SPECTACLE AS MYTH:

Guanxi, the relational and the urban quotidian in contemporary Chinese art (2005-2008)

VOON POW BARTLETT (NEE HIU)

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The University of the Arts, London, *TrAIN* and Chelsea College of Art and Design

http://transnational.org.uk/people/48-voon-pow-bartlett

e. voonpow@mac.com

m. 07932 763 599

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an interrogation of the spectacle of Chinese contemporary art and the concept of a Chinese modernity, in terms of the legacy from the Communist era, China's social fabric and its urban quotidian.

It contributes to knowledge in a way of understanding Chinese contemporary art that is firmly rooted in both Chinese and Western historical and cultural theories and from the point of view of a Chinese from the diaspora. Its originality also derives from the manner in which it questions the validity of imposing a Western modernity on a Chinese context and its identification of a more complex causal framework influencing fine art discourses globally.

The principle has been to reconstitute the idea of the Orient, in this case China, as a significant Other, not at the periphery of Western culture but with equal stature in terms of hegemony, history and heritage. This has necessitated an interdisciplinary interrogation that accounts for a range of influences such as the Chinese political, social and cultural elements within China's dynamic economic growth and alongside influences of globalisation and Western modernism.

The research is built on the author's academic scholarship in western art theory and practice, Chinese art history and culture and a particular personal connection with China. The first is an undergraduate First Class Honours degree in Fine Art from Central St. Martins and subsequent professional practice as an artist and lecturer, the second a Masters degree in Chinese Art and Archaeology from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and the third as a Chinese from the diaspora, born in a Beijing *hutong* and whose father's early professional life was inextricably linked to that of Mao.

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University of the Arts London
Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation
http://transnational.org.uk/people/48-voon-pow-bartlett

e. voonpow@mac.com
m. 07932 763 599

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Voon Pow Bartlett

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by Voon Pow Bartlett

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INTRODUCTION

Audience and context

Institutions - museums, biennale, auction houses and collectors

The earth is seething with incoherent power and unorganised intelligence. Have you ever reflected on the case of China? There you have millions of quick brains stifled in trumpery crafts. They have no direction, no driving power, so the sum of their efforts is futile, and the world laughs at China.

Said 2003: 251 [1]

At the time of writing (2005-2008), the international spotlight was on China, not just issues about urban development and heritage, the impact of its economic growth, but also pressing environmental issues, the 2008 Olympics and China's human rights record. Although China's rise has been compared to those of Rome and the Ottoman Empire [2], in terms of its contemporary art, it has been suggested by Homi Bhabha that the relationship between Chinese artists and the postmodern art world is that they live in 'the nation of others' [3].

Like their contemporaries worldwide, Chinese artists have to grapple with the imperatives of institutionalisation caught in inverted relationships; inverted curatorship is expressed as a desire to curate the world replacing the earlier mania to collect [4], an 'essentially information–based editing process replacing an encyclopaedically accumulative one' [5] and an inverted economy where biennales have been de-localised [6]. Artists are also cast as CEO-entrepreneurs and nomads with Harald Szeeman's Giving Artist being attributed the responsibility of renegotiating traditional notions of authorship with critics and curators, the latter ostensibly defenders of Chinese arts and culture, but often appearing to be united by self-interests [7].

The rise of Chinese contemporary art has been compared to European art in the early 20th century. Even the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York is featuring Cai Guo-Qiang as the subject of the first solo retrospective in 2008 devoted to a Chinese-born artist. Between 2005 and 2006 the global value of Chinese contemporary art sales increased by an incredible 983%, clearly outstripping western staples such as Warhol and Turner [8]. Barbara Kruger's '*When I hear the word culture I take out my checkbook*' is a wry explication of this cultural phenomenon [9].

