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PROLOGUE: *CRUEL/LOVING BODIES*

SASHA SU-LING WELLAND

The *Cruel/Loving Bodies* project has grown out of a panel proposal by artists who planned to give presentations in July 2003 at "Feminism in China Since *The Women's Bell*," an international conference in Shanghai that has been postponed due to SARS until the summer of 2004. This conference, jointly sponsored by the Department of History at Fudan University and the Center for Chinese Studies and the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Michigan, aims to bridge the intellectual gap between China scholars in and outside of China by engendering the historiography of modern China. Originally coordinated to coincide with the centennial of the publication of *Nüjie Zhong* (The Women's Bell), the organizers invited participants to address topics that would enhance academic awareness of the genealogy of Chinese feminism. As the essays that follow demonstrate, the participants in the *Cruel/Loving Bodies* project "speak" alongside each other, from different locations of Chinese-ness, to the cross-cultural and translingual exchanges that shape feminist thought and practice. They challenge the generic categorical power that has been conferred upon the concepts of "Chinese" and "woman"—and their intersectional sum of "Chinese woman"—by the politics of Chinese nationalism, colonial imagination, and Western feminism. They do so by uncovering, within and between these categories, subjectivities, fissures, and translations that have been suppressed or erased by hegemonic versions of history.

In 1903, the writer Jin Tiange published *The Woman's Bell* in Shanghai under the penname of Jin Yi, "Lover of Freedom." This revolutionary tract was the first of its kind to explicitly address a female audience, calling for "men and women united in purpose as a starting point, with the organization of a new citizenry as a final goal."[1] Jin had studied in Japan, like many Chinese intellectuals of his day, and returned to China to establish a girls' school and engage in revolutionary activities. In his effort to awaken Chinese women, he outlined the rights he believed they should have: the right to enter school; to social contacts; to earn a living; to possess property; to freedom of movement; and to freedom of marriage.[2] Women would thus be able to properly embody "public virtue," by which he meant a commitment to patriotism that would rescue China. Already in this early vision of women's emancipation, which would also become an important concern of the fledgling Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the male intellectual Lover of Freedom based his argument for women's rights in a nationalist struggle requiring morally upright women. While early female activists in China similarly linked their struggle to that of the modern nation against feudalism and imperialism, they also endeavored to transform gender relations within the newly developing social and political formations. However, their criticism of patriarchy, and its re-inscription in ostensibly revolutionary discourse, increasingly fell victim to political demands for unity.[3] When the CCP came to power, its leaders simply declared women officially emancipated from the traditional domestic realm, with a line drawn at 1949 between feudal and modern gender relations. This rhetorical move required a characterization of pre-liberation Chinese women as confined, oppressed, and voiceless—an image that also suited the devices of Western imaginations that turned to China, and particularly its women, as proof of their own modern progress. In the last two decades, Chinese women in various locations of greater China and its diaspora have chipped away at a homogeneous picture of "Chinese woman" as passive exhibit of the past, as well as her "liberated," nongendered post-1949 counterpart. Their cultural productions reveal individual subjectivities that roil below the two-dimensional surface constructed by state-sponsored feminism and other appropriating eyes.

The 1980s constituted a formative cultural period in China, Britain, and Hong Kong. Deeply rooted national mythologies in each place ran up against alternative conceptions of national/transnational community, influencing all of the artists included in *Cruel/Loving Bodies*. Reforms in Mainland China resulted in the loosening of restrictions on traditional Chinese culture and traditional gender values, never fully eradicated, began to resurface, even in arguments for "essential" masculinity or femininity aimed at opposing state gender discourse.[4] Yet, official critics resolutely blamed the spiritual pollution of society, exhibited for example in the (masculine) hoodlum aesthetic of avant-garde art, on consumerist-oriented global culture.[5] At the same time, the racialized "other" of Britain struck back at the heart of its cultural metropole, as activists, writers, and artists interjected another history of the empire into public discourse. And, their counterparts in Hong Kong, anticipating the territory's "handover" from one dominant power to another, struggled to define a local culture that resisted both, as well as the festishistic characterization of their city as ultimate emblem of East/West dichotomy or betwixt-and-between hybridity.[6] These are the historical contexts from which the artists of this project have emerged. While similarities between those from the Mainland, Britain, or Hong Kong could be drawn, to choose the easy route of sub-grouping them under nationalistic labels would actually be a radical, although self-defeating, move since none of them are necessarily seen (or see themselves) at the centre of contemporary Chinese or British art. Their critical edge comes precisely from their off-centre positions, which in the textual and visual conversation that is our purpose probe at the intersections of gender with colonial, racial, and national politics.

The process of translation—of gender ideology, feminist theory, and visual/verbal expression—is central to this conversation. Of this I am reminded, as project coordinator, at a pragmatic level whenever my software fails to process an email in complex Chinese characters from Hong Kong or forward one in simplified characters from the Mainland. The un-seamlessness of back-and-forth translation continually impinges upon our exchange across multivalent borders of terminology (what most closely approximates *nüxing*—female, feminine, or woman?); of cultural history (how does a *lienü* biography read and who is Hong Kong Phooey?); and of polemical style (how and when does whose feminism oppress or liberate?). We intended for these essays to be initially presented in Chinese at the conference in Shanghai; but they now first appear in English. This situation has caused Anthony Leung Po Shan to comment on her discomfort at sending a Hong Kong Chinese essay written for a Mainland Chinese audience into an English-first world, causing the temporary short-circuit of a targeted argument.

Literary critic Lydia Liu has written of translation not as a process of revealing natural equivalencies, but of meaningful alterations that occur when words (and images) travel through time and cultural space.[7] Thinking in this mode about the process of rewriting involved in translation, anthropologist Anna Tsing exposes the cross-cultural politics that underpin the history of feminism by asking:

> How have the accounts of the role of theory in the U.S. women's movement drawn attention away from the theoretical insights U.S. feminists gained in the 1960s and 1970s from Algerian debates about the polities of the female body, from the Chinese land reform movement's use of female personal narrative…? That is, how is feminist theory actively and continually created, against much evidence, as a Western thing?[8]

Yet, when the concept of "the personal is political," as developed by feminists in the West, re-entered China around the time of the 1995 UN Women's Conference in Beijing, the Chinese feminist Li Xiaojiang registered unease with its importation:

> While this slogan has gained wide influence in Western society, it is nothing new in Chinese society… In the past half-century in China, the personal has without exception been political. In everything from relations between men and women to marriage and family relations, the hand of politics was felt everywhere.[9]

This one example of traveling theory provides several questions for the cross-cultural work of *Cruel/Loving Bodies:* when does foreign theoretical locution attract or repel; how does translation involve seduction, rejection, and erasure; and who gets left out of the loop on what occasions?

As art and artists traveling under the label of "contemporary Chinese art" have drawn increasing international attention, survey exhibitions aiming to represent this group have marginalized both female and non-Mainland Chinese artists. This project aims, in part, to redress this situation. But, more importantly, it endeavors to open a dialogue between scholars of gender and artists working in the Mainland and Chinese diaspora. Both contemporary art and feminism are fields that have evolved through international exchange, yet local conditions deeply influence their cultural production. In order to elucidate this point and debunk the notion of hierarchies of First and Third World feminism, the authors in this section present individual visions of what it means to be an artist engaged with questions of gender. Their essays—including those written by Anthony Leung Po Shan, Wu Weihe, He Chengyao, and Lesley Sanderson for the Shanghai conference, an artist's statement by Mayling To, and a contemplative exploration by susan pui san lok of the "cruel/loving" theme across the body of each artist's work—serve as textual complement to the artists' primarily visual work, as well as a document of our project-in-progress.

In response to the ongoing trend of male dominance within contemporary art from the Mainland, *Cruel/Loving Bodies* places women and the female body at the heart of its inquiry. This insistence on making women visible is grounded, however, in an understanding of gender as a cultural construction that relies on female/male relationality. Anthony Leung Po Shan's polemic against "women's art" warns precisely against the danger of separating women into their own exhibition space or the new Chinese art history category of *nüxing yishu*, emphasizing that just as "Chinese" cannot be neatly fitted into a nation, neither can "woman" be represented by an occasional festival or book chapter. As one way of moving beyond this form of self-ghettoization, *Cruel/Loving Bodies* presents the work of two artistic teams, Wu Weihe and Bai Chongmin and Lesley Sanderson and Neil Conroy. Both partnerships create art collaboratively, as a dialogue between different gender and cultural positions, and demonstrate how questions of gender or feminism do not remain exclusive to women.

Cruel/Loving Bodies brings together artwork in diverse media—painting, sculpture, installation, performance, photography, and video—that reflects upon the interrelated issues of gender and the body, particularly in the context of China or the Chinese diaspora. The artists work from locations and backgrounds that challenge a dichotomous East/West border, each grappling with the question of Chinese identity, but in local contexts with different social and historical conditions. From this rich layering of experience emerges a shared exploration of how personal histories or historical legacies are inscribed on the gendered body. In an early attempt to describe her exploration of feminist thought through art, He Chengyao likened the experience to a scene in the film *The Red Detachment of Women*, in which a woman denounces a vicious landlord by tearing open her clothes and showing her wounds. Lesley Sanderson writes in a similar vein: "For those labeled Other, the body—and specifically one's own body—becomes a cultural vehicle that artists…have used as a symbol of resistance and change." While a singular emphasis on bodily oppression can lead to a reification of woman as victim, the art of *Cruel/Loving Bodies* demonstrates a defiance of

this trope—by staring back, reclaiming the body laid waste by history, undermining stable roles of gaze and control, overturning the moral order of an art world that mirrors the status quo it claims to critique, and reflecting back anxieties of self-image in ambiguously gendered plush bodies at play in a field of love and hate.

The collective work of these practitioners crossing borders represents social and historical cruelty inflicted upon the body—in the form of physical violence or social regimes of surveillance—but also counters cruelty with a simultaneous focus on the body as a sensual site of love and subversive possibility. They mix cruelty with cuteness, violence with humor, intrusion with intimacy, and suppressed histories with metaphors of healing.

Notes

[1] Charlotte L. Beahan, "The Woman's Movement and Nationalism in the Late Ch'ing China," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976), 176.

[2] Ibid., 176-177.

[3] See Christina Kelley Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[4] In contrast with Euro-American feminists who strove in this period to denaturalize the female body, post-Mao Chinese feminists discussed naturalizing the female body as a way of recovering it from state discourse. See Tani E. Barlow, "Politics and Protocols of *Funü*: (Un)Making National Woman," in Christina K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel, and Tyrene White, eds., *Engendering China: Woman, Culture, and the State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[5] Charles Merewether, "The Spectre of Being Human," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 2, no. 2: 59-63.

[6] Joan Kee, "Art, Hong Kong, and Hybridity: A Task of Reconsideration," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 2, no. 2: 90-98.

[7] Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[8] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Transition as Translations," in *Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminisms in International Politics*, Joan W. Scott, Cora Kaplan, and Debra Keates, eds., (New York: Routlege, 1997): 254.

[9] Li Xiaojiang, "With What Discourse Do We Reflect on Chinese Women? Thoughts on Transnational Feminism in China," in Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, ed., *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998): 275.

IN ANTICIPATION OF MEN´S ART: RE-READING WOMEN´S ART IN HONG KONG

ANTHONY LEUNG PO SHAN / TRANSLATED BY SASHA S. WELLAND

Figure 1. Liang Yee-woo, *Lotus Lady*, 1983, ink on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

I'm not prepared to provide a complete historical record of women's art in Hong Kong. On the contrary, I set forth from a small place. For this article, I interviewed several artists of different ages and backgrounds in order to understand their varying attitudes toward "women's art." I also use a comparative reading of art work from the Mainland and Hong Kong in an attempt to analyze the variable entry points to "women's art" taken by artists in different contexts.

THE DIFFERENT CONDITIONS OF WOMEN´S ART

The widespread adoption of the term "women's art" or "female/feminine art" (*nüxing yishu*) occurred in the Mainland in the 1990s. Art with a "female form" (*nüxing fangshi*) or "female sensibility" (*nüxing tezhi*) was described in a general sense in the following ways: diaristic or autobiographical work initiated by an individualistic perspective; an exploration of female symbols or signs; or art with some kind of emphasis on abstract or indescribable qualities (delicacy, intuitiveness, gentleness, ingenuity, sensitivity…).[1] In recent years, female art and artists have become an unavoidable "chapter" in the grand narratives presented by books on Chinese contemporary art.[2] This kind of special treatment, while always more healthy than turning a completely blind eye to the subject, still indicates how the Art (with a big A) historical record remains largely unchanged—something may be pointed out and explained as a special case, but otherwise Art marches on unaffected by the influence of women, or even more so, of gender. Women's art has, by every kind of discussion, become a fixed and legitimated category, with its subversive ideology diminished—as Liao Wen says, "sunken into a mistaken area defined by a painstaking search for its difference from men."[3] "Female sensibility" has turned into dogma, with artistic expression become all one of the same. This has resulted in the loss of the individual's vivid experiential and representational insight.

As for Hong Kong, the contemporary art activity whose earliest of bright banners summoning the public for "woman" (*nüxing*) arrived belatedly on the scene in the late 1980s and reached its height during the "Women Art Festival."[4] However, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, women's art—as evidenced by artists such as Fang Chao-ling[5] and Irene Chou Lu-yun[6] working under the label of "Guixiu Painters"[7]—had already secretly developed a new style within the male-dominated New Ink Painting movement of those two decades.[8] According to May Fung[9] and Liang Yee-woo,[10]

formal discussion about "Women's Art" began in the 1980s. In the words of May Fung, this decade in Hong Kong was an era of "rising wind and gathering clouds," first triggered by the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 and propelled by opposition to the public security legislation and efforts to petition for direct elections. As a result, the topic of women, as one among many other social movements, entered an agenda that called for change.[11]

"HUMAN" OR "WOMAN"[12]

Women have long been involved in making art, but gender consciousness in art is the result of political strategizing. Generations of female artists have dealt with their own circumstances in ways that have led to different choices and forms of analysis. In Hong Kong, female artists who achieved early success and prominence tended to oppose the application of the label "female/feminine" to their art and refused to acknowledge any difference in their work because the qualifier "female" carried a vague negative connotation. With the passage of time, another group of female artists now opposes the use of gender in descriptions of them, but their reasoning lies in an attitude of "Wah! To talk about women artists is so passé." I therefore hope that the cases I present below will help lead to a comparative generational study of female artists in Hong Kong.

Liang Yee-woo studied abroad in Canada during the 1960s. During her time in Canada, she actively participated in many kinds of minority civil rights movements, but because of her "foreigner" identity, she returned to Hong Kong at the end of the 1970s to "seek roots."[13] At just that time, the New Ink Painting led by Lui Shou-kwan[14] had come to the forefront, along with another New Ink school headed by Liu Kuo-sung,[15] who was based at the Chinese University Fine Art department. Liang regarded the New Ink movement as an emptying out of traditional Chinese painting, a clever deception using clever methods. In addition, her foundation in traditional painting was weak, so she chose to start out by following another painter, Ting Yin Yung.[16] Lotus flowers became her most unique and favorite subject matter: they faintly suggested a Chinese literati tradition, as well as associations with maternity. In her first series of ink paintings completed in the early 1980s, which used abstract, impressionistic brushwork, she focused on specific female images—the breast, pregnancy, and flexible, pliable bodies captured in dance movements (fig. 1). The New Ink painters found her work difficult to accept, pointing to her subject matter as a way of "exposing" her failings. At this time, Liang became truly aware of the Hong Kong art world's conservatism. As a result, she felt the need to emphasize women's art and began calling herself a "female painter," which she has continued to do from 1979 to the present. Her subsequent experience of giving birth led her to affirm the female body more directly and to assert the opinion that "birth is a kind of blessing." She strongly felt that "the female body was already inside [her] painting," and with strength gained from her experience of birth, she finally finished doing imitative studies and embarked upon a new creative stage.

In order to reaffirm her direction, Liang took an opportunity to conduct a series of special features on women artists in the 1980s for *Breakthrough Magazine*.[17] In the interviews, she explored the situation of female artists and the idea of female sensitivity in art. The interviewees felt no need for this gendered lens and again did not recognize any "female sensibility" in their own work. Perhaps through subjective projection, Liang Yee-woo did find in their work an attention to the household and the banality of daily life seen infrequently in work by male artists. Citing examples such as Fang Chao-ling's scene of family happiness (*Peace Under Heaven*, 1985); the "tender and gentle female sensitivity" of Choi Yan-chi's[18] installation piece *Fourth Space* in her solo exhibition held in the Hong Kong Art Centre in 1985; and Liu Siu-jane's[19] prints using her infant son's footprints, Liang felt that it was secondary after all whether or not the designation of "woman"

appeared as a strategic consideration, and that only when creativity emerges from one's own truthful experience can female sensibility be naturally revealed.[20]

Starting out using super-8 film, May Fung was one of the original pioneers in Hong Kong in experimental film and video. In 1986, Fung together with Ellen Pau,[21] Comyn Mo,[22] and Wong Chi-fai[23] formed Videotage[24] and took the lead in using video as a creative medium. Fung's video works that record, in part, an exploration of the female subject include: *The Second Sex* (1986), *Her Border, Her Lines* (1990), *Hong Kong in Transition—Getting Personal* (1997), and *In the Mood for Love—In the Mood for Life* (2001). Her experimental works with observations on social-political issues from a women's perspective include: *Pieces* (super-8 film, 1977), *Monologue* (video, 1984), *She Said Why Me* (video, 1989), *She Ran Amok in the City* (video, 1990), and *Cinderella Meets the Pauper Prince* (video, 1999)(figs. 2 and 3). Yet, Fung firmly claims she's not a feminist. Other artists tend to quietly call her a "feminist who denies she's a feminist." But the label she values more is "independent art worker." She says, "I basically don't have that kind of morale…I understand that for some friends who have spent significant time overseas gender is a political urgency that arises from academic and personal identity conditions of necessity.[25] But in Hong Kong, I've never had a feeling of oppression or a sense of urgency to necessarily always think about it…" In 1961, Hong Kong first introduced the "equal wage" principle within the government bureaucracy. Fung was a mid-level civil servant before she retired in 1998. Of the women she saw and heard about at work, none of them had abilities or achievements that differed from those of their male colleagues. Her level of salary promised her economic independence and freedom of artistic expression. As she

Figure 2. May Fung, *She Said Why Me*, 1989, video. Courtesy of the artist.

notes, "At that time Ellen Pau and I could begin video experimentation relatively early because economically we had no worries."[26] Regarding why she doesn't recognize herself as a feminist, she believes the question lies in whether or not artistic creation should use identity to make a statement. However, one can't fail to acknowledge that her artwork contains a strong critical consciousness with regard to gender politics. Her first video piece, *The Second Sex*, gained its inspiration from the original work of this title by Western author Simone de Beauvoir. From the time of her youth, May Fung has paid "unusual" attention to politics.[27] How individuals and politics frame each other has been at the core of thinking behind her art.[28] Cinema has influenced her technique, and she believes in "less is more" and the pursuit of poetic video making. Her tactics do not place gender at the forefront, but rather approach gender politics from politics in general; simply because she was born a woman, her work begins more from this gendered subjectivity.

Although these two artists of a "previous generation" both dealt with women's issues in their artwork, over time they have come to a similar conclusion of doubting whether or not it is necessary to concertedly emphasize women's art. Liang Yee-woo's hope has been for a greater exploration of aesthetics that tend toward a feminine (*yinxing*, refering to *yin* of the *yin/yang* relationship) sensibility, not for political opposition based on biological gender determinism.[29] And, while May Fung has never failed to be a strong advocate of the efforts of her female artist friends, her

intuition is to feel "jaded" and that the next step requires considering how to emerge from the fetters of feminism in art.

FEMINISM: A HISTORICAL BURDEN

Even though women artists in Hong Kong have played a pioneering role in the development of video and installation as artistic media, these media and other accompanying new aesthetic orientations have not come to be understood as solely female specialties. In fact, May Fung's description of her own career overturned my original assumption that women fervently opened up a new aesthetics based on new media as a way of breaking from male-dominated traditional media. (Fung believes "technology has no gender.") However, their achievements and self-confidence in these new media undoubtedly expanded the vast space open to younger female artists, allowing us to go beyond the limits of gender and temporarily shed the heavy cloak of gender politics. In the system of arts organization, Hong Kong female arts administrators and curators are too numerous to count: Grace Cheng, Hong Kong Art Centre exhibition manager; Christina Chu, chief curator of the Hong Kong Art Museum; May Fung and Choi Yan-chi, leading members of 1-A Art Space; Ellen Pau, Videotage artistic director; Claire Hsu, executive director of the newly founded Asia Art Archive…[30] On the flip side, it is a paradise for male artists when women are compelled to play a supporting role by becoming administrators.

I remember that the first time I went to Japan to participate in a performance art festival 1994, the organizers saw my appearance and very politely asked me two questions—"Are you a lesbian?"

Figure 3. May Fung, *She Ran Amok in the City*, 1990, video. Courtesy of the artist.

followed by "Are you a feminist?" I expressed denial on the first count and responded to the second by asking, "What kind of feminist do you mean?" Feminisms can differ in a thousand and one ways, and the more you know, the more you want to avoid possible pigeonholes. Although the negative connotations of the female label no longer exist as they once did, too many of those who have assumed politically correct positions now feel restless. I was born in 1970s Hong Kong, and my thoughts on gender came mostly from external sources of "inspiration" and my study of theory. This sort of external rather than internal "inspiration" caused my early artwork to more resemble an illustration of (Western) theory than to originate from my own (local) life experience. For example, my 1997 piece *P-read: Visual Dialogue of Anthony Leung and Phoebe Man* used menstruation as its theme, causing art critics to point out European influences and an attitude of self-imposed victimization. Their criticism was not unreasonable.

At the same time that I strove to get rid of the female art tag, an even younger generation of artists refused to get involved in the matter at all. Kwok Ying,[31] who graduated from the art department of Chinese University in Hong Kong, says, "Female art? I'm opposed to this, but not at all because it's derogatory. It's only that I feel it's so outdated." In fact, the painters Kwok Ying looked to during her early studies were the extremely macho Jasper Johns and Jean Dubuffet with his fascination for the savage and childlike. She did not purposefully edit out the male imprint of these "masters," but

Figure 4. Kwok Ying, *Welcome*, 2002, colour pencil and ceramic clay on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

accepted or rejected whatever influenced her according to her own disposition. Kwok Ying enjoys repetition and labour: "Painting is just leaving a mark on a surface." In her thinking, what to keep or throw out depends upon a consideration of how to put different painting materials to the best use and in discovering their special properties, emotional qualities, veins, and lines, as well as humour in ordinary items. Her microscopic vision of banal materials bears a resemblance to the work of Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum (Kwok's *Welcome*, 2002 invites comparison with Mona Hatoum's *Doormat*, 1996)(fig. 4). To see stubborn adherence to the process of repetition and experimentation in expressive forms using ink and painting, we can also look at the coincidental similarity of works by the Mainland painters Ding Yi (male/*Crosses*, 1997) and Lu Qing (female/*Untitled*, 1999). Of course, in the eyes of the artists, the differences between their works must seem greater than the similarities, but under my gaze this comparative example proves that artistic temperament and the biological gender of the artist only has a probable relationship—one that can be based in an appropriation or parody of gender politics; a programmatic exploration of the feminine (*yinxing*) or masculine (*yangxing*); or simply the natural orientation of individual sensibility.[32] The "girl's thing" effect in the art of Kwok Ying was not the result of deliberate incorporation.

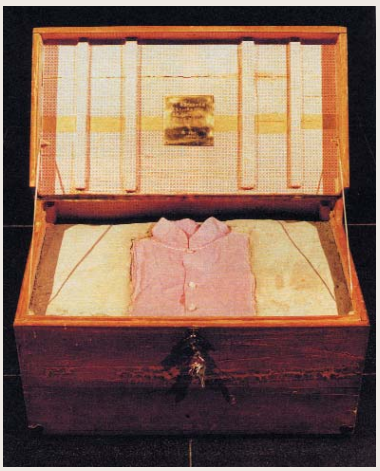


Figure 5. Yin Xiuzhen, *Suitcase*, 1996/2002, installation: wooden box, cement, old clothes of the artist. Courtesy of the artist.

Here, I'd like to raise another example using a comparison of *Solid* by the male artist Pak Sheung-chuen[33] and *Suitcase* by the female artist Yin Xiuzhen,[34] which both deal with the heavy and emotional accumulative expression of history. Yin Xiuzhen aims to memorialize an individual (female) role in the historical narrative; in her piece, artefacts of clothing have received their final judgment, embalmed in cement contained within a wooden coffin (fig. 5). Pak Sheung-chuen wants to record the sentimentality of human emotion and the ephemerality of sympathy and personality. The emotional scars of autobiographical and diary-like sentiment infill the work of both artists. With the same cherishing of small things, Yin Xiuzhen displays a steadfast self-negating/self-reaffirming

power while Pak Sheung-chuen freezes the moment with his nimble mind and deft hands (fig. 6). The two together provide evidence that a feminine (*yinxing*) aesthetic sensibility is certainly not the exclusive realm of female artists. In following, it might be pointed out that this kind of feminine (*yinxing*) sensibility has become gradually more distinct among some male Hong Kong artists but remains rarely embodied by male artists from the Mainland; could it be that Hong Kong men are all relatively sentimental?[35] Or have they received separate, specific social, cultural, and political influences?

MEN´S ART: IN ANTICIPATION

I really hope that this is my last essay addressing the topic of women's art. Exhibits parading women's art in Hong Kong happen almost all the time. Under the pen of art critics, the words "female sensibility" in art criticism have become equivalent with insufficient critical language and analytical skills, called up when writers feel helpless to address the work of female artists. How can we prevent the moralistic attitudes that have suffused feminism and women's art from covering up individual perspectives and experience? If gender liberation relies solely on the efforts of our *sisters* to achieve it, how can feminism not but become self-ghettoization? What methods can be employed to enable the other gender to contribute and participate? I remain in anticipation of a men's art exhibition, not only because my current interest in "men's art" is greater but also because I believe that there are many more topics that await our discovery within a gender perspective.

Figure 6. Pak Sheung-cheung, *Solid*, 2001, installation: cement, 45.7 x 45.7 x 12.7 cm. (series of six). Courtesy of the artist.

Notes

[1] Writing of female sculptors in *Sculpting Space*, Sun Zhenhua summarized characteristics of the "female form" in art as: 1) originating from a concrete understanding of individual life; 2) sensitivity to understanding the body and; 3) in the choice of principle materials and production process, exhibiting special features of female intuition, exquisite attention to detail, and meticulousness. See *Sculpting Space* (Hunan: Hunan Art Publishing Company, 2001), 166-169.

[2] I roughly skimmed books I could find in Hong Kong about Chinese contemporary art. In Gao Minglu's *History of Chinese Contemporary Art 1985-1986* (Shanghai: People's Publishing House, 1991), Liu Chun's *Chinese Avant-Garde Art* (Tianjin: Hundred Flowers Arts Publishing House, 1999), and Lu Peng and Yi Dan's *A History of Chinese Modern Art 1979-1989* (Hunan: Hunan Arts Publishing House, 1992), I found no specially designated section on female art or artists. However, in revised histories published in recent years, authors have started to respond to current demands by adding separate chapters on women's art. Lu Peng's *90s Art China 1990-1999* (Hunan: Hunan Art Publishing House, 2000) and the catalogue edited by Wu Hung for the First Guangzhou Triennale, *Representation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art (1990-2000)* (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Museum of Art, 2002), are both cases that represent this development.

[3] Liao Wen, "Women's Art One, Two, Three—Women's Art as the Contemporary Art Question of the 1990s," in *Reinterpretation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art (1990-2000)*: 61-67.

[4] The festival entitled "*Nuxing*" in 1990 was first presented by the City Contemporary Theater (operated by the City Contemporary Dance Company) and curated by a male curator, Cheung Fai. However, no persons or organizations were able to present a second festival. Inheriting the idea of the first festival, Yau Ching and Ribble Chung curated *The Girl Play: Hong Kong Women's Theater Festival* in 2001 (presented by the Hong Kong Art Center). Curators of *The Girl Play 2003* included Cheng Yee-chai, Vivian Leong, and Ribble Chung, and co-presenters of the festival were the Hong Kong Art Center and the On & On Theater Workshop. Although the festival's main attractions were theater performances, it also incorporated visual art programs.

[5] Fang Zhaoling (b. 1914).

[6] Zhou Luyun, also Irene Chou (b. 1924).

[7] By coincidence, both of them first received artistic recognition as a surprise in their married lives. (Translator's note: *Guixiu*, a traditional Chinese term for women that can be variously translated as "cultivated lady," "woman of good breeding," "modest woman," or "excellent woman from a family of high social standing," refers in a complimentary way to an ideal feminine type of the educated woman sequestered within a family's women's quarters away from the corrupt outer world, but can also indicate pejorative connotations in a modern context to describe the work of a woman.)

[8] There have been two recent exhibitions reflecting back on New Ink Painting. *Hong Kong Cityscapes: Ink Painting in Transition*, presented by the Hong Kong Museum of Art at the Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London in 2002, was a recent refashioning of the movement. *The Universe is My Heart is the Universe: The Art of Irene Chou*, presented by the Hong Kong Arts Center in 2003, exhibited the artist's continuing developments in her later years.

[9] Feng Meihua (b. 1952).

[10] Liang Yihu, also Evelyna Liang (b. 1949).

[11] The "New Women's Association" and the "Hong Kong Christian Women's Association" were founded separately in 1984 and 1987 and formed the core organization of the women's movement. Choi Po-king, "The Hong Kong Woman's Movement: Identity Construction and Contradiction" in Man Si-wai and Leung Mei-yee, *Thought Exchange and Convergence: Philosophy in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Youth Literary Book Store, 1997): 319-359.

[12] The same humanistic logic echoes through a famous quote by Li Yi, a political commentator: "First one must learn how to become a person in order to learn how to become a Chinese person." The search for national cultural identity and the search for gender identity seem to have coincided with each other during the "rising wind and gathering clouds" period of the 1980s.

[13] Liang Yee-woo recalls from her time in Canada that after a foreign professor who taught Chinese art history learned she came from Hong Kong, the professor very impolitely called her someone "neither Chinese nor Western" who did not understand Chinese culture.

[14] Lu Shoukun (1919-1975).

[15] Liu Guosong (b. 1932).

[16] Ding Yangyong (1902-1978).

[17] An influential cultural magazine in the 1980s, which took Christianity as its foundation, was published by a Christian organization.

[18] Cai Renzi (b. 1949).

[19] Liao Shaozhen.

[20] Interview with Liang Yee-woo on 6 April 2003.

[21] Bao Ailun, also Ellen Pau (b. 1961).

[22] Mao Wenyu (b. 1960).

[23] Huang Zhihui.

[24] Videotage later became known as one of the most important video art organizations in Hong Kong. In recent years, the collective has promoted creative media and digital work and instituted the Microwave International Media Arts Festival.

[25] The acceptance or rejection among Hong Kong female artists of a feminine label for their art almost always corresponds to their experience of studying abroad in the West. Apart from the case of Liang Yee-woo just mentioned, artists in a younger generation such as Yau Ching and Phoebe Man (Wen Jingying, b. 1969), who spent a year in the United States, proclaim themselves to be feminists. The development of women's art greatly resembled the women's movement as a social movement. "One can say it was an 'import'; it certainly didn't arise from local social life conditions or have roots in local identity." Choi Bo-king, ibid.: 320.

[26] May Fung believes that this kind of "freedom" and "independence" also comes from class difference. With regard to her middle class outlook, she is careful to guard against desires for a safe and stable life. Interview on 10 April 2003.

[27] The example she raises harkens back to another era: "When I was in middle school, I would read several newspapers a day, because I wanted to know whether or not Nixon would be elected president. A left-leaning classmate would always persuade her to join the Hong Kong Red Guard organization. I argued endlessly with this classmate with strong resistance."

[28] Her video piece *Cinderella Meets the Pauper Prince* (1999) deals in a moving way with the Myanmar hero Aung San Suu Kyi caught between the two difficulties of country and love. (In 1999, Aung San Suu Kyi's husband died in England; in order to prevent the military government's use of any international travel on her part as an opportunity to send her into exile, she chose not to visit him during his illness. When he died, she had not seen him in three years.)

[29] The main points of this article are not focused on exploring theory or definitions, but for an example of femininity interpreted as an aesthetic sensibility, see the works of Hélène Cixous or Julia Kristeva. The basic definition used in their work goes beyond aesthetic orientations based in biological determinism to understand gender as an always changing and emerging process; based on the structural concept of the female labia, the feminine is a relative sensibility working in opposition to that of male centrism.

[30] Although women hold such positions, they also can continue to follow the artistic tastes of men. Or, they can come to play a supporting role for male artists.

[31] Guo Ying (b. 1977).

[32] The only female experiences that cannot be shared are perhaps birth and menstruation.

[33] Bai Shuangquan (b. 1977).

[34] Yin Xiuzhen (b. 1963).

[35] An exhibition entitled *Wo-men*, presented by Para/Site Art Space and held at the Old Ladies House in Macau in 2001, included the male artists Tsang Tak-ping and Patrick Lee. It represented the very beginning of the cultivation of male artists' feminine sensibility (*yinxing tezhi*), but the exhibition lacked much theoretical dimension.

CASTING THE MOLD OF FEMALE BODY AND IDENTITY: REINTERPRETING *GUANG LIENÜ ZHUAN* (BIOGRAPHIES OF EXEMPLARY WOMEN)...

WU WEIHE / TRANSLATED BY SASHA S. WELLAND

Figure 1. Bai Chongmin and Wu Weihe, *National Sacrifice: Herstory*, 1996, mixed media on canvas. Courtesy of the artists.

When I was young I didn't understand why simply because I was a girl I couldn't enjoy the same freedom as my brother. I persisted in believing I was the same as him, that I could follow my desires. I dreamed that I could travel long distances by myself, going a thousand miles away to see my grandmother with bound feet. I wanted to spill open her hope chest and try on her "three inch golden lotus" shoes. I wanted to know whether or not I could fit into them, whether or not my feet were too big. I was met, however, with rejection, which led me to yearn more strongly for my own horizon.

