in the foreign policy of the United States was one of the greatest powers during that time with an absolute capacity and leverage to enhance the Abstract Expressionist movement. In the Cold War, the infiltration of internationalism-oriented foreign policy in the field of art can be seen as the strengthening of America’s status in art and culture. The contest against socialist realism and the ideology of the Soviet Union turn all these into a cultural war. All in all, the United States, from top to bottom, from the civil sphere to the government, all made unremitting endeavors in fighting for victory in the cultural Cold War. It is a must for those studying the post-Cold War period to date back to the initial stage of the Cold War. In the cultural Cold War, the United States had made policies for its battle in the arts which to a large extent provide historical insights and policy inquiry for cultural diplomacy after the Cold War. Its advantages and disadvantages are worthy of being evaluated.

Examining where it started, the embryonic thoughts and Policy of Containment basically germinated in the leading bureaucracy after the Yalta Conference. Later when the Greek-Turkish crisis occurred, the United States thought it was time to bring it further, thus the Truman doctrine was subsequently openly raised and became the national policy of America in the early stage of the Cold War with containment as its theoretical foundation. The United States was especially proficient in utilising secret actions in the field of psychological warfare and “Campaign of Truth” together with art and culture during the Cold War. The plan was carried out via covert wars in politics, the economy, arts, and military as a way of supplementing the open foreign activities of the United States, although the limitations of the cultural containment strategy were also obvious.⁸ Situated on the same timeline, these tactics had much to do with the rise of the Abstract Expressionist movement. “Abstract Expressionist manner (or ‘Tenth Street Touch’) was becoming institutionalised by a second generation of artists who were more Eurocentric ... and less to the left politically than the first generation (Rudolf Baranik is an important exception here).” (Sandler, 1978, pp. 18-20) Truly, their position with respect to the dominant political forces of the decade of 1946-1956, i.e., the McCarthy years, was even more difficult.

“Instead of pointing out the utter ignorance with which Dondero referred to Marxism, Communism, or modernity in the arts, the most prominent liberal respondents in the art world, like critic Alfred Barr of the Museum of Modern Art, took another tack. They allowed these hysterical attacks on the political Left to go unchallenged... In an eloquent public lecture of 1944, Robert Motherwell correlated the role of avant-garde art with that of democratic socialism and expressed deep alienation from the dominant economic system as well as its concomitant ideological values”. (Craven, 1991)

⁸ Actually there are some members of the Central Intelligence Agency who were advocates of rationality and idealism in foreign policy then, against the prevailing McCarthyism. These groups held the idea that isolationism should be deserted while the internationalism should be embraced. The triumph of these idealists at the same time represented the overwhelming win of internationalism in America’s final foreign policy.

On this issue there are critiques commenting that the organs truly controlling the core political rights of the United States are the deep states, part of them many elites with close connections to the rising Democratic Party. Some old European families who possessed significant and crucial power in world politics and finance over a few centuries had also taken part in the operation of promotion without exception. They were considered to be responsible for the left-leaning approach⁹ which directly affected the foreign policy and shift in direction of the United States in the Cold War. Hence “at a time when the globalization of U.S. values was in conflict with an authentic internationalism and concomitant multiculturalism that contravened this new trajectory of power, the Abstract Expressionists generally sided with the latter position” (Craven, 1991). It was exactly in the initial stage of the Cold War, as what has been mentioned above, that some conservative advocates were not willing to make the shift to internationalism and there was controversy regarding the shift in foreign policy, like the representative figure of MacArthur, whose judgement of world politics were otherwise rather sound and intelligent, as can be gleaned from his biography that was opposite to the idealists. However, the conservatives were in the end suppressed by the American establishment, and the motives and clues of cultural diplomacy as well as foreign policy from a left leaning premise emerged clearly after the Second World War. Its political impact in art was also apparent. “Both ultra-right McCarthyists and Cold War liberals repeatedly extolled the superiority of what was supposedly to be ‘American’ (Cox, 1982, pp. 68ff.). While Clement Greenberg and other Cold War apologists for Pollock might refer to his art in 1947 as ‘radically American’ (Greenberg, 1947, p. 26), Pollock himself earlier claimed that ‘the basic problems of contemporary painting are independent of any one country.’” (Craven, 1991, pp. 44-66) To put it in a nutshell, the collective promotion of Abstract Expressionism by the government and civilian forces, though met with opposition at first, is quite easy to figure out.