Western models of institutionalisation have the veneer of success for catapulting Chinese contemporary art into the global scene, partly for their role as a legitimising device and partly as an economic imperative. Biennales (and triennials) are now a must have in many major Chinese cities, facilitating the creation of artists as global brands. Having a biennale appears to be the new criteria for achieving city status. The 'mediation of reconstituted aesthetic experiences is now located through a mega-exhibitory machine' such as through the relational and contingent with museums, galleries, auction houses, international curators, critics and collectors [10]. International art collectors schedule Beijing and Shanghai into their circuits, alongside Hong Kong, Jakarta and New York, akin to a holidaymaker planning their annual vacations. However 'surprising and crazy', the situation is now shrouded in ambivalence and thought to be a limiting factor for some artists' enthusiasm and ardour [11]. Their detractors have doubts regarding their long term and local viability,

and consider their efficacy as artificial and fabricated, and as a quick fix to the lack of an intrinsic art system in China.

China has also been swept into the international arena seeking a redefinition of the museum's role, one able to address multiple publics in a 'more porous, contingent manner' [12]. The International Council of Museums' 1995 Triennial Program highlighted the role of museums as instruments of relational aesthetics and as a democratised site for genuine and new conversations in the art world, especially Harald Szeeman's Giving Artist, whose identities are contingent upon their protectors, such as the critics, curators, administrators and a select group of public audience [13]. Rachel Weiss's view regarding the instrumentalisation of exhibitions is that it is nothing more than a giant relational exercise for propaganda and commercial purposes [14].

Nicolas Bourriaud asserted in *Relational Aesthetics* that there is a homogenisation effect in the world's biennials as well as in art practices. The 2005 *Second Guangzhou Triennial* could have been conceived as a crucial part of the *D-lab* (*Delta-lab*) development, a propaganda machine attached to the development of the *Pearl River Delta* in the Guanzhou district. In fact, the biennales in China, such as the Shanghai and Beijing biennales, have been driven mainly by a small and close-knit group of curators and artists.

Contemporary art criticism in China has also been institutionalised. It is now included as a science of the Humanities and has started to draw serious attention and study at an academic level. This new generation of philanthropists and pioneers are considered as today's spiritual leaders and have won unprecedented international honour and respect as well as power. Exhibitions as a site of enquiry in China have been foreshadowed by a propagandist function, partly as a representation of nationhood via biennales, but also to historicise art in order to establish a cultural legacy, whose end purpose it is argued, can only be seen as a commodification process, a buttressing of its tourist and property economy. The 19th Century Venice once-in-two-years Biennial that focussed on the new and unprecedented, has now been transformed into an Asian cattle market, with

frequencies matching that of the UK high street sales, a global art market, but at least with Chinese contemporary art being the rising stars, for now [15].

The Chinese art world

China's rapid growth has caused a collision of the past and present, leading to a situation of temporal desynchronisation that is impacting on art and society [16]. Its economic transformation has assailed its inhabitants like a *Tsunami*, causing them to experience a profound identity crisis. At the same time, the post Cultural Revolution trauma is paradoxically and ironically manifested in a nostalgic yearning for the rustic simplicity of the past.

A major impact on contemporary art are global influences such as modernity. Although globalisation has created an 'attractive celebration of difference', it is nonetheless a double-edged sword, simultaneously an 'encouragement of standardization' [17]. An anxiety is articulated over the full-blown absorption or sublimation of China into the global world system, leading to the loss of revolutionary power for intervention and resistance. There is a concern that globalisation can set up an indispensable structural context for analysing the dialectical process between capitalism disguised as a triumphant universal globalism and a concrete historical condition [18]. Furthermore, the imposition of Western ideas is at variance with China's aspiration to achieve territorial and ideological independence, not to mention its long and distinguished history. It also represents China's failure to serve as the anti-imperialist inspiration to other Third World cultures, which was dealt a deathblow by the tragic events of the Tiananmen massacre in 1989.