I resisted and banged my head against the wall throughout a depressing childhood. My heart ached bitterly, and my crimes grew too numerous to count. My brother could have a camera, but when I tried to get one, I came up empty-handed, with no means to visualize my life. I persisted in sitting for the university exams five times, which caused people to ask how a single woman of my age would ever find a husband. My mother shed many tears over this daughter of hers and wondered why I couldn't be like other girls.

When I graduated from university I was already twenty-six years old, an old youth. I went to work in a Beijing school that gave me the darkest memory of all. I would eventually lose my job due to the "system" of this institution, for I had moved out of the school dormitory to live and paint in a studio I'd found. However, because I was an unmarried woman, even though one of twenty-six years, the school could act as my guardian and oppose my behavior. I was discussed as a woman with bad behavior, maybe a woman of scandal, for what other reason would I have to want to live alone? They went so far as to move my suitcases back to the dormitory, and they repeatedly told me that I must pay attention to the proper morality of a single woman. These absurd morals prevented me from thinking, moving, or breathing, but where did they come from?

In 1995 I met Bai Chongmin. He had just moved out of the Yuanming Yuan artist village to a new location and helped me find a studio next to his.[1] I was still very distressed by how I'd lost my job, so we often discussed this problem. We both wanted to find a way to cut to the root of traditional Chinese gender morals by using artistic expression and we began exploring the *Guang Lienü Zhuan*. This collection of historical figures narrates the lives of female exemplars of moral behavior. In the past, it served as the textbook of the woman's inner chambers and imparted rudimentary information to them on how to pursue virtuous ideals. As artists, the two of us began a conversation between two genders in an inquiry into the historical identity of Chinese women. From this joint perspective, we attempt to interpose feminist art into local Chinese discourse, as well as local Chinese discourse into feminist art. Feminism came onto the stage in a flash, providing Chinese contemporary art in the 1990s with a new more pluralistic contextual space, a completely new visual angle. This opened an important channel for gaining perspective on society and overturning history.

In the process of creating our series entitled *National Sacrifice: Guang Lienü Zhuan*, which required examining and understanding the past afresh, we read this historical document as one way that a certain "ideology" was purposefully legitimated through historiographical editing—the creation of a particular version of woman. The *Guang Lienü Zhuan* is just one among many texts meant to "clarify female instruction and make womanly virtue evident," including *Instructions for Women* (Nüjie), *Historical Maxims for Women* (Nü shizhen), *Analects for Women* (Nü lunyu), *Inner Teachings* (Nei xun), and *Examples of Female Success* (Nüfan jielu). These premodern primers followed a pattern set by Liu Xiang's *Lienü Zhuan*, a book that served the "righteous cause of compiling the records kept by numerous families of virtuous women in order to provide a broad

Figure 2. Bai Chongmin and Wu Weihe, *National Sacrifice: Lienü Figures/Herstory*, 2001, terracotta sculptures, 110-175 cm. tall. Courtesy of the artists.

example for posterity." This work of twenty sections includes empresses, imperial consorts, princesses, exemplary mothers, female models, chaste wives, female martyrs, loyal women, filial women, and depraved women.[2]

The compiler Liu Xiang lost his father at a young age. Inspired by his mother's example of preserving her chastity in widowhood and remaining single until her death, he began his editing work to honor and provide evidence of her motherly virtue. After Liu died, his wife was buried alive with him. The records in his book include a thousand women's tragic histories, but the book also represents the stories of these two unnamed women whose tragedies followed and then provided didactic Confucian example. If the "afterward" of this book is taken as truth, Liu "gave wing to and promoted the success of popular morals of the time; and indeed after the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 AD), more historical records included women's biographies to amply repair what had been left out." Liu conscientiously and diligently collected vast materials, truly achieving a record of "righteous examples for the later ages," with the end result of confining ever more women to traditional ritual. Most dramatically, the two women closest to the author (his mother and wife), one "chaste" and one "martyred," became early sacrifices to these precepts; his mother's tragedy had led him to shed his heart's blood in repayment for the deeds of her "female teaching."

The rulers of more than two thousand years of history continued to encourage and reward filial sons, virtuous women, and century after century of this type of household. Beginning with the

Figure 3. Bai Chongmin and Wu Weihe, *National Sacrifice: Lienü Figures/Herstory*, 2001, terracotta sculptures (detail). Courtesy of the artists.

start of unified rule under the Qin emperor (221-206 BCE), the example of presenting "banners for chaste martyrs" began as a way of protecting patriarchy. In the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 AD), the practice became established convention under an imperial edict that stated "chaste women from among the common people, who became widows before the age of thirty or forty but not after fifty, will be rewarded with a banner at their village gate relinquishing their family from conscript labor." This decree resulted in increased reporting of virtuous deeds to the imperial court; in 1402 AD a revised and expanded *Lienü Zhuan* was submitted to the second Ming dynasty empress, and in 1405 the palace was ordered to abide by a book of rules for female behavior published in her name. Later the wealthy Zhang Jiabeng's thirty-eight concubines all requested to be buried alive with him. A Ming dynasty version of the *Lienü Zhuan* describes how "educational inspectors patrolled the land every year in order to bestow offerings at ancestral temples for significant deeds, displaying graceful inscriptions on trees and in lanes to brighten village courtyards, gates, and even the doors of women in remote places, leading to the encouragement of virtuous behavior and prefectural records of no less than ten thousand women." The sections labeled "inner chambers chastity" and "martyrs of the inner chambers" in the *Complete Collection of Pictures and Books of Old and New Times* (Gu jin tu shu ji cheng) document nearly 36,000 chaste and martyred women in the Ming Dynasty.[3] The deeds of chaste martyrs from every region emerged in an endless stream, proving that "a girl who one day chose the road of the chaste martyr not only brought glory to her family and village but also rose above others and left her mark in the annals of history." In addition, officials competing to report the deeds of chaste martyrs from their region were resorted to the corrupt practice of issuing proliferating false reports.[4] The wide-ranging precepts for female morality promulgated by rulers in every dynasty called for the female body to be laid upon the sacrificial altar.

The female body gradually became the grounds on which men built patriarchy. Confucian thinkers laid the theoretical foundation for the worship of female morality and provided a detailed hierarchy of traditional human relations based on those of an emperor and his subject, after which relations of father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother were modeled. The difference between male and female bodies and the resulting subordinate social position of women reveals a continual appropriation of biology by male ideology. The transfer of a girl from fulfilling the aspirations of her parents to those of her husband meant she followed her father at home, and then her husband and son after marriage. This exchange of identities, both based on unequal relations, thoroughly cast the mold of female thought and life under patriarchy.

Our series of works entitled *National Sacrifice* is based on the text of the *Guang Lienü Zhuan* and composed of a synthesis of materials and approaches including painting and sculpted terracotta figures (figs. 1 and 2). We borrow this record of women's history in traditional culture and reinterpret the text. In the paintings, the Chinese text is duplicated, broken up by red editing marks, or scorched by fire, obstructed, covered, cut into pieces and then sutured back together. Or, we might paint directly over the text to the point of destruction. The general atmosphere of our treatment suggests emotions of estrangement and distance, amplified by the key colors of black and yellow

ochre. In addition to these expressive elements, we also use materials or found objects related to our theme—silk, rope, shoes for bound feet, and other symbolic visual signs—in a blending of visuality and analysis that allows viewers to interpret the work from their own perspective.

National Sacrifice: Lienü Figures consists of rough kiln-fired pottery figures, and the overall plan-in-progress is to use clay from every pottery works in China to create 1,290 sculptures (the approximate number of women recorded in *Guang Lienü Zhuan*) (fig. 3). Our main intention in sculpting *National Sacrifice: Lienü Figures* has been to reduce the gesture and form of the figures to their most basic extreme, while also making each one individual by marking them with an inscribed symbol that indicates identity in the text by serial number. In the creation of both the paintings and the terracotta figures, we use the female body to express the effects of being collectively controlled and to emphasize the unconscious of a group subjected to norms of standardization. The figures stand there as a group, as if lined up in battle array and produce a silent accusatory power: the body guarded from disgrace, the body buried in the name of chastity, sacrificed to patriarchal principles of honor and shame, as well as witness to "cannibalistic" feudal ethics. The covered heads of the female figures symbolize their passive position in marriage, lack of clarity in individual identity, and preconditioned state of remaining unawakened.

In a society where men remain at the center, patriarchal consciousness has not been truly eradicated. While women have achieved some political rights, a complete break from traditional precepts, at a deep level of consciousness, has still not taken place. From the beginning of our involvement in feminist art, Bai Chongmin and I have gradually learned from experience the marginality of its "other" position. This experience has demonstrated to us that society will not, due to one's own wishful thinking, simply arrive at the equality of female and male identity. We therefore aim to investigate the unequal position of women from a broad social level, in order to build a richer and deeper dialogue between the genders and between art and society.

Notes

[1] In the early 1990s, a large "artist village" formed to the northwest of Beijing near the grounds of the Yuanming Yuan or Old Summer Palace. In this semi-rural area, artists found living and working spaces cheap and easy to rent without a Beijing residence permit. However, as the community grew and began to attract foreign art collectors and reporters, Chinese authorities grew wary and cleared all people resembling artists from the area.

[2] Anne Behnke Kinney, ibid., highlights further categories created by the text: "The seven categories of feminine behavior that Liu Xiang devised are: 1) matronly deportment; 2) sagacious clarity; 3) benevolent wisdom; 4) chaste obedience; 5) pure righteousness; 6) rhetorical competence and; 7) depraved favoritism."

[3] See Chen Menglei, ed., compiled by Jiang Tingxi, *Gu jin tu shu ji cheng* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985).

[4] See Jiang Xiaoyuan, *Chinese People Under Gender Tension* (**Xing zhang li xia de Zhongguo ren**) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe,1995).

LIFT THE COVER FROM YOUR HEAD

HE CHENGYAO / TRANSLATED BY SASHA S. WELLAND

Lift the cover from your head
Let me see your eyebrows
Your eyebrows long and thin
Like the curved moon in a treetop

Lift the cover from your head
Let me see your eyes
Your eyes clear and bright
Like autumn waves the very same

Lift the cover from your head
Let me see your face
Your face red and round
Like an apple on harvest day

"Lift the Cover from Your Head" is a Chinese folk song. From inside and out, in action and stillness, its lyrics narrate a man unveiling a woman's head—an exhibition of male desire and power. This is an age-old visage of patriarchy and a manifestation of Chinese women's lives (fig. 1).

I'd never heard of Jin Yi or *The Women's Bell* before preparing for this project, and then I only came to understand the contents of his text from copies of materials found in the U.S. I hold deep respect and gratitude for the surprise discovery of a pioneer shouting loudly and waving the flag for women's rights one hundred years ago. At the same time, I am ashamed by my own lack of knowledge and want to pursue even more the question of why his writing isn't readily found in its country of origin. Could it be that women who are completely liberated, play a central role in the family, and "hold up half the sky" don't need it?

For hundreds of years, imagery of the female nude has been the creation of male painters; the female nude in art has persistently symbolized antithetical concepts: chastity and dissipation, purity and degeneracy, empire and colony. In a performance art piece that I realized a few years ago, I fused my own personal history and body into the work, using this female nude as a means to challenge the female image as a male construction, as well as gender rules and taboos created under male control. With my art as example, I present one existing case of a Chinese woman's life.

On May 17, 2001, I completed a performance piece at the site of Jinshanling on the Great Wall outside of Beijing (fig. 2). The German artist H. A. Schult had installed his artwork of one thousand "trash people," each 1.8 meters tall, displayed like terracotta soldiers on the Great Wall at Jinshanling. The figures were made of consumer waste and shipped by boat to China from his great nation. In the middle of the crowd at the exhibit, I took off my red t-shirt. Naked on top and grasping the shirt in my hand, I led the audience, including H. A. Schult, through the lines of his "trash people" troops and finally climbed a beacon tower.[1]

After *Opening the Great Wall*, the name of my first performance art piece, my family and I bore criticism and scorn from every direction of society. The rationale behind these reproaches was, contrary to my expectations, based solely on gender. People saw this work as a woman using her

Figure 1. He Chengyao, *Lift the Cover from Your Head*, 2003, installation.

Figure 2. He Chengyao, *Opening the Great Wall*, 2001, photograph of performance.

body in a last ditch effort to gain fame. In contrast, men who have used the male body as an artistic medium have received social recognition and approval.[2] This kind of double standard for artworks of the same type spurred me to search for the source of the situation in which I found myself.

Everything must be traced back to the original story.

Recall the life of my maternal grandmother. When she was thirty, her husband lost his mind, fell into a river, and drowned. For more than forty years she protected her female virtue by remaining a chaste widow. Relying upon sewing and washing, she raised three children on her own. During the Cultural Revolution, she was labeled a landlord, struggled against, and subjected to labor reform. Her entire life resulted in no small amount of misery and humiliation.

The weaving maid goddess in the beautiful mythic tale of the "Cowherd and the Weaving Maid" violated the rules of heaven and secretly descended to the mortal world. She clandestinely decided to spend her life with the cowherd she loved, until eventually she ran into the patriarchal power of the Jade Emperor of Heaven who dispatched a deity to capture the weaving maid and bring her back to be denounced and severely punished. The cowherd could then only rely on the magpies that flew to create a bridge for him once a year on the seventh day of the seventh month, allowing him to carry his son and daughter across, to briefly unite as a family, in a narrative of the pain and longing of separation. My mother and father lived a real version of this myth and met with the same punishment as the cowherd and weaving maid. In the 1960s my mother, because she had illegally (according to the rules established by patriarchy) become pregnant outside of wedlock, had to choose between her job and me. She chose me. My father, also spurned and shamed, was fired from his job and his name dragged through the dirt. My mother bore the disgrace of being labeled "morally degenerate" and has since been yoked to an unquiet mind.

If I didn't have a mother who runs, day and night, stark naked with disheveled hair, shouting through the streets and alley of my hometown, who uses this method to expose the confining morals of patriarchy, to protest its discipline and violence, and to look down upon its authority, by using the extreme behavior of insanity to realize her freedom, then I wouldn't have used the identity of artist for my behavior on the Great Wall. I understand that I similarly violated the prohibition of male-dominated society against women freely controlling their own bodies, especially in the "name of art." I believe that I cannot allow myself to sink into the dust left behind by my predecessors and become one more sacrificial offering to patriarchal society. I acted instinctively to make a new start, by using my body as a weapon to open a dialogue with and challenge to restrictions hundreds of years old.

Mama and Me was created in the summer of 2001. After *Opening the Great Wall*, I returned to my hometown to see my mother. When I arrived, she sat quietly on a stool at one side of the courtyard, half naked and playing with a rotten apple. I stood behind her and also took off my top. That was the first time my mother and I ever had our picture taken together. The photograph allowed

me to squarely face my family's history of insanity that I had carefully hidden and avoided for so long, to reaffirm the family line that connects me and my mother, and to partially satisfy a yearning of more than thirty years to support, touch, and embrace her.

Testimony consists of three photographs. The first uses the image of my mother from *Mama and Me*, in which she curiously crooks her head to look up at me standing half nude behind her (fig. 3). In the second photograph, I sit and my son stands behind me. In the third photograph, my son sits with an empty background behind him. With this piece, I want to express respect and care for weak and marginalized people whose lives continue on regardless. They are one part of history, a testimony to history.

Figure 3. He Chengyao, *Testimony*, 2001, triptych of colour photographs.

When I was a child, my grandmother tried all sorts of folk cures and superstitious methods to treat my mother. She hired many spirit doctors and forced my mother to swallow great quantities of Chinese and western medicine. She even attracted the attention of several People's Liberation Army "uncles" from a nearby military factory; they were "studying Lei Feng" and doing good deeds. These soldiers used their free time on Sunday to come to our house and attempt to treat my mother's illness. They exerted all their might to hold my mother down on a wooden door used as a table, and one of them stuck acupuncture needles into her. My mother lay on the door screaming and struggling. *99 Needles* is offered to my mother, who received so much shameful wearing down, as atonement because I stood as eyewitness but could not help her (fig. 4).

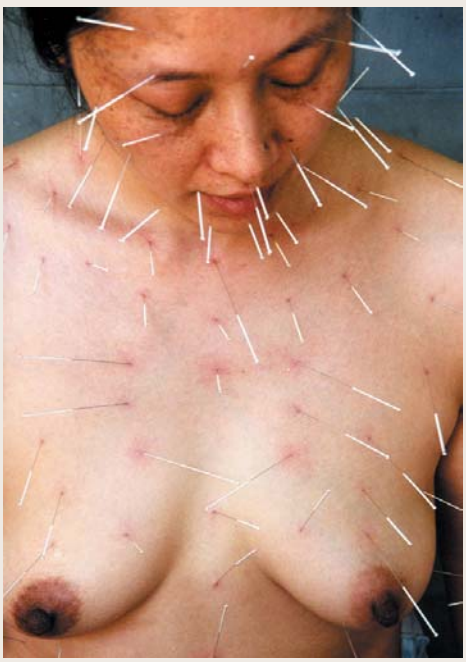


Figure 4. He Chengyao, *99 Needles*, 2002, photograph of performance.

Illusion is a performance art piece I did in February 2002 at the Beijing Art Archives and Warehouse. The work was executed in this fashion: I invited a male audience member at the site to hold a mirror and use it to refract sunlight onto the background of a gray brick wall. I ran in front of the wall and chased the illusive patch of sun. The person grasping the mirror casually controlled all of my running, jumping, hiding, and movements of evasion (fig. 5). The performance lasted approximately ten minutes. In July 2002 I participated in the seventh Asian Performance Art Festival held in Japan, where I orchestrated this piece three more times. Each time the performance process unfolded differently. Each time the roles of participation shifted and took on different dimensions.

Figure 5. He Chengyao, *Illusion*, 2002, photograph of performance.

With *Illusion*, I express my understanding of power and desire. Power exists in opposition, multiplicity, plurality, lovability, and divisiveness. One power always confronts another, locking in contest with a power diametrically opposed to it in quality. Forces bind and struggle with each other: forces that move, originate, subjugate, or control and forces that respond, recede, comply, or adjust. Each and every form emerges as the product of resistance to and struggle for power. The reality produced by power is the ultimate product of desire. It is only an invented outcome; everything is a projection of our desire: love, marriage, wealth, power, fate…there is no one who can control and direct everything. Just as we want to catch the sunlight along the wall, it's only the shape of the relationship between the person holding the mirror and the person running along the wall. Only this game can produce the controller and the controlled.

My life includes a young girl, a woman, and the person I am now. Traditional norms and codes of conduct disciplined and suppressed me, and spurred me to use art as a form of creation and confrontation. I know that I'm currently using a different method than my mother to redeem myself and throw off fate's curse.

Notes

[1] For a review of this performance, see He Mai, "On He Chengyao," *Chinese Contemporary Art* 4, no. 4 (http://www.chinese-art.com/Contemporary/volumefourissue5/beijing2_2.htm).

[2] There has been a tradition in Chinese avant-garde art since at least the late 1980s of male performance artists staging works on the Great Wall. Such artists include the 21st Century Group (Sheng Qi, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke, Zhao Jianhai), Zheng Lianjie, and Ma Liuming. Of the many male artists who have used their own nude body in performances pieces, Ma Liuming and Zhang Huan have become the most well known. Cf. Gao Minglu, "From Elite to Small Man: The Many Faces of a Transitional Avant-Garde in Mainland China," in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, Gao Minglu, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 164.

CHANGE AND FABRICATION: THE BODY AS SITE FOR THE FEMININE AND INTER-CULTURAL

LESLEY SANDERSON

Figure 1. Lesley Sanderson, *Time for a Change*, 1988, oil on canvas.

In addressing representation of the female body, I speak as an artist. I use two of my works to elucidate the discourses around gender and race that have been of main concern in my art. The two works I discuss pivot around the act of viewing the body (or denial of this viewing) in the construction of an image's meaning. My art practice is a reflection of living in the West, where to be both female and Chinese/Anglo is to be doubly inscribed as Other. Occupying this peripheral position requires understanding how visible difference is inscribed on the body. The feminized and racialized body is a site of political and social discourse, with representation of the body one important way that cultures establish structures of meaning and power. Control over women's identity has left women little room to express their own sexuality or to directly shape their social position. I aim to allow for greater self-determination by making evident the link between the body and the ideological power structures defining our understandings of it.

The use of my own body in my work introduces ruptures to standard traditions of representing the female body. Conventional Western representations of the female Other, such as the Chinese female, have long been based on an external, objectifying view, rather than on the actual, individual experience of being that subject. My images aim to work with and against the Western canon as a subtle but potent subversion, providing imagery from a previously unarticulated position. My work does not function as a straightforward oppositional critique of the patriarchal Western canon, but highlights a blurring of boundaries. I am working in the place of inter-, between viewer and viewed; colonizer and colonized; male and female; and geographical and cultural dislocation. The work produced between these dichotomies seeks to counter structures of power based on suppressed subjectivities.

For those labeled Other, the body—and specifically one's own body—becomes a cultural vehicle that artists such as myself have used as a symbol of resistance and change. We saw the personal as political, a way of interrogating issues of collective interest. Taking authorship of one's own image seemed a powerful act of subverting the patriarchal Western canon. The use of the self, thus, allowed me to fully explore the complexities and shifting parameters of what it was to be a subject and how to represent her position within society. In the 1980s, the understanding that Britain, my adopted homeland, provided little visibility within art or culture to the Chinese subject, and especially the Chinese female, served as artistic motivation. I used the self-image to challenge the idea of the "exotic," to dispel the notion that those seen as Other, and in particular the Chinese diaspora in Britain, were a "homogeneous exotic category." I wanted to challenge Orientalist iconography and unsettle traditional representation of the Chinese female as marginalized, submissive and available to the gaze.

In the 1980s, I placed my work within a feminist framework and within the black art movement. This decision was deliberate and self-conscious. To make work as a feminist or as a black artist meant engaging with a critique of established structures of race, gender and sexuality. The black art movement of the early 1980s was the first generation of politicized black artists, for whom notions of difference and self-determination were paramount. "Black" did not necessarily refer to skin colour, but to the very notion of difference and being defined as Other within the West. Included under this umbrella were artists from the Indian sub-continent, but I was the only artist of Chinese descent showing within this movement. This group of young, highly politicized "black" artists made self-representations where there had previously been a void and brought a new "non-Eurocentric" perspective to the British public. As a Chinese artist, to name myself a black artist was to claim a political position in resistance to the Eurocentric position.

One of the drawbacks of being placed in the black context was the general public's perception that work produced by artists of different cultural backgrounds was homogenous. In fact, the nuances of difference explored, the issues approached and the means of expression had breadth and depth that went largely overlooked. The complexities of what it was to be seen as a Chinese, when actually being a Chinese/Anglo female, were subsumed by the issue of what it was to be broadly seen as Other. Furthermore, the radical stance of such oppositional work placed it outside the mainstream, ensuring that black and feminist remained marginalized categories. Inclusion within the mainstream of British art generally served as nothing more than a tokenistic gesture.

Within feminist discourse, the female body has been one of the most discussed theoretical issues. In the Western canon, the female nude has been understood as a way of containing femininity and female sexuality. Within this genre, the intended spectator is taken to be male, with the female

body the object of the "male gaze," understood to be inseparable from the operations of power. My painting *Time for a Change* (oil on canvas, 1988) critiques this genre by playing with modes of looking at the female body (fig. 1). It attempts to challenge the traditionally passive image of both the female body and the Chinese subject. It leaves no room for voyeurism and makes the viewer aware of the figure in an unnerving, uncomfortable way. The female subject intervenes directly within established codes of looking and disrupts a long Western history of the female nude.

A naked self-portrait sits in front of an Orientalist reproduction of an "ethnic" woman dressed in South East Asian clothing and depicted as passive. I chose this particular reproduction for several reasons. I was very familiar with this image because it occupied a prominent location on the walls of my family home. I grew up with it as an idealized image of the Asian woman, an image of ultimate beauty and femininity, signaled by the softness, serenity and gentility of the woman as she sits elegantly but self-consciously on the floor mat. It evokes a servile image of femininity, caught in a moment of stillness and contemplation. The traditional costume and hairdressing signify the accepted place of the female Other in patriarchal society, seen but not heard. I also chose this reproduction because of its immense popularity in Europe—it hung on the walls in many households. I strove to understand why this particular image was so seductive to me, and to a general European audience, as a desirable and comprehendible representation of the feminine Other. She represents the exotic in her Otherness and a sexual availability in her passiveness. My own attraction to the image became highly problematic for me as I realized the extent to which I had adopted this imagery, with its corresponding meanings, without question. I realized the potential power of its seduction, achieved through the subtle construction of eroticized ways of looking, which force one to either possess or become the object possessed.

I painted myself as a female nude sitting in front of this reproduction in order to engage with the traditions of this genre. This painting highlights the gap between being represented and having authorship, and exposes the exotic and erotic nature in which the colonizer viewed the colonized. I intended to disrupt this exchange of viewing, making it more complex and ambiguous. Of *Time for a Change*, Rosemary Betterton writes: "The exotic Other and its potential in the pornographic imagination is destabilized as the figure of the artist interposes herself between viewer and viewed."[1] The clothed figure on the right maintains a self-reflective state, her gaze turned sideways in private thought, allowing the viewer to intrude and survey her demure posture. The painting within the painting could be seen as more sexually charged than the nude self-portrait in the forefront. The nude's pose denies the viewer an easy, non-confrontational point of entry. Her stance controls the act of viewing, in contrast with the still and inert pose of the female in the background. The nude's gaze returns the viewer's in an active and provoking exchange. Her lack of clothing breaks with the traditions that the female on the right signifies and asserts an active female sexuality within the frame. Her cropped and dyed red hair also reinforces this position, denying the embrace of the tame feminine Other of Western male erotic fantasy.

My early work demonstrated a concern with self-representation and played with the idea that femininity is performative and socially constructed, and therefore a mutable rather than static concept. I used the self-image and my own body not only as a strategy and symbol of possible of change, but also as a challenge to perceived notions of the feminine.

More recently I have employed a different working method, a collaborative art practice with the British artist Neil Conroy. While authorship of the female body was central to my previous practice, I now approach the concept of authorship in yet another way. Our collaboration continues to

explore how the individual and the body is portrayed, and by whom. The female Chinese subject is now placed within a broader frame rather than being the sole subject of the work, and yet, she continues to remain very central. For me this collaborative work places the Chinese female in context, reflecting the situation that I find myself in: I live in diaspora where one is always seen in relation to the dominant culture.

Figure 2. Neil Conroy and Lesley Sanderson, *Fabrication*, 2000, mixed media installation.

The hybridity of proliferating diasporic cultures has necessitated an inquiry into boundaries and their collapse. Clearly defined categories of race, class, gender, nationality and the body have been called into question and tested. Our collaborative work is a composite of different elements used to reflect the new cultural space opened up by hybridity—a process that subverts the colonial center by shifting the power structure of the subjects. A sympathetic relationship between the colonized and the colonizer creates a third position. This third position is borne out of the duality of previous historical positions, but roots itself in contemporary narratives of the "inter-cultural." Helen McDonald, speaking about the collaborative process, says that it confounds expectations that "art arises from a 'single order of the mind' and that it is an effect of 'slippery subject positions' or even multiple subject positions."[2] In collaboration, we deny attributing authorship to different aspects of the work, a strategy for exploring the collapse of boundary and the blurring between Self and Other. As such it becomes "a subtle, feminized critique of Eurocentrism."[3]

The title of one collaborative piece, *Fabrication* (mixed media installation, 2000), plays with several meanings of the word: to build and construct, to invent and deceive (fig. 2). It posits that identity is a construct, shaped by society as much as biology. *Fabrication* subverts the commemorative function of portraiture, refusing to present evidence of who is depicted or whether they are recognizable individuals. (In fact, the people in the drawings are our parents and ourselves.) The incomplete images dismantle the portrait, conveying a sense of absence and presence. They indicate a lack of visibility, unease and dislocation experienced across societies when old roles and senses of belonging are called into question. The defining facial features remain absent, making the individuals anonymous and unclassifiable. Yet, anonymity is also refused by the particularity of the foreheads. The piece implies "anonymity and specificity, or detachment and intimacy, simultaneously."[4] These drawings of incomplete faces have an unexpected amount of presence, and yet their identity is difficult to establish. The subjects cannot be easily categorized or ordered into a hierarchy of either gender or race. Otherness is largely based on the visible; insufficient visual information to "place" these portraits frustrates the impulse to assign difference. In a panoptic world of increasing surveillance, inability to image a subject can be seen as a potent act of resistance and subversion rather than a lack of agency.

Fabrication uses sound and moving light to add elements of time and change to the static and fixed nature of portraiture. The viewer experiences a sense of unfolding and mutability through visual and auditory channels. Sound, broken by intervals of silence, emanates from below each portrait. A lift door opens and closes, followed by the mechanical sound of the travelling lift devoid of any noise of occupants within. Sound allows an exploration of the body's absence in a non-visual

way. These empty journeys indicate absence, but also hint at a physical and metaphoric striving to locate the subject. The line of white light that travels up and down the portraits searches, scanning in a futile attempt to plot the body and fix identity. This friction between an external searching and a subjective understanding of the self causes anxiety over our collective and individual identity and sense of place.

Fabrication attempts to destabilize the audience's expectations by producing uncertainty. The incomplete images, further unsettled by the elusive sound that punctuates the space and then disappears, disallow a static viewing experience. These linked elements evoke void, loss and a continual searching for bodily presence, as if this will offer some understanding of the individual. In this installation, we convey the inadequacy of the body as a site on which to locate many aspects of subjectivity.

Both of these works explore the pivotal role that viewing and control of viewing have in the meaning of a work and its reflection of social and political positions. The body in representation activates very particular viewing responses from the audience, which are related to the power relationships set up by the artist between the work and its audience. The body in representation is never a neutral subject, but one always inscribed with ideology. In the West the female body within art history has long been the object of a controlling "male gaze." *Time for a Change* directly challenges this mastering gaze, and by implication, the power structure enforced by this exchange. *Fabrication* undercuts the notion of the "male gaze" with a more ambiguous approach. Ambiguity communicates a lack of fixity and an inability to visualize the entire image or a complete understanding of the subjects portrayed. By frustrating the act of viewing, we undermine its traditional role in how artwork is read, making the viewer aware of the problem of using visibility as a means to understanding a subject.

My work has changed in content and approach, but the underlying concerns of being a Chinese woman strongly underpin the history of my artistic practice. For me the Chinese female in diaspora occupies a crucial position from which to speak within the shifting parameters of contemporary society. This will continue but different times and developments also require different strategies, both within society and in artistic practice. The strategies I seek interrogate the position of the inter-cultural, and reflect the blurring of increasing hybrid cultures as the boundaries between Self and Other shift and stretch.

Notes

[1] Rosemary Betterton, *Intimate Distance: Women, Artists, and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), 167.

[2] Helen McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art* (London: Routledge, 2001), 207.

[3] Ibid., 212.

[4] Ibid., 211-12.

THE STRANGER: AN ARTIST´S STATEMENT

MAYLING TO

Cruel/Loving Bodies suggests the notion of ambivalence that is often mirrored in my practice. My work explores cultural, racialized and ethnicized forms of "representation" and "appropriation" in their popularized and commodified forms. By engaging with contexts of voyeurism and subjectivism, I aim to question representations of cultural ambiguity and the notion of authenticity.

This position of ambivalence in terms of my British and Chinese identity means exploring formulations of "in-between-ness" and "otherness" and the emotive state of cultural identity, of desire and belonging: the coexistence of love and hate.

Figure 1. Mayling To, *The Stranger*, 2002, video with colour and sound, 11:25 minutes. Commissioned and produced by The Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA).

Figure 2. Mayling To, *The Stranger*, 2002, video with colour and sound, 11:25 minutes. Commissioned and produced by The Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA).

I have an interest in the anthropomorphic form, a hybrid, somewhere between the human and the animal. I am concerned with the psychoanalysis of human sentimentality towards animals and the means of humanizing the animal form, exploiting political, racial or social use of the anthropomorphic. Subverting the cute and innocuous with an undercurrent of potential violence and humour, I am interested in the notion that humour induces ambivalence, referring to differing forms of conflict; between friendliness and hostility, and between play and seriousness.

In my recent video work, playful allegories of submission and aggression are played out. Panda, the protagonist in *Being* (2001) and *Living* (2001), is a life-size version of the cuddly and innocuous toy, a generic cultural artefact that represents loaded themes of human identity. Through raw gritty imagery, we enter the narrative world of Panda, where fantasy collides with the harsh realities of everyday life. Panda searches for the meaning of life and self-fulfilment through furry inanimate objects, martial arts, spiritual guidance manuals and bamboo blinds.

Figure 3. Mayling To, *The Stranger*, 2002, video with colour and sound, 11:25 minutes. Commissioned and produced by The Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA).

In *The Stranger* (2002), Panda has become a more alienated and complex character that shifts the viewer's perceptions around the real and the authentic. Here, Panda journeys between suburban charity shops, in a search for his likeness in the form of cuddly panda toys and cultural paraphernalia (figs. 1-3). Throughout his daily reality we observe the inner turmoil that ensues where Panda finds a release for his intolerable repression. In the finale, Panda finds himself unable to resist the destruction of the very objects he desires.

In previous works, I have reconstructed a soft-sculpture of the 1970s American cult cartoon character Hong Kong Phooey by way of re-examining an identity that conveys mixed and confused messages of orientalism. As a child growing up during the kung fu craze of 1970s Britain, I found the Hong Kong Phooey cartoon problematic by the euphoric affection it received—and still holds sentimental nostalgia for audiences today—and how that in turn has affected me, as a Chinese person. For me, Hong Kong Phooey is a complex image with implications that personally reflects an ambivalent relationship of both hatred and fandom. I hated him as much as I loved him. *A Cute Puncture* (1998) is a re-fabrication of Hong Kong Phooey that toys between being cruel and loving, a body lovingly recreated yet ambivalently punctured with acupuncture needles (fig. 4).