Furthermore, the decision making and foreign policy formulation processes of the United States also determine the implementation of foreign policy and its shift in inclination. There is a school of scholars arguing that president-oriented politics constitute the core of decision making in American foreign policy, and that presidents have in some cases directly incited the hidden battlefield related to art propaganda (Wu Song, 1996). Soon after the Second World War, the United States had a strong sense of insecurity in its fight against the USSR, that is to say, Americans were very much worried about their own safety, and this anxiety and fear penetrated the Cold War. Actually, the United States has been proficient at setting up the image of simulated enemies after the war, and the reason for this mainly goes down to its intention to strengthen American security measures so as to surpass and contain its foes in terms of its military weapons capacity. Interestingly, “The disinclination to endorse nationalistic projects and ethnocentric language was explicable not only because of political convictions, but also because of the fact that most of the Abstract Expressionists were either immigrants or the offspring of immigrants. As such, they were directly implicated in U.S. congressional criticism during the late 1940s and early 1950s of subversive artists who were ‘newly made American’.” (Craven, 1991, pp. 44-66) That being said, that could have been an advantage for the artists and their art to be delivered abroad on the bandwagon of internationalism instead of ethnocentrism. Reviewing the strategy, it has already become a consensus for the political and social walks of life, a generation by generation mentality. It was interesting that the artworks sent to different parts of the world varied in content and form of expression, indicating the tiny distinctions in America’s fear of different regions under various degree of communist rule. Additionally, President Truman and Eisenhower also showed great support for the approach and stance that the CIA and the CCF took, and the contributions made by related foundations and partners were also valued.¹⁰ They took firm stances in approving approaches in the way of promotion, especially those that promoted the exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism and its artworks. That is to say, in the cultural field, America’s foreign policy had created much space for a cultural NATO due to its worries for its own security from the covert front led by CIA, a worry which applied to numerous left-leaning civil organizations and foundations as well. Despite all that, the cultural traditions and domestic situation of the United States have also profoundly affected the making of the foreign policy of the United States and its iterations in the Cold War. For a long time Calvinism has had a huge impact on American political thought and ideology, with its assertions regarding Americans as redeemers and saviors of the world, and the American nation as being chosen and bound to spread freedom, equality and democracy as its infectious political ideology around the globe. Coincidentally, where the aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism are concerned, “unconsciousness” features in most artworks. In abstract paintings by notable artists of that era, the awareness of having no focus on images shook the supreme status of rationalism. Their way of creating and painting was fulfilled with uncertainty and without restrictions, only bold and untrammelled traits were permitted, even subverting the traditional essence of experience in aesthetics, exploring further and going after higher standards of art. In fact, American Abstract artists presumed that there was true self in transcendental meanings, which could effectively

⁹ Essentially the white liberals, or non-communist leftists judging from the stand of neutralism in the context of American politics.

¹⁰ As a matter of fact, the Cultural Cold War was named by the US government and the CIA as “Campaign of Truth” which had specific institution of launching the war in the reign of President Truman and Eisenhower.

distinguish and express noumenon in a free-wheeling manner. From a philosophical perspective, they were chasing the genuine presence of “absolute noumenon”, a kind of ontology that was anti-optic. All these knit a close relation to the American spirit and mentality, with its complex constituents of belief and cultural traditions. Therefore it is sound to judge the inclination towards internationalism and expansionism in US foreign policy since the spiritual core of the art and the political goal highly corresponded to each other. In essence, isolation and expansion reflect the paradoxical and contrasting relations in the foreign relations of the United States, but these two are also interrelated and interact closely. For instance, an extremely strong sense of individualism is not only a big reason that drives Americans to improve their life relentlessly, but it also dominates American ideology for such a long time that it can easily turn into the reckless expansion of the interests of the United States when reflected in foreign policy. Meanwhile, the diverse and deep changes in social opinion in America, the circles of academia and the arts in particular, are all rooted in the origins and traditions of the culture and history being discussed.