The Unknown rebel (Fig. 1a) was a photograph taken by Jeff Widener, on 5 June 1989 and depicted an unknown man trying to stop the People's Liberation Army's advancing tanks on Tiananmen Square [19]. It remained a very recognisable western icon of China, symbolising China's public humiliation, and predictably a spectacle treasured by the west. Understandably, a successful Olympics was a



Fig. 1a. *The Unknown rebel,* 1989. Jeff Widener. Photograph.

golden opportunity to salvage national pride.

Modernity is an intrinsically Western construct not ameliorated by the use of Chinese friendly terms such as Chinese modernity, Chinese postmodern, Modern China, Chinese modern, even Yellow River capitalism and Pearl River capitalism, and so on. China's autonomy in a western-centred world is a much contested topic that impacts upon the context in which Chinese contemporary art is negotiated. As a socialist country with perhaps the fastest economic growth in the world today, China presents a challenge to critical thinking about globalisation. The search for a new narrative and pictorial paradigm has been an essential part of the cultural-intellectualistic approach to national crisis, a volatile historical dynamic since the end of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). The current Chinese debates over alternative modernity such as nationalism, postmodernism and related postcolonialism, Neo-Humanism and Neo-Confucianism may serve as critiques on the discourse of globalisation. Crucially, they are reminiscent of Maoism, retaining an ideological and political self identity as a Third World, socialist country and thus highlighting the intellectual disorientation and critical potency in China's latest struggle to construct an ideological hegemony.

In our 21st century 'communication superhighways', the experience of helplessness and alienation of Chinese artists living in cities is not dissimilar to other major cities in the world [20]. It has been asserted that the current Chinese discourse of alternative modernity and globalisation is by its very nature contradictory and

fractured [21]. There is an ambivalence demonstrated by some artists in their attitude towards this ostensible freedom, sometimes resulting in the rejection of the modern, often commercial and western modes of legitimisation and sometimes a rejection of their country's past.

For lovers of *shanshuihua* (traditional ink paintings), contemporary Chinese art is considered anomalous and an affront. The conflict between the archaic and the modern, the personal and the communal are elements that have contributed to a situation of ambivalence. With China's historic rise creating a hothouse for an unprecedented output of artists, there is a tacit need for artists to negotiate with the relational in terms of the global audience and the urban quotidian, with their heritage and *guanxi* as renewed forces in their everyday lives.

Economic imperatives and academia coexist within a tension, with perhaps the phenomena of Biennales and Chinese museums being the most manifest cultural articulation for contemporary artists. The godfather of Chinese arts, critic Li Xianting, who previously could not get published in China and whose view was that Chinese art had no contact with Modernism, was not representative of the majority of art critics in China, but was given the honour of opening the Today Art Museum, the prestigious first independent art museum in Beijing, in October 2006. The Chinese art world is not unaware of its cultural dilemma [22].

New Sinologists / Orientalists

There are many paradigms of contemporary Chinese studies that share elements of self-critical scrutiny but at the same time appear to be caught in a predicament between the extremes of a western centeredness [23], philanthropy [24] and the Chinese viewpoint. However compelling, this attitude still contains an element of ethnocentric distortion and prejudgment which can divest China of its autonomy and make it an intellectual possession of the west [25].

The term 'Orientalist', is embroiled in the polemical debates relating to the relevance of Edward Said's radical, post colonialist critique of the Orientalist Gaze in his book *Orientalism,* on British and European Orientalist imagery. 'Sinologist', however, is an Orientalist term used to describe scholars interested in Chinese studies, but have become outmoded and imbued with negative connotations. It carries a stereotypical view of a scholar in possession of previously vested exclusive privileges of and power over China [26]. Sinologist scholars often regard themselves as victims, possessing a debilitating contempt for the China fever of the 1960s and 70s and the rising independence of Chinese artists and critics [27]. The implication is that the so-called natives had the impudence of de-objectivising the exotic and de-orientalising themselves, choosing a cosy ethnicity that is too westernised and devoid of a national cultural heritage [28]. Although proclaiming a dedication to 'vindicating the subalterns', many Sinologists have been accused of being market traders guilty in the rush for gold. They have been quick to point out the exploitativeness of Benjamin Disraeli's 'The east is a career' but remained blind to their own exploitativeness as they make the East their career, and a promising route to authority and power [29].