Figure 4. Mayling To, *A Cute Puncture*, 1998, wood, foam, fabric, polyester, acupuncture needles, approximately 65 x 60 x 70 cm.

EPILOGUE: *CRUEL / LOVING BODIES*

susan pui san lok

I

To slash, to stroke, to cut, to caress; a line leans fine and spare, a hair-like split. Chasing a chasm between cruelty and love (—a phantasm, a haunting divide?), a stance or position is struck.

Words ill-match the tense, shifting weight of forced embraces, viewed intimately from a distance. "Love" taken, amassed, "love" given, for someone or other's own good; drip-fed, slow-spooned, dished out, knifed-in, "I LOVE YOU TO DEATH." Do you feel the same?

Words rush and halt, an apology after acts blunt and reticent: she strips, they strip back, dress up, overdress, breaths corsetted, holding in, holding out.

II

Skin slips into view. At a border—a wonder—a kingdom symbolically walled from the rest of the world, a woman half-bares her body, a breach at a barrier. Not stilled nor impassive, she walks semi-naked, displeasing eyes used to teasing below-counters / through peep-holes / in mirrors, now averted wide-shut with contempt: outrageous exposure of willful flesh, a gesture self-gratifying, self-ratifying.

III

Skin comes up close, a surface of feathery granite, the grain of a voice, ventriloquised. Porous, elusive, defying the frame, a landscape locks into a dyad. A cheap wardrobe-husk braces body and birth-place, a strange, dense expanse and emblem-home: Asia-as-landmark, Malaysian twin towers made toy-like and flimsy. An eye-hole punctures the boxed body shells, and eyes peer into the blue. Mere daydream, inside and out.

IV

Doubled up in double happiness, s/he's captured, enraptured, enraged. Wrapped up, in arms, their faces-for-hands are tied. A two-headed monster, an everyday creature looks out from pretty coloured strings, now mummified, now bandaged, now blind and mute behind cartoon mouths and eyes. Whose wound in need of covering, whose broken skin, dirtied? Clipped by the ears for wrong-doings, conjoined by choice and reparation, the double-dealing, double-faced, double-hearted, double-tongued speak from the belly, venter loqui:

> chinesejapanesedirtykneeswhatarethesheadsshoulderskneesandtoeskneesandtoes
> chinesejapaneseheadsshouldersdirtykneeswhatarethesekneesandtoeskneesandtoes

V

Skin itches. A woman implores you, for one-night only, to scratch. Her stage is a battleground in want of opponents—aggressors or defenders, your choosing. Sometimes eight-legged, the woman-arachnid desires and repels, othertimes playing and pleading devotion. Sunflowers shed salty tears, pungent sobs hammered helpless into wood. Watched and heard, scratched and sniffed by a game and solemn audience, she makes up a hard, damp, sweet-smelling bed, and sleeps.

VI

Sleep and needles pin a soft-sculptured dog to a foam-topped, glass-encased plinth. She sews and stuffs the look-alike-imposter, a cult cartoon character made inanimate. Doubling the double, a celluloid fiction aspiring to fiction: by day, a mild-mannered dog-janitor, by night, a would-be superhero with kung-fu kicks, his crime-fighting success sealed by a feline side-kick. The fur-deep hybrid of dubious heritage dreams Chinese-Black-American dreams. Lovable, laughable, the butt of an old joke: ha ha, there is no real you; but it's funnier if you don't know it.

The pleasure and pain-staked hero, more impotent than omnipotent, is a copy, a dummy—an idiot and surrogate for her aggressions / affections, a sometime victim / bully. Eyes closed, blacked out in black, she lays him to rest, a curative / injurous love / hate dying, awaiting a fairytale ending.

VII

Fake fur, fake skins. Skin slips inside another: an awkward, ill-fitting costume, a pantomime panda. He peruses shop windows and collects stuffed toys—his own untrue image. Idols in miniature, nation-symbols endangered, embodied, preserved. Covetous, lonely, he caresses, and assaults, cutting, mutilating, he pulls insides out, to find only synthetic filling.

VIII

Still faithful, still chaste, the terracotta women advance, veiled in clay. Recalled from dust, they collect, recollect each solitary sacrifice. Shored up to sustain the great and good, exemplary deaths, hers and hers, adorn his and his memory. In silence, in solitude, in suicide, they submit their deference and protest.

IX

She cannot see so she casts no final glances, makes no final call. She cannot write, so no note remains. All are provided for, all, but one, have grown and flown. She shrinks with age and illness. Miles on, miles on, she wakes, she walks, she eats, she rests, never properly sleeps—something, always something keeps her from this place. The radio chats with urgency, and favourite operas cycle through the comic-tragic. Pains worsen and dull, and worsen, each killer dose quickening unbidden ghosts who will not, will not leave. Today she is tired, her complaints are the same and we don't know what to do. Useless distracted daughter's daughters, love mismatching duty, hearts failing. More doctors, more drugs? She laughs and hugs with her soft body and papery hands, she strokes and stares, and later, she protests.

Image stills from susan pui san lok's *Notes on Return*, 2003, sound and DVD installation, approximately 10 minutes.

YU HONG'S *WITNESS TO GROWTH*: HISTORIC DETERMINATION AND INDIVIDUAL CONTINGENCY

XENIA TETMAJER VON PRZERWA

Figure 1. Yu Hong, *Yu Hong Two Years Old*, 1999-2002, oil on canvas.

A little girl sits at her desk in a dusty rural village school, while her mother labours in the adjacent fields for re-educational enlightenment. A few scraps of paper and a pencil are scattered on the desk in front of her. Most of the other kids of Hao Jia Fu elementary school already left, but this girl waits every day for her mother. The mother tells her that bad things happen beyond the safety of the school walls. Nonetheless, dreaming of a heroic future under the all-enveloping red sun of Mao's China, the little girl gazes out into the courtyard. Then she starts to draw the things that surround her everyday: classmates, houses, and fields.

Today, Yu Hong is undoubtedly one of the most important and successful female artists in the contemporary Chinese art world. Her oeuvre shows an emphatic interest in the human condition, or "real life" as she puts it, which she ponders through the prism of a female gender identity. As Britta Erickson writes, "Yu Hong is one of the few artists who depicts the female point of view with such a high level of understanding and understatement."[1] Yu Hong's works are personal, emotionally intense, involving, and reflective. Putting female experience at the centre of her investigation, she visually breaches the boundaries of the marginalized woman and creates an independent female space for her contemplations.

Like many artists of her generation, Yu Hong was trained in the academic Socialist Realist painting style that dominated Mainland Chinese political art production for over thirty years. She was enrolled at the oil painting department of the prestigious Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Despite the continuous influx of Western trends into the Chinese art world, the influence of Yu Hong's original training remains strong. "It taught me to carefully look at my surroundings. Realism remains the best way for me to express my ideas and feelings."[2] Over the years, Yu Hong's observation skills nurtured her sensitivity to gestures, postures, and facial expressions. By capturing the most minuscule details in a person's demeanour, Yu Hong is able to open a window onto the subtle nuances of human emotions.

In her recent and still ongoing series *Witness to Growth* (Muji chengzhang), Yu Hong's keen sense of observation and her deep involvement with real life are evident. The series embodies her understanding of life and its rules of unfolding. On the one hand, Yu Hong strongly believes that an individual is irreversibly shaped by the time and historic circumstances in which he or she grows up. On the other hand, she also observes that no matter what happens, daily life unfolds according to its trivial routines. In *Witness to Growth*, Yu Hong investigates the balance between collective meaning and individual irrelevance and depicts its various nuances. This idea lends itself exceedingly well to an investigation of China's tumultuous recent history and the effects it has had on the individual.

Figure 2. From page 13 of *China Pictorial*, no. 9 (1968). "In celebration of the oil painting *Chairman Mao on His Way to Anyuan*."

The *Witness to Growth* series consists of forty-five oil on canvas paintings, one for each year of her own life and one for each of her daughter, Liu Wa. Each painting in the series is based on a photograph chosen from snapshots accumulated over the years. Paintings from before the time of colour photography are in monochrome. By reflecting this technological progress, the artist emphasizes the fact that these images are based on reality.

Yu Hong started to work on the *Witness to Growth* series in 1999.[3] After the birth of her daughter five years earlier, she had hardly painted at all. Having stepped into this new phase of her life, Yu Hong started to contemplate the nature of an individual's growth and development. The conclusions have heavily shaped her outlook on life. "A baby is as that of a blank sheet of paper before an artist. While working on a piece, it is impossible to know the final outcome. It cannot be controlled. Similarly, parents cannot control what their children become. It is the social circumstances and time that decide."[4] It is this guiding presence of a societal superstructure vis-à-vis the unfolding of an individual's personality that stands at the centre of her investigation in this series.

One media photograph of the time is paired with each painting. They are exhibited to the left of the oil canvas. Yu Hong collected the photographs from a wide variety of pictorials published in the People's Republic. In this series, they become symbols for the political and social situation in China at a given moment. The photographs qualify and are qualified by the individual experience portrayed in Yu Hong's paintings. The artist did not employ the pictorial cut-outs in their original seize but enlarged them to have the same one-meter width as the paintings. Their height is slightly

Figure 3. Yu Hong, Liu Wa Two Years Old, 1999-2002, oil on canvas.

less, thereby retaining their original rectangular format. By doing this, Yu Hong allows both painting and photograph to stand on equal visual footing.

Yu Hong bears witness to both China's modern history and to her and her daughter's life as individuals. Putting her life story and that of China side by side, their interrelation is established not only visually but also theoretically. Through this pairing, the work ties together collective and individual memory. In Mainland China, perception of history is heavily shaped by current politics. It is, therefore, not a stable construct but rather an especially malleable one that remains in permanent flux. The same holds true for the conception of the individual's role and sphere in the People's Republic.

The use of photographs is also relevant in relation to the painting's representation of reality, the key theoretical underpinning of the style in which Yu Hong was trained. A painting belongs to the realm of reconstruction, memory, and imagination. A photograph, as Roland Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida*, "mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially."[5] It reproduces reality but not its meaning. By painting photographs, Yu Hong emphasizes both the reality of her subject and re-infuses it with meaning. "For me, having a photo album filled with images is meaningless. Only if I go through the process of choosing photographs and painting them, I add memory and emotion to it," she explains.[6] When the artist paints a photograph of herself, she rejoins her identity and consciousness, the dissociation of which Barthes identified as being at the core of photography.[7]

Comparing representations of Yu Hong and Liu Wa at the same age—two, four and six respectively —highlights the fundamental idea the artist aims to get across. They both were little girls, screaming, playing in the park, and going to school. However, the historic and social surrounding was vastly different, moulding these two individuals in distinctive ways.

Yu Hong was born in Beijing in 1966. In true Cultural Revolution fashion, her parents named her "*Hong*" (red), a colour emphatically imbued with revolutionary fervour. *Yu Hong Two Years Old* shows her in a frilly dress and adorned with two Mao souvenir badges; one small and one disproportionately large (fig. 1). Liu Chunhua's famous oil painting *Chairman Mao on His Way to Anyuan* (1967) is reproduced at the centre of the large badge.[8] Radiant cloth flower petals encircle the image like the rays of the sun. The little girl's gleaming and confident eyes suggest that she is quite proud of her outfit. "The badge was really pretty," Yu Hong agrees. "A printmaker at the publishing house my mother worked for then especially made it for me."[9] A photograph from *China Pictorial*[10] entitled *In Celebration of the Publishing of the Oil Painting Chairman Mao on His Way to Anyuan* accompanies the painting (fig. 2). It both explicates and emphasizes the importance of the badge in the image. The celebration party in the photograph shares the young Yu Hong's naive excitement.

Yu Hong's mother, holding her daughter by the hand, does not effuse the same enthusiasm. Herself a painter and intellectual, Gao Zhenmei pays tribute to the current political zeal by sporting the same small Mao badge as Yu Hong. Her frowning face, however, is filled with worry and apprehension. The contradiction between little Yu Hong proudly parading her huge badge and the tall mother dutifully adorned with a small one accentuates the different people's view of reality depending on their position in life and in history. For Yu Hong, the Cultural Revolution is all she knows. For her mother, being born in 1940, it is yet another phase in Maoist China's tumultuous history she must endure. Also, Yu Hong is revelling in the aesthetic aspect of the badge. Her mother, on the other hand, cannot help but relate to the iconographic meaning.

Figure 4. From page 2 of *China Pictorial*, no. 6 (1996). Villas in a Beijing suburb.

In comparison, *Liu Wa Two Years Old* exudes certainty, calmness, as well as disregard (fig. 3). The scene is set in Yu Hong's studio in 1996. Against the backdrop of a giant portrait of Chairman Mao, Liu Wa has fallen fast asleep on a softly padded modern office chair. "The portrait is from the Cultural Revolution," Yu Hong explains. During the height of the Mao Zedong personality cult, each household sported such a portrait. The Chairman was regarded as a serious leader, a role model. Liu Wa could not care less. For her, he is just a face in a painting. As in many of her paintings, Yu Hong adds a touch of irony—the red cushion Liu Wa sleeps on. The little girl comfortably rests on the fruits of the revolution.

Today's fruits of the revolution are, however, the bourgeois evils of the past. Paired with *Liu Wa Two Years Old* is a photograph from the *China Pictorial* (fig. 4). The image is a close-up shot of a newly built villa complex in a Beijing suburb.[11] "To live in one of these houses is everyone's dream," Yu Hong says. The contrast between today's bourgeois aspirations and the communizing of whole towns and villages in Yu Hong's youth is striking. Surely, Mao would not rest as easily as Liu Wa does in this painting if he knew what she is dreaming of.

Figure 5. Yu Hong, *Yu Hong Four Years Old*, 1999-2002, oil on canvas.

Yu Hong Four Years Old is set in 1970 (fig. 5). The little girl, holding a flower in her left hand, is shouting and screaming. Again adorned with a Mao souvenir badge—although this time in a more measured format—she stands at the foot of one of the two unique pillars guarding the gates of the Forbidden City. From this setting, it is only a short mental leap to the fanatically recited "Long, long life to Chairman Mao" mantra that reverberated amongst the millions of Red Guards then regularly gathering in Tian'anmen Square. The same association is achieved by the *China Pictorial* image that accompanies the painting (fig. 6).[12] The photograph is crowded with Red Guards, each seemingly in his and her own world of political fervour. Their facial expressions and that of little Yu Hong are frighteningly similar. Both the Red Guards and Yu Hong are in state of exalted happiness, if for different reasons. Yu Hong revels in the celebration of her own life while the Red Guards in that of their beloved leader.

The structural composition of the painting is oddly off-balance. Little Yu Hong stands straight up, aligned with the vertical edges of the painting. In relation, the large marble pillar seems tilted as if in the process of toppling over. Chinese history—for which these pillars are a standard symbol—was standing on shaky grounds at that time. The country found itself at the brink of total chaos, just as the towering marble pillar could crush the little girl and her carefree happiness at any time. An omen all too real in view of the fact that only a few months later Yu Hong's parents were separated and sent to the countryside for labour rectification. Through the pillar, Yu Hong focuses on the unpredictable and uncontrollable aspect of historical situations and their impact on the individual. At the same time, its dominance alludes to the enclosed China-centric world a little girl at that time grew up in.

Compared to the relative isolation Yu Hong grew up in, Liu Wa experiences an internationally integrated China and the success—and therefore monetary resources—of her parents. *Liu Wa Four Years Old* depicts a scene from the family's trip to Egypt in 1998 (fig. 7). During this time, her father was on a sabbatical in Spain, which allowed the family to travel. Like in *Yu Hong Four Years Old*, we see a little girl juxtaposed against monuments and symbols of ancient culture. Just as Yu Hong's straight body echoed the architecture of the pillar, Liu Wa's triangular posture echoes that of the pyramid. Here, however, it is not an oppressive but an empowering relationship. Whereas the marble pillar ominously towered over Yu Hong, Liu Wa's figure dwarfs these giant Egyptian structures. Even the head of the sphinx is smaller than that of Liu Wa. Rather than threatening to crush the little girl, these ancient structures support her. Liu Wa looks as if she is about to start flying, carried away by the wind that ruffles her skirt. The atmosphere in the painting is one of limitless freedom.

Figure 6. From back cover of *China Pictorial*, no. 7 (1970). "Long long life to Chairman Mao."

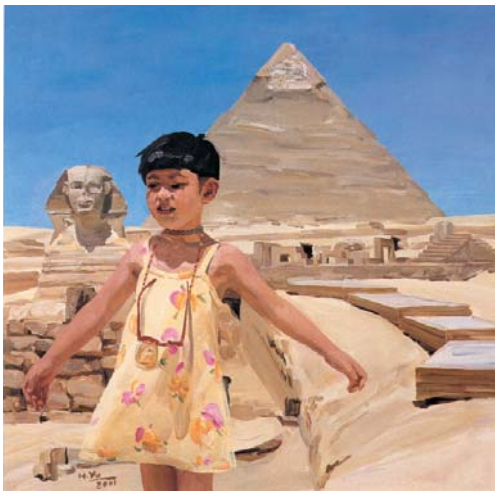


Figure 7. Yu Hong, *Liu Wa Four Years Old*, 1999-2002, oil on canvas.

The *PLA Pictorial* photograph that accompanies this painting muffles the positive tone.[13] It depicts the floods that ravaged China in the summer of 1998, which affected about two hundred and forty million people and killed several thousand. It is not the killings by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution but it is no less tragic. While the Egyptian stone structures are crumbling remnants of past glories, *The Great Wall Out of Iron*—as the photograph is entitled—of PLA soldiers is a human feat of the present. Today, the former is an object of pleasure and consumption while the latter was instrumental in the battle for countless lives and the defence of precious arable land. Yu Hong would have not had the chance to escape the reality of such a catastrophe. Today's increasing global integration of China, however, ensures that the flood's destruction of crops does not cause widespread famine. The internationalized environment Liu Wa grows up in enables her to explore the lands beyond the Great Wall.

Yu Hong Six Years Old is set in 1972, just after the failed *coup d'état* by Lin Biao, the once appointed successor to Chairman Mao (fig. 8). At this point, Yu Hong had just returned to Beijing from spending two years with her mother in Hao Jia Fu, the village to which Gao Zhenmei had been "sent down" (*xiaxiang*) for labour re-education. The bitterness of her mother's experience was well hidden from Yu Hong. She revelled in the propagandistic stories of heroes, valour, and strength. This mood is very much reflected in this painting that could quite well be mistaken for a Cultural Revolution propaganda piece of the model child. Yu Hong sits at a desk in her home at the Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics.[14] Against the backdrop of the widely

Figure 8. Yu Hong, *Yu Hong Six Years Old*, 1999-2002, oil on canvas.

distributed propaganda poster "Every young person should be a hero." Yu Hong looks up from her reading and pensively gazes into the distance. Clearly, the young girl is not solving an onerous mathematical problem. "I was always imagining how I could become a heroine. I was a dreamer and idealist," she remembers.[15]

The photograph from *China Pictorial*[16] paired with this painting documents the meeting between Mao and the then American president, Richard Nixon. While the daily ideological indoctrination children received incited them to destroy the evils of capitalism, the government did not shy away from receiving the leaders of Western countries. From an ideological standpoint, the meeting with President Nixon was counter-revolutionary and a moral corruption of the leadership. While Mao and Nixon cordially sip tea together, Yu Hong was planning her own revolutionary acts in the common drive to root out the enemy. Adding a touch of irony, Mao's facial expression and that of little Yu Hong are almost identical. Are they thinking of the same thing? Although Yu Hong was oblivious to the implications of Nixon's visit to China, its historic consequences would invariably shape her life.

Liu Wa Six Years Old stands in stark contrast to *Yu Hong Six Years Old* (fig. 9). Set in the year 2000, the viewer does not encounter a girl dreaming of heroic acts in a socialist future but one that energetically engages with her increasingly capitalist surroundings. "Liu Wa does not know anything of revolution and its ideals, she only knows carefree happiness."[17] The young girl's figure

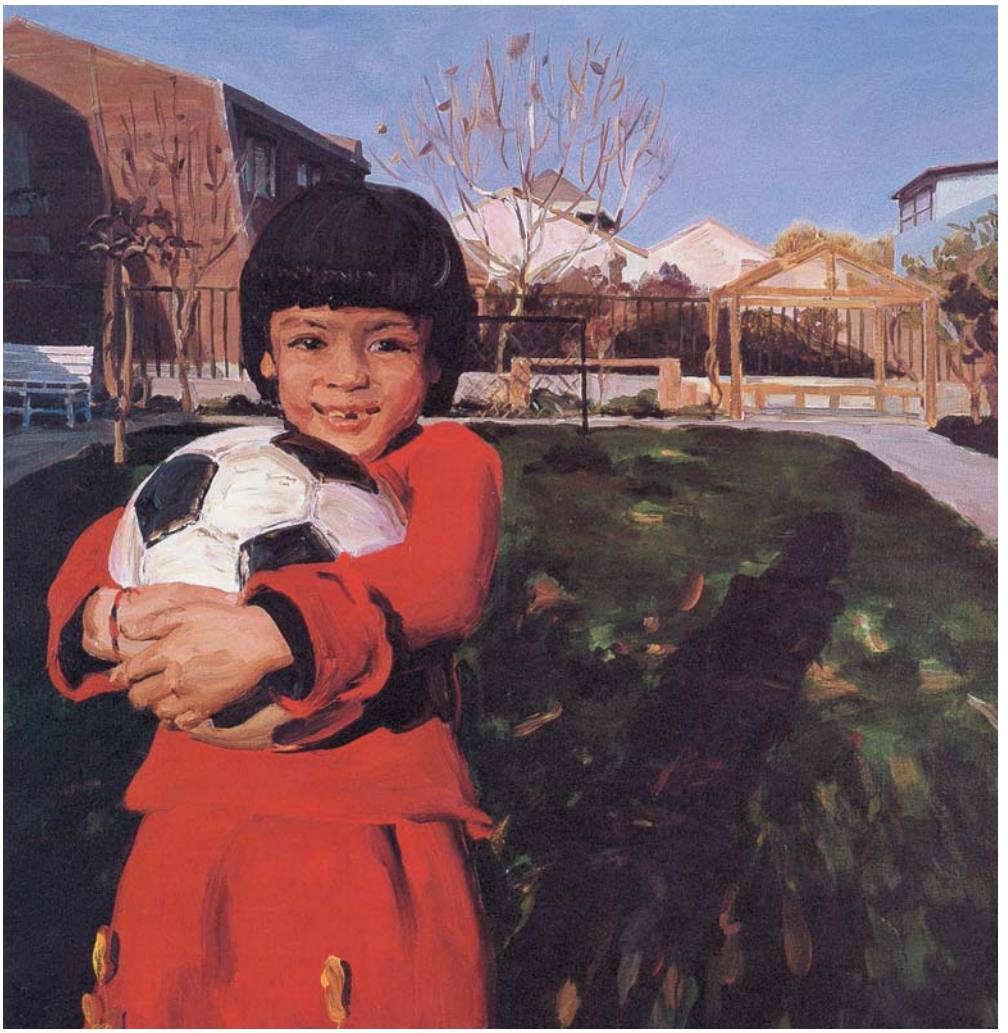


Figure 9. Yu Hong, *Liu Wa Six Years Old*, 1999-2002, oil on canvas.

dominates the composition. Standing on a lawn, she fervently holds onto a large football, as if saying "Come and get it if you can." Liu Wa does not evade the viewer as does the six-year old Yu Hong. On the contrary, she fixes her gaze on the camera lens. The long shadow cast on the grass belongs to the photographer but from the vantage point of the viewer, it could be his or hers too. A direct interaction is created.

The photograph from the *Shanghai Pictorial*[18] Yu Hong paired with this work depicts people similarly engaged in leisure activities (fig. 10). They are exercising in one of the many little street parks that are scattered around China's cities. Keeping fit has become a priority for urban Chinese. To be able to afford the time or to even dare to engage in such an unmistakably bourgeois endeavour is a modern luxury, one that many hold very dear. The old woman doing the splits echoes the same cheerful grin and carefree happiness as Liu Wa in the painting. Especially when it comes to leisure time, it is quite obvious how history and social circumstances influence the life of an individual. No doubt, it would have been one thing Yu Hong would have prohibited in her revolutionary plans almost thirty years earlier.

At a basic level, *Witness to Growth* documents the process of two people growing up. The depictions of Yu Hong involve a self-reflective process while Liu Wa's are of a documentary nature. In both cases, Yu Hong remains the centrifugal vantage point from which people and events are seen and depicted. By focusing on a female rather than on a male family lineage, Yu Hong challenges a

Figure 10. Page 32 of *Shanghai Pictorial*, no. 1 (2000). "A nearby area for keeping fit."

tradition of patriarchy. In this series, the narrator (Yu Hong), the protagonists (Yu Hong and Liu Wa), and the supporting actors (Yu Hong's mother, her sister, and her grandmother) are all women. As such, Yu Hong presents the viewer with a distinctively female view of the world. A point that stands out even more when considering that the series' stage setting was designed by mainly male orchestrators: Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Jiang Zemin.

In historical constructions, women's lives were generally touched only indirectly in contrast to their fathers, husbands, or brothers. Yu Hong shows a woman's life being immediately influenced by the external world. Her women do more than just hold up half the sky; they stand firmly, without male support. As an artist, Yu Hong also stands on her own merit—without the support of her husband, the well-known contemporary Chinese artist Liu Xiaodong. Although both work in the Socialist Realist painting style, their outlooks on life and their art are vastly different and independent of one another.

Each one of the works in *Witness to Growth* is nuanced, touching on particular issues within a larger framework. Yu Hong consciously refrains from pronouncing blatant social criticisms—something her contemporary Chinese colleagues often fall over each other to do—but focuses on her own experience and vantage point. Through this personal prism, she looks at society and deals with issues where and when they affect her. *Witness to Growth* takes Yu Hong's audience on a journey of self-reflection. Presenting the viewer with her personal experiences and worldview in such a direct and intimate way, pondering ones own situation becomes almost inevitable. Despite focusing on herself, Yu Hong reaches out. Her paintings are not islands unto themselves. "Painting is my prime mode of communication. Through them I reveal my thoughts and my emotions."[19]

Notes

[1] Britta Erickson, "Portrait of Everyday Existence," *A Woman's Life: The Art of Yu Hong* (London: Field Print and Graphics, 2003): 2.

[2] Interview with Yu Hong, 13 June 2003.

[3] In 2002, Yu Hong also completed a namesake series incorporating fifteen of the same images in pastel on paper.

[4] Interview with Yu Hong, 13 June 2003.

[5] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 4.

[6] Interview with Yu Hong, 13 June 2003.

[7] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 12.

[8] Shortly after its completion, Jiang Qing decided that this image was a good model for Cultural Revolution art. *The Peoples' Daily* immediately distributed a colour reproduction nationwide. By 1968, it was institutionalized as one of the model paintings and copied all over the country. See Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China 1949 – 1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 338-40.

[9] Interview with Yu Hong, 17 June 2003.

[10] *China Pictorial*, no. 9 (1968): 13.

[11] *China Pictorial*, no. 6 (1996): 2.

[12] *China Pictorial*, no. 7 (1970): back cover.

[13] *PLA Pictorial*, no. 9 (1998): 3.

[14] Her father was a professor at the Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

[15] Interview with Yu Hong, 15 June 2003.

[16] *China Pictorial*, no. 4 (1972): supplementary issue.

[17] Interview with Yu Hong, June, 2003.

[18] *Shanghai Pictorial*, no. 1 (2000) 32.

[19] Interview with Yu Hong, 17 June 2003.

EMERGING FROM BEHIND THE SCREEN OF FEMALE ART

GU ZHENQING AND YANG LI

I

Among the present dynamic community of Chinese female artists, there are still very few who recognize themselves to be creating female or feminist art. By and large, they lack a clear theoretical attitude and independent standpoint. The group is split between those who have a self-aware female consciousness and those who do not. Nevertheless, this kind of female consciousness is still sufficient for female artists to emerge from behind the screen of contemporary gender art. Trapped behind this screen for many years, female art has been dominated by a consciousness controlled by male culture.

During the period when artists were united in the style of Revolutionary Realism and the women's liberation movement, newly released from old values, created the concept of the "New Female" artist, there was not a single female artist who did not use male standards to identify herself. Taking on the male role of "holding up half the sky," women's work was kept behind a screen of collective social responsibility. In the years that followed the Cultural Revolution, traditional female ideals returned. Female artists once again felt the perspectival, formal, and conceptual constraints of the dull style of antiquated "Bedroom Paintings." Female artists hurried away from a "non-gendered" art back to their original position. Far from a centralized artistic system and the artistic model of utilitarianism, they returned to the traditional female role buried underneath the surface of male society. As a group, their art followed similar paths: they neatly returned to a conventional art defined by traditional "feminine" beauty.

Figures 1 and 2. Lin Tianmiao and Wang Gongxin, *Here or There?*, 2002, mixed media and video.

The goal of their artistic search became the visual element of an unoriginal kind of formal "beauty." It was the embodiment of the kind of female beauty that male society joyfully accepted. Over time, this style began looking more and more like an art about fashion and only aggravated the problem of the barrier separating the genders within the artistic field. Most works by female artists of this time exhibited a uniform characteristic: they relied solely on a style of "weakness" from which the artist's gender could easily be deduced. Such self-consciousness exploited the surface appearance of women. It did not constitute an understanding of the female self born out of new social change or new historical conditions. Instead, it passively continued an inherited traditional value system of "male-female difference."

Since the mid-1990s, the freedom and willpower necessary for Chinese female artists to express their feelings and experiences have finally sprouted. This new generation of female artists has a greater spirit of independence and stronger female consciousness than the previous generation. Their concerns and feelings about their life struggles have molded an artistic language with a personality all its own. In terms of thought and theory, these artists grapple with female identity and female consciousness by stressing spontaneity and taking action in a way that is different from "all-talk" European and American feminists.

Due to socio-economic conditions and traditional ethics, Chinese female artists generally maintain an ideal of harmony between the sexes, not an adversarial relationship between men and women. While they pursue and endorse independence, values of female independence and personal freedom must first be built on a foundation of gender harmony. Unlike their European and American

Figures 3 and 4. Chen Lingyang, *Twelve Flower Months*, 2001, c-print.

counterparts, their independent feminist spirit did not emerge from an environment with an already high-degree of equality between the sexes. In reality, there are very few Chinese female artists who would call themselves feminists. Nevertheless, the unending importation of international feminist thought has been a great source of energy in the development of Chinese female art.

In the past few years, female art has occupied more and more of the centre stage. It is no longer a "sheet of loose sand" under the control of male values. Rather, it has become an organic whole aware of its gendered identity and has garnered the growing attention of the public. With the maturation of several notable female artists—in terms of feeling, expression, and execution—female artists as a group are realizing an increasingly distinctive female point of view. Of special importance is the way the power of their independent personalities has dominated their artistic language—even as this language has emerged from the male discourse of governmental and non-governmental bodies. They have opened up a unique field of vision and a deep psychological space that possesses female values. Collectively, the style of their works is directed at producing an influence on contemporary Chinese culture and cannot be ignored.

II

In 1994, Chen Yanyin and Shi Hui created a series of installation pieces under the label of sculpture that broke ground for the contemporary Chinese female aesthetic. Their works exhibited a blossoming female consciousness and their point of view was worlds apart from the grand narrative style frequently used by male artists of the time. The artistic language of their works superceded that of their female contemporaries, who were preoccupied with painting bland self-portraits, using floral patterns to represent self-examination and artless symbolism to represent self-satisfaction. Instead, Chen Yanyin and Shi Hui placed more importance on creative exploration and brought out the special artistic properties of the materials used. Chen Yanyin's *Box Series* (1994) was abstract and sparse in form. Wooden spikes lined the inside and outside of wooden cabinets in a dense pattern that was both aggressive and shocking. Armed to the teeth, the cabinets lost their original function. By logical extension, one can take this to represent the artist's reflections on female discontentment and pain.

Shi Hui's *Knots Series* (1994-95) consisted of strips of traditional calligraphy paper and cotton-thread inside a wooden frame. The paper and thread were woven into natural shapes—such as bird nests and spider webs—but in such a way as to create a supernatural effect. The irregular hole at the centre of this woven shape stands as metaphor for female reproductive organs and the traditional Chinese world-view concept of *yin*. During the exhibition, Shi Hui paid careful attention to the effects of lighting and space, hanging transparent material throughout the area and then inundating the room with rays of light. The contrast of the lighting's delicate ink-wash effects and the work's sexual narrative produced a gentle atmosphere.

The formation of the context of Chinese female artists as a whole cannot be separated from the experiences of a group of artists who have studied, lived, and exhibited abroad. These include Shen Yuan, Qin Yufen, Cai Jin, Lin Tianmiao of the "Returning From Overseas" School, and Chen Qingqing (all of whom lived for long periods in Europe or America). Those who studied or lived only briefly in Europe or America include Yin Xiuzhen, Zhang Lei, and Xing Danwen. While overseas, these artists intimately experienced an already entrenched feminist social organization and saw with their own eyes the robust development of feminist art. What they saw and heard helped them form a stronger sense of female self-awareness. This consciousness stressed a self-confident and self-motivated female identity. These artists have diligently strived to express themselves and have explored the possibilities of building an independent female discourse.

Household living is an important part of the female experience. Therefore, through intuition and survival instinct, these artists have found their point of entry into art in the experience of their daily lives. From such familiar territory, they have selected their materials and imbued them with the exquisite delicacy and complex sensitivity of the female experience. Thus, when making their works, these artists have more often than not selected familiar objects primarily from everyday life. Shen Yuan's *In Threes and Fours* (1997) and *Hair Salon* (2000) made use of hemp rope. Qin Yufen's *Silent Wind* (1997) and Chan Juan's *Mondfrauen* (1998) both utilized silk fabric. In her *Banana Plants* (1997), Cai Jin decorated a mattress and an embroidered silk bedspread with banana-leaf patterns. Tian Linmiao used white cotton thread in both *The Proliferation of Thread-Winding* (1995) and *Braiding* (1999). Chen Qingqing, in her *Partner Search Series* (1998-2000), produced hemp clothing. Yin Xiuzhen's *Suitcase* (2000) used the clothes she wore from childhood until adulthood. Zhang Lei's *Soft Archive* (1997) used cotton padding. Because of their intimate relationship to the female body, these materials have a significant connection to the status of women in society.