IV. THE MUTUAL EFFECT OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM AND FOREIGN POLICY IN THE COLD WAR

Abstract Expressionism was born in the extreme rivalry between capitalism and communism. On an artistic and aesthetic level, a lack of control in art making under Abstract Expressionism, with its emphasis on the tense emotion and self-disclosure, was perfect to symbolize the international image of American art. If it was due to its battle against the USSR which strongly supported art in the realist socialist style, when the United States promoted Abstract Expressionism in that historical period, then America's tender of the changes and conversions of American cultural power and capacity were of greater concern being in a bad need of resolution. Andreas Huyssen has written that in Germany the “reductive Cold War opposition between abstraction and figuration, modernism and realism, held sway throughout the 1950s”.¹¹ “In the early decades of the twentieth century, and prior to Stalin's ascendancy, Adorno argued that ‘artistic and politically advanced thought went in tandem’ and that anyone who came of age at that time viewed art ‘a priori as politically on the left’. With the onset of the Cold War, ‘avant-garde doctrines, if their opposition to communis opinio is grasped with sufficient abstractness and if they remain to some degree moderate, are sometimes susceptible to elitist reinterpretation’.” (Adorno, 2004, p. 330) When McCarthyism prevailed in the United States, opinions within political and intellectual circles varied in the debates over whether the promotion of the Abstract Expressionism was supposed to be taken seriously, and its emblematic sense as American art was also contentious.

However, after McCarthyism abated, elites and intellectuals of the left, plus leftists in the circles of art and culture gained the upper hand and worked even harder to promote Abstract Expressionism. A thousand to one, this foreign policy has affected the United States largely owing to an alteration in its goals, and also thanks to the promotion of Abstract Expression, which can be seen as a reasonable motive for this phenomenon given the perspective of foreign policy in the Cold War, where the deeper level of the reasons are also worth being testified. From documents and government websites that have been declassified, it can be deduced that a wide array of foundations and museums which enjoy household fame have also played deceptive roles in the promotion of the movement in cooperation with the CIA. They were active in spreading individually avant-garde elements in the cultural competition against the USSR's promotion of socialist realist artworks, as a way to intensify and elevate America's status as a cultural pioneer in the Cold War. At the same time, the characteristics of Abstract Expressionist artworks consolidated the image of American art being advanced, remarkably representative, and facing the outer world to the greatest extent. Additionally, the attributes of diversity together with the pursuit of freedom and democracy related to the political context are also well demonstrated by the art and its promotion. Some scholars assume that the intersection between the arts, society and social ideology is hard to discern. That is even more true of the relations between these elements which are intertwined with each other. If we have a close look at history from the perspective of the domestic environment of the United States, the rise of Abstract Expressionism in America has had a positive interaction with the development of ideology in its interior. Diplomacy is the extension of the domestic politics, so America's ideology urges her to output cultural resources internationally which shall benefit its diplomatic interests. No matter which field the scholars are in, the cultural Cold War of theories and practice of cultural diplomacy have all discussed the phenomenon aforementioned in details. It is beyond doubt that the case of outward and global advertisement of Abstract Expressionism in the Cold War by the United States, applying methods like the implementation of foreign policy and Cultural Cold War to achieve its goals, is one of the most successful examples of cultural diplomacy and cultural output after the WWII. In other areas, such as its exchange scholars program, education program and cultural intrusion of the third world, the United States also had rather successful practice in the hidden front by highly similar means. That was the vivid portrayal of one of the profiles of America's cultural diplomacy which was specifically defined as namely the cultural Cold War. In a sense

¹¹ Andreas Huyssen, “Figures of memory in the course of time” in Barron and Eckman (eds), op. cit., 229.

the Abstract Expressionism was a powerful weapon for the promotion and attacking the socialism in the cultural Cold War, and so far the question in the study was almost answered. When a number of art museums, foundations and non-governmental organizations successfully held intinerent exhibitions of Abstract Art around the world, the American government and correlated civil organizations that were interested were therefore greatly encouraged, arguing that the promotion was quite reasonable and beneficial. For instance, the Museum of Modern Art held an exhibition called “New American Painting” classified as an intinerent exhibition of the Abstract Art from 1958 to 1959, gaining much attention. The same was observed in the case of the Whitney Museum and more. To study the organizations and institutions involved, the CCF and the CIA, both of them ideally served the chief and leading official sponsors and fronts for promoting the exhibitions of Abstract Art which were truly pushing hands behind the curtain with the exploitation of great many informers, even with contacts in senior leaders over variety of countries and domains. Even so, many artists had no idea that who were the pushing hands backstage. However, there was evidence that former intelligence official like Donald James admitted that the CIA did deem Abstract Expressionism as a chance and took it into practice which facilitated the art makers’ execution. Generally speaking, artists of the Abstract Expressionist movement in turn showed support of and even took an approving attitude towards the shift in foreign policy of the United States at first.