The rise of China has given birth to another generation of new New Sinologists, ranging from the romantically ideological to the pragmatic. They are mainly Chinese from the 1970s generation, predominantly Western educated, and acknowledging a relationship with the global arena [30]. They represent another side of the spectrum which recognises a blurring and sublimation of the globalisation process. Critic and curator Hou Hanru, living in Paris and now New York since 2006, is probably a role model, although of an earlier generation and criticised for having left China for Paris in the 1980s. He is characteristic of a Romantic ideologue and is of the opinion that Chinese artists have 'become true individuals', implying total autonomy [31].

Nowhere is it clearer than in the field of the arts that we see the battle building up amidst artists and Sinologists, a spectacle with cohesive self-interest that is enduring intense surveillance. Some Chinese literati (see *wenren* in glossary) adopt a strategic attitude that 'use(s) aliens to control the aliens, to use western marginal discourses to resist western mainstream discourse…', rather than to confront with native knowledge [32].

Argument

This research argues that Chinese contemporary art is part of a myth through the employment of the spectacle, as a legacy of the Maoist era, China's heritage and social fabric such as *guanxi*, global influences such as relational aesthetics and its urban quotidian. This has led to an unfinished project of a Chinese modernity that is suffused with ambivalence, complicity and contradiction.

Method

Integration of theory with practice

This research integrates academic scholarship with fine art practice in a discursive and cumulative process to interrogate its central themes. It is based on a particular interpretation of key terms and their inter-relationships to formulate the context and the dialectic of the thesis.

The research specifically engages in a critical dialogue with issues of identity for Chinese contemporary artists, explored reflexively with the author's own identity as a diasporic Chinese artist living in London and those of the Chinese living on the Mainland of China.

The interrogation of a range of Euro-American and Chinese sources reflect the strategy of many Chinese artists. It is based on a holistic approach to enable a fusing of the theoretical and the critical, the private and personal, the historical and the everyday, with the author as artist, character and interrogator engaged in a detached observation, analysis and production of visual and written texts. An insider view of contemporary Chinese art is obtained from Chinese literature, artists, academics, critics, curators, gallery owners and others interested in the subject. A discursive dialogue is set up with Western discourses, specifically on discussions of Modernism, current art practices and issues of representation, the social and the quotidian.

Author as artist and flaneur within a Euro-American context and part of the London Chinese diaspora

The process of interrogation invokes a critical methodology of reflective identification with China, insight and analysis through the production, incorporation and editing of written and visual texts. The author acknowledges the irony of a critique that borders on the ethnological which is also part of the essence of its critique.

The thesis reflects on Chinese contemporary art, being in constant negotiation of a framework which is at once archaic and modern. Archaic being the framework of traditional Chinese art over the last 2,000 years and its society's social fabric, modern being the forces of the global framework. This dilemma and dialectic between old and new, East and West, informs the structure of the thesis and represents the struggle for identity for all Chinese.

For the author, an artist of the diaspora, the identification process involves the *modus operandi* of a *flaneur*, a peripatetic artist, equipped with insights into more than one culture, including Western as well as Chinese perspectives.

Blue Mao, a key visual text of the research, was principally made through an engagement at an academic level, to examine the position of Chinese literati artists and the author's own relationship with Chinese contemporary art. As such, *Blue Mao* juxtaposes familiar Chinese icons which raise issues relating to a superficial and sometime erroneous understanding of Chinese culture through an embedded history of exoticisation in the West.