Female artists have always been able to twist, wrap, and join materials to form both expected and unexpected artistic forms and, in the process, turn these linked, interdependent, entangled shapes into a metaphor for life and gender. For some artists, however, what began as a way to express their discontentment has turned into an exuberant interest. Traditional needlework comes in many varieties—all somewhat monotonous, tedious, and tried many times by these artists. Over time, these artists have developed a dependence on traditional female handicrafts. Thus, a weak and pliable material quality and the use of symbolic connotations regarding form have become the easily recognized calling card and well-travelled path for female artists.

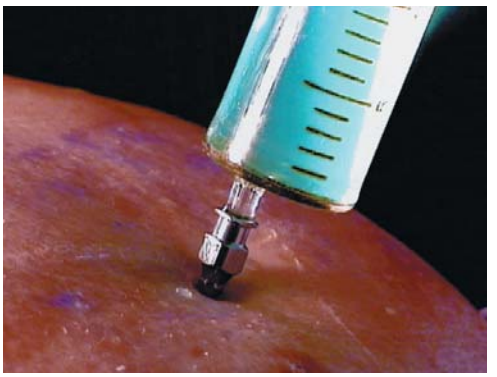
Even those new female artists who have arrived on the scene presenting installations carefully sprinkled with image, sound, video, and other new media, seem unable to break free of this formulaic pattern. Such work does not exhibit that definable "female flavor" of traditional needlework. Rather, it shows that these artists are in danger of losing their way once again by following the path of a gender identity that is both narcissistic and stubborn. Because many female artists have become accustomed to the belief that what they identify with has value, they continue to believe that artistic creation revolves around a set of constant rules. Their work and thought have all too easily been restricted to a number of different paths: 1) female identity, including the recognition of gender identity, and the questioning and investigation of the relationship between the two sexes; 2) self-examination and self-display; 3) sex, including sexual behavior, sexual consciousness, sexual fantasy, and sexual metaphor; 4) female sexual organs, female bodily resources, the onset and continued experience of womanhood; 5) traditional needlework and everyday household life; 6) generalizations about reproduction and intergenerational relations, a subject which includes obsessions with childhood dolls; 7) getting back to nature and environmental protection; 8) makeup and; 9) "playing the Chinese card," or the playing up of the artist's Chinese identity.

A closer look into the above categories reveals the inheritance of the Chinese traditional system of values and the importation of values from European and American feminism. In either case, the sources of inspiration have not changed yet. There is not one of these points of views, paths of thought, or intersections of these paths of thought that cannot yield thoughtful art. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that artists are trapped in complacency, only seeking to increase artistic output. Some of today's most outstanding female artists have broken out of this suffocating environment, and upon breaking out have found a vast new world of creative freedom.

The direction taken by European and American female artists is also extremely pluralistic. Because of economic conditions and the long entrenchment of feminist values, Europe, America, and even Japan and Korea, all possess great numbers of female artists. The majority of female artists work in the style of pleasing themselves. The focus of their attention is to use art to improve their character, their values, and their understanding of culture. But there are so many people pursuing art—all trying to show their own unique personality and striving to differentiate themselves from others. Their points of view seem to extend into every corner of human experience.

III

Those pursuing contemporary Chinese female art are few and far between. If these artists once again bind together and scrupulously follow certain restricted emotional and expressive methods then, as a group, they will certainly be caught in the trap of their own whispered chatter. How can female artists broaden the breadth of their work? How can they build a new discourse for female



Figures 5 and 6. Cao Fei, *Chains*, 2000, video still.

art? These major questions make those female artists who do not play any expected cards all the more important. They are essentially experimental artists, maintaining a free spirit of artistic creation, continually refurbishing the appearance their works, and thus making sure that no one will lightly label their works as "brand name art." They excel at holding up one small part to illuminate the whole. They have strengthened the plasticity and flexibility of their art, ensuring that their future horizons are broad.

Shen Yuan, in her installation *Wasting One's Spittle* (1994), used ice and alcohol to create nine coloured tongues. Extending from standing pillars and walls, the nine tongues melted drop by drop, drooling down into nine spittoons. In the end, all that remained on the wall was the cold glimmer of nine daggers. This installation was both spatial and temporal: only when the "tongues" were finished melting could the daggers be seen. The installation also stimulated all five senses: smell, sound, and colour all in the process of change. Melting from the soft and benign tongue into the edge of a dagger, the installation possessed a steel blade's spirit of attack, and expressed a whole host of the artist's buried worries about problems of existence—from nourishment, to language, to sex. This dramatic change from outward weakness to a steel core gave the audience a visual shock.

Another of Shen Yuan's installations, *A Morning in the World* (1999), consisted of miniature versions of the world's monuments now found in some Chinese public gardens. Working from her memories of Fujian-style architecture, she built a standard ratio model of four-walled closed-rooftop courtyards, complete with green roof tiles, hot red peppers, and the sounds of livestock. With remarkable accuracy, the artist brought back to life a scene of folk life. Obviously, even for an artist, this type of everyday life has already been lost, separated from the present by a feeling of "look but cannot touch." Even if the past is saved as a relic, its flavor only turns sour as it becomes exotic scenery for foreign enjoyment.

Li Tianmiao and Wang Gongxin's latest collaborative video installation *Here or There?* (2002) is an example of female artist's tough but cool attitude (figs. 1 and 2). Borrowing from the patterns of today's "cool" fashions, they sewed together fur pelts and human-made skins to create a unique style of clothing. The clothes were arranged within a bare and desolate space. On the back wall, the black-and-white video images of ghostly figures dressed in these same clothes flickered and swayed. The desolate scene resembled the ruins and goblins seen in Japanese horror films. This installation had the power to dispel people's feelings of safety in public spaces and to shock a desensitized audience into rethinking their system of beliefs.

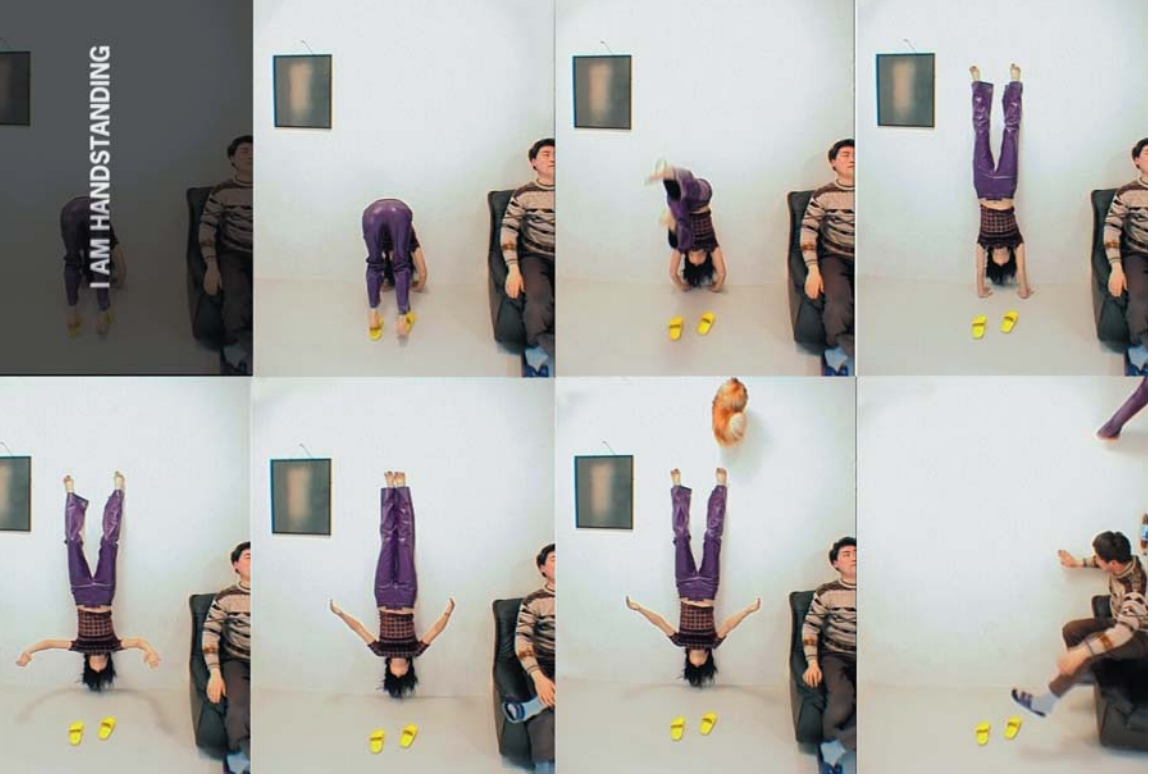


Figure 7. Peng Yu, *Headstand*, 2002, video still.

IV

The latest group of young Chinese female artists grew up during a time of relative economic prosperity and in an environment with fewer restrictions of traditional thought. There is a marked difference between them and those of the previous generation. Mainly, they acknowledge their female identity but do not go out of their way to emphasize or avoid it. They have stepped from behind the screen that has obscured women in the past to discover a more self-aware and independent female consciousness. Their thinking is lively and bold. They freely select from the new mediums and materials offered by the digital age in order to sharpen their skills at self-expression. In terms of artistic philosophy, they uphold an individual standpoint before a female one.

In *Twelve Flower Month* (2001), a video project that garnered her international attention, Chen Lingyang made what can be considered inside China a very bold work (figs. 3 and 4). The title *Twelve Flower Month* alludes to monthly menstruation. Chen Lingyang's video combined images of menstruation and a woman's sexual organs with the elegant aesthetic appropriated from Chinese classical painting and traditional props of female life, such as window lattices and dressing table mirrors. The combination resulted in a naked and unobstructed contrast to the grand narrative-style of "classic" feminism. In *Twelve Flower Month*, one sees a sexual politics that identifies itself with American feminism. Here, the artist brings the subject of menstruation onto the public stage in order to make visible women's biological experiences. With an overload of sensory stimulation, parts of the video represented the body in a way that made it difficult for the audience to watch. It censured the long history of masculine voyeurism and broke the system of patriarchally determined taboos restricting female behavior.

In her recorded performance piece *Kan Xuan, Eh!* (1999), Kan Xuan represented the reality of self-consciousness within present social circumstances. Amid the crowds of a subway station, she ran madly about, shouting her name over and over, and then responding to herself. Self-discovery and self-recognition are no longer under the strict jurisdiction of the individual, but rather realized through public spaces. It is only through the reaction of other people to her echoing cries and answers that allowed Kan Xuan's process of self-discovery to achieve any sort of effect.

Cao Fei's video piece *Chains* (2000) staged an operation under a mass of theater lights in order to create a child's fairytale (figs. 5 and 6). Dancers dressed as doctors and nurses performed with evil facial expressions and strange body gestures. Hidden behind the operating room's white curtain, the actions of the doctors and nurses were exaggerated by the artist so that the performance turned into a scene of everyday violence. Cao Fei used a linear narrative structure but disrupted the structure by quickening the pace, thus producing a hallucinatory effect. Through this scene of make-believe, the artist created an atmosphere of horror.

In Peng Yu's video piece *Headstand* (2002), the artist lay on the ground imitating the headstand position of "one finger meditation" and "two finger meditation" of Buddhist spiritual martial arts (fig. 7). Because the video was so meticulously set up according to religious references, it induced the audience to believe it was somehow "authentic." Using only low-tech visual effects, the artist was thus able to mock our hi-tech, digitally illusory, media-saturated society.

The works discussed in this essay touch on a wide variety of cultural problems related to gender and representation. Their means of expression and possibilities for individual interpretation are diverse. Although each and every one of the young female artists discussed is distinct, they have each faced the rising tide of globalization by maintaining a progressive attitude. Standing on a stage, performing before different cultures, they are able to blend into the international context. Perhaps it will be them who, in this age of searching for direction amid pluralism, expand the discourses around female art.

A PANEL DISCUSSION

LOOKING FORWARD FROM VENICE: THE PROSPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART

TRANSCRIBED BY AMY CHENG/TRANSLATED BY MICHAEL FEI

TIME: JUNE 14, 2003 LOCATION: VENICE, ITALY SPONSOR: ART AND COLLECTION GROUP, LTD.

TOP ROW: LU JIE, WANG SHUN-KIT, ZHENG SHENGTIAN • SECOND ROW: CHANG TSONG-ZUNG, FEI DAWEI, UNG VAI MENG • THIRD ROW: MANRAY HSU, HUANG TSAI-LANG, LIN SHU-MIN • FOURTH ROW: SHIN-YI YANG, CHRIS MAO, LAU KIN-WAH • FIFTH ROW: TSANG TAK PING, LEUNG CHIN-FUNG, HOU HANRU

Moderator: Zheng Shengtian, Managing Editor, *Yishu*

Panelists: Fei Dawei (Art Director, Guy and Myriam Ullens Foundation), Lin Shu-min (Curator, Taiwan Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale), Huang Tsai-lang (Director, Taipei Fine Arts Museum), Fang-wei Chang (Curator, Taipei Fine Arts Museum), Manray Hsu (Independent Curator), Lu Jie (President, Long March Foundation), Chang Tsong-Zung (Owner, Hanart TZ Gallery and Independent Curator), Lau Kin-wah (Artist and Art Critic, *PS: Visual Arts and Culture Magazine*), Tsang Tak Ping (Artist, Para/Site of Hong Kong), Leung Chin-fung (*PS: Visual Arts and Culture Magazine*), Ung Vai Meng (Director, Macau Museum of Art), Wang Shun-kit (Chairman, Visual Arts Committee, Hong Kong Arts Development Council), Shin-Yi Yang (Ph.D. Candidate, Cornell University), Claire Hsu (Asia Art Archive), Hou Hanru (Independent Curator, *Z.O.U.* at the 50th Venice Biennale), and Chris W. Mao (Chambers Fine Art).

Zheng Shengtian: The theme of today's discussion is "Looking Forward from Venice: The Prospects of Contemporary Chinese Art." This panel discussion is sponsored by Taiwan's Art and Collection Group. First of all, I would like to welcome everybody on behalf of Katy Hsiu-Chih Chien, President of Art and Collection. It is my pleasure to meet with friends from all over the world here in Venice. I would also like to greet everybody on behalf of Professor Ken Lum, Editor of *Yishu*, and Hsieh Hui-Ching, Editor-in-Chief of *Art Today*. It is our hope that we can take this opportunity, as we convene here in Venice, to discuss certain issues relating to the development of contemporary Chinese art, as well as to share experiences among ourselves. In the past ten years, we have witnessed significant progress within contemporary art in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. From an international perspective, Chinese artists have emerged from their largely unknown status and occasional guerrilla-style appearances in exhibitions, to become a key component of today's contemporary art. Virtually no international curators are unacquainted with the names of at least a few Chinese artists. Back in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China, contemporary art has also evolved from outside into the existing establishment. Contemporary art has experienced rapid development in Taiwan since martial law was lifted. It has also shown some progress in Hong Kong under government support. In Mainland China, we have seen in the past few years that contemporary art has begun to be recognized and even promoted by mainstream institutions. In such a scenario, what effect does this have in terms of sustaining a criticality in contemporary art in those areas? We can address this theme based on our common experiences and the different problems we have encountered.

Chang Tsong-Zung: As a major development in Chinese art history, contemporary art has stepped out onto the international stage since the 1980s. By participating in an international exchange, remarkable changes have occurred in relation to the way in which art is created. As of today, bringing Chinese art to the rest of the world is no longer an issue. The key to the next step is to tackle such internal issues as theory development. Currently, many important issues have been initiated in the West, and we are simply responding to them. Our push, at this point, should focus on how to facilitate further advancement of theoretical and academic studies. The job is not only to digest and understand Western theories from a Chinese perspective. Rather, it is to form new points of view. How do we measure the indicator of international success for contemporary Chinese art? Our ultimate expectation is that it should lead and influence artistic creation in other parts of the world in theories and ideas. This is also the foremost goal of contemporary Chinese art internationally.

Zheng Shengtian: Mr. Chang has raised some more serious issues which we have faced in the current environment. Seeking opportunities to exhibit internationally is not the only goal of Chinese contemporary art. What it needs more is the development of ideas and theories. In the endeavors of the Para/Site Art Space in Hong Kong and the Long March Foundation in New York, have you encountered this problem? What did your experiences tell you?

Tsang Tak Ping: I totally agree with what Mr. Chang has said. We have been actively striving to establish our own theory and to put our own contemporary art in context. There are two institutions in Hong Kong—one of which is Para/Site—that are responsible for promoting art and art criticism. The other is an international institution of art criticism. Both of us are searching for more appropriate and effective ways to advance the development of art in Hong Kong.

Zheng Shengtian: Do we have any practical means and suggestions? Take *Yishu*, for example. It has been a year and a half since its launch. We have discovered that it is still quite challenging to find authors who have done in-depth theoretical research. While there are many artists and curators now working in China, contemporary philosophical art criticism remains undeveloped. What needs to be done to rectify this problem?

Ung Vai Meng: I am from the Macau Museum of Art. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to join in such a discussion here. I can offer an example of the way artists become a part of the establishment. In Macau, there is a group of artists similar to Para/Site. With the financial assistance of certain institutions a few years ago, the group started to host events in old and unused spaces belonging to charity organizations. By taking over these spaces, the artists have organized a number of events with limited resources. This is a good example of art and culture programs run by artists themselves through utilization of cultural heritage and government resources. I work for the museum in a managerial position. As an institution, we also have very limited resources. We are required to go through approval and bidding procedures when we need to organize events or publish books. Private organizations, however, do not have to go through these complicated procedures. It is easier for them to initiate projects and get them done. So, when the government commits limited resources, private organizations can do an excellent job in developing and utilizing these resources. But there was a problem last year. Because occupation of some of the old buildings was unsafe, the government decided to renovate the buildings and asked the artists to vacate these spaces for the time being. Communications between the government and artists did not go smoothly. The artists felt that they were being driven out of the establishment. After further coordination, the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau made an arrangement for artists to move into the cattle depot, where artists have continued to run their programs successfully. Through this incident, the government and artists have learned how to communicate and operate. It is a positive resolution of the issue.

Wang Shun-kit: I am going to say something about the situation in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government has supported the contemporary art biennale, which is sponsored by a public museum. The biennale has been running for over twenty years, but the museum's perception of contemporary art remains at a different level. Traditional Chinese ink paintings are still exhibited with contemporary pieces. We raised the question to the museum as to why traditional paintings were listed as contemporary art. The former director of the museum believed that any work created by contemporary artists should be considered contemporary art. Subsequently, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council was established in 1996. The council is a semi-governmental institution, which tends to endorse contemporary art by allocating funds for the art community to

apply towards art programs. The council itself can organize events as well. It has been a process for the Arts Development Council to support contemporary art. Every two years, we elect council members. If elected members are tradition-oriented, they will prefer to sponsor programs in such traditional categories as ink painting. If elected members lean more towards modern art, then contemporary art programs will flourish. The situation is shifting.

The Arts Development Council has supported the participation of Hong Kong artists in this year's Venice Biennale. Our original plan was to cooperate with the public museum, as we did in 2001. The museum, however, did not join in at all this time. We, as a semi-governmental agency, had to undertake activities involving preparation for the biennale. It was very difficult and burdensome for us to be involved in the process, as we ran short of managerial and administrative staff. Lots of tasks fell to Para/Site, whose workload was quite heavy. Artist groups had to take care of many things by themselves. Besides, supporting Hong Kong's participation in the Venice Biennale is by no means a long-term commitment. Rather, an application must be submitted each time for approval. It is in fact quite time-consuming to process the application each time. Moreover, the funds available will be determined by the situation at the time of approval. We are now considering how to turn this participation in the Venice Biennale into a long-term program by formalizing the process. Another project in the planning stage is the preparation of an art event to be held in Hong Kong, similar to a biennale or triennale. We are now negotiating with the government for additional resources. This is another link that we want to have formalized. Similarly, as mentioned in a report on culture and art development by the Hong Kong Culture and Heritage Commission, cultural development efforts should justify the addition of a culture department to Hong Kong's overseas economic and trade offices. This could help tighten communication between local artists in Hong Kong and their international counterparts. Contemporary art should and needs to play a heavy role here.

There are a few examples of private efforts. Para/Site is one of them. As Mr. Ung just pointed out, however, what artists need, first and foremost, is available space. The government at one point decided to lease out many unused spaces at a rent as low as HK$2 per square foot. A number of artists and art groups occupied those spaces as soon as the news went out. This decision unintentionally helped create something along the lines of an artist village, which was not what the government had anticipated. As a result, many avant-garde events performed there were interrupted. By the end of 1999, the government demanded the spaces back in order to build a pier for cruise lines. Artists then realized it was a matter of space and existence. They joined to petition for continuation of their tenancy and to negotiate with the government. Since its ultimate goal was to move artists out of the property, the government agreed to spend money renovating the cattle depot to relocate artists. But the Government Property Agency, which manages the cattle depot, did not want to let artists move in. They have set up rules and regulations to restrict art activities, such as banning posters and enforcing complex application procedures for organizing events on the property. These measures have not yet been completely changed. Artist tenants in the cattle depot are now teaming up, hoping to renegotiate with the government. Ideally, they want the government to transfer the responsibility for managing the property to a culture department so that many rules can be modified.

Ung Vai Meng: The situation in Macau is comparatively better. Artists there were also thrown into the cattle depot, but the government is more willing to communicate, and never meddles with the contents of art programs.

Zheng Shengtian: Speaking of contents, last time Mr. Wang took me to the cattle depot, an artist with the Art Commune made a performance project entitled *Writing Letters to Tung Chee Hwa* and incorporated Tung's response as a part of his artwork. In dealing with such a situation when the government attempts to support contemporary art, what kinds of experiences can you share with us?

Wang Shun-kit: We hire professionals to handle the process of grant evaluation, which should not be influenced by politics. If it is run by the government, you can always expect some problems.

Zheng Shengtian: Can you talk about what is happening in Taiwan, Mr. Lin?

Lin Shu-min: I would like to say something about Chinese artists in the international context. Within Chinese circles, Taiwan was the first to take part in the Venice Biennale. This is its fifth time. We have accumulated almost ten years of experience and, therefore, have established a very good system that benefits curators a great deal. Among the four artists participating in this biennale, three of them, plus myself, live overseas. I believe this is a very positive sign, indicating our entire perspective is expanding. Many artists and curators living overseas have already built a career foundation. Their joint efforts will generate an even more significant impact. Another area is publicity. Personally, I pay more attention to the direction of new media. If we can send out information by putting up websites, the concept of the "art museum without walls" is more likely to become a reality. Works of art will be accessible at the same time in different locations. If academic ideas can also be delivered through this means, perhaps it will be more effective than regional seminars and lead to more successful communication.

Zheng Shengtian: You mentioned that, in the course of curating this biennale, the entire administrative support system was already there. Can you further illustrate how the government and private sectors in Taiwan, as a whole, have extended their support to contemporary art?

Lin Shu-min: Despite continuous setbacks in its efforts to develop political relations with the outside world, Taiwan has experienced no international constraints in the area of contemporary art. Since the first Venice Biennale, a growing number of artists have gained international attention. Quite a few Taiwanese artists can be found participating in prominent international exhibitions. There have always been institutions, both in the public and private sectors, that provide financial assistance for which artists can apply. I feel the system is quite complete in this regard. In addition, seminars and conferences are now being held inside Taiwan. Inviting international scholars to Taiwan to participate in these events also add strength to the development of art in Taiwan.

Zheng Shengtian: Have artists themselves thought of any aspects of the system that are incomplete or any ways to improve the system?

Lin Shu-min: My personal feeling is that there should be some follow-up to such an exhibition. We should do an overall study, even including such areas as public relations and follow-up evaluations. Artists will face the issues of how to continue growing and how to secure future support after representing Taiwan in an international exhibition. In terms of systems, it depends on whether the government can come up with a better artist development program. Museums in the United States have done an excellent job in this role.

Zheng Shengtian: Which institutions are more appropriate for taking on the follow-up work? In Western countries, it will probably be the task of the art museums. In the greater China area, however, it seems that, at this point, things are not yet so well defined.

Lin Shu-min: It requires, I believe, the establishment of a system. In Western countries, they have gradually formed their own set of operation methods through years of development. Let's take the New Zealand Pavilion as an example. What they did surprised me. Conceivably, they had a powerful public relations program, as I often received information from them. I met their PR people and learned that they had a fairly generous PR budget, almost forty percent of total expenses. Yet, our budget was so tight it barely covered the cost of producing the exhibition. Therefore, we were unable to achieve what they had. Such PR programs should be handled by professionals—perhaps by journalists or PR specialists—not necessarily by art administrators.

Lu Jie: I want to ask you a question concerning a different area, where Taiwan has a head start over Mainland China. Now, there is a very prevalent issue in China: the existence of tension between independent curators, artists, and the administrative establishment. We have an expression: "after we have spent time working and sweating outside the establishment or underground, in the end the establishment wants to collect the fruits of our labour." Another observation is that exhibitions are not just exhibitions. The establishment I refer to includes the art galleries. In a general sense, financial contributions from businesses are also part of the establishment. Initially, contemporary artists held opinions and positions in opposition to those of the establishment. When the two sides started to mingle, the tension began. Where did the early critical spirit go? As you said, if it makes available subsequent resources, the establishment will be much more powerful than independent curators. Any criticizing of independent curators will likely be lost. Is there similar tension in Taiwan?

Lin Shu-min: In a perfect cultural realm, mainstream and non-mainstream cultures must co-exist. When one non-mainstream culture is assimilated, another non-mainstream culture will inevitably emerge to maintain an ecological balance. This is inevitable. It all depends on where your beliefs are located. Non-mainstream cultures will definitely have their own territorial block in a highly mature culture. So, in my opinion, there is nothing to worry about. Each period has its controversial point, which is also a matter of choice. In taking a non-mainstream position, you have to face the consequent difficulties and problems. A non-mainstream voice is actually not insignificant. It does have a role to play through media coverage and observations. There has always been a power that seems weaker but challenges a stronger power. At a certain level, even the mainstream will voluntarily reach out to search for non-mainstream voices. It depends, I believe, on where you stand and how well you make use of the virtue of your position. If you look at it positively, the intense relations you mentioned could perhaps put you in the best strategic position.

Yang Shin-yi: I would like to respond to Lu Jie's question. We first discussed the issue of criticism, then the issue you just mentioned. Actually, these all boil down to the issue of a system. If a system is allowed a long period of time to develop, each link will be tightly connected with a professional division of labour. The government controls resources but they may not be able to find non-mainstream artists. These non-mainstreamers are not necessarily willing to cooperate with the government. When the system develops to a certain degree, each level is quite distinctive. Three years ago, when I started to write for New York magazines, I was a novice critic to them. The artists I first knew might not have been well-known but the list of curators and artists I know has grown

since my experience has reached a certain level. Since then, I have moved up to another level. With a very detailed division of labour, people at different levels are doing different things.

Lu Jie: I am quite interested in Taiwan's situation. When we talk in illusory terms, this is it. If we get down to specifics, there will be difficulties. For instance, if the establishment of Taiwan were in Venice to promote its image, there would have been issues involving political ideology. If Mainland China took part in the Venice Biennale, they would have similar considerations. So, will artists as exhibition participants be involved in the presence of relations between ideology and art? Certain issues raise questions as to how artists play a subversive role in the face of the establishment.

Lin Shu-min: There are many different types of artistic creations and artists. What Lu Jie sees is from the perspective of a particular type of artist. If they intend to subvert something, will these artists run into trouble if an event is run by the establishment? On the other hand, are artists required to speak for the establishment if they participate in establishment-funded exhibitions? I do not think this is the case. Take Taiwan's participating artists as an example. Every one of them works with a high degree of independence. They have already followed their own artistic direction and have not modified their creative ideas in compliance with the establishment's requirements in order to be exhibited at the Venice Biennale. As to whether the establishment will accept a work of art that is largely of a critical nature, the answer probably lies within the context of art history. I am not sure if such examples exist. In my own experience with this biennale, I did not bump into this kind of problem and came under no pressure from the establishment to make any adjustments.

Lu Jie: I am not saying that the entire purpose of an artist, when invited to exhibit in a national pavilion, is to subvert or deconstruct it. However, will the establishment accept the artist if he or she intends to do so?

Lin Shu-min: If so, I would expect the government to be tolerant enough to acknowledge that politics is politics and art is art by acknowledging the artistic quality of a work of art. This is a highly mature attitude as well as a means of education.

Zheng Shengtian: The way Lin Shu-min responded was quite interesting. Throughout the process, then, which link is likely to be blocked? What happens in Hong Kong when proposed art programs are not accepted by the government?

Wang Shun-kit: We have in place an evaluation system, which invites experts to conduct evaluations based on professional considerations. Their opinions should not reflect those of the government.

Tsang Tak Ping: There have been some problems with actual operation. Take Para/Site as an example. We strongly uphold the independence and integrity of art and art criticism, but sometimes things are not totally under our control. A paper written by Lau Kin-wah and others about the relationship between art and social development in Hong Kong was rejected for inclusion in the official publication because it was too sensitive. After some conflict, the issue was eventually resolved by the decision to publish a second edition. However, there were still many links beyond our control. For instance, the CD-Rom of the second and complete edition of the official publication did not reach us until after the opening date. These are the little tricks the government often plays, while we are just not able to control all these issues, big or small. The system is in

place, but the government still controls many things behind the scenes. Besides, some policies appear to be imperfect or even warped, such as prohibiting artists who had works exhibited in previous Venice Biennales to take part in this year's biennale. This is not an effort to strike a balance, but rather an effort to create an imbalance. The essence is to exercise another form of control in the name of "fairness and justice."

Lu Jie: The situation in Mainland China may not necessarily be the same. In China's system, when there are policies, there are countermeasures. For example, when I posted information regarding this biennale on TOM.com, no one responded to it publicly. It was not, in fact, because no one was interested. On the contrary, people were extremely interested, as I received many responses in private. Perhaps we should pay attention to the context of another level. In recent years, the establishment has started to support participation in large international exhibitions. Actually, it was artists and independent curators who had gradually stepped out of the underground or private realm, and began to press the establishment to take part in such events. The Long March project, for instance, was turned down by the Zunyi authorities; but we were accepted and welcomed by the local authorities elsewhere. So the treatment we received was inconsistent. It depends on the relationships developed by artists and curators with civilian societies and public spaces. It is also a gradual process in which the establishment becomes involved in contemporary art.

Another interesting phenomenon is the fairly significant role played by individuals in this process. At a given period of time, certain men and women can have varying influence in the establishment's offices. This is a subtle aspect of the transition between the establishment and the private system. Out of these relationships and processes, I have sensed the importance of theory development and how to come up with explanations, how to make presentations, and how to draw conclusions. The key here lies in educational systems. Contemporary art has been twisted and distorted—in both official and private systems—because, in general, there have been no scientifically-based rules and schemes. Also contributing to the weakness in theory are the curators, most of whom used to be art critics or art history researchers in China. When they move into the area of curating, how should they define their own interdisciplinary capacities? At the same time, no other theoretical frameworks are available to them to rectify the situation.

Fei Dawei: I think the issues raised by Lu Jie have been around for quite a long time. It won't be helpful even if we continue making the appeals, because the reality is like that. Many things do not go the way we think they should. Of course, we expect the emergence of theorists. But the reality is that none have emerged yet. It is also a generation-specific issue. In certain generations, there might be plenty of theorists, while other periods might have many less. For instance, a pool of "masters" emerged during the Renaissance, while other eras have produced relatively few. If that is the case, however much we cry out, it won't make a difference. This is a situation typical of certain historic periods, and China now appears to be in such a situation. We can prepare frameworks and conditions, but the essential content is not determined by the framework.

Another issue I often hear discussed is how to internationally promote contemporary art of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. In fact, I object to the idea of viewing a geographic area as an issue and trying to promote it. I recognize a fundamental difference in our positions. The more we want to push it to the world, and the harder we try, the further China's contemporary art will drift from the international arena of contemporary art. It will more likely end up as a regional concept. Art is art. It is very simple. What we are looking at is how profound a work of art can be. Nothing else matters as much as this. What I am doing is also related to Chinese contemporary art, but I do

not view it as an issue. This is a fundamental difference of position. I believe the most significant obstacle is the promotion of "China" or "Asia" as an issue.

Manray Hsu: On the issue of theory, I view it at different levels. At which level shall a theory be developed? Shall we develop a philosophical theory for the whole world's population, or just a provisional theory with limited cultural-geographical application? From the works created by Asians or Chinese, for instance, can we ferret out some common and universal features of the region? Each theory with a universal application has its scope and sphere. What makes us a bit frustrated is that, while Chinese contemporary art has come a long way, the applicability of its theory has so far been unable to grow stronger. This assumption, however, is problematic. It runs, from its starting point, counter to the direction of real world artistic creation. When they create, today's artists will not accentuate the region where they come from; nor will they decipher things in a regional way. This approach, to some extent, affects the way criticism and curation are performed. Traditional art history has largely fallen apart in contemporary art, as artists now see from a rather different angle. The traditional way of handling art history has also been broken down and is no longer employable. Therefore, we need a different system to respond to. This is what many curators are doing today by offering context at different levels. In traditional art history, there was a clear national context. At this point, a new perspective has not yet been formed in a new context. We are not even sure whether it will be called art history. Curators are developing this new and broader structure of fundamental theory, which could be an interim theory at a middle level. It has not reached the stage of a high-level theory, nor even that of a strong theoretical structure. The so-called global culture is slowly emerging. Yet, it still remains at an incipient and infirm stage. What is actually happening also reflects a state of confusion and division. Any theories developed under such circumstances would likely be interim and low-level.

Fei Dawei: In my mind, theory means practice. It does not necessarily take the form of a thesis filled with academic terminology. The core issue here is the development of ideas, which are included in practice.