“By 1970, American art and politics had been locked in a Cold War struggle for nearly a quarter of a century. For U.S. officials, whether in the Department of State, the USIA, or the IAP at the Smithsonian, American art was often seen as simply another weapon in an ever-broadening diplomatic arsenal. Military might and actively pursue its leadership of the ‘free world.’” (Krenn, 2005, p. 233) America’s pursuit of its own style of arts and global reputation with a strong sense of arrogance in ideology and democratic value was perfectly achieved and reflected in her employment of foreign policy, i.e. the diplomatic weapon. “Like an atomic weapon, a multilateral defense agreement, a massive foreign aid package—or, perhaps, a fallout shelter—art would serve the interests and dictates of America’s foreign policy.” (Krenn, 2005, p. 233) Honestly, a wide array of organs and departments have taken part in the promotion of abstract art, but it was foreign policy carried out by the US government, especially the Department of State and their covert or overground cooperation with USIA and funds of various kinds that really worked. The effect together with America’s supreme power politics worldwide and absolute leverage and coercive rule of the international system also reinforced the practice of the diplomatic weapon. It was before the close of the Second World War that the mission of American art was unveiled. It would serve as an international language of healing and comprehension of a world scarred and tortured by global war whose aim was to protect the “human spirit.” Though there are controversies over the issue that American art like Abstract Expressionism was largely utilized and narrowed down to propaganda for Cold War containment, which is quite appalling, it should not be ignored that the purpose of using it as a powerful diplomatic weapon in the Cold War period has nowhere to hide, in comparison with the promotion of the exhibitions or the art movement itself.

To be honest, free art has the social role of consolidating capitalism, however it is valued for its uselessness, and that was its most important function as a Cold War weapon at the time, leading avant-garde art into somewhat of a predicament. To illustrate further, “the civilizations that policy-makers in the USA and USSR marshalled to promote their overlapping brands of modernity were the civilizations of the longue durée...the national cultures of the Cold War years were shaped in part, then, by this return of the repressed...” (Gordon, 2010, p. 305)

If we carefully analyze the post-war foreign policy of the United States, the comments on idealism in politics and selfishness in the economy are rather fair. There is criticism on the true boss of the United States, i.e. the deep states. Among this group, many members and elites have closes relationships with the Democratic Party and Wall Street elites who represent the quintessential part of the so-called American intellectuals (Shils & Coleman, 2009). However, when it came to art, “U.S. policy makers sadly overestimated their ability to use art as a weapon in the Cold War. Many seemed to believe that a painting or other work of art, much like a surface-to-air missile, could be ‘aimed’ and ‘fired’ with no small degree of precision...Particularly when dealing with modern art and abstract expressionism, which tried to eschew any political connotations, American policy makers were faced with a situation in which the propaganda ‘product’ necessarily had to be interpreted by the viewer.” (Krenn, 2005, p. 236) As accepted and experienced by most art lovers and museum goers, art, if it has to be explained, is what people enjoy and sense, viz. *id quod visum placet*.¹² Furthermore, the joy of aesthetics can be passed on among people. As art is a material that delivers spirits, it already lost efficacy due to the separation of spirits and materials by philosophy and religion. Therefore it would be more difficult for people to regain accurate perceptions of what is art and what is joy, not to mention the contradictory and political interventions in the appreciation of the artworks of various camps under the shadow of propagandism. The misunderstandings and battles of

¹² For what they *seeing* enjoy, that is art. The Latin quotes the denotes of St Thomas Aquinas’ terminology on beauty: “pulchrum est quod visum palcet”, meaning that which pleases upon being seen.

minds deteriorate and damage the pure aesthetics of the artworks and movement in the confrontation between the joint forces of art and politics – deliberate and self-complacent.

Furthermore, it makes no sense to name the culture of the USSR as socialist realist or to argue that modernism was the culture of modernity in the West, in particular the United States. The procedures whereby modernist work was incorporated aesthetically into the cultural canon and economically through the commodity form are well known, a vocabulary as redolent of the marketplace as it was of the autonomous artist or creative worker, but modernism's or the style of the abstract's relationship to capitalism during the Cold War remains more attenuated, more arm's length, than socialist realism's relationship to the Soviet project (Gordon, 2010, p. 305).

V. CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

When we begin to reflect America's full support and promotion of artworks of the Abstract Expressionist movement, it is easy to find that this act was helpful in the elevation of the America's cultural and artistic influence to a historically dominant and central position worldwide. However, it has many negative impacts on the development of Abstract Art that foreign policy and politics were involved, because Abstract Expressionism descended to a political weapon and tool despite its certain Avant-garde aesthetic characteristics.