Blue Mao was followed by *Living in Beijing*, a series of work that attempts to engage with everyday life in Beijing. *LIBJ (Nighttime Beijing)* considers alienation in the city, *LIBJ (Maid in China)* the plight of migrant maids and the *OrientX*, China's transport crisis.

The series *Chinese woman in Beijing* addresses the author's interaction with Beijingers and the inhabitants of her former *hutong*, and an extrapolation from that of the relationship between the Mainland Chinese and its diaspora. The various titles attached to this series refer to different issues discussed within the text, such as *CWIBJ* (*Hutong sisters)*, *CWIBJ* (*Le Flaneur*), *CWIBJ (Serve the people), CWIBJ (Let a hundred flowers bloom)* and *CWIBJ (Miss Hybridity)*.

Chinese woman in Beijing is also the title of the exhibition in which the work featured, as part of the *Dangdai Festival* of 2007, the annual international art festival based in the *798* art district of Beijing. The author, as artist, collaborated with Chinese artists and academics identified as relevant to this thesis, and utilising the technical support systems used by major Chinese artists.

Knowledge and concepts

Conceptual underpinning

This thesis is an interrogation of the spectacle as part of a myth making process in the context of China's present socialist state, underpinned by rapidly changing influences such as Mao's communism, the impact of key elements of social fabric such as *guanxi* and the influence of Western Modernism.

As contemporary Chinese art is posturing towards a global audience, artists will be disadvantaged in ignoring historical developments. The referencing of Western discourses in the thesis reflects the direction adopted by Chinese artists since the early 20th century, with many popular translated texts such as Edward Said and Fredric Jameson being part of scholarly discussions amongst Chinese artists and critics. Several French and Euro-American texts have been selected in order to cast light upon China's modernisation such as Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational aesthetics*, 2002 that provided key references for engaging with the primacy of the everyday and various texts on China's society based on *guanxi*. Texts on the everyday life such as Lefebvre's *The critique of everyday life* informed issues pertinent to Beijing's urban quotidian.

Post colonialism has also firmly established the idea of difference and hybridity, moving from a racially inferior connotation in the 19th century to symbolise a force of subversion and transformation in identity politics in the 20th and 21st centuries. Hybridity is now inscribed into identity, which becomes a constant negotiation and affirmation of difference between the self and a multitude of others. The fluidity of borders forms the current dominant modes of rethinking race, gender, class and identity whilst the legitimising process in a Western-centred world determines how Chinese artists produce work that is relational in function, possibly *guanxi* in integrity and antagonistic in intent.

The comparison between the philosophies of Mao and those of Althusser and Benjamin is used to illuminate the impact of Maoism and China's Socialism on Chinese contemporary art. The term 'myth' is borrowed from Roland Barthe's *Mythology* to help elucidate the myth created by Mao.

The concept of 'spectacle' is derived from Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, describing a social condition in a visual form. Its relationship with the everyday in society is used to address Chinese contemporary art. It is currently relevant to China as its market economy is similar to a capitalist market, with the invasion and restructuring of free time, private life, leisure and personal expression [33]. The spectacle is specifically referenced in the manner of the art historian TJ Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life*, in critiquing the visual method used by the French Impressionists during the end of the 19th century, as a response to Modernity.

Debord described 3 types of spectacles, being, diffused, concentrated and integrated. The Diffused spectacles is associated with western bureaucratic capitalism, affluent society and an abundance of commodities. The concentrated spectacles are totalitarian with the use of violence to maintain order. 'The integrated spectacle is a convergence of the first two and is characterised by incessant technological renewal and an eternal present (impoverishment of memory). The thesis ascribes this latter situation to China.

Guanxi is considered as part of China's Confucian social fabric and is a key term in this context, in interrogating the everyday relationships between people, and between artists and contemporary culture. The dialectics between *guanxi* and relational aesthetics serve as a tool for interrogating strategies employed by artists.