Zheng Shengtian: From my experience as an editor, I haven't seen much in-depth art criticism, nor have I seen much analysis and discourse about the content created by artists. Instead, everybody seems to applaud artists who are popular at the present time. No alternative observations are available to provoke more and more meaningful discussions.

Manray Hsu: Actually, it sometimes boils down to the issue of power distribution. We often ask why we do not have our own language, and why we have to use other people's language. The mystery involved here is the issue of power distribution. We should not look at content, but rather at how power is distributed. In other words, where the money comes from, and where the power gathers. Today, the global resources are still concentrated in Europe and North America. As far as curating and art-making are concerned, the distribution is fairly even. Yet, institutional and financial resources are still geographically concentrated. In addressing the issue of theory, if we want to talk about "our own language," there are issues of distribution involving institutional and financial resources. The reform should not just be theory-oriented or content-oriented, it should involve the entire power system.

Yang Shin-yi: From a practical view, it is very critical to archive and create multimedia databases. Otherwise, it would be difficult for scholars interested in research to have an overall picture of the information they need. Researchers will face many obstacles, particularly when different languages are involved. I have some Western friends who are interested in Chinese contemporary art. Because of the language barrier, it has been extremely difficult for them even to conduct an interview. Where can they find any relevant information besides contacting artists themselves? Information available on the Internet or elsewhere is severely limited. These problems have hindered the development of theoretical research. It is, therefore, essential to set up systems.

Manray Hsu: Many institutions in Taiwan are building up their own art databases, such as the Council for Cultural Affairs, the Cultural Affairs Bureaus, the National Central Library, or private organizations like the Dimension Endowment of Art. But the problem is that the content of collected information has not been carefully sorted out and filtered. Admittedly, the more complete the information, the better. However, more complete does not mean easier to use. The availability of information per se does not indicate the vitality of the information. Instead, curators can do a better job in archiving, gleaning, and sharing information about those artists with whom they are familiar. Taiwan does not lack such a system, but it has done a poor job of using the system to make it better organized.

Huang Tsai-lang: With regard to curating management, let's take the Venice Biennale as an example. We have set up, from a practical point of view, a very good mechanism, through our involvement in the past few years. When we have selected curators, we have tried to avoid focusing resources on a particular group of people. Also, we have done well with evaluation. After a list of artists is proposed by the curator, the next step is to discuss why this or that artist gets to be represented in the biennale. Then, the proposed artists are examined by the professional media. Since the whole process remains open and transparent, it has never been questioned. Taiwan is a small place, where people bump into each other quite frequently. It is, therefore, rare to find criticism that is arbitrary and biting. Rather, there are many discussions from different perspectives about creators of art and the theories behind their works. This is an encouraging situation. As for information management, I think it is essential even though it could be problematic in citing information unless you have been personally involved in contemporary art. In addition to professional print media, there are newspaper sections and columns devoted to art and literature. We have also established an annual award for the purpose of honouring excellent works in art criticism. Taiwan's limited geographic area has benefited its art criticism, resulting in an environment which is not so confrontational and controversial. This environment has been quite helpful in developing theories and in exposing the public to contemporary art. We encourage new ideas, as the museum does not take a stand on issues. It would place a limitation on the study of contemporary art in Taiwan, if we went down the road of merely managing information. We have done all we possibly can to cooperate with talent from all walks of life, in spite of our sometimes limited financial resources.

Zheng Shengtian: Among the Chinese art communities, Taiwan was the first to have a pavilion at the Venice Biennale. As a museum playing a leading role, how do you provide for independence in exhibiting contents? Does the government make any demands? Please share the Taiwan experience with us.

Huang Tsai-lang: Each Venice Biennale has a theme. Naturally, every party involved will make demands as to how the Taiwan pavilion should be presented. At the time, the museum has a bridging role to play, allowing the avant-garde and independent concepts of curators and artists to be appreciated by all the sponsors and supporters, through the bridge of our museum. Since the museum is an integral institution, the government will not interfere with the naming and orientation of an exhibition; instead, it will respect the independence of the art profession.

Hou Hanru: I would like to address the issue of the critical nature and theory of contemporary art. This is rather a complicated issue. At first glimpse, contemporary art will soften its critical tone as it becomes part of the establishment. Actually, this is an invisible form of self-criticism. Another crucial question is: what does this critical nature imply? How to maintain our individual and independent ideas and stands, I believe, is by far the most important concern. It is more crucial than simply waging social or political protests. The critical nature of artists has confronted two kinds of pressure: one being the traditional pressure from the government which has slowly diminished, and the other being the intangible economic pressure of the market, the pressure imposed on individuals by the capitalist system. This pressure—perhaps a global one—also appears quite significant. What stands out more in China, however, is the combination of the previous autocratic system and the present corrosion of market forces and their value system. To a great extent, people have lost their space for independent thinking, let alone their independent voices. This is very serious, as many artists are locked into a situation where they have to mass-produce for both the establishment and the market.

This relates to another issue, as to why there are only a limited number of contemporary art critics in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. This is happening not only in the art world. An entire intellectual class of society has come close to disappearing. This is the result of years of brainwashing and the consequence of advocating vocational instead of intellectual education. Consequently, we now have this money-centred lifestyle. The last time I spoke with Professor Ken Lum, he asked me why there were few outstanding art critics in China. My response was that the biggest problem lay in the societal life of China, where it was almost impossible to face yourself alone and to sustain your solitude. The price you must pay to create an independent space for yourself is just too great. Most people will not—or do not even have the courage to—conceive that they should have their own thoughts. In Taiwan, some components of the traditional culture have been retained in a way. Also, there exists a middle class, which has its own continuity. An independent middle class has not yet emerged in Mainland China, let alone its continuity of existence. Moreover, many well-to-do people in China are not really part of the middle class. They are new mandarins and nouveaux riches. I am not so optimistic about the big picture. Sure, there are still people who are constantly trying to find their own independent spaces.

The artists I have chosen for this biennale are odd people. They are marginal artists, and do not belong to the group of mainstream artists who can sell and become famous. Working from this perspective requires lots and lots of time, I think. Of course, we cannot say that nobody in China is doing academic research. But what is the purpose of doing such research? Quite a few people have memorized many books and would like to restate them as a way to ornament themselves with their knowledge rather than to use them as a wellspring for their thoughts. That is the reason I still have not seen the apparent emergence of new critics. From a different perspective, however, there are some interesting people in the literary and film communities. What they are discussing may not be totally about art, but everyday social problems or topics such as their opinions on society. Frankly, I hope art critics will not be reduced to the simple role of selling artists. An art

critic does not have to talk about art. He or she can talk about the simple issues of life. Certainly, they need to understand lifestyles. Today, few people in China know how to appreciate lifestyles. No matter how profound their theories might be, it is not often that they can sit back sometimes, quietly and peacefully having a drink with friends, and chat about something non-utilitarian. Among the people I have often spoken with lately, the most interesting are those like Zhang Yonghe and Ou Ning. Their ideas appear to be more independent, profound, and discerning than those in the art community. They are not directly utilitarian-oriented, nor do they stay on the margin. They are active participants within society as Zhang has built a number of buildings and Ou has done many designs and media works. They are thinkers, whose existence is not a unique Chinese phenomenon, though they are quite noticeable in today's China. These artists are equipped with excellent skills. The training they have received has made them very much interested in artistic skills. Another type called the "Beat Generation" is also very interesting. Well, if the entire art community wants to move forward in a more stable manner, we cannot just rely on something emotional or something comical. We need something deeper and something exceptionally individual. To be honest, my understanding in this regard is still insufficient so far.

Zheng Shengtian: I want to thank all participants for taking the time to join this discussion. We have addressed issues of common concern from the different perspectives of curators, art museum directors, critics, and artists. Each of you have made very good points in relation to your own professional fields. The discussion will be published in both Chinese and English for readers interested in these topics and to further enhance intellectual interaction and exchange. Thank you all again. This concludes today's panel discussion.

THREE MEN AND A CAMERA: CHANG YUNG HO, WANG JIANWEI, AND YANG FUDONG

VIVIAN REHBERG

Hans Ulrich Obrist conducted these interviews during our preparations for the exhibition *Camera* that took place between 7 February and 20 April 2003 at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. *Camera* introduced the museum's public to an unprecedented collaboration between the architect Chang Yung Ho, artist Wang Jianwei, both of Beijing, and the Shanghai-based artist Yang Fudong. Initially published in the exhibition catalogue, the interviews offer a perspective on what at the time was work in progress. My description of the exhibition here is meant to provide the necessary context *après coup* for understanding the impetus behind these conversations.

In *Camera*, Chang Yung Ho's interest in the ways in which photography and cinema open up spaces for looking—in theatres, cinemas, and art exhibitions—dovetailed with Wang Jianwei's and Yang Fudong's own concern with the spatial and temporal economies of film and video. The metaphor of the camera was decided upon during Chang's first visit to Paris. It would structure our entire approach to the exhibition and the catalogue, with the rectangular hole through the middle of the venue acting as both viewfinder and frame—spaces for the production and reception of images.

While the artists set to work on shooting and editing their videos, Chang and his atelier FCJZ designed four structures, named after different brands of cameras—*Seagull*, *Nikon*, *Leica* and *Polaroid*. Through the use of the name brands, each structure referred to a specific geographical location (China, Japan, Germany and the United States) and historical moment. In turn, the materials the structures were built from—paper, wood and mirrors, sheet metal, and Plexiglas, respectively—introduced another layer of referential complexity, recalling the solid components used in the construction of both buildings and cameras. The metaphor of the camera also served another purpose, as Chang explains in his interview: the references at play in the architectural modules prevent us from making generalizations about contemporary Chinese identity and artistic production.

The architecture and art were conceived to function together with each and every element contributing to the overall viewing experience. The exhibition opened with Wang Jianwei's video *Square*, a montage of archival footage and present-day commemorations of Tian'anmen Square, which was projected from *Polaroid* onto a wall at the entrance to the exhibition. The space occupied by the work and the Plexiglas envelope reflected Wang's long-standing engagement with questions of public and private space. The transparent structure, built to resemble the bellows of the camera, served both as bleachers and a podium from which to watch the mutations of the highly regimented use of this symbolically loaded square. According to their placement in *Polaroid*, the visitors could choose to occupy the upright position of command or the more passive role of the seated spectator. Passersby regularly crossed in front of the projection, becoming more or less integrated into *Square*, and those seated or standing in *Polaroid* were constantly visible. The encounter with the image was concretely framed in such a way to highlight a tension between private and public spheres, and the experience of seeing and being seen.

This tension was also at work in the presentation of Wang Jianwei's *Theatre*, two videos tracing the political and ideological manipulation of the legend of the "White-Haired Girl" in Chinese film, theatre, and dance representations over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century. In order to access the videos, the spectator entered *Seagull* (named after the first Chinese camera brand), a horizontally floating, hollow, rice paper cinema, and stood before a double projection on a screen built into the module *Nikon*, which extended into the previous rooms and employed mirrors to capture the images and activity taking place there. The montage and interplay of the two videos in *Theatre*, and the incessant reappearance of the same characters—the White-Haired Girl, her father, the evil landowner, and peasants—under different guises provided a glimpse into the ways in which history, despite our obsessions with the ideas of historic erasure and new beginnings, often repeats itself with only minor transformations.

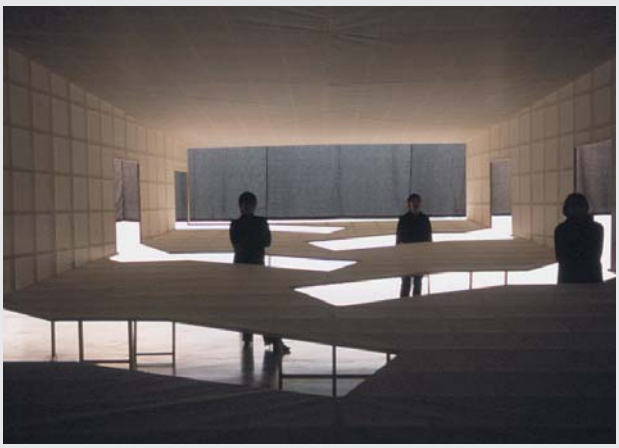
In contrast to the manifest foregrounding of display in *Polaroid/Square* and in *Nikon/Seagull/Theatre*, the opaque sheet metal of the joined triangular halves of the *Leica* provided a more intimate atmosphere in which to view Yang Fudong's *Honey* and *Liu Lan*. In *Liu Lan*, a misty black and white 35mm film transferred onto digital video, an elderly woman who lives on Lake Tai recalls the moment of the awakening of her desire and the male object of her longing for love. The accompanying song tells her story, which turns out to be a fantasy. On the opposite screen, Honey, with her military costume and fishnet stockings, is the ambiguous protagonist of a sensually colourful recasting of the Chinese espionage film genre. Yang's conscious employment of narrative and his allusions to the history of cinema in these films require the kind of attention available to a spectator under more conventional viewing conditions. While the centre of *Leica* was entirely open and acted as an overhead bridge under which visitors could pass or linger, the seats built into the structure projected them towards the screen of the sequence of films. Again, thanks to the mirrors in *Nikon*, portions of the rest of the exhibition space remained visible to the eye at any given moment. In the end, this collaboration between Chang Yung Ho, Wang Jianwei, and Yang Fudong brought to the foreground the imbrications of viewpoints, temporalities, spaces, cultures, and images that constantly mediate our accesss to contemporary art and architecture today.

HANS ULRICH OBRIST *CAMERA* INTERVIEWS

CHANG YUNG HO

Hans Ulrich Obrist: This exhibition bridges art and architecture because, along with you, we have two filmmakers/video artists, Wang Jianwei and Yang Fudong (*Camera*, ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2003). Wang Jianwei has a more conceptual approach to film, whereas Yang Fudong deals with it in a much more narrative manner. Through this dialogue between art and architecture, you develop a new method for showing video or film in the museum by introducing four small cinemas into the space. Could you tell me about this bridge between art and architecture in your work in general, and more specifically about the genesis of the idea for these four cinemas?

Chang Yung Ho: Before I studied architecture, I was more interested in art than I was in architecture. I thought about becoming a painter, but I was so bad that the dream was not realized. Naturally, after having studied architecture I have become much more interested in architecture than in art. But at this moment, I am very involved in art. Perhaps I am changing, but what is certain is that art is really changing. The boundaries of art are so blurred that even though I am not doing



Installation views of *Camera*, ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. From left to right: *Leica*, *Seagull*, *Nikon*, and *Polaroid*.
Photo credit: Marc Domage/Tutti.

anything that falls outside the realm of architecture, I am touching the boundaries of art. Of course, I have been doing interdisciplinary collaborations for years. It started with *Cities on the Move*, and a very fruitful collaboration with Huang Yongping at the Vienna Secession in 1997. These collaborations are beneficial to everyone. Breaking the boundaries, or as you proposed, bridging the gap, is just one thing people do to achieve something even better.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Let's talk about the idea for the exhibition at ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris.

Chang Yung Ho: I have known Wang Jianwei for more than ten years and have been watching his films all along. Yang Fudong is a new friend. It's really about three people doing one piece of work, not three people making a group exhibition. It is one exhibition, but it shows one piece of work created by three people. You may know or you may not know who did what. Our idea is to create a new, singular temporal and spatial experience for the visitors in the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris through film and architecture. We use the idea of the camera to counteract the

stereotypical kinds of exhibitions that show works from a particular geographical region. The names of the cameras—Leica, Seagull, Nikon and Polaroid—are metaphors, but they also refer to four different countries and the globe. It is not about "Chinese" cameras, it's about cameras. We are offering a challenge to people who want to read a pronounced Chinese identity through this exhibition.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: So the notion of the camera becomes a critical way of approaching the question of a national group show?

Chang Yung Ho: Yes, we are offering a challenge to people who want to read a pronounced Chinese identity through this exhibition. I don't think Chinese identity is so obvious. The three of us can be seen in a way, as contemporary Chinese, or at least our work deals with the contemporary state of China.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: China is going through an incredible period of transformation. Do these four cameras try to read the signs of the present?

Chang Yung Ho: The present state in China is confusing and even chaotic. But it is clear that China is going through a great cultural transition, we cannot use the word "revolution" because it refers to our past history. Looking through the cameras would first perhaps constitute searching for a contemporary China.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: On the one hand, you mentioned a more complex way of questioning the stereotypical exhibition. But on the other hand, as Richard Hamilton pointed out to me, all-important exhibitions since the 1850s have developed innovative display features, not just exhibition architecture. Your camera/cinemas break stereotypes, but also they shatter the homogenization of display. There are more and more video exhibitions, and often they are just a matter of a darkened white cube with a video projector on the floor projecting a big image on the wall. Rirkrit Tiravanija calls it a "video-room." This exhibition breaks with that by offering four completely different experiences for relating to cinema and film in the museum.

Chang Yung Ho: To my mind, we are creating a garden of cameras. It is not just that these small pieces of architecture will contain projections, but also that the four cameras activate the existing space at the ARC. Through the treatment of the space, the visitors become very involved in the exhibition. The architecture is configured so that we see people seeing the space and the videos. We are challenging the static exhibition in a white or dark box.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: How do you see the current mutations in urbanism and architecture, as well as the social and political transformations in China? Having travelled frequently to China, I get a sense of incredible energy, a sense of optimism and of endless possibility. Is mine just an outsider's perspective?

Chang Yung Ho: There are two aspects to the current changes. There seems to be an open-mindedness, perhaps related to a newly acquired wealth, which drives a lot of Chinese people, and perhaps the nation as a whole, to a new kind of ambition and to the idea that everything and anything is possible. But, on the other hand, this transition involves so much uncertainty. As an architect, I do not know what a contemporary piece of Chinese architecture should be, nor does my client, nor do my colleagues. We can only discuss contemporary Chinese architecture in terms of what it could be. Wealth and cultural uncertainty give people something more than optimism, a more open and experimental spirit.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: In France, there has been a very strong reception of Chinese cinema. How do you relate to the incredibly active film scene?

Chang Yung Ho: I am not only attracted to Chinese film. For a long time, I have been interested in the French New Wave. The potential of design of space and time in film is something I would like to incorporate more and more into architecture. There are two movies in particular that count for me. I find them incredibly boring, but I have seen them half a dozen times: one is *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) and the other is *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). I have seen them so many times because I fall asleep and I have to watch them again. Yet, I have gotten a great deal out of them. The present Chinese cinema is more narrative-based, I enjoy it, but I think maybe it can be pushed into other directions as well.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Apart from your activity as an architect, which involves many new buildings, besides your teaching and your urban laboratory, you also widen architecture as a field into other areas such as conferences and magazines.

Chang Yung Ho: We certainly participate in a market economy, but in no way would I accept the routine of production and consumption. The buildings, the exhibitions, the conferences, and the publications all roll up into one big cultural activity, which has a much greater social and cultural agenda. The teaching activity is about social service as well. What we are doing collectively goes beyond producing objects that may be buildings, but it's much more significant—I don't know what words to use—maybe "cultural phenomena." For example, with the *Camera* exhibition, I wonder whether it will help people to understand each other. So maybe, in a sort of melodramatic way, it's pro-peace [*laughs*].

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Exhibition history has been productive in its capacity to produce experiments. How important is this exhibition history for you? Is the exhibition a laboratory for you? Does doing exhibitions enable you to do things that you wouldn't necessarily be able to envisage when doing a building?

Chang Yung Ho: First of all, the exhibition is a laboratory for urban ideas and architectural ideas. There is a tradition in Europe and in America, and we have started one here in China, with other architects, who are also interested in doing exhibition and installation design as architects. To me, architecture has many facets. Doing exhibitions is one kind of architecture; it is faster for one thing [*laughs*]. We get much quicker feedback, and it is rewarding in that aspect.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: But exhibitions are subject to amnesia often, as soon as the show is dismantled, the memory fades, don't you think?

Chang Yung Ho: There is a kind of amnesia, but there is something that is even more deadly, which is the creation of the profession of exhibition designers. It is becoming totally non-creative (I hope I am not offending too many people by saying that). Our idea for Paris is to do an exhibition, which is not an exhibition almost. We are trying to see if there are other possibilities, in exhibitions and in art.

WANG JIANWEI

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Let's begin with the beginnings. You started working during the 1980s when there was a sort of underground avant-garde in Beijing. The Chinese 1980s resemble the 1960s in Europe, they both harboured artists who organized provocative exhibitions often ending in scandals, and who showed a strong resistance against the established order.

Wang Jianwei: I started out studying oil painting. From 1975 to 1977, at the end of the Cultural Revolution, many young people were encouraged to go to the countryside and work as farmers in the fields. During these two years, I was labouring in the fields and that is when I started working with oil paints, with the help of a teacher who lived elsewhere and who I saw twice a year.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Many young artists nowadays think of you as one of the pioneers of conceptual art in China. When did you start painting in a more conceptual manner?

Wang Jianwei: The biggest change in my work took place in 1985. From 1985 to 1987, I attended Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, which has been renamed the China Academy of Fine Arts. It's the same school that Yang Fudong went to later on. During these two years, I barely ever painted. Instead, I read many occidental books of literature and philosophy. In this period, not only did I discover occidental culture and history, but I also became acquainted with my own history, which had been slightly overlooked in the education I had received. These books came to me as a discovery and I began to doubt that I would ever be able to express all this through oil painting.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: What exactly did you read?

Wang Jianwei: The texts that had the biggest impact on me were by Camus and Sartre, the existentialists, and Borgès. These three authors influenced me the most. At first, I was certain that I was supposed to express these new discoveries through oil painting. Therefore, I began to do a lot of painting from 1987 to 1990, always trying to transmit more conceptual matter in my paintings. Finally (around 1991) I understood that it was very difficult, almost impossible to do. That year I held an individual exhibition of my paintings and after that, I quit painting altogether.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Is that when you started working with video?

Wang Jianwei: No, not just then. After the exhibition, I began to read again, and this time I read scientific works, such as Bohr and Einstein, which completely shattered my relationship with art and changed my work methods. I did my first work, *Event, Process, State Laboratorium* in 1992 according to the process of time. I filled three centimeters thick of paper with rough sketches before reaching satisfaction. My first video was made in 1995 and I made it work around an installation. There was a screen, a monitor, and a mobile. That is the way I proceeded with all my videos before 1996, making them evolve around an installation. I did my first independent video, entitled *Production*, in 1997. I chose seven different cities and in each city, I chose a public place, a gathering area, which became the theme of each part of the video. People tend to mistake it for the one called *Tea House*, because of the fact that the places I chose to shoot were somewhat related to the traditional house of tea. In this project, I brought my attention to the concept of space, language, and the various sociological reasons people are drawn to these places. I consider these places to be traditional grounds for exchanging information, which in my mind may be compared to modern media.

Then I did some work on the theater with Chang Yung Ho. The theater is also a place for exchanging information. In a similar way to *Production*, I chose certain images from shows taking place in the theater from a sociological view. I don't necessarily see myself as an artist in this particular work; I believe that I am able to become someone or something else. In these videos, I consider myself to be a sociological observer, in the same way as when I worked with the theater. I am not interested in knowing if my work is that of an artist or not, but I do always make it become a form of experimentation.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: It is true that you do observe cities through a sociological point of view? I would like to know in what way you use the city as a source of inspiration for your work.

Wang Jianwei: I am in a place now where I worry about globalization and uniformity in creation, which is the direct repercussion of globalization.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Could you tell us about the exhibition at the ARC and what you have prepared for it?

Wang Jianwei: I am interested in the relationship that humans have with the space around them, as well as that between public and private spaces, which is part of it. The two areas that are most fascinating to me are the theater and *agoras*, or public squares. For two years now I have been filming public places and city squares. I then add people separately. I therefore produce a gap between the two, which is very interesting to me. In a theater, I try to compare the imagination of the audience with their individual daily lives outside the theater. The various questions born from these different forms of space have been strongly present in my work for years.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Cities in China have been undertaking profound mutations over the last decade. How do you feel about these changes? How do you deal with them in your work and in your daily life?

Wang Jianwei: I believe that one of the major consequences of these disruptions in a city, architecturally speaking most especially, is the fading out of its history and patrimony. This destruction is complete because Chinese history has already been quite damaged. This is a common practice in Chinese imperial history. Each emperor attempted to erase the past of his predecessor. We can see this same thing happening today. With the erection of modern architecture as well as occidental urbanism, the recent history as well as poverty and misery are being covered up in China.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: To finish, let's talk about the collaboration between art and architecture, and more precisely about the collaboration with Chang Yung Ho.

Wang Jianwei: This exhibition is the materialization of a long conceptual and intellectual collaboration between Chan Yung Ho and myself. In the end, we are able to go beyond the intellectual level and to enter a more visual aspect. Up until now, our collaboration had always taken place in discussions and debates.

YANG FUDONG

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Let's talk about the background to your work. Shanghai was a well-known filmmaking centre in the 1920s and 1930s. What has been the importance of this history on your practice? But maybe I should start by asking you whether you studied contemporary art or film first.

Yang Fudong: Both of those factors have influenced me. Firstly, I studied at the China Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, where I was taught about contemporary art. As for cinema, I've watched, and still watch, a lot of Chinese movies, Yuan Muzhi's *Street Angels* (Malu tianshi, 1937) and Fei Mu's *Springtime in a Small Town* (Xiao chen zhi chun, 1948), a film many cinema people are talking about at the moment. There is a contemporary film director, Tian Zhuang Zhuang, who re-made this film, keeping its original title, and it was shown at the film festival in Venice in 2002.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: You also told me that you have been influenced by the artist Huang Yongping.

Yang Fudong: Actually, Huang Yongping attended the same school as me and belonged to the generation of my professors. Although I didn't know him personally, I discovered his work in various catalogues after 1989, in a rather tense atmosphere. In his artwork, I discovered something I had never seen elsewhere and, in a way, I began to see him as a teacher from a distance.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: The exhibition that you are partaking in along with Wang Jianwei and Chang Yung Ho in Paris is based on the idea of multiple forms of expression, dealing with the links between art and architecture as well as between art and cinema. You started out working mainly in video, but *An Estranged Paradise* (Moshen tiantang, 1997-2002), which is maybe your best-known piece, is a black and white movie much more related to Chinese cinema of the 1920s. Can you tell me about how you use or allude to old Chinese cinema in your work?

Yang Fudong: The relationship between my work and the films of the 1920s is pretty vague. Artists today can appropriate any medium to express their way of living and seeing, and make that choice according to their need to say something specific. I see the sensitivity that marks my films as a personal thing having its roots in my past and my experiences. I am afraid that I am unable to be more explicit about this personal relationship that I have with cinema from the 1920s.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: In your work, you speak directly and indirectly about the city.

Yang Fudong: My family lives in Beijing and I live in Shanghai, where I got married. I always have this feeling of not living in my own city, of being a long way from my family in a city that isn't really mine.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Isn't it something that goes along with the changes taking place in Chinese contemporary society?

Yang Fudong: I feel like a foreigner in Shanghai. It's as if I'm trying to get things happening in a context where there are political pressures that might get in the way. Like all of us, I'm a bit like that "first intellectual."

Hans Ulrich Obrist: You mean the character in your photographic series *The First Intellectual* (2000) who is hit by a brick that someone threw at him?

Yang Fudong: Yes. One wants to accomplish big things, but in the end it doesn't happen. Every educated Chinese person is very ambitious, and obviously there are obstacles, obstacles coming either from society or from inside oneself. The "first intellectual" has been wounded: he has blood running down his face and he wants to respond and react, but he doesn't know whom he should throw his brick at. He doesn't know if the problem stems from him or society.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Can we talk a bit about your dialogue with the architect Chang Yung Ho. How did it go when you first brainstormed for this exhibition?

Yang Fudong: We talked for a while and he explained what he wanted to do. I immediately got the impression that he is a person one could really work with. Now that I have seen the space at the ARC and the framework that I was given to work in, I realize that I need to re-think my initial project because it doesn't fit the architectural set up.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Still, it's important to find a solution that you agree upon. The architecture should be made to fit your project.

Yang Fudong: In my initial plan, I wanted to use the space only with the projection of my video. But now I must find a balance between all three projects. I wanted to make a horizontal picture like the traditional Chinese scrolls with images inside. But when I saw the shape of the room, I realized that it wouldn't be possible. I do have other ideas that would work out fine in the given space. This isn't only my exhibition though, and I think it is important to take into consideration whatever the others are planning on doing. I really appreciate the work of both Wang Jianwei and Chang Yung Ho and I hope that my contribution to this exhibition will be an interesting piece to an even more interesting puzzle.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Could you tell me about the work you created for the Istanbul Biennial (*Egofugal: Fugue from Ego for the Next Emergence*, 7th International Istanbul Biennale, 2001)? It was a video installation that gave the viewer the feeling he was in some kind of paradise.

Yang Fudong: The work is called *Tonight's Moon* (Jinwande yueliang, 2000). I wanted to talk about paradise, the ideal, and a dream world. It's set in a traditional Chinese garden, which is a kind of dreamy image. I really like showing this sort of atmosphere: very calm, very beautiful, but with a strange aspect that disturbs the context.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: What are your "utopias" or projects that you haven't been able to get off the ground, but that you would still like to carry out?

Yang Fudong: There are two very important projects that I'd like to do late next year. The first is a film about what I call the ideal or ideals you have when you're young and which stay with you all your life. The second project is about intellectuals but it has nothing to do with *The First Intellectual*! I'd also like to prepare my own solo show, which would include film, video, sculpture, and painting.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Sort of like a complete work of art?

Yang Fudong: This project will be a global project of the understanding that I have of my life as well as my comprehension of intellectuals. I seriously plan on taking my time in completing this project; it will be done quite slowly. Perhaps it is too soon to even be talking about it.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: In your work, there's a narrative presence reminiscent of the cinema, but it's something more elusive: a narrative that's open-ended rather than completed. Could you tell me something about this narrative aspect?

Yang Fudong: I would, in fact, like to move into cinema, but not to tell stories or go completely into a narrative mode. I'm tempted by the idea of seeing my films shown in movie houses, but at the same time I want to stay experimental and keep on working on things for the exhibition.

IF IT ISN´T BUILT, IT CAN´T BE TORN DOWN: NOTES ON WANG WEI´S *TEMPORARY SPACE*

PHILIP TINARI

Wang Wei, *What Does Not Stand Cannot Fall*, 2003, colour photographs, 60 x 40 cm. (series of twelve). Courtesy of the Long March Foundation.

The Long March project out of which this space grows was built around a dense web of curatorial precepts involving utopia, socialism, vernacular visual culture, the exhibition system, and revolution. Perhaps the most compelling of these is an idea that Lu Jie, chief curator of the Long March project, voiced on the road, that "space has memory." This logic justified, beyond the curious mandate of "bringing art to the people," many of the exhibition projects we undertook in remote towns along the route of the historical Long March. Like those projects, Wang Wei's experiment makes no pretense of permanence.

On June 30, a stream of donkey carts came up Jiuxianqiao Road and turned right into the factory compound housing the "Dashanzi Art District." Twenty-five thousand bricks, harvested from formerly outlying villages torn down to make way for Beijing's expansion, assumed temporary positions on the sidewalk outside the 25000 Cultural Transmission Center. 25,000 x 0.13 RMB was paid to the brick-sellers for the load. For each of the next twelve mornings, instead of making their daily income by hacking at bricks, ten of these men and women will work with Wang Wei to erect four walls, pasting their bricks together with mortar. On July 12, construction will cease and art luminaries will enter for an opening. Then the workers will demolish what they have built and buy the bricks back at 0.08 RMB apiece. The donkey carts will arrive once more, and the bricks will leave for a new home somewhere else, probably also between the fourth and fifth ring roads. The space will be empty again, leaving only images and discourses where once there were bricks.

As a photographer, Wang Wei is well-suited to capture the construction and deconstruction which he has arranged inside the gallery. Throughout the lifespan of the "temporary space," Wang will create a series of twelve photographs. Like his earlier works, the photographs on display on the

gallery's back wall, behind the building they depict, are studies of people (in this case the peasant workers he has hired for a construction project) in an environment (in this case the 25000 Cultural Transmission Center). Though this is an explicitly artistic project, it draws on the artist's experience as a photojournalist: Wang Wei met his subjects last year on assignment for the *Beijing Youth Daily*.

The photographs will chart the rise and fall of a structure, hinting at the instability that has become the only constant of the visual landscape of Beijing. At no point can the entire work be perceived in its entirety: when the building is at its highest and most complete, the series of photographs will remain unfinished. When all twelve photographs are present, the building will be gone.

The exhibition includes more than the brick building. In one corner of the space there is a video projection, a ten-minute DVD about the brick-sellers entitled *Dong Ba*, after the former village in which they are currently working. The sounds of brick-sellers hacking mortar from old bricks waft from a pair of speakers, in subtle contrast to the sounds of the same brick-sellers, physically present in the space, what may be the same bricks together again. The video's tone is both lyrical and documentary. The only narration comes in the opening shot of a sign proclaiming the area "the backyard of the central business district," and in a closing text panel that explains that "around Beijing, three thousand people survive on the city's destruction." The final shot is a 360-degree panorama, a classic vista of workers whipping horses, piled debris, and new apartment buildings—still swathed in green mesh—rising in the distance. It seems only fitting that a project so connected to the ideas of centre and periphery end with a shot that takes in, from a single point, a circular landscape.

And yet this experiment is less an installation or a photographic cycle than a series of basic interactions with an economy that needs movable bricks and temporary labour at least as much as it needs avant-garde art. In this Beijing, perhaps the successful artist is less a creator of permanence than a practitioner of strategic building and tearing down, someone like Wang Wei, who captures the zeitgeist if only for a few days at a time. Up and down and up and down and up and down, from now until whenever.