The paradoxical connection between the American art world and the government has influenced the result of the outward advertisement of the movement. The members of the American art world have unrealistic antipathy to government control over cultural affairs, and they were tempered in that thought for two reasons. On the one hand, they believed that governmental support sent a convincing message to the world and the American people that art was something meaningful and of great significance. Of course, on the other hand, the cost of promoting American art overseas required resources and budgets far beyond the capabilities of private institutions and civil power. There is no doubt that the relations between the art, artists and the society were put onto the table again in this discussion. However, the so-called individualism-oriented USA was adept at influencing artists in sending abroad the exhibition and succeeding in spite of some failing protests. Facing external world and enemy in the Cold War, the US strategy in elevating Abstract art witnessed its victory in building the image of a cultural supremacy (which is now coming along to haunt the country); vice versa, it had profound impacts on the American domestic art market and recognition towards the changes. It is facile to disclose that the conservatives were kept haunted by the avant-garde art which the radicals support.

As for the relations between artistic value and propaganda stratagem, the author partly agrees with the point of view that "the art needed to be considered within a specific context in order for its propaganda value to be most successfully achieved." (Krenn, 2005, p. 236) In the light of correlating documents, the Department of State and USIA worked persistently in establishing the idea from 1950s to the early 1960s, thus Art became a mirror of the Cold War world, i.e. they exploited the mirror on which they were free to depict what they wish to target audiences. Looking at it, the viewers would see vividly reflected the dynamic power of American democracy, values and freedom in contrast to the increasingly banal and suppressed state-controlled artworks of the communist world led by the USSR. Yet it is ironic that US officials later found the art and artists held up as exemplary of the US spirit suddenly transforming into tools used to attack American imperialism, and the war in Vietnam as well.

Frankly speaking, apart from the department officials and the leftists, members of the American art world, however, were not entirely innocent in the failure of the international art program. When the people in political circles were indeed adhering to the perspective that a political message could be promoted in art, American artists, critics, curators, and others seemed to blithely believe that art to some extent was able to be kept entirely free of any political connotations. At best, this type of thinking was somewhat naive and did not stand up to scrutiny. At worst, it coerced the American art community in a web of hypocrisy. Hoping to encourage government support of an international art program, advocates soon jettisoned proclamations about art as an international language or a healing force for a crippled and threatening world (Krenn, 2005, p. 237). The downfall of attempts like Advancing American Art, as some described – it "fell prey to Red Scare politics" – changed the proposals, represented by Alfred Barr, and they went to great lengths to distance American art from any possible connection to communist organizations or thinking, so as to 'depoliticize' the art. Almost simultaneously, they turned to emphasize the idea of art as a powerful weapon in the Cold War to try to encourage government's approval of their practices. These acts may have inadvertently killed their original intentions for art in the international realm. By striving for the anti-communist appeal of American art, they de facto exerted and laid in it a political message, ultimately greatly weakening their position that art should be simply art. What should be noted is "perhaps in part the gradual dissolution of the international art program after 1970 was due to the fact that so many of the leading figures of the American art world who participated in the earlier successes and controversies surrounding the

program were gone by that time...and the two men who led the charge against the program in Congress were also gone.” (Krenn, 2005, p. 237-238)

“When artists and art organizations felt that the government was trying to censor or control the art, they rebelled. When the State Department, the USIA, or, to a lesser extent, the IAP, came to believe that the art(or artists) was sending a wrong or ineffective message, their eagerness to support the initiative quickly faded...In the end, the international art program provided neither an ideological ‘fallout shelter’ for American propagandists, nor an avenue for speaking to the ‘human spirit’ so desired by American art lovers.” (Krenn, 2005, p. 239)

Hence it is not difficult to show that the relationship between art and the politics can be regarded as the two sides of the same coin. Needless to say, it was nearly impossible for art in the Cold War in particular to stay away from the propaganda. Just as the artist George Braque put it, “Art is meant to disturb” (Krenn, 2005, p. 239), and that worked perfectly for American Abstract Expressionism’s disturbance and involvement in the Cold War campaign, which was purposefully exploited by the government of the United States through foreign policy and related exhibitions. As expected, this act infuriated congressmen and conservative art groups that were not in favor of abstract art, besides the Soviets who were much more disturbed than anyone. In a word, the modern art of America, which finally approached Moscow in its way in 1959, was termed bourgeois, symptomatic of a crafted and threatening mental psychosis.