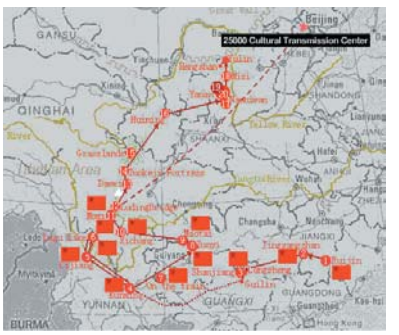
LONG MARCH: A WALKING VISUAL DISPLAY ON-SITE CRITICISM MEETING

TRANSCRIBED BY LU JIE / TRANSLATED BY PHILIP TINARI

Time: April 10, 2003
Location: Sanlian Bookstore Café, Beijing
Organized by: *Dushu Magazine* and Li Xuejun

PARTICIPANTS:

Hang Jian (Professor, Chair of Art History Department, Art Academy, Qinghua University, Beijing), Han Yuhai (Professor, Literature Department, Beijing University, Beijing), Huang Ping (Executive Chief Editor, *Dushu Magazine*; Researcher of Social Science Institute, Beijing), Kuang Xinnian (Professor, History Department, Qinghua University, Beijing), Li Xuejun (Deputy Chief Editor, *Dushu Magazine*, Beijing), Lu Jie (Chief Curator, Long March project), Meng Hui (Editor, *Dushu Magazine*, Beijing), Qi Jianping (Professor, Qinghua University), Philip Tinari (Associate Curator, Long March project), Wang Hui (Executive Chief Editor, *Dushu Magazine*; Professor, Qinghua University), Wang Jianwei (Artist), Wang Mingxian (Chief Editor, *Architecture Magazine*, Beijing), Zhang Guangtian (Playwright and Director), and Zhu Jinshi (Artist)



Long March Map representing the route of the *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*. The flags symbolize the twelve completed sites.

Lu Jie: The Long March project is a difficult thing to discuss. One problem is my lack of sufficient theoretical and curatorial preparation. A bigger problem is that envisioning and planning are nothing more than envisioning and planning. Later, when we hit the road, it was "the road that led us along,"[1] and the whole feel of the project was utterly changed. In many cases, when we actually went to realize an artist's proposal, the artist's feeling and intention was different from the effect finally produced. Other changes were made on account of the people we encountered, or the spaces we used, all of which stand in interactive relation to the project itself. In this process, change is a constant. Perhaps when we were actually there, we felt that there were tremendous obstacles. Or rather, we felt like things we did were failing? But we were very open, taking failure as experience, as a way to accumulate material. But when we got to the eleventh site, I sprouted some new ideas and decided that things as they stood were not good enough, that we must stop. Later, when we got to the twelfth site, we were continuously debating this question with our artists and our curatorial team. In the end, we decided to stop, to declare the project "an uncompleted completion." But overall, I felt that the reasons behind our early end included both the obstacles we encountered on the road, as well as certain misunderstandings that date back to our preparation and manifest themselves in our realization. That is to say, the artists and the curatorial team both had misunderstandings, including my own misunderstanding and misperceptions of the working environment in the art community in China.

Another problem was that before departure, we failed to establish a strong common foundation in the public realm, so that in the end the entire project was skewed toward the existing elitist art

circle. When we picked our team members, most of the newcomers were very idealistic, saying that they wanted to use this opportunity as a self-ablution, to come work and sweat again. But when it came to actually working, we couldn't help but bring along our old working styles, which is to say, to bring in the old habits of the art circle. We ignored questions like how to turn the project into a "sower of seeds" by working with media and society at large. Still though, looking back on a few examples from the road, many of our projects did have a direct connection with the viewers, an effect on the people and events in a given environment.

One of the twenty baby sculptures Jiang Jie made for her work, *Sending off the Red Army: In Commemoration of the Mothers on the Long March*, Site Eleven, Moxi, Sichuan, China, 2002 Photo credit: The Long March Foundation.

Jiang Jie's baby is now part of Xiao Honggang's family and is named Xiao Shuxian, Site Eleven, Moxi, Sichuan, China, 2002. Photo credit: The Long March Foundation.

Take for example Jiang Jie's work involving "adopting" sculptures of babies. Those babies may be an eternal topic of conversation in the villages in which they were left.[2] But still, if we want to spread this project wide and far, we need to have a dialogue with society. We regret how closed the project is, that in the end it became a "theme exhibition." There was not enough discourse internal to the project, and not enough discourse was created by the project. Today, in this room, I hope that we can have a dialogue, a discourse, an interdisciplinary conversation. What do you think of the curatorial concept like this? What of the things that we have done can we affirm? Which of the problems we faced were not really as big as they seemed? We hope we can stop for a second, return to older questions, and turn them over for awhile. Actually, this runs parallel to the context of the historical Long March.

The travails that befell the Red Army after crossing Luding Bridge—the treks over the snowy mountains, across the grasslands—these were all fundamentally fights against the road itself, individual struggles to exceed oneself over and over again. We dared to set out, but should we dare to stop? Should we dare to march on to Yan'an? Should we dare to march toward success? Should we dare to fail, and to face the consequences? People have voiced doubt about me, saying that I should have taken the project directly to completion. They say that as a curator, I must do it this way, otherwise I will self-destruct. But I was never hoping to do a project in this form. At that time. we truly lacked interdisciplinary debate and scholarly support. We lacked media attention, and so we decided to return and fill in the holes, to see how we could do things better.

After we returned, we held a small press conference, which was mainly a reception for the art circle. We pointed out that to merely complete the Long March project is not enough. We pointed out that there is no need to hold too rigidly to the historical framework—with the temporal and geographical limits it implies—and complete the project merely in the name of completing it. This actually forces us to consider a theoretical question: when we put together exhibitions, we always think about how to begin them, but do we think about how to end them? In deciding on our own to stop our exhibition, to end it, is actually a challenge to the current exhibition system. Such a big exhibition has never had a chance of stopping in mid-stream, to declare it a failure. As far as the system is concerned, there is no way to do an exhibition in this way. Can we thus say that the capacities of that system are in doubt? Also, since we have this freedom to stop, since we are doing this on our own, do we not also have the freedom to defy the temporal and geographical framework of the historical Long March? And so we stopped. When we set out again, it will be the second Long March.

Zhu Jinshi: The Western art system has its problems, and the comparison you just drew—you say that when you decided to stop you stopped—this is something that would not be possible in the Western system. But I feel that this outcome is still essentially unsuccessful, because it makes clear that the power still lies mainly in the hands of the curator. Of course, I am not saying that this is a fundamental problem—actually, what it really shows is something that could never come from the Western art system, and that is what you have done in this Long March.

I remember debating the question of systems once with Wang Hui. We talked about Documenta, about what kind of measures we should take relative to the Western system, to Western power. Wang Hui believes that the system is necessary, that the system need only do things slightly better than its counterpart. Speaking like this is rather honest. The Long March, if it is to continue on, will face the same problems you have already pointed out. You feel like it has been confined to a circle, including the Zunyi Curatorial Symposium. Historically speaking, in Zunyi, Mao Zedong found more than just his own Red Army; he was looking for all different kinds of people. But actually, later on, only once he became powerful and did not really go look for all different kinds of people did we really have what can be called the failure of democracy.

Art presents a similar problem: if art has no boundaries, if, as you're saying, it is able to reach out through scholarly exchange and media attention, it becomes very powerful, it can continue on, and it will be more interesting. It won't necessarily mean being on the route of the Long March; perhaps it's fine to march in this city as well. Speaking of the Long March spirit, if you travel your former route once more and the vibe is not right, it would be wrong to travel for even half of one day. You stopped for a reason, which is to say, you discovered problems. These were not financial problems or fatigue problems, but rather questions such as "what is the significance of going on like this?" As an artist, I ask you what kind of ideas the artists were really able to put forth. The artists had problems. To put it more directly, I think the curators had problems. If you don't admit this, I fear that if you set out again you will have to stop once more. Yes or no?

Zhang Guangtian and others at the Sanlian Bookstore Café in Beijing, April 10, 2003. Photo credit: The Long March Foundation.

Lu Jie: I agree with your point. First of all, I should admit that this is about me. Whether we talk about failure or problems, I should take responsibility for it all. That's how it really is.

Zhu Jinshi: I'm not saying it failed; I'm talking about the issue of power struggle. If the Long March continues, of course it will face problems of power. Contemporary art is facing just these kinds of problems. The better achievement of Long March is not looking to free itself from the hierarchy in the international system, but from a fundamental idea about people, about our relations within and to the idea of art, and the question of whether it has an independent self-worth.

Zhang Guangtian: You've talked about the problem of artist's surface-level engagement and participation in the Long March. Too many people who participate in your project are looking to actualize their own goals. As an artist, I would look after my own interests too. If I were to participate, I would wonder whether Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie would be suspicious of my left-wing agenda. Therefore, I do not want my left-wing label to bring more trouble to the already easy-to-be-attacked identity of the Long March project. Looking at the works you just showed us, there were a few that especially moved me. It is hard to place a value on the materials you have left at the end. Still, I believe that this process has been successful and I believe the dialogues that people have had surrounding it are relevant and interesting. I'd like to make the pedestrian point that this Long March corresponds to Mao's Long March. As I think about it now, there seems to be a huge parallel, even a parallel with the Chinese revolution. When you arrived at Shi Dakai's place at Luding Bridge, you decided you couldn't go any farther. Chairman Mao went on but you didn't.[3]

Lu Jie: We never planned it that way.

Wang Jin, *Hanging Swords on the Cliff with Swords Hung Upside-Down*, Site One, Jingganshan, Jiangxi, China. Photo credit: The Long March Foundation.

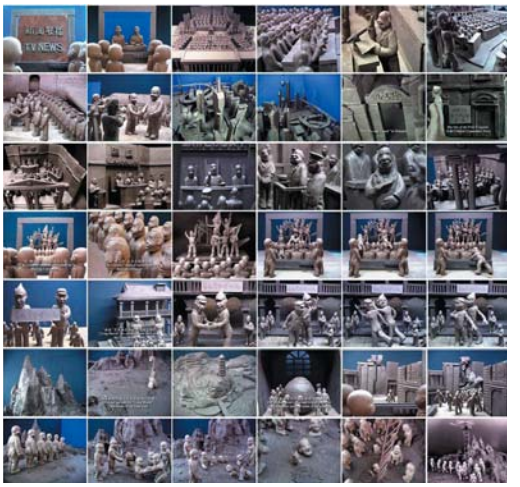
Zhang Guangtian: I'm wondering why you couldn't get beyond this bridge. I feel like there is a very simple reason. All of us who had never seen artworks like this before have something in common: we all wonder what this is about. No matter whether it is a peasant or an intellectual, or someone from some other business, they might feel confused by this thing. Now let's think, now it's the twenty-first century, but if it were the beginning of the twentieth century, the time of the Long March, when Mao Zedong took revolutionary plays to Zunyi and put them on, we might feel the same way. Then they took Marx's picture and hung it in the Catholic Church in Zunyi, and just like their reaction to your project here, the common folk were seeing something completely strange and foreign.

Wang Hui: So it wasn't until Yan'an that we had to "reform our studies."

Zhang Guangtian: For this reason, I feel that this project has a bit of Moscow to it,[4] it's a set route. I do not doubt everyone's idealism, and I do not doubt the success of the works. But I think that this route is a "Wang Ming route."[5] Twenty-eight-and-a-half-Bolsheviks right.[6] This is a project run by twenty-eight-and-a-half-artists. This project needs to enter the life of the Chinese people. You have done some successful things—like the display on the train—things that involve dialogue with the people. But the project you did in Maotai did not succeed because it was too forceful. This forcefulness doesn't come only from you, but from the entire process of the Chinese revolution. It's like the work by Wang Jin, *Hanging Swords on the Cliff with Swords Hung Upside-Down*, where the person doesn't really touch the ground.

Of course, I believe you do everything from the perspective of idealists. Why else would you want to do things like this? Because people will doubt you. You just spoke of an entire project, and of some problems that arose while curating it, including problems of authority like Zhu Jinshi just

mentioned. You should first consider that all of the people you are cooperating with in China are extremely simple: they want fame and power. If I participate in Lu Jie's project, they ask, what good will it do me? Will it get me name recognition? Will it get me money? If you can't give me these, why should I deal with you? Even Chairman Mao posted a notice in Zunyi during the Long March, which I imagine you've seen, asking where everyone's wives had run off to, saying that they had gone to sleep with the landlords. Where did your food go? It went into the landlords' warehouse. And thus we need a revolution. If you work with me, he claimed, you'll get all this back. Propaganda was about people's interests. In this project, you haven't declared what people's interests are. I'm not encouraging you to call people to persuade their practical interest in order to follow your ideal, but this is really a big problem faced by you and me and all idealists. What should we do in such a practical and ego bounded era?



Zhou Xiaohu, *Utopian Machine*, 2002, animation video.

I suppose everyone who participated in your project was looking to realize their own goals. And these people's selfish goals, you can't even tell them whether they can achieve or not. I think this must have been a very different project to set in motion from the perspective of the curatorial system and the system of authority in our country right now. That is to say, you have to discuss all these things clearly with the participants. Later, I heard that many people were paying attention to your show, saying it was a very influential project, asking how they could participate in it. Behind this concern, these people all have a worry. Where are you coming from? Who are you and what can you deliver? You must be clear to people about their payoff. Where did the Red Army come from? Whence its legitimacy? If we say that the Red Army was just twenty-eight-and-a-half-Bolsheviks, then they are able to bring in "foreign bread."

From another perspective, the question might have been, by joining the Red Army, will you help me go to Moscow? Lots of people weren't willing to participate. So what do they do? They go to biennales, which is also "foreign bread." What do I want from joining your ranks, they ask. So finding resources is a problem. I think there is a parallel here with Mao Zedong; he thought this question out on the later part of the Long March and made it clear to the people. "I don't have resources, I have nothing, and I am sitting on a folded python. I am a pure idealist." If you follow me you can only sacrifice or win. Otherwise you don't follow." This was completely clear.

Of the people who followed Mao, of course, very few were "good." The "good people" had better things to do. Those who followed were missing arms and had lame legs, no? People with "talent" decided not to go with Mao. But those who followed the Long March will be totally committed. This won't give rise to any problems later. So when you talk about "bread," then the problems become clear. If you were making local bread available to starving people while they are busy begging foreign bread from the international biennales, this is a big problem. This is my approximate feeling. But I still think that there were several very successful works, which finally

established a dialogue. How to make this project even deeper is a very good question, how to carry on this work; it isn't over.

Wang Hui: Last year when I talked with you, I remember you saying that you didn't just want to go on the road, but to turn the Long March into a long-lasting system like a biennale. To take this Long March from our history that society has forgotten, and suddenly revisit this topic anew, bring it out for discussion, using art, which has its own problems, and through artworks look at this history, this attitude, to express it through participation. I thought this sounded very interesting, but I couldn't imagine at the time what it would look like in the end. I didn't know if you could find enough people who could discuss these topics. As far as I know, there aren't very many people in our intellectual circle who can talk about these topics. There are many knowledgeable people, but hardly any who have penetrating insights about the Long March. As I watched your presentation just now, I thought there were a number of interesting works, and I began to think that it is another problem altogether.

Today, people think of the Long March as a utopia. In modern history, it is not the kind of utopia imagined by intellectuals, but something else—a development that began slowly at the grassroots, under extremely harsh conditions, that included foreign ideas, and that produced a vision of utopia. If we return to the present moment and look at the entire world—not just China—where we have reached a so-called twenty-first century culture. If we make a comparison to the overall cultural, intellectual, and artistic situation of the early twentieth century, the biggest difference, experimentally, is the disappearance of utopia. It's essentially gone, although the impetuous drive for utopia is still with us. If we look at the literature of the 1980s in China, it's there. It is also in the literature of the 1990s. I remember that period. Of course, there were those who denied utopia, but there were definitely people who believed in it. Wang Anyi, Zhang Chengzhi, lots of authors wrote directly about utopia. But as an intellectual and artistic experiment, utopia cannot re-establish itself. Utopia has only a past and not a future. Utopia is also impractical, so as soon as you create a utopia, every problem is neatly condensed. In everything from its motive to its eventual end, your Long March reflects a problem, and I think that this is very interesting. The diligence required to build a utopia in the end, insures the destruction of that utopia. This process represents a typical problem of the contemporary world, which is that certain cultural and intellectual formulas actually cannot be built, just as there is no way to re-build utopia. Now if there is no way to build utopia, left-wing intellectuals may criticize you, asking why we no longer have utopia.

Of course besides "economies of desire," "capitalism" and similar expressions, there are others who say that in the academy one necessarily enters a closed circle of people, and that this circle becomes a very important factor in the deconstruction of utopia. That is, all of one's power to communicate is lost. Everything is confined to a set domain, and when people summarize the failure of utopia, they often limit themselves to a summary of this circle saying, for example, that we in the circle are doing this in our own interest, or that we want power, making arguments in this genre. But they don't notice what the broader context is. What they see is rather small.

I think of this question because it is all I have been thinking of lately, because I am about to go to Duke University for a conference on the "future of utopia." When they first sent out the announcement, there was serious criticism, saying that the reason there is no longer a utopia is that everyone in the academy is a "deconstructionist." They argued that the deconstructionism which has become so prevalent in the academy in the last few decades has made it impossible for anyone to be serious about building a utopia. In terms of the circle, this is correct, because all the tropes of theory and culture move in this direction. But if we expand our field of vision, we see problems inside. Why? Because this phenomenon of the cultural elite is actually a result of something else, we are not powerless because people intrinsically like deconstruction, or because everything is "post-." Rather, because we are powerless, we choose this method. There is of course an interactive relationship present here. Now as we pass judgment on your summary, I think that Zhu Jinshi gave the real introduction, and a few of the things he said were quite interesting. One was mentioned by Jinshi and Zhang Guangtian, the question of power, which was certainly one reason why the utopia of the historical Long March ultimately self-deconstructed.

In the process of history, actually, internal utopias seem always to produce power relationships, which in the end kill everyone's ability to believe in utopia. This propensity for failure is tough to see when you're working with art on a relatively small scale. But if you enlarge it, you find that this is a problem which cannot be overcome. In other words, the utopian experiment fundamentally contains an inherent contradiction. Whether you like utopia or not, you must face this problem. Managing things like we are now is, I think, a good way of facing it. Because in the end you get something. Because to a certain degree, it reflects a judgment about internal logic.

The second interesting thing is the question that Guangtian just brought up, that the process of getting artists to participate in this experiment requires complicity with the working style of the broader society. If everyone were to approach the project looking to go their own direction, you would encounter two major treasons. One is your own will, your will to lead. The second is individualism. These are problems that the real revolution ran into as well. With respect to these important themes, I remember looking at your earliest plans, how you wanted to begin by discussing utopia at Ruijin and go from there, taking in questions of nationality, Trotsky, Wang Ming Route, etc. The interesting thing is, if you were to carry on marching, perhaps you would think of exploring these questions further and deeper, since there is no way to enter directly into the debates that happened at that time.

If artists enter into these debates, they do it in a way that is inextricably intertwined with your process. You need to keep this process going, keep talking, not stop, but think for a second about how to resolve the power issues, how to resolve the question of interaction with the people. If you can incorporate your answers to these questions into a new style, I think it would be quite interesting. Furthermore, I just asked Zhang Guangtian to speak. No matter how we view his play *Che Guevara*,[7] whether we like it or not, we all wonder how it got so hot, how it became such a major social incident. Why is the Long March art exhibition so difficult to enter our social life and public realm? I really haven't thought of a reason.

Zhang Guangtian: It would be hard for me to use *Che Guevara* as a revolutionary example to provide reference for your project, since the two are very different. I actually think that the Long March project had an even greater impetus. I think you should ignore those elitists and professional artists. Those who wanted to participate came of their own will. If they don't know how to fight, you teach them, train them. You should only use the armatures and outsiders. Mao did it this way. That is to say, if you believe in utopia, you come and make the revolution with me. If you don't believe in utopia and all you are after is your benefit and interest then bug off. I don't have you. Under these circumstances, you don't mind that our guns and ammunition are broken, that we have nothing, you just brainwash us everyday, and then it all becomes possible. You distribute homemade guns and cannons and ask them do it the Long March way: take the hardship and have faith in it and build your own thing. If you do it like this, how can you fail?

Zhang Guangtian: Back when Lu Jie first spoke of the project with me, I completely supported him. I said that this is great endeavor. Lu Jie's work here is not unlike Mao's work of leading the Red Army. The difference is that Mao killed people. I guess the whole process of curating is as difficult and revolutionary as the previous Long March. I was very worried about you; you are challenging the powerful people and the system by moving their ground. The Chinese art world is a dark place. It's not a place for people.

Wang Jianwei: Let me talk about this from a participant's perspective. After 1997, the public environment in China opened up a little bit and many artists jumped directly into the public space. But in the end there was a problem: the departure point for public art in the West is a departure from the museum system. We just don't have this feeling of departure. Entering the public space for us was actually a matter of taking a private, personal, closed space into the open, but we never opened up these individual things; there was no connection between the normal viewer and the works. This process made it look as if everyone had entered the public space, but it was, in fact, a closed public space.

Let me mention the two points that hit me the hardest when I talked about the Long March with Lu Jie in New York. First, I think the utopia envisioned here is the opening of a new space. China lacks the support of a museum system, and we're not willing to keep going back to the Western museums for more of the same. China has to make some trenchant choices about its context and about the questions it wishes to consider, and we are forced to relate to those choices. At this point, everyone starts to think, good—since our cultural perspective and our ways of thinking, and even our life experiences are not like theirs, let's do a project like this one. I think the utopia lies herein. The second utopian idea was that no one is happy with the inner state of the art world at the moment, and so we wanted, through the Long March, to open up the essential concepts behind our works. In Europe, contemporary art is certainly not a movement by one circle of people; it is an expression of an entire society. Why did so many museums and famous artists oppose Catherine David's *Documenta X*? It was the first time that an exhibition was challenging a system of choosing works based on a star system, a system on which many museums depend for survival. At that time, everyone was cursing the exhibition. Works were placed in public spaces, in hallways. Advertising for the show was completely mixed in with local advertising. Many things were destroyed. But in order to launch this subversion, a massive apparatus was first necessary.

Wang Jianwei and others at the Sanlian Bookstore Café in Beijing, April 10, 2003. Photo credit: The Long March Foundation.

Museums, exhibitions, investors, and foundations—*Documenta X* destroyed all of these in a very simple way. It caused an important shake-up. But after seeing that exhibition, many Chinese artists had another conclusion: that the exhibition lacked aesthetic value. And in fact the exhibition had very little of this.

When I got back I started thinking, China has contemporary art, but why? Being someone from the Third World, or as a member of so-called cultural elite here, why does one do art? Maybe Western artists choose to be an artist, which is to say, they start making art even though they have many other choices. But I think many in our generation started making art simply because we studied art—we were compelled by the system in a way. That is to say that the hidden motives with which we began are different from theirs. Back then, perhaps art would win you a few things. If you were from a small town and you were an artist, you had a special identity. Now, as society has grown more complex, people have more leeway for real choices and their own values, and some of them no longer need to choose art.

But in Chinese contemporary art, the vast majority of artists still feel limited. For example, they wait for exhibitions to choose them. If you go talk to a contemporary Chinese artist, they will give you a CV that is a list of exhibitions, not a list of works. They won't bring up one or another particular work and discuss with you the problems it solves. And so, one year ago, I felt that by participating in the Long March, I would find a kind of utopia. When I went to join the ranks and realize my work at Luding Bridge, we swayed back and forth that night, debating whether or not to end the march. I said then that I didn't think there was anything to finish, because to a large extent, the Long March was not a Long March of imitation. Therefore, I said, when you feel you should finish the project, you can finish the project. Also, I felt that in some ways, the Long March is fundamentally ambiguous.

Jiang Jiwei and his stone carvings at *Quotation Mountain*, Site Three, Guangxi, China, 2002. Photo credit: The Long March Foundation.

The historical Red Army similarly had no idea where it was headed. And when you reached a point on this Long March, you also said, let's go. I think this is actually O.K. And so on the bridge that day, everyone had a very serious feeling, that to stop before finishing was somehow inappropriate. But I think good things always come out of "inappropriate" situations. Now I am regretful that the project seems over, and in the end it seems as if what Lu Jie did is give a new platform to artists on which to make products. I imagine Lu Jie is not satisfied with this. For example, many of the works could have been realized here in this room, with the result that after travelling across provinces and spending loads of money, switching to a new context, the works are the same. I think this makes them meaningless.

Inasmuch as you enter the Long March, certain unpredictable and irreplaceable things will happen. If a work can be realized here in this room, why is there need to take it on the Long March? The corollary is that works which could be realized on the Long March can't necessarily be replicated back at home, that is to say the Long March forces the artists to truly consider the issue of public space. This is not a purely materialistic consideration, not a question of how tall, how wide, or how good the light is. I think there are many other non-material considerations that were not taken into account.

No matter how Mao Zedong made his strategies, when we talk about cultural strategy today, I just wish people would realize the meaning and value of following you and your Long March. It's wrong to not participate or support you, unless they have nothing to contribute. The Long March is actually a kind of capital without form. It is not a matter of me giving you ten dollars in exchange for your support; it is a formless capital that grows useful the moment it is placed in local context. Since Lu Jie returned to Beijing, he has been hoping for dialogue and debate. I agree

Jiang Jiwei and his stone carvings at *Quotation Mountain*, Site Three, Guangxi, China, 2002. Photo credit: The Long March Foundation.

with what Wang Hui says, that these questions imposed by Long March must be considered in a realm that transcends the tiny scope of Chinese contemporary art if the debate is to be useful. Otherwise, there is no way to debate this topic. I have also heard a lot of artists talking about the Long March who have no real ability to communicate. When Lu Jie wanted to debate Trotskyism, and went to the art circle, the artists thought he was crazy. They didn't know what connection it had to them. And then there were all those movie screenings during his Long March —Godard, Antonioni, etc.—the majority of Chinese artists think that these also have nothing to do with them. Many artists care solely and directly about their own interests. I think this is not the Long March. It must be approached idealistically, like Guangtian just said. If it's a matter of "come with us, and you'll get a good opportunity out of it," then it has become a different kind of utopia.

Zhang Guangtian: If you have people march with you, they can study on the road. I mean to say that the ranks of the viewers might now have a connection with the Long March. Of course, "elite troops" are also very important, because they start a dialogue. They comprise an external system. Dialogue is extremely important. Perhaps Godard and Trotsky have nothing to do with the viewers, but if these works help you to start an exchange, then they are interesting. You make these people come along for the ride, and when problems arise through your use of works by Trotsky, Trotsky has entered your project.

Wang Jianwei: Chinese contemporary art is actually much more of an export than many other disciplines here. Let's first not talk about whether this is right or wrong. Speaking practically, it has more opportunities to go abroad, more exhibitions in which to participate. But these exhibitions bring with them a big problem—and we really do feel it—that this is not our discourse. That is to say, even if you appear often in these exhibitions, they really don't represent you. In a way, you can

Li Tianbing taking photographs of villagers in Hua'an, Fujian, China,1999. Photo credit: Li Jingchen.

do nothing but be silent. The exhibitions only take up the public discourses behind you, or rather, the public discourses have already been decided upon. Returning to China, you feel as if these things have never been discussed here, as if there were never an opportunity. So perhaps the utopia of the Long March is the chance to find something between the two extremes. It looks like Lu Jie is trying to hold himself back right now, as if he wanted to say just this. But I don't think the Long March is the only way to resolve this problem, I think there will be others. If you say, for example, that the contemporary art is constructed in a fundamentally Western way, based on the

strong connection between people and material goods that can only grow out of an industrial society, then how do you bring it into our public space? Sometimes when I see installation works by Chinese artists, I look at them once and know that they're not right. You have no connection to that material; you have temporarily moved it into the space. How are we to look at this question again today? We are Chinese people. When we leave the country, everyone says, "Hey, you're Chinese" and begins to ask questions about China. Suddenly you discover that your education has left you completely confused about Chinese culture. I didn't know about China's tradition of cave carving until I saw pictures in exhibition catalogues in Japan in the 1980s. Before that, I had no idea that China had something so good! Our generation does not completely follow along with the West, but it is also cut off from its own culture. Sometimes we are not allowed to express it completely, but we have a real confidence in our own cultural heritage. And so perhaps the Long March is like sticking a knife in from the centre. Utopia is a strange thing. In the last year it seems like every e-mail I receive is about this topic.

Wang Hui: The feeling I get looking at the works today is stronger than the one I had when Lu Jie first told me about the project. I think it really does have a utopian significance. But if you look at the actual process of participation, it seems that the works are all opposed to utopia. It is clear that they are all sarcastic, because this is a trend. In the last twenty or thirty years, this has been the fundamental trend, opposed to tradition, including Qiu Zhijie's work where he walks and left and right are reversed and obscured.[8] Can the "middle way" still exist when in the end even the most basic assumptions underlying utopia have been deconstructed? Almost everyone, all styles of doing works, they are all sarcastic. Except for when the project is really working with the folk—on projects that have nothing to do with your high art, on projects that have no connection to your artists. You suddenly discovered an old man who takes photos, and took them for so many years.[9] That is truly for the people—how could taking so many pictures not be for the people? But other than when men like that appear, almost all of your artworks are against utopia. This shows that in a way, there is no difference between the art circle and the intellectual circles, and so this thing is a trend. If you want to build a utopia inside the trend, all of the materials available to you are anti-utopian. If you build a utopia here, in the end it self-deconstructs.

Speaking this way, you get a very postmodern and strange result, not something you could have predicted. But here I just thought of a difference with no connection to art. When I went to villages along the Chishui River, I discovered that though the houses are made from dirt, they still have satellite television. I was amazed and confused about how such a poor place could have satellite television. Later, I was talking with a man in our group, someone who had spent a few years working there. He said: "You know that during the Cultural Revolution when the young intellectuals took to the mountains and went down to the countryside, the influence on us peasants by the Chishui River was greater than the influence of any of the countless education campaigns. All of the 'reforms and openings' in my village today, all of the transitions to modernity, happened because the young intellectuals came." And so the relation of the world to the village changed completely because of a few young intellectuals.

The most important thing to consider is Mao's idea at the time of the Long March as "sower of seeds." He may not have thought this way but, still in the end, the Long March became a route to

power. When he had yet to control power, he had some very open ideas. He thought that he would march, but was never entirely certain just to where. The places he passed, because they had experienced this thing, this exchange, because this change happened in the world, there arose a kind of confidence in the time. I can't postulate what method it should use, but I think contemporary art has the ability to take this idea and display it. And just like Wang Jianwei said, you then open your entire circle, your entire profession; you switch to a new place, for example, you march through and perhaps you are not happy with yourselves, but perhaps the scene in that village, perhaps just because the Long March appeared there, has undergone drastic change. But because it doesn't occur under our field of vision, because it cannot be collected by a museum, because it cannot be theorized by art critics, it's as if it never happened. But how would you ever go about trying to put this within your field of vision? This question, to a certain extent, is the reason why so many so-called intellectuals and scholars are debating why utopia has no future.

Zhang Guangtian: Actually, the greatest influence on our art world since the 1980s has been the deconstruction of utopia. Now we have this right-wing" liberalism" that is deconstructing the left wing from the point of view of aesthetic value. In the 1990s, we deconstructed everything carelessly. Left-wingers deconstructed right-wing liberals, liberals deconstructed the left wing. Utopia was destroyed. In my public campaign, did I not fuck the Statue of Liberty? Did I not deconstruct liberalism? And yet, at the same time, they try to deconstruct our "Red Shoulder Chang Qing Leads the Road."[10] What Wang Hui says is right. If we discuss utopia, all our materials, all our styles of working, all our fulcrums are already counter-utopian. Where is our fulcrum? This is a very serious question. Looking just now at that old man and his natural-light camera—it's no wonder that he has become our last fulcrum.

Wang Jianwei: That's right. What Wang Hui just said is interesting. Looking back on the Young Intellectuals Movement during the Cultural Revolution, whether we say it succeeded or failed, at times it certainly did open up the door to a certain place. But does contemporary art really need to resemble what we think of as "contemporary art" if it is going to take on this capacity? Have we really entered into this capacity? Could a work take on the form of education or some other form, and then not resemble, or count as art? The Long March didn't really open this up. My personal feeling is that too many works from the Long March resemble actual works of art. Say, for example, that we go to some far-off place, and bring a bunch of the same old artists to a restaurant or teahouse out there. We take their same works and perhaps, because the context has changed, a chain reaction is set off, and some detail of the work comes into clearer view. But if there is no connection at all, then nothing has been opened, and this is a problem. One reason may be the difference between the countryside and the city; another is that artists, including the people behind this project, have some problems.

Huang Ping: If you want to realize a Long March of contemporary art, to find another life-force for art, this must merge with all sorts of already existing folk art. This is true if you decide to do alternative art, if you connect art with history. Your departure must be idealistic—regardless of from where, New York, Beijing, Ruijin. This is not to say that only we can do art, and that we are sowing the seeds. The problem is reversed—we go to the countryside looking for nourishment.

And these local artists, particularly the old man photographer you talked about, are very obvious examples. It's like what Guangtian just spoke of, the blending of the elite and the masses in search of revolution, although they might actually travel two different roads. There is such a thing as virtual performance, as in the case of Jiang Jiwei's *Quotation Mountain*, which I have encountered often. I meet somebody on the road of Long March, his father joined the Second Battalion and left home, but he fled into the mountains when the Nationalists came back to slaughter a small boy. He remained in the mountains planting trees for decades. You could call this unconsciously planting trees a kind of zoology, a work of art in itself. One man's work changing an entire landscape.

This kind of tree planting is different from art, no matter whether one wants to be in biennales, or to be one of the "twenty-eight-and-a-half-artists" on the route, or to search for utopia. I think that on the road you need to search ceaselessly for nourishment and build your confidence. Lu Jie just spoke very teleologically, saying that he encountered some problems and fought at them one by one. He fought through a whole road's worth of problems. There are problems left over and we are asking what to do next: this is the integration of local and international. Fight with the international hierarchy by using the local context. This methodology was called "To Reform Our Study" during the historical Long March.

The necessity of Chairman Mao's Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts is something no one encountered until the Red Army settled in Yan'an after the Long March. Because when the Red Army settled in at Yan'an, youth came from Beijing and Shanghai to join in the war against Japanese aggression. Before this, when the Red Army was on the road, the most popular art forms originated from folk art for propaganda use. They were all created by young intellectuals from the city. Remember the images of those guys in the old pictures wearing glasses? Liam Chengzhi wore handcuffs and wrote three-and-a-half sentence excerpts all along the road, always looking for a way to unite with the locals as a way to entice young peasants to join the struggle so that it would become an honest indigenous march. Of course, at the beginning of the Long March, the leaders never thought of what they were doing. They did it of necessity, nothing more than retreat and evacuation, no one knowing where they were headed. They didn't know how long they would go, and they didn't know that they were going north to fight the Japanese—these are constructs that were added later.

Wang Hui: I think one important question touched upon by the Long March is that the reasons for constructing a utopia are completely different from the utopia we often debate. The latter is what we think up ourselves, but the Long March was a forced march, and only later did it really get beyond itself. The interesting thing is that the Long March was actually abortive, even though it declared itself a revolutionary victory. The Long March later became a very serious issue in Chinese art history, because the Chinese revolution is truly a very important incident. The 1930s and 1940s are essentially the period in which the modernism created in the wake of May Fourth could go no further. When it could go no further, everyone thought that, in terms of historical accident, we had no social movement like the Chinese revolution at the time which could discover the resources of the folk tradition and incorporate them into the most mainstream of art forms. "Three and a half sentence" slogans, Sichuan opera, Han opera, that's what people were working

with, and later a group of artists appeared—Zhao Shuli, Li Xiangxiang, Tian Jian—and the forms underwent a great change.

This change was later subsumed into a broader tradition of "revolutionary arts," and thus failed. This extremism spelled its end, but still the things it came up with had never been seen before. There are some things that should be explained by Chinese art history. This question of mobilization and the power to discover combined with the reasons for its ultimate failure are connected with the anti-utopian currents of the present. Everyone feels that revolutionary art in the end got only this far, then no one was willing to go on, so it turned around. From this perspective, the Long March is an unfinished experiment. From this perspective, the current Long March is also like this.

Zhang Guangtian: Do today's common folk not have culture? Of course they have their folk cultural, but what is that? I don't think the Chinese cultural circles have been able to confirm it. What is today's folk culture? When we think of it, we immediately bring up "three-and-a-half sentences," but these have already been used up, this resource has already vaporized. Right now, it is very possible that the real locus of folk culture is the "Big Character Manifesto."[11]

Lu Jie: When we were in Hailuogou, we discovered some incredible texts. There they have an old people's club that meets in a temple which has served three different religions. On the walls they have pasted the lyrics to "Nanniwan," "The East is Red," all of these revolutionary songs that they have rewritten into advertisements for tourism in Hailuogou. When they sang the songs, the tunes were the same as the old folk songs, but the words had been changed into slogans about how to sell the revolutionary heritage of their town.

Our Long March very easily gives people a false impression that we are "taking paintings to the countryside,"[12] bringing art to the people. People say that we are like Bolsheviks, using art we learned from abroad to oppose the mainstream system in China. They ask why we need to do something alternative here when the museum system is still so weak. They tell us that our ideas are copied from old Western artists of the 1960s and 1970s. But it's not like this. We are not only looking to take things to people, and taking things to people is not to say that they are good things which we provide for their enjoyment. We take them there to be tested, and we bring things from wherever we go back with us.

The Long March has always been concerned with this sort of bi-directional relationship. Another layer is that we are not only going on-site to do new things, but taking works from the 1980s and 1990s that had a so-called public nature, and exploring their fraudulence, or rather their emptiness by bringing them to the people and strolling them around. Is it true that these works can't stand up to an attack? Or do they have their own sensitivity? We are mindful of both the artistic predicament at the current moment, and to the meaning of artistic work that has happened in the moments leading up to now.

The third question returns to the issues about utopia you were all just debating. It's true; there is a certain romance behind this project, which extends to its administration and even its

funding sources. To found this huge project all by myself and my family, it is very sacrificial yet romantic, and might even look crazy compared with the way in which other people do things. But I want to answer a point Guangtian just made. In running a revolution, you need to tell your participants how it will benefit them. Another point to consider is who I am and what I am doing. I think my personal goal in doing this project is to do constructive work; I am not interested in sitting here and talking about utopia.

Wan Wenhai's balcony and his collection of Mao works, Yan'an, China, 2002.
Photo credit: The Long March Foundation.

Through this project, I want to set a few things straight, at least in the realm of contemporary art. I want to pull out the resources I have, first Chinese—of tradition, of socialist memory, of the connections between folk and contemporary art—and tidy up the connections between art and social reality. Like Wang Jianwei just said, the flow of artworks is generally from China towards the so-called global world, so you exist in a translated realm. Before you really question the imagined self and others by revisiting and re-examining the resources you have, you floated directly on the surface. Even less necessary is a discussion of your materials: you look to reflect the people, but the people don't even know it. It's a shame my collaborator Qiu Zhijie is not able to be here today. At the Zunyi Conference he had one very good line: "Art in China is at a point where it cannot go on unless it goes on a Long March." I think this explains a lot. What are our resources and are they are useful? Will they are used up? It gets at the idea of re-understanding the folk; this is another important working style of the Long March. There are artists who refused to participate in the Long March, who felt wronged. They said we have to speak the international language so that we will be heard; we have to be practical in order to survive in an internationalized cultural environment. They thought we would take their works and compare them to folk art in order to humiliate them. But I responded that we were finding the folk in order to support them.

In my curatorial outline, I stress that in the art of the 1990s through today, there are lots of games and satires, but there is no real, direct confrontation with our political resources and reality. This includes utopia and our understanding of revolution. Some works in the 1990s rendered a simple verdict on politics, but we are looking, through the Long March, to re-consolidate and understand, and thus to re-depart. I want to do real work. Just as in the international cultural arena, you must participate in biennales or in the market. I also support this, but is it possible to stand in a richer position from which to examine your own perspective, and not in a position in which culture is always there to be consumed?

For this reason we included materials in every site that discuss Western representations of China, and we included materials from the 1960s through to the 1990s as well as many Chinese works that touch on imaginings of the West. I'd like to make an example: when we were at the Xichang

Long March Satellite Launcher Station in Sichuan, we fought hard to gain access to the facility and hold a dialogue with artists there. The scientists at this base sit at the avant-garde of science and technology in China, and the so-called language of science is utterly universal. But when these people made art, they painted traditional and local motifs of peonies and peacocks—so-called unsophisticated subjects.

I wanted to start this dialogue because of things like early twentieth century painter Xu Beihong's massive failure in going to Europe and mounting an exhibition of Chinese master painters on the Republican government's dime. The rejection and misunderstanding of those wonderful works in the outside world has always troubled me. As has the government's exhibitions before the reform era, when they took paper cutting to the Venice Biennale and exhibited it, and which were also huge failures. I have always been troubled by this. Taking paper cutting abroad is not wrong. But in addition to the fact that there were problems with the dialogue they wished to create, there were also problems with their curating, there were no problems with the materials. Xu Beihong brought along incredible works by Fu Baoshi and Zhang Daqian. Why were they refused? Why weren't they recognized?

I think there is a lot worth talking about here. The state-employed artists of the satellite station are supposed to paint rockets and weapons and other modern things, but they refuse, preferring to paint peonies and peacocks. You can speak a foreign language or a peasant pidgin—neither is wrong. But as curators, people who do cultural display, our strategies are often wrong. In doing the Long March, I made some of these strategic considerations; I looked to create interactive relationships between things people thought were unrelated or even opposed.

To make another example, our curatorial plan made many references to the Wanderers of the Russian avant-garde and their connection to the October revolution, to the connection between communism and many Western artists, like Picasso's declaration upon entering the communist party. In doing this, we were looking to highlight actualities, to prove that contemporary or avant-garde art is not opposed to the revolution. They are part and parcel of each other. In our society now, I get worried by everyone's lack of confidence in contemporary art. The avant-garde has been turned into a so-called underground, anti-mainstream thing by excessive sensitivity; but actually it is just that its theoretical underpinnings have a few problems which have created a problem whereby not only the government or the dominant ideology but also members of the society at large believe that contemporary art is anti-revolutionary.

Qi Jianping: Actually there are two different kinds of utopia. When we started talking about the Long March, I thought of the Long March television series in 2000. In it there was one detail that particularly struck me. Liu Ying, the wife of Zhang Wentian, was in Zunyi receiving guests, talking with the masses, and memorizing poems. But she was memorizing not only Tang Dynasty poetry but also poems by Pushkin. I thought this was a very strange juxtaposition, that in front of peasants she would recite poems by Pushkin. Actually this is another so-called utopia, putting things from two different spaces together. Why did they shoot the television series in this way? Why would she recite Pushkin? I think that Mao Zedong also represents a kind of utopia. In the

end, at least in terms of military strategy, he succeeded. Just now, when Lu Jie spoke of conceptual changes in art, the differences among the avant-garde, and how the idea of entering the museum system is gradually coming to be tolerated in China. But the idea of leaving the museum, however, is apparently difficult to accept in China. I thought this might be because of some widespread problems in China with the idea of art, with the museum system in China.

Perhaps there are differences in this respect between China and some of the Western countries. Perhaps China has not made sufficient preparations in this regard. You just voiced some doubts toward Chinese officialdom's approach to contemporary art, misunderstandings of the folk, which the media have also had a hard time interpreting. Perhaps Chinese people can accept this; I don't think this is a completely unattainable utopia, but there still exist questions of how to go about attaining it. And perhaps for Chinese society as a whole, the larger issue is that our theoretical preparation has not been sufficient—how to view, how to interpret, how to explain—it is a phenomenon not dissimilar to the juxtaposition I just mentioned of Pushkin and the Tang poetry. Perhaps your Long March in China is an opportunity to make Chinese people believe in art.

Perhaps this problem requires an approach, and perhaps the media can provide a way to slowly change these details, to create some foundations for interpretation. So, I think that if the Long March has results like we've seen today, whether out of misunderstanding or out of problems with the participants, it still reflects the entire way in which things are done in China, it still brings up some problems.

Zhang Guangtian: I think what Lu Jie just said sounds dangerous for him. I understand what he means; he is telling us that revolution and modernist art are twins, that there is no conflict here. But if you want to display these symbols in Chinese society today, how many people will throw bricks at you? In any case, no one can listen to this talk. But if you succeed, the hordes would come and support you, and their enemies would no longer be able to go on claiming to be revolutionary by being anti-revolutionary.

Han Yuhai: Of course that's true, this is obvious. After watching the computer display you just showed us, I think it is very good. The Long March is a topic to which we keep returning in China. It is like the *Internationale*, which also expressed the idea of global unification. The Long March was also a problem of praxis. Because at the time, it had no set goals. It was an event that proceeded and evolved from there. Many high-level leaders went along for the ride, and many young people came along to play. It was a kind of wandering that really did resemble a very special kind of performance art, with a very experimental flair. So, when Mao Zedong summed up the Long March, he called it a manifesto, a political manifesto, uniting the political potentials of the leader class with the places through which they passed, a way of making Bolshevist thought connect with Chinese localities, a constant process of looking for ways to connect the two. And so it is a manifesto, but at the same time, it called itself a "sower of seeds." It was like a proliferation, a continuous transmission. And so this theme is very good, as it always lives on in reality. I remember a few years ago there was an avant-garde biennale, a Beijing biennale, and they asked me to write a preface. I wrote about the left-wing art of China in the 1930s.

In his later years, Lu Xun supported this; Lu Xun was very much a supporter of printmaking and film. His support of this and the Red Army's Long March have some similarities. One is that Lu Xun died in October, 1936. One month before, in September, the Red Army reached the Wayaiobao. These two things happened simultaneously, only a month apart. Furthermore, after reaching Yan'an, people doing left-wing art in Shanghai had a place to gather. And so it was that the leftist artists of Shanghai came to unite, because they had a place to gather in northern Shaanxi that the Red Army established for them. The *Yellow River Chorus* and many similar things came out of this. I wrote my preface in just this way. Many Chinese avant-garde artists wish to erase this history, they wish they could claim that avant-garde art never had such a close connection to the Communist Party, they feel they should leave this out. Like Wang Hui just said, memory of this period, including the revolutionizing of the 1930s left-wing artists who got their beginnings in the May Fourth Movement, has been refused in a very interesting way.

Wang Hui: The situation at that time resembles the one today. Xian Xinghai lived in the cave dwelling in Yan'an, unkempt, and people wondered how an artist could be like this. When the locals view performance art today, it is also like this.

Han Yuhai: Today's avant-garde artists are rather willing to refuse these connections. We went through this in the 1980s as well when everyone was studying things in the West, and we feel this still today. We realized that Foucault and others were all influenced by Marx and even by Mao. How is this possible? This is an interesting refusal. I once travelled part of the route of the Long March with Huang Ping, and in the process I was constantly enriching my own understanding of the Long March. The Long March was truly a utopia. But we also encounter many other utopias in history like, for example Shangri-la, a horizon which once disappeared, an imaginary space in the British style. But when I was travelling with Huang Ping, we discovered the green mountains and waters along a road that China had developed. It ran the route of the "Go West" campaign, running west into Tibet. In this process, it is very possible to discover that utopia is formless. It is also possible that going further one discovers its shape and form, like a China that grew out of the workings of Yan'an. Now we talk in a very Western style, about the international and Shanghai intellectuals and their plans for China. And these plans were all quite similar. Why was Mao Zedong bold and assured only after he got to Yan'an? It has everything to do with the revolutionary route he travelled on the Long March.

Wang Hui: We have held so many meetings at *Dushu* about art. I feel like the biggest worry on everyone's mind is the West. Every time we have one of these meetings, the artists' biggest worry is that the shadow of the West is too big. They want to get out and can't. Every time we meet, whether the topic is the museum system, artistic trends, whatever, the topic always comes up. The history of the Chinese revolution provides us with an important experience. To put it frankly, no matter how you construct this "Western shadow," the more you construct it, the bigger it gets, and the result is that art becomes elite. On the Long March they studied everything, including the West. Much of Mao Zedong thought comes from the West. Ignoring for a minute its later problems, let's talk about the successful pieces of Mao Zedong thought. It is worth discussing why no one even felt worried about the Western constructs therein.

Everyone talks about the folk now, but of you look closely, the artists of Yan'an collected folk songs and bound them together. However, the form they took was Western. Bai Maonu's operatic form, the *Yellow River Chorus* and others. And then there is what I was talking about with Lu Jie last time, the Romanization of Chinese Written Language Movement, and on such a large scale. Think about it, the Red Army was going to talk with peasants, and they pulled out books in Latin letters to read propaganda materials about the war against Japan. There were so many of these texts, and no one ever thought this was a problem worth worrying about. This presents a problem to artists and intellectuals. Not only artists, who have worried about his for many years, but also to those of us in the academy, where our biggest worry is that everything we do is Western. If you do it this way, we think, it becomes Western. And what is Western, really? Is it possible not to be Western? What has the West really become?

We need to look at this as a process of realization, to re-consider these problems, otherwise we have no way out, and it's as if we block ourselves in. Going on in this way is problematic. On the one hand, it is good for everyone to be worried, because it is important to be self-conscious, lest we float with the tide. On the other hand, after ways of thinking grew excessively elite, after the adversary of the West grew so exaggerated that it no longer had form, thus creating the possibility of asphyxiating ourselves. Why is our time so different from the people on the road of Long March or in Yan'an? They really didn't have this problem. If they did something, they did something. And after they did it, you didn't think it was totally Western. There was not the anxiety we have today about being Western. I think this experience is worth talking about. In any case, in the last few years there hasn't been a case in which we did not talk about it. The question of power is ultimately a question about the West, but in the revolutionary experience, what does this ultimately mean?

Zhang Guangtian: Wang Hui's comments just now touch upon the questions I was asking earlier about folk songs; these problems are created when we deny these things. That is to say, they are created when we have no interest in our own time, but are completely confident about our past and future. You ask why people at that time didn't have this problem, whether it was the Long March, or going to Yan'an to study and clear things up. There was always a feeling that they were changing the world, creating a new world where both the leaders and the masses were participants. There was no comparison between past and future. The future was a communist society that was still unthinkably far off. It was like Baghdad is today; the army was approaching. In these past few days they have torn down the statues of Saddam. Can you help but worry? The position at that time was not the same. Then the revolution was successively swelling, the anti-fascist movement was growing, and the communist camp was getting larger. What is the situation now? Only China is left. Only you. If Arab culture doesn't win this battle, it will have proved that it is not right. In the end, the only one that can hang with Western culture is Chinese culture. Prepare to surrender.

Wang Mingxian: Recent art historical scholarship talks about a few important points in art in twentieth century China. One is the printmaking of the revolutionary era. Whenever I see Lu Jie, I think of the Long March. He prepared for years, and formally began to realize it just last year. I think the problem with Chinese contemporary art right now is precisely the closed circle, and the art world itself has come to this realization too. How to solve it? There really is no route, so Lu Jie decided to walk the Long March route. I have not seriously researched the Red Army's Long

March; I have only heard legends. At the time, it was a kind of exile, a kind of defeat, a time when there were actually no routes, where you went somewhere and didn't know where you would go from there. In the end, they found a newspaper left by the Nationalists, which said that Liu Zhidan's Red Army had made it to Yan'an, and people went to join them. Actually, it was a sudden and necessary thing that arose from chaos. So we can say that Mao had military and political genius. This Long March project, although it has stopped, when you were going, you must have discovered some things. For example Yu Huiyong, who in the 1950s researched Chinese folk music, came to lead a resurgence of Chinese folk music in the 1960s. I wonder if your Long March is not looking for something. You talk of connecting with the common folk. For example, the scientists who run the Xichang satellite launcher like to paint peonies and peacocks, and now I'm thinking to myself that peonies and peacocks aren't so bad.

Huang Ping: Shi Dakai couldn't get past the Luding Bridge because he lost his connection with the folk. Whether it was the Red Army's Long March or some other historical incident, success has ultimately depended on one's ability to draw on the support of local resources. I say this as a metaphor; if we say that artists want to find a new beginning, to start an alternative dialogue, they should look for possibility among the locals. Just like Guangtian said, the answer is not with the Artists' Association or the Writer's Association or the Council of Learned Societies. It is in people like that folk photographer. I think there are many very interesting things like that, none of them in the art circle. If you have not found a foundation among the masses, it gets very difficult.

Zhu Jinshi: Wang Hui's comments on Romanization of Chinese Written Language have to do with that special era. Without a revolutionary movement, without a revolutionary background, it would have been impossible to have revolutionary success. The current Long March lacks a revolutionary context. The relationship between art and folk is not the way you seem to be imagining it; the folk has not yet gotten to this point. If it were so mature already, there would be no need for artists to go and create a relationship. Art is not a paradigm, a movement, or a system. Has the Western model really provided a point of reference for this Long March? If we look at this question from an artist's perspective, or as Easterners, the question is whether this paradigm, this system, is really useful to artists. Wang Jianwei planted the earth for a year. Does this count as a Long March? Wang Jianwei was not satisfied with the Long March, probably because it became a work of art performance, because it took on the flavor of its curator. How will Wang Jianwei go on to imagine education, communication, and transmission? I don't think he will simply absorb something thoughtlessly from folk culture. It seems that the Long March as a system is quite prone to initiating things. I even look at our meeting today, and many methods used were initiative. I don't think this can change.

Speaking of absorption, I think that if urban artists go to the country to absorb things, we have to remember that these artists are fundamentally aristocratic, and that their working style is oriented primarily toward Venice and Kassel; their style of absorption is to get something out of participating in an exhibition. The working style of Western biennales is understood quite clearly by Chinese artists, quite simply, that name decides success or failure. They will ask whether the Long March can be a springboard. Another question is whether there are any artists who really want to go on the Long March. Of course there are, there must be. But they are not necessarily on the road.

Zhang Guangtian: Would anyone here really have been willing to go on the Long March? This is a very serious question. I have asked myself, and I think we all need to ask ourselves.

Qi Jianping: We have spoken of Yan'an and why its art succeeded. We have spoken of the elite and the folk, the West and China, and of the posturing required by these relationships, which include education and absorption. The later development of Yan'an and other bases had nothing to do with posturing; there was no consideration of rationale and gesture, but only of very practical issues like the war against Japan, land reform, and educating the peasants and soldiers. At that time there were fixed recipients of art, and art existed under a framework of revolutionary necessity. Only in this framework could it have succeeded. The first group of recipients is incredibly important. For example, everyone forgets who the first audience was of the *Yellow River Chorus*, because it has become a symbol. But at the time, the performance was for a real group of viewers. This relationship is very important. What kind of viewers are you looking for right now? What kind of life situation are you looking for? Will it succeed or fail? Will it continue or will you try again in the future? These are questions worth considering.

Hang Jian: I think I can feel why Wang Jianwei is still guessing why Lu Jie wasn't happy with the Long March. He is an artist who participated in the twelfth site and final site. The fact that he is still guessing why you stopped is worth looking into. We have been talking fairly calmly and almost entirely constructively. I think this is because of your curatorial plan before us, because everyone really likes that text. When I first looked at the website, I remember thinking that this was a very good curatorial plan. But if Chairman Mao had used a map like this for the Red Army's Long March, we would not be talking about it in this way. I think you understand the Long March from the point of view of today's cultural sphere. You have found a few poignant links between culture today and the Long March then. This is good. But you are also constantly tying in the historical Long March, and I don't think that this project is a Long March in the original sense of the word. You can leave the historical route, you can change your way mid-stream, and in the end it is quite possible that you will not reach northern Shaanxi but some other place altogether.

You still hold on to the utopian dreams Wang Hui just spoke of, never relinquishing them. You went abroad to study, which should have changed some of the assumptions you had coming out of the Chinese system where you studied art. But when you came back to China to choose artists, you set out from the perspective of Chinese art, and not from the perspective of your original curatorial plan. And more than eighty percent of participating artists are famous already, so they all bring their own baggage into the project, which of course creates contradictions. Speaking again of the problem of folk art, it seems that we are far behind where Mao Zedong was on his route. Now, you spend a little money and ask them to hold works, or you go find some cultural institutions to cooperate with you. But what is the essence of contemporary folk culture? This is a tough question for the contemporary elite, people who were born into an academic art background. High culture often misinterprets folk culture. Zhang Guangtian believes that folk culture lies in drama, but I think it is more in residential committees, karaoke parlors, hair salons that double as brothels, places that developed naturally and make people feel happy. Impulsive situations give rise to folk culture. So if you set out from the perspective of Chinese and foreign contemporary art looking to

force yourself in, it will seem like a joke, both to them and to later viewers. If it isn't natural, can it really lead to a collision? These fears are all worth considering. I respect that you've used so much of your own capital to mount this project, I think we could truly used the word "great" to describe it. But I recommend that now you sit down, close the door, and write. Take this experience, this process, and turn it into a text. This would be worthwhile.

Lu Jie: Other people have made that suggestion, that I don't need to finish the project, but just to write a text. Still other people warned me that Chinese artists were not suited to participating in such a project, that I could only write a book and never actually do a project. But doing the Long March is different from talking about it. Let me briefly mention the problems of the Long March. I don't think they are intellectual problems, but rather problems in integrating ideas with the current moment. If our participants wished us success, and those not participating wished us failure, and if they believe we have failed after they are done participating, I think something is wrong. Actually the project wants to be an incident, an incident through which the current attitude is changed, and things inside are set aside. Now if we don't march or do this, there is no way to set things aside. There is a frequent criticism: too many topics, too much ambition, too many concepts. I think I knew from the beginning that, either because of me or the nature of this project, it was doomed to failure. And perhaps it is a failure in the conventional sense. Why did we want to string together so many topics? What significance did those topics have there? No matter how big a failure the project ultimately was, the goal was actually to return to the problems of the people involved.

Han Yuhai: But you can't stop things that have already happened.

Zhu Jinshi: Speaking from the international perspective, this really is not something one would see in the Western system. I have never heard of a project like the Long March, and when I first saw the proposal, I too caught the bug. There are certainly plenty of very interesting things here. But casualties will be necessary; isn't it a war after all? People are going to die. It's a different era.

Man Sitting in Sanlian Bookstore Café: I am a listener from Taiwan, who just happened to pass by and decided to sit and listen in on your debate. All of the themes you have been debating here could be summarized in one: the time for artists to study *en masse* has come. The necessity of this study has made itself apparent in the work you have done. Secondly, revolution and degeneration are inseparable, so if you are going to talk about revolution, you need to ask why art today will degenerate. That you have already done this is precious. The most important thing is what you do next, how much you can precipitate, how much you can accumulate. You have to keep going, and then this thing will exist. If you don't continue, the project will not bear fruit.

Huang Ping: There is a line in *Guevara* that is pretty good: "get on board again, depart again."

Wang Hui: The core question is whether there are new topics to be had. In the past twenty years, in what we might call a reaction to the revolution that preceded it, there have been two extremes. In the end, it left us with an either an obscured memory or a distorted understanding of the entire

history of the twentieth century. This history, I think, needs to be re-narrated under current conditions. I remember talking with Lu Jie long ago, and saying that in terms of Chinese history, you can legitimately say that without the revolution there would be no modernity. Or else there would have only been colonial modernity. That is to say that only because there was the Chinese revolution was there subjectivity. Regardless of the tragedy of the revolution we could talk about, if we obscure its history, we obscure the entire question of the modern, at least for Chinese people. So we need to take revolutionary history and tell the story over again thoroughly, from the top. This is not to say that we should simply deny the tragedies of the revolution that everyone has come to discuss in the past twenty or thirty years. Thinking over is important, but it cannot turn into a reactionary movement. But the basic process now is that thinking over becomes reaction, and this creates problems. It is as if there was no revolutionary history; after a century of struggle, in the end colonialism and imperialism are right. That turns re-consideration into anti-revolution. I don't mean anti-revolution in the same sense in which it was once used. The idea is a farewell to modernity, because modernity is one of the things that need to be reconsidered as well. But you cannot simply deny modernity, because modernity actually comprises the process of the reconstitution of subjectivity. So bringing this topic up, including summarizing the tragedy of revolution itself, that is what would be meaningful.

What we talked about today is not simply art's problems in actualizing itself, but really the entire historical predicament of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of my bigger regrets is that, owing to the division of intellectual labour and our different fields, there has been little chance for dialogue. This so-called "circle-ization" refers not only to our distance from society, but is also internal to the various fields, be they artistic or scholarly. There is too little dialogue. If there is a chance to entice all different kinds of people to throw themselves into a debate of this process, that is interesting. It doesn't matter how you debate, but it must become a larger topic.

Lu Jie: What you say makes me regret that we didn't have the participation of the intellectual circles. One of the major reasons why we stopped was precisely this. Originally the thinking was that after we were done, we would invite everyone to debate. Now we have discovered that the exchange that needs to go into the creation of this thought must be established in the process. The original plan was to invite everyone to a big conference at Yan'an. But this is not right, and for this reason—that is to say, so that we could have this chance to sit down and talk today—we stopped the whole project, because we still need to have an intellectual exchange.

Han Yuhai: It seems right now like we've gone from the hot summer months into the fog. Before everyone was hot, and suddenly the sky has grown dark. It is a cloudy feeling. So I want to use the cloudy months to draw a metaphor. Wang Hui's famous article on 1989 and the New Liberalism, and especially his analysis therein of Louis Bonaparte's April 18th, reflects an entirely gray outlook. Gray is the confluence of light and dark, an unexpected result. It was not a unification achieved by capital, and it was not a victory of the proletariat, but rather a unification achieved by an order. Marx once said that it would be a hooligan proletarian seizing an opportunity unexpectedly. To look at Mao's revolution in this context is very interesting.

Meng Hui: When I first saw your list of participants, I was shocked at how many "pure" artists were there. I don't have any prejudice against "pure" artists, but I don't think they necessarily walk the same road as you. And thus I have my doubts.

Kuang Xinnian: I don't understand art, the idea of modern art, or the goal of art. Mao's goals for art were not the same as our goals for art. We say this project failed, but what does that mean? From what perspective are we saying it failed?

Qi Jianping: You have brought up a very interesting question. In what sense do we say that the project failed? Is it that it was never finished and did not have the desired stimulatory effect? Or that it did not catch the attention of the society at large? Or that you did not reach your goal, did not realize truly creative works?

Huang Ping: When Mao met with an Albanian delegation in 1966, he talked especially about just this problem, he talked about the possibility of failure of the revolution. Why was there the Cultural Revolution? Mao needed to remind everyone that perhaps the revolution had failed. We are talking here from the perspective of failure, not success.

Hang Jian: Speaking about success, what do you really think of contemporary art? With art that is based on concept and thought, the processes by which it happens and the criticism which it receives after it happens are not the same as its influence on reality. You are looking now to lay roots and bloom flowers in the process. You have considered many very complicated strategic questions but you still need to consider the project's aftermath, the value it will attain in the culture at large. So, I think this is something that works on two levels, and there are certain things that cannot be grasped in their entirety on-site.

Kuang Xinnian: But modern art always has these problems, even in the so-called West. It was only later, once the museum system had taken shape, that anyone admitted Vincent Van Gogh's works were valuable. Doesn't that seem far-out? They never expected him to succeed, and Van Gogh died without money. Where did his success come from?

Huang Ping: Why did the years after 1989, at the time of the so called "end of history," turn out to be a good time to debate Marx? Because Marx was the first thinker to write after Hegel, and so perhaps this failure gave him an opportunity. Just as Wang Hui said, the historical logic of May Fourth, almost over in the 1930s, provided a new possibility for the Long March. Its failure was simply an occasion.

Wang Hui: The things that are truly confirmed in history all grow out of finding new possibilities at times when it seems there is no further road to travel. Only in this way are things chosen by history, not because they failed or didn't fail. For example, the Red Army's work of uniting the fringes, finding the possibilities that connected several different areas (there was no way for Chen Duxiu to know what was going on from Shanghai). No one could see what was happening except for the people who were right there; if people had seen it, there would have been a way. From this perspective, it seems that one's vision and attitude play an important role in history, rather than

whether one particular thing succeeded or failed. I still refuse to believe that there is any history devoid of choice. Places that look devoid of possibility are precisely the places in which possibility is to be found. Today, no matter what field we are in, people are not only finding possibilities but also developing them. And this is what we are affirming in the Long March project—it has succeeded in this way, otherwise, it would never have existed.

Huang Ping: Speaking again of modern art, only when you understand what you need to do next can you start to talk about success or failure. All setbacks turn into experiences, and so finding a possibility in a setback as Wang Hui just mentioned might allow you to set your position anew. I think that Chinese and Western art alike can't go on just doing biennales. They need to re-establish alternative art, or the possibility of new forms of art. So, it doesn't matter if your participants are famous or not, and maybe it doesn't even matter if they have artistic credentials. Perhaps they're not members of the Writer's Association or the Council of Learned Societies. Perhaps they don't paint or write poems. Then they can form a new art constituency and a new form for art. Plenty of those who went to northern Shaanxi with the Red Army were just peasants and children.

Meng Hui: I rather agree with Huang Ping. When Sun Yat-sen began the capitalist revolution, he obviously didn't go to the Qing court looking for support. When Mao started the Red Army, he had to create his ranks entirely from scratch. So, this Long March, since it represents a new opinion, perhaps requires that you find some new people. You can't stick only with those who already have a place in the power structure. Old policemen, old weapons—every artistic movement begins like this. You must have new talent before you can have new ideas.

I think that in this way Lu Jie's ambition is not large enough. Since you're doing the project on such a grand scale, you should take on even more. You should aim for a complete subversion of the avant-garde art community, you should look to make many famous people angry. After the movement has gone on, there should be a new group, and it will kill all those old elites. You need to look at world history, at any movement, whether a revolution, a political movement, a literary movement, an artistic movement—they all began with new people extinguishing the old, a duel between old and new.

Lu Jie: Wang Jianwei, I really want to know what you think about this as an artist.

Wang Jianwei: The problems solved by the Long March are not artistic problems. For example, with regard to participants, I don't really care if they are artists or non-artists, in the end that is up to Lu Jie. The Long March is absolutely not going to solve artistic problems, and it should not say that it is going to, because the art world will run away. If you find a new group of people, it will be the same. The key thing is to find people in your same camp, but I don't think these people are necessarily the type who would go on the march with you. Continuing Wang Hui's line of thought: for whom do we make works? Why do we make works? If you can follow these questions and solve them, then it's over, you no longer need to answer other questions.

I'll continue what we were just saying about the problems of finding a new group of people. Since September of last year, He Duoling has been doing something called "open studio." Liu Jiakun is

the curator. He stresses the importance of the non-specialist. In writing, this sounds very good. Then, when we were discussing, we decided not to invite artists. He wrote something: how big his space was, a list of technical specifications, and he gave it to everyone to read. It was a good text. In the end, after you went there, you felt that there were still the same old problems. The more the project pretended to be non-specialized, the more specialized it became. You didn't know whether to laugh or cry. There is a woman who does biomedical engineering, a very interesting person, who tries to impart aesthetic presence to her technical work and turn it into a visual display. When you go to her studio, she talks about her works just like we talk about art. So, I think that perhaps we don't need to find a group of new people, or to think about how to lead an army. It might not be realistic to say that as soon as this army leaves the art circle, it will become purified. You don't need to think about attacking some people and leading others. If you do things that have no connection with a particular person, that person will automatically be released.

Hang Jian: I have a different opinion. Meng Hui just asked whether it would be O.K. to discover another Wang Jianwei. You, Wang Jianwei, how did you get here? The problems you just mentioned with new people will always be there; so you will not pick those new people? I will instead pick the most outstanding new people with the most potential.

Wang Jianwei: I don't think this is necessary. If you want to dig up something new, you don't do it by first delineating a clear front. As we were just saying of the Long March, if you don't lay it out clearly to begin with, people start to think it does not have a connection with them. And if they think that, you have actually chosen them. Perhaps these people have never condemned you, or perhaps they once did, saying the Long March is meaningless. In actuality, these people have been chosen by you. Your army needs to start marching, moving, because only then is it an army. You can't sit here in a room and think it out, saying this guy is no good, that guy is no good, so let's find some new people. You can take the new people out, come back here, and still have the same problems.

Hang Jian: I'm not saying there is an absolute division between old and new, but there are some artists who are already famous, whose work is relatively mature, and who might have problems if you insert them into Lu Jie's system. Rather than doing it like this, it would be better to play another round.