According with the effects of its promotion, the demonizing of abstract aesthetics in the rivalry between abstraction and realism between both sides left a profound impact on the cultural exchanges and education of art during the Cold War and the contemporary era. Some involved are still trapped by the extreme confrontation of democratic values and communist expansion, which hampers the pure sensation and perception of art and the artistic phenomenon. International politics, foreign policy, societal impact and the arts are closely intertwined, especially during the confrontation, with effects remaining on new fronts. As some researches interested in the debate of naming the cultural Cold War in the field of Abstract Expressionism and Socialist Realism’s confrontation, it is hard to say whether it is the triumph of the art, or just the win of the United States. Soon after the end of the Cold War, the clue for America’s support of promoting contemporary art is still widely criticized as equating “American art” to “international art”, diminishing the legitimacy of the art and culture of other nations. In essence, even if the United States never officially admitted the theft of artistic resources from Europe before the 1950s, it is nearly difficult for the “culturally glorious and advancing state” to ignore the politicized damage enacted on both Abstract art and Realist art, which led to the disappearance of the rather pure aesthetics of the newly arising artistic movement and once hindered the healthy progress of the movement itself. So, rather than call it the victory of American Abstract Expressionism, the author would rather term it as the condition of foreign policy intervention efforts, not what the movement wanted to prove or achieve. As a matter of fact, totally there’s no winner in the field of art, particularly in the span of Cold War.

The problems are unavoidably intertwined with politics and aesthetics, given the long-term educational and cognitive effects of the competition of certain artistic movements. The arguments of Adorno, Deleuze and Agamben can offer an aesthetic viewpoint in the elaboration of this issue. They focus on the problems of perception and the aesthetic politics of critical theory that can be applied to the Cold War struggle, presenting different approaches to aesthetic politics. In summary, Adorno takes the non-identity experience of the subject and the object to dispel the identity stipulation of transcendental principle on perception of Kant. With the turn of Post-Critical Theory in the dimension of perception based on social reality, Deleuze, different from Kant’s concept of aesthetic appreciation, emphasizes the creation of perceptual life in reality. To be specific, the relations between perception and concrete context of life are examined by Contemporary Critical Theory, e.g. Agamben criticizes Kant and Deleuze’s explanation of perception and reckons that life’s potential emerges in the rupture of it. In this sense, Agamben and Jacques Rancière make the sense get close to the detailed and subtle form of life of the ordinary, retreating the political emancipation to cataclysm of routines and order of perceptual life, not merely creation, endowing the true possibility of aesthetics’s involvement in social practice (Rancière, 2017, p. 43-44). In contrast to the extreme boast of Cold War aesthetics of free art’s superiority over socialist art by the United States, many conservative civilians kept a rather sensible aesthetics towards the dazzling grand exhibits around the corner. Critical Theory may have provided an insight on a good distance between the appreciation of beauty and social practice, if it’s a good way for the reformation of sentient form to have something to do with specific political matters.¹³ The author persists that principle of prudence shall be adhered to the shift of transcendence to experience in perceptions, or the shift from abstract philosophical epistemology to definite social ethical issues, particularly in the new century.

Before the closing remarks, let us observe a normal but thought-provoking scene. Two Russian engineers

¹³ Refer to Dore Ashton, *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (University of California Press, 1992); Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976); David Anfam, *Abstract Expressionism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990); Shen Yubing, *Art Criticism in the 20th century* (Hangzhou: China Academy of Art Press, 2003); Evedca Cockroft, “Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War”, *Artforum*, vol.12/10, June 1974.

visiting the United States stopped by the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Eleanor Mitchell could tell much in normal perspectives. They wished to see “contemporary American paintings”, liked the “earlier 20th century landscapes” but “shrugged their shoulders” in “amusement” at the abstract art. “For an hour, these three people from very different nations and cultures ceased to be communist sympathizers, or symbols of democracy and freedom, or agents of imperialism. They were simply three individuals, looking at the pictures and suggesting that if art is meant to disturb, it is also meant to reach out and touch the common humanity of all people.” (Krenn, 2005, p. 242-243). Cautiously judging reality, the stereotypes of Cold War confrontation are still worsening current international markets of culture and art with the rudimental toxins left over from before the 1990s, and there is still no clear sign of striding over that trap in the near future.

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