Philip Tinari: Many people criticize us, saying that we are doing the Long March to export. Whether they are gallery directors in Beijing, art-world types—they all think that the Long March should first be completed here in China and that only then should it go abroad. Like Nike shoes, made in China, sold abroad. I have always opposed this point of view. Concepts like "Chinese art" and "Chinese contemporary art" limit us in very serious ways. And yet no one here seems to doubt these constructs; no one denies that there is a Chinese contemporary art. Lu Jie hasn't spoken today about the international significance of the Long March, but he has a real yearning to take this idea of Chinese art and complicate it, whether by bringing foreign artists into the Long March, or by taking the project to non-Chinese contexts. And in this way we can debate the limits imposed upon us by ideas of nationality. It also brings out some other problems, like foreign

artists' understanding and imagining of China. We have said that the project involving Judy Chicago and female Chinese artists at Lugu Lake was a so-called "successful failure." And in the next few months, the Long March will move on to Norway, Japan, and elsewhere—taking the project into new discursive contexts one stop at a time.

Lu Jie: Actually, a big part of the Long March is international exhibitions. First of all, every stop on our route included the participation of foreign artists. Perhaps they did works about China before, or perhaps they have a certain perception or experience of China, or perhaps they have a working style similar to the Long March, a definite connection to our project, and thus they were invited. At the same time the Long March has always considered how to transmit itself inside the arena of international art, although at present we are up against some significant problems. If the arrows don't come from behind our backs, they come at us straight on. I talk on and on about the Long March methodology, but people still accuse me of doing this for foreign museums. This criticism is easy to make; as soon as people hear that you've been abroad, they think you've sold out the motherland. In reality, we think that transmission is relatively important, and that people abroad are hungry to understand the Long March. There are people abroad who think like we do, who worry like we do, who ask if we are going to carry on.

Zhang Guangtian: You can answer this question. Many people ask it of me. They say, Zhang Guangtian, you've put on these plays, all in theaters for three hundred people. The common folk don't see them. In name you support the common folk; how can you claim that yours is the art of the proletariat? I ask them if they understand Lu Xun's works. There are only a few big-name professors who really understand Lu Xun. If professors can't understand him, how could rickshaw drivers understand him? And if rickshaw drivers didn't understand him, how did he become the hero of proletarian art? Because he killed his enemy, he angered his enemy to death. He made certain people uncomfortable, and this is what we call struggle. Liang Shiqiu was uncomfortable, and so the rickshaw drivers grew comfortable. When those who kissed the asses of landlords got uncomfortable, other people were comfortable. I don't want to understand Lu Xun's works. Thus, I think that literature has two phases: one is struggle, because struggle is truly a dialogue. After struggle perhaps comes construction; if there is no struggle, there can be no construction.

Wang Hui: Right now there are only two historical readings of the Chinese revolution. One is official, the other is Rightist. If it's not official, then it's Rightist. This is just how it is, and so while many people want to find and use a historical framework that incorporates the revolution, hardly anyone is actually familiar with this history, and so we can't explain ourselves.

Li Xuejun: I think time is about up. When I organized this activity, I thought of two questions. One was Lu Jie's Long March and how he has spun it as an abstract symbol of achieving a revolution. Key to this is the idea of a utopian spirit, and I think we've talked about this quite a bit today. The other question was whether this Long March needs to continue, because the Long March cannot stop for us to debate it. The key question is still how to do it, since you've already gone on one road that, in many ways, resembles the route of the original Long March. Actually, you still need to think about the historical conditions of that time, the complicated historical background,

and you need to understand those problems deeply in order to make a theoretical preparation. Today, I regret that in organizing which scholars to invite, I wanted to find some who had this kind of historical background, who were incredibly familiar with that time, and had researched it. But of young scholars in China today, there is hardly anyone with this specialty. There are a few among the older scholars, especially the mainstream ones, those doing Party History. But of the younger scholars, there is basically no one doing revolutionary history, or doing it well. This points to a problem. In terms of scholarship, we have already begun to forget this era. Putting this together, I thought there would be people who could provide truly historical advice, or clarify some things, that might provide some real help to Lu Jie. But it looks as if we can only continue to converse and argue if we are going to reach that goal.

Notes

[1] When his daughter asked the late Deng Xiaoping what did he do when he was on the road of the historical Long March, he answered, "followed the road that led us along."

[2] Jiang Jie's work for the Long March was entitled *Farewell to the Red Army: Remembering the Mothers of the Long March*. She was interested in the female Red Army soldiers of those years, who gave birth to babies on the road, were not able to keep them, and had to give them up for adoption to the locals. She had sculpted twenty of these babies, and wanted the Long March contingent to give them up for "adoption" to families along the route, helping her to establish contact with the adoptive parents. She would provide expenses if the families would take a picture of themselves with the baby and mail it to her each year on the anniversary of the baby's adoption. The sculpture, of course, would never grow up, while the family members would grow old by the year, eventually dying. The massive scale of this work, its spanning of time (lasting decades), and its straddling of space involved history, humanities, geography, gender, family, and personal fate on many levels. It went beyond a simple discussion of the female experience of reproduction. The first sculpture baby was adopted byy school teacher Xiao's family and named Grace Xiao. The second baby was adopted by Queen's Museum curator Valerie Smith and artist Matt Mullican, named Zula Smith Mullican.

[3] Luding Bridge was the turning point for the historical Long March. They successfully crossed the bridge and entered the Tibetan highlands, breaking the blockage by the Nationalist's Army, which historically, General Shi Da Kai was not able to cross. He was subsequently defeated and caught by the Qing government, symbolically ending the Tai Ping Movement.

[4] Before the Zunyi Meeting during the Long March, the Chinese communists were lead by Wang Ming and the twenty-eight-and-a-half-Bushwicks who were trained in Moscow. The terms "Wang Ming," "twenty-eight and half-Bushwicks," and "Moscow," all symbolize young intellectuals who only followed Comintern doctrines and orders from Moscow's thus causing the failure of the Chinese revolution. It was Mao who fought against this leadership.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Zhang Guantian's play *Che Guevara* is the most popular and controversial play in the recent cultural scene in China. It has caused endless debates and symbolized the love or hate attitude towards the New Left in China.

[8] Every day during the Long March, Qiu Zhijie, artist and co-curator of the Long March, wore a pair of shoes with soles engraved with the characters for "left" and "right." The catch was that "left" was engraved on the right sole and vice versa. So, technically this work was realized at every point along the Long March where he left footprints, though the prints were often invisible.

[9] Li Tianbing is the Guinness Record holder of taking and developing photographs only with natural resources. A dark kitchen and his quilt serve as his darkroom and the light from his chimney is used to expose the film. He still uses one outdated British camera, which he traded with the family farm cattle in early 1940s. He has served the villagers for over fifty years, and experienced more than two hundred thousand kilometers of journeys.

[10] "Red Shoulder Chang Qing Leads the Road" is the standard gesture and pose of the Revolutionary Ballet *The Red Women Army* that was promoted by Madam Mao during the Cultural Revolution.

[11] "Big Character Manifesto" was the most powerful and popular weapon during the Cultural Revolution. "Zooming in on the Enemy's Headquarters: My Big Character Manifesto" was the first one written by Mao to announce the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.

[12] "Taking paintings to the countryside" was a public and cultural campaign popular during Mao's era.

CHEN ZHEN AT P.S. 1

JONATHAN GOODMAN

Figure 1. Chen Zhen, *Crystal Landscape of Inner Body*, 2000, crystal, iron, glass, 95 x 190 x 70 cm. Collection of Anthony T. Podestà, Washington. Courtesy of Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Italy.

Shanghai-born, Paris-based artist Chen Zhen passed away in 2000 after a decades-long battle with auto-immune hemolytic anemia. His presence in the Chinese contemporary art scene is much missed. Like many of his colleagues, Chen Zhen sought in his art not so much a simple merger of Western and Eastern influences, but rather a poetic resolution of the problem of cultural homelessness. In actuality, the artist's work suggests a dual attitude, that is, a combination of Eastern thought and Western avant-garde techniques. Generally speaking, this has been the way the Chinese contemporary art scene has proceeded—with a predilection for Asian philosophy expressed through the avant-garde strategies of recent Western art. Like other Mainland artists Huang Yongping, Xu Bing, and Cai Guoqiang, Chen Zhen matured during the Cultural Revolution; and like these other artists, he often created interactive works that claimed the interest of viewers through physical interventions. In the massive work *Jue Chang: Fifty Strokes to Each* (1998), for example, he built an interactive installation in which visitors of any background could beat away on drums made from chairs, beds, and stools gathered from around the world.

In a world of hybrids, Chen Zhen stood out as someone who was better than most at finding a position that would do justice to the way he thought and the way art is being made today. He worked with a dialectical sense of dualities—between East and West, old and new cultures, communalism and individualism, illness and health. Some of his best work is concerned with his illness. His struggle with anemia became a metaphor for the difficulties inherent in the making of art. Indeed, he grew to believe that his actions to maintain health were central to his creativity. He commented, "My daily battle against illness has given me such energy that the whole experience has been transformed into a positive creative force. Treatment, cure, therapy, purification, and meditation: these daily preoccupations have become the universe in which art and life feed on each other."[1] It is characteristic of the artist's energy to have seen what most people regarded as a crippling disease as an opening of the mind and spirit. In this sense, his story is gripping and exemplary. By reading his illness as a metaphor, he was able to concentrate his considerable energies on the kinds of freedom and creativity won from conditions beyond his control.

The kind of thinking Chen Zhen came to stand for does not, as one might expect, support an unfettered individualism. Chen Zhen maintained his very Chinese notion of a group mentality and applied it to the current circumstances that he faced. He was very clear about this during a conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist: "Now we are in a system, a complex global network, in which the individual artist is no longer sufficient for creative thinking and innovation. I am interested in becoming destabilized because I want to be able to gather, to accumulate, all of my experiences of different places."[2] It would seem that, instead of reading his displacement and hybridity as circumstances to be overcome, Chen Zhen embraced his context as revelatory of much of the world's contemporary experience. He was consistent in his ability to see an opening in places many of us would consider closed. He offered his audience an optimism in a time when a cheerful demeanor has seemed less than adequate as a response to our circumstances.

So, it was clear that Chen Zhen saw danger in any kind of convention. He asserted that, "As soon as something becomes a system, a formula, it's time to find something else.[3] His thinking reminds the viewer of Buddhism; indeed, meditation was part of his daily routine. At the same time, however, it is necessary to point out that the artist was a bit of a magpie in his thinking, making use of whatever might be available to communicate his decentralized view of things. There is an earthy humour to much of his work. One of his best-known pieces, *Daily Incantations* (1996), consists of an arrangement of wooden chamber pots bought in Shanghai. They refer to Chen Zhen's daily childhood experience of going to school in Shanghai and seeing the pots being washed on the street. As part of the work, the artist included aural elements: there was the sound of a pot being washed, as well as the voices of children reciting the daily catechism taken from Mao's Little Red Book.

In the middle of the installation is a large sphere of electronic junk—computer parts, wires, audio components—meant to offset the chamber pots, which reflect traditional practices that are increasingly anachronistic in China. Here Chen Zhen saw spirituality where others might well react in disgust; he even found spirituality in the sounds accompanying the installation, commenting, "The mixture of the sound of the chamber pot washing and political preaching creates a kind of religious atmosphere which makes one experience the pleasure of transcendence from the mundane noises."[4] It is characteristic of the artist to have invested meaning in elements many people would disdain; the sound of the washing and the children reciting Mao are elevated into a meaningfulness by being taken up in a different context in which the subtexts and casual expressions of daily life suddenly take on important meaning.

For many in Chen Zhen's audience, *Jue Chang: Fifty Strokes to Each* is a brilliant statement, primarily against the violence attending contemporary disputes. The words "*jue chang*" literally mean "the peak of poetic perfection," while the phrase "fifty strokes to each" refers to a Buddhist maxim indicating that in the case of a conflict, the simplest way of resolving the problem is the application of fifty strokes to the buttocks of each of the antagonists. All in all, the installation is a huge percussive instrument, with one hundred drums prepared from chairs and beds taken from around the world. (Most are from the Middle East.) The drum batons are created from police clubs, branches, and other pieces of wood.

Jue Chang was a favorite work in the P.S. 1 exhibition, with visitors of all ages maniacally drumming upon the hides stretched over chairs and beds. According to the artist, the piece "was stimulated by the historical and actual contexts of the Middle East, but must not necessarily apply to this region alone: [it] questions generally all kinds of disputes and conflicts in the world and tries to 'offer' an efficient solution."[5] The aggressive energy going into the act of drumming is thus channeled into the gentler function of art. *Jue Chang* is intended to travel the world and provide an outlet for anger and violence. Typically, the artist universalizes from a very particular set of conditions; the tragedy of the ongoing Middle Eastern dispute is taken up as evidence of a deeply human, worldwide problem. This writer can say, from experience, that the beating of the drums is a wonderfully cathartic activity.

The collection of glass organs that comprises the late work, *Crystal Landscape of Inner Body* (2000), is remarkable for its transparent aesthetic (fig. 1). Consisting of glass versions of lungs, the colon, kidneys, gallbladder, and so on, it references Chen Zhen's increasing concern with his body. His openness in a work such as this is clear; the body parts may easily reference both Eastern and Western medicine systems. One of the most meditative works in the exhibition was *Opening of Closed Center* (1997). This work was the result of the artist's having spent a month with the curator France Morin and other artists in Sabbathday Lake, Maine, where the sole surviving Shaker community is located. According to Morin, the month-long residency "questioned the assumption that art and life are mutually exclusive."[6] In response to his stay, Chen Zhen created a piece marked by enclosures: a circular rocking chair, reminiscent in its simplicity of Shaker furniture, sits in the centre of a space enclosed by wooden window frames taken from a Chinese monastery—"a space within a space," as Morin puts it.[7] One side of the circular piece consists of a series of small, standing tables—altars, really—on which pots and food containers used in everyday life are placed. The use of the pots not only refers to the Shaker notion of piety found in everyday activities, but also to the Chinese tradition of creating altars at home devoted to success and personal happiness. At the same time, the circular rocking chair refers not only to sitting in Shaker prayer but also in Asian meditation, both activities attempting to mediate life through a contemplative calm.

During his stay, Chen Zhen also contributed highly skilled renderings of the Shakers living in Sabbathday Lake. His colour drawings capture the spiritual determination of the individuals making up the small group. The drawings accompanying the larger installation works were remarkably accomplished; in them one could see a highly skilled and intelligent artist working out the practical aspects of his projects. Very much a member of his accomplished generation, Chen Zhen was essentially an installation artist most taken with finding and demonstrating correspondences between the mind and the world. His mixed allegiances resulted in an art whose structure was inevitably open to cultural influences from all over the world. Quite rightly, he eschewed anything that would fix his thought in place, destabilization becoming not a problem but, in fact, an ethic. The implications of his art can be dizzying by virtue of their variety; viewers might well wonder about where he stood in regard to his background and his use of the past.

Chen Zhen's refusal to worry tells us a lot about what he valued; his aesthetic consists of an *ad hoc* determination to improvise in environments notable for their antagonism toward creativity. He explained himself at length: "The idea of 'residence,' 'resonance,' and 'resistance,' which has grown out of my experiences of the last few years, asserts some positions I would like to develop. 'Reside' or anchor yourself in a variety of cultural contexts; 'resonate' a dialogue with 'local' cultures; 'resist' or dilute the monocultural influence of the West on your mind."[8] Apprehensive of cultural institutionalism of any sort, Chen Zhen sought to orient himself in the moment—much as a Zen practitioner might become aware of the holiness of everyday life. He did not so much give up the particulars of his own past as he embraced the newness of the cultures he travelled to, preferring the local and the immediately "true," above all else. And he did the best he could to make sense of, and at the same time, maintain independence from the cultural constructs of the West, where he had elected to work. His example, I think, will prove telling to future generations of artists, who will likely also be taken with the complexities of contemporary culture, increasingly a multivalent rather than a monolithic entity. In his travels around the world, because of his willingness to embrace the moment at hand, and despite the hardships of his illness, Chen Zhen became a pioneer whose energy and ethics are not easily forgotten.

Chen Zhen: A Tribute
P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Centre, New York
16 February to 31 August 31, 2003

Notes

[1] This quotation is taken from France Morin, "In China There Is a Proverb That Says...," in *Chen Zhen* (New York: P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 2003): 19.

[2] Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Conversation with Chen Zhen," in *Chen Zhen* (New York: P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 2003): 20-21.

[3] Ibid., 22.

[4] Chen Zhen, "Artist's Statements," in *Chen Zhen* (New York: P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 2003): 181.

[5] Ibid., 179.

[6] France Morin, "In China There Is a Proverb That Says…," in *Chen Zhen* (New York: P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center): 18.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Jérôme Sans, "The Resounding Silence: Interview of Chen Zhen," in *Chen Zhen* (New York: P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center): 29.

RONG RONG'S EAST VILLAGE AT CHAMBERS FINE ART

JONATHAN GOODMAN

Documentary and conceptual Mainland Chinese photographer Rong Rong moved to Beijing from Fujian in 1993. Desperately poor, he rented a farmhouse in Dashanzhuang, a dirty, rundown village located on the eastern edges of Beijing. According to Wu Hung, the village consisted of "some sixty to seventy farmhouses connected by narrow dirt roads."[1] Today, Dashanzhuang no longer exists, having been swallowed up by an ever-burgeoning city. There would be no reason to remember or memorialize this place if it were not for Rong Rong having documented the art production of other inhabitants—painters, performance artists, and rock stars—who were also living there.

The group named the place Dongcun, or East Village, in emulation of the New York City neighbourhood that was, and still is, the home of people affecting an artistic, bohemian lifestyle. Between 1992 and 1994, Dongcun was the site of artistic experimentation by artists whose actions and work would be recognized as the start of an avant-garde in the Mainland. A number of the artists, such as Zhang Huan and Ma Liuming, have since established international careers.

In the forty photographs that made up the recent exhibition at Chambers Fine Art in New York, Rong Rong documented a bold number of experiments. The photographs are divided into three groups: the first is composed of work witnessing the actions and art of the East Village denizens; the second follows performances enacted by East Village artists from late 1994 to 1997, after they were forcibly disbanded by police in June 1994; and the third consists of Rong Rong's conceptual self-portraits, taken during his East Village stay.

The portfolio, containing an essay by Wu Hung, has been printed as a book in an edition of eight hundred; the first forty copies comprise the gallery's deluxe edition—forty gelatin silver prints, each signed and numbered by the artist, contained in an iron box—along with a regular, clothbound edition of seven hundred and sixty copies. The catalogue essay by Wu Hung includes historical commentary along with extensive quotation of the diaries Rong Rong kept while living in Dongcun. Wu Hung's discerning insights effectively place the work of artists who produced art that squarely challenged the assumptions of Chinese society. There was a price for making such work: Zhang Huan was beaten up and others spent time in prison. Most of the art took the form of performances and photographs and, as Wu Hung points out, the authorship and ownership of the images would become a contested sore point among the artists responsible for them. The confused terms of ownership notwithstanding, Rong Rong's representation of the artists' actions would become well known for their precise description of an astonishing month of creativity—from the middle of May to the middle of June in 1994.

Major performances included Zhang Huan's now-famous hour-long sitting, covered with fish oil and honey, in the filthiest public toilet in Dongcun that was memorably recorded by Rong Rong and Ma Liuming's *Fen-Ma Liuming's Lunch*, for which the artist made himself up using women's cosmetics. In the first installation of the latter's two-part performance piece, live fish were boiled in a pot, after which

Figure 1. Rong Rong, *East Village Beijing No. 43*, 1995, 161.3 x 106.7 cm.

the artist attached a plastic tube to his mouth and penis. According to Wu Hung, "Ma later stated, 'Through the link of the tube, I wanted to circulate my *yang*, my masculinity, with my *yin*, my femininity'"(78). The performance ended with the artist offering the cooked fish to his audience and placing the remaining carcasses in an aquarium.

There is a marvelous photograph of a group performing in May 1995, entitled *To Add One Meter to An Anonymous Mountain*, in which ten artists—including Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming, and Curse (a rock musician and poet who also had lived in East Village)—lay naked on top of each other, with the heaviest taking the lowest position and the lighter artists lying upon them. This image was not photographed by Rong Rong, who was in Fujian on a commercial assignment at the time, but its description is included in Wu Hung's commentary as it has become a very conspicuous image after being shown in the exhibition *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* in 1999. Wu Hung points out that the performance "marked the culmination as well as the end of the large-scale collaborations between the East Village artists" (125).

Rong Rong would go on to take photographs of his own conceptualized performances, in which he and a female companion, wearing glamorous dresses, embraced in ruined buildings. Wishing to document the extraordinarily rapid change in the urban landscape of Beijing, Rong Rong also took to seeking out and photographing images placed on the walls of the homes, partially in ruins, having fallen prey to the intense urban rebuilding in China. It was clear that, like Rong Rong, the other artists were also intent on working individually; the tight group broke up and pursued separate paths. Zhang Huan would go on to New York, where he has enjoyed ongoing media attention and has shown at some of the city's most prestigious galleries, including Jeffrey Deitch and Max Protetch.

Although Zhang Huan was only one of the organizers of the collectively realized performance *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain*, he claimed that the photographic image was his own to sell, setting off a controversy about who actually owned the picture. The argument—which so far as I know was not settled to anyone's satisfaction—brings up the problems of authorship and ownership of the photographs, which attract interest and good prices in the Western art world. Rong Rong's photographs of the performances he saw have become noted works of art. Even so, they are dependent on the individual and group creativity of the artists he portrays. A kind of hybrid creativity has resulted: the photographs reference famous actions but must be treated as art objects in their own right.

Rong Rong's decision to begin making images based on his own ideas is an indication that he wished to be an artist

himself, and not only a historian of Mainland China's fledgling avant-garde. If we think about the authorship of these works, the problems seem relatively clear—it is possible to direct authorship to the artist performing the action. But if we consider who owns the image, the difficulty seems greater. Does Rong Rong benefit alone from having taken the photograph? At that moment—on the anonymous mountain in the Miaofeng Mountains near Beijing—were the ten naked artists laying on top of each other performing for themselves or for the audience of the photographer taking the picture? Who is to decide the image's ownership? The decision must acknowledge the intricacies of the action's circumstances.

Unlike *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain*, the performances in *Primordial Sounds* (1995) extended the notion of the East Village artist in that only six of the twelve participants actually lived in the East Village (Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming, Rong Rong, Cang Xin, Wang Shihua, and Curse). During his trip to Fujian, Rong Rong shot a provocative image of himself lying naked on the bed in which he was born. Clearly, the definition of the East Village artist was growing larger and more complex, encompassing new, conceptually challenging art. The night time performances produced for *Primordial Sounds* were both ritualistic and perverse: Ma Liuming drank five bottles of beer so as to urinate for some extraordinary length of time; Curse, the rock poet and performer, screamed into the dark three times; and Rong Rong photographed a girl who was holding a candle up to her face, slowly erasing the distance between himself and her, until the camera came nearly to rest on her face. Zhang Huan, always an extremist, participated naked while crossing a highway and laughing hysterically. Rong Rong writes in his diary, "From a distance [Zhang Huan's] actions looked as if he was fighting a battle. But he was the only warrior in the battlefield while his opponent was himself" (118). Reaching an underpass, Zhang Huan lay down and filled his mouth with earthworms; the photographs of his performance are both horrific and mesmerizing.

Rong Rong also documented *The Third Contact*, a series of performances realized in March 1995. According to Wu Hung, Rong Rong acted in "a role comparable to that of a 'conductor' or 'director'" (128). He asked Zhang Huan and Ma Liuming to interact together in a friend's bathroom—a decidedly cleaner place than Dongcun's public toilet. Rong Rong writes that "it was not a very large bathroom, only about six or seven meters, but very clean. If the public toilet in the East Village is hell, then this is heaven" (128). During the duration of the performance, the two artists interacted in a deliberately bizarre fashion. Zhang Huan shaved his own pubic hair while Ma Liuming shaved Zhang Huan's already-bald head with an electric razor. Both stepped into the bathtub, which Zhang Huan had filled with a pile of hair Rong Rong describes as having been "prepared for the occasion" (129) (fig. 1).

The photographs are strange but fascinating, with Zhang Huan's tough-guy features and demeanor contrasting sharply with Ma Liuming's cosmetically enhanced androgyny. As the beginning of an avant-garde, these performances were in fact giant steps in establishing a provocative methodology, whose stratagem was first and foremost to shock. The nudity itself was a transgression in a society whose mores are—at least on the surface—deeply conservative. But there is also a point at which the meaninglessness of the activity, coupled with a rebellion nearly religious in its implied content, tended to cancel itself out.

While striking, Rong Rong's images are interesting beyond their formal qualities. They are memorable for the inspired circumstances they document—the stories about the East Village are given pictures for history and corroboration. The pictures illustrate the sometimes magical, sometimes horrific interventions the artists made while living on the very edge of society. As such, they claim our attention by their outrageousness. While the actions are often much more than adolescent pranks and can sometimes be deeply moving, a Dada spirit of rebellion runs through many of the interventions, which inevitably owe more than a little to the spirit of the Western avant-garde. It may be that what has happened in China is an explosion similar to the kinds of stress and change that produced the avant-garde in Europe and America; more than a few writers and critics have noted the Duchampian irony in much of contemporary Chinese art, as well as its nod to American avant-garde art of recent decades past. Yet, it is clear that the Chinese artists are seeking solutions to quandaries that are Chinese rather than Western in origin; they have discovered and also appropriated those methodologies best suited to their needs. It is not a matter of imitation as it is a matter of focus. The question of "how Chinese is it?" hangs in the air over all the outrageousness, and we answer the query not so much by citing correspondences with Western precedents but rather by tying the actions to powerful Chinese cultural concerns.

Because Rong Rong's pictures develop a history of a distinctive generation of artists, they are greatly enhanced by the inclusion of his diary entries and the intelligent and historically knowledgeable commentary by Wu Hung. There is a great deal to learn here for the Western viewer, who may see the images more as mere historical documents than as interpretations of a consuming rebelliousness. But the achievement of Rong Rong's pictures, like the performances they portray, is considerable. The photographs capture a moment in time when the anonymity and sheer exuberance of the artists freed them to behave in ways that would later seem astonishingly direct; they describe a mind set whose very nature was taken up with the idea of challenge and rebellion.

My own sense of the movement is that the artists were not quite sure of what they themselves were creating. Yet, they were convinced that their creativity had innate meaningfulness. Rong Rong began by being a documenter and ended up a participant and creator. It is fascinating to think of the photographs and actions from a Chinese perspective, as opposed to a Western overview. Rong Rong's invaluable contribution as a photographer enables us to share some of the charged moments of creativity and change the East Village artists produced. The energy of the performances was so high that his documentation of the interventions carries a similar electricity. For that alone, the exhibition is historically relevant. At the same time, there was a clarity and focus to the exhibition that made it as compelling as art. Rong Rong has successfully documented an important moment in contemporary Chinese culture, doing so with psychological strength and considerable formal creativity.

Rong Rong's East Village: 1993-1998
Chambers Fine Art, New York
9 May to 21 June, 2003

Notes

[1] Wu Hung, *Rong Rong's East Village* (New York: Chambers Fine Art, 2003), 10. All subsequent quotations are from this text with the page numbers indicated accordingly.

CHINESE NAME INDEX*

Bai Chongmin	白崇民
Cai Jin	蔡錦
Cao Fei	曹斐
Chang Fang-Wei	張芳薇
Chang Tsong-Zung	張頌仁
Chang Yung Ho	張永和
Chen Linyang	陳羚羊
Chen Qingqing	陳慶慶
Chen Yanyin	陳妍音
Cheng Sim-kee Grace	鄭嬋琦
Choi Yan-chi	蔡仞姿
Chou Lu-yun Irene	周綠雲
Chu Kam-lun Christina	朱錦鸞
Ding Yi	丁乙
Fang Chao-lin	方召麐
Fei Dawei	費大為
Fung May	馮美花
Gao Zhenmei	高振美
Gu Zhenqing	顧振清
Han Yuhai	韓毓海
Hang Jian	杭間
He Chengyao	何成瑤
Hou Hanru	侯瀚如
Hsu Claire	徐文玠
Hsu Manray	徐文瑞
Huang Ping	黃平
Huang Tsai-lang	黃才郎
Kan Xuan	闞宣
Kuang Xinnian	曠新年
Kwok-Ying	郭瑛
Lau Kin-wah Jaspar	劉建華
Leung Chin-Fung Jeff	梁展峰
Leung Po Shan Anthony	梁寶山
Li Xuejun	李學軍
Liang Yee-woo	梁以瑚
Liang Yue	梁玥
Lin Biao	林彪
Lin Shu-Min	林書民
Lin Tianmiao	林天苗
Liu Kuo-sung	劉國松
Liu Siu-jane	廖少珍
Liu Wa	劉娃
Liu Xiaodong	劉小東
Lu Jie	盧杰
Lu Qing	路青
Mao Chris	茅為清
Meng Hui	孟暉
Mo Comyn	毛文羽
Pak Sheung-chung	白雙全
Pau Ellen	鮑藹倫
Peng Yu	彭禹
pui san lok susan	駱佩珊
Qi Jianping	齊建平
Qin Yufen	秦玉芬
Rong Rong	榮榮
Shen Yuan	沈遠
Shi Hui	施慧
Ting Yin Yung	丁衍庸
To Mayling	杜美玲
Tsang Tak Ping	曾德平
Ung Vai Meng	吳衛鳴
Wang Gongxin	王功新
Wang Hui	汪暉
Wang Jianwei	汪建偉
Wang Jin	王晉
Wang Mingxian	王明賢
Wang Wei	王衛
Wong Chi-fai	黃志輝
Wong Shun-kit	王純杰
Wu Weihe	吳瑋禾
Xin Danwen	邢丹文
Yang Fudong	楊福東
Yang Li	楊荔
Yang Shin-yi	楊心一
Yin Xiuzhen	尹秀珍
Yu Hong	喻紅
Zhang Guantian	張廣天
Zhang Lei	張蕾
Zheng Shengtian	鄭勝天
Zhou Xiaohu	周嘯虎
Zhu Jinshi	朱金石

*The English spelling in this index is according to the text in which the names appear.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Contemporary Chinese Visual Culture

Symposium

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER
CONTEMPORARY CHINESE VISUAL CULTURE

LOCATION
Centre for the Study of Democracy,
100, Park Village East, London NW1

DATE
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Those interested in participating should send a one-page abstract (no more than 250 words) and a cover letter, including your name, academic affiliation and address to the address below. The deadline for submissions is 1 October, 2003.

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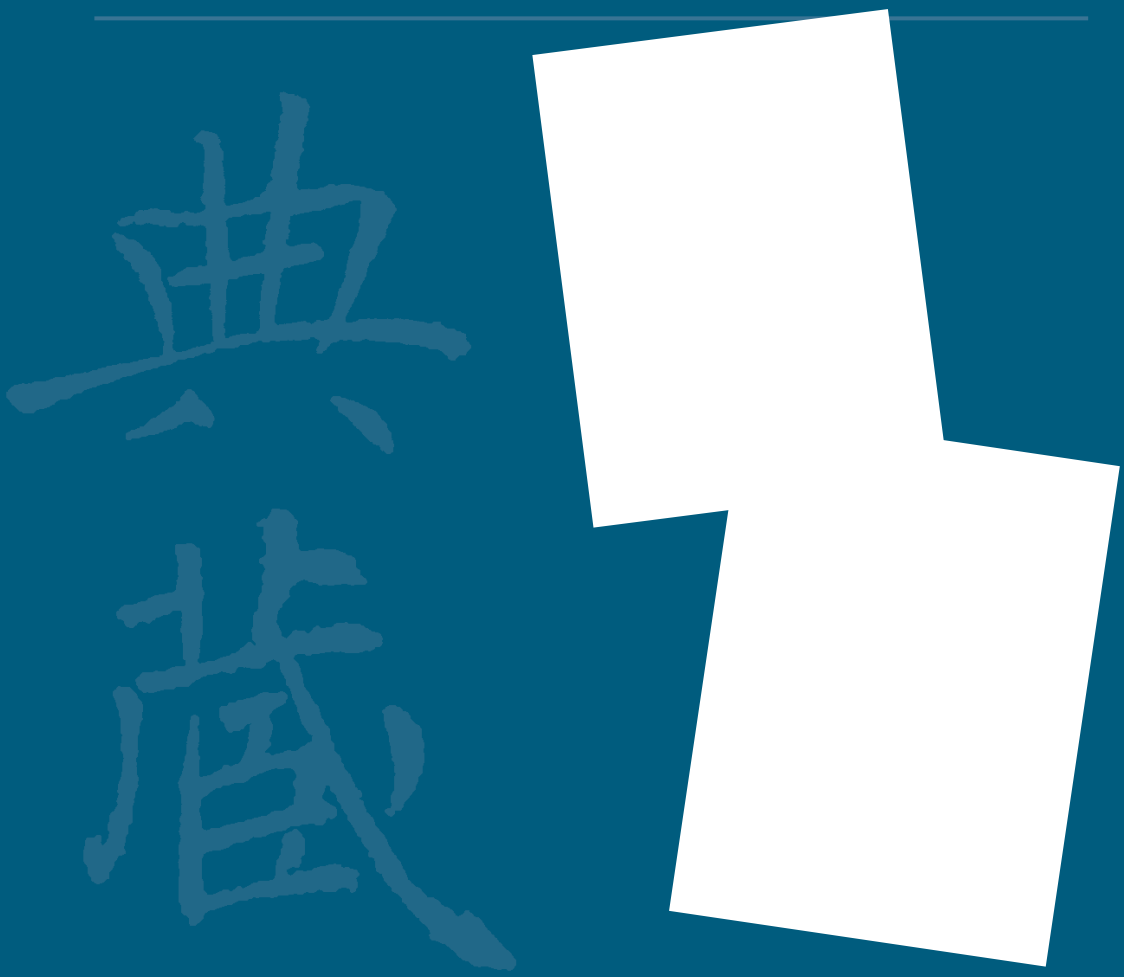

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