Modernism in art

The idea of Modernity became full-blown at the end of the dynastic period of the early 20th century when China opened up to the west and imported western ideas. However, the temporal and cultural differences bestowed upon Modernity in China is more of a systemic and contested epistemological encroachment, rather than a process of enlightenment as in the West.

An understanding of Modernism in Chinese contemporary art serves to elucidate the role of the spectacle in discussing the modern in China. This involves the imposition of the idea of the modern in Western art as a realisation of the myth of illusion and the paradox of perception where art was historically assigned the agency of reality. The Modern painters, epitomised by Manet, serve as useful models where a style was adopted that signified the end of illusion and the beginning of inconsistent and ironic representation, such as the flatness in painting. The aesthetic of Modernism celebrated discrepancy and the myth of representation and embraced such modes as 'irony, negation, deadpan, the pretence of ignorance or innocence, the unfinished' [34].

Everyday life

Mao aspired to a fuller life for his people that valorised completeness and transcendence. It was about an agrarian society as well as a fascination with modern industrial power, an egalitarian commitment to social harmony and an almost aristocratic refusal of the mundane and the physical. The paradox is that everyday life in modern fragmented societies has been narrowed and impoverished to the extent that a Modernist desire is as much a critique of Modernity. This

antimodern and yet Modernist rejection of everyday life seems also to be a deeply embedded impulse of the revolutionary and utopian culture in modern China. Therefore, the success of the Communist Utopia is paradoxically measured in its failure, in its negation by late 20th century consumerism and mass culture, and the failure of the latter helps to retrospectively release the utopian potency of a revolutionary tradition.

Choice of artists

The economic phenomenon of China as a Communist state is now firmly written into history. However, China is also trying to integrate ways of governance from other countries in order to strengthen its brand of communism [35]. Equally its artists are trying to find ways to modernise and intellectualise the transition from the thousand year old literati art (landscape paintings of the scholars) to the present forms of contemporary art. Chinese artists are not merely grappling with the technicality of representation, but the trauma of the Cultural Revolution, the sudden transformation of everyday life due to its commercial success and not least the searing heat of the international spotlight. During this period of temporal desynchronisation, from revolutionary zeal to economic boom, many artists are using spectacular strategies such as violent representations, self-exoticisation, or becoming Biennale groupies [36].

The Beijing art scene is the frame of reference, for personal as well as pragmatic reasons. Beijing is the birthplace of the author and also home to the Imperial Palace and Court since 1420, as well as being China's political and cultural centre [37]. The impact of the geographical and the environmental on its artform is aptly described by an ancient saying, 'If orange in south of China is sweet but if in north then bitter' [38]. 'Beijing is undergoing an artistic rebirth on a scale not witnessed since the Tang dynasty…when the history of art comes to be written in 50 years' time, I suspect that Beijing circa 2008 will come to be bracketed alongside 1950s New York and 1960s swinging London: the site for a creative explosion that made those cities places that defined the zeitgeist' [39]. However, due to the nomadic nature of 21st century artists and the state of international exhibitions, Beijing artists denote those who live and work in Beijing as well as domicile and origin [40].

The hub of the Beijing art scene is mainly situated in the *798 Dashanzi* art district, spontaneously formed by artists through the fusing together of traditional culture and those of Europe and America. The *Dashanzi* (renamed *Dangdai* In 2007) Festival brings together thousands of visitors and artists every year as a platform for Chinese contemporary art [41]. The *Dangdai 798* district, latterly joined by the *East End* district, is a mix of Europe's White Cube model and Art Laboratories. Although 798 is considered by some as the Real Thing, the East End merely shares the same geographical location as London's East End, but bears neither the diversity nor glamour now associated with the latter. At the same time, such buzzwords as Laboratory, Construction Site and Art Factory, also serve to refresh the traditional bureaucratic museums based on collections. This situation of institutional renaissance has not escaped many artists and curators in seizing their 15 minutes of fame, and embracing as well as being a constituent of this spectacle [42].

A selection of Song Dong's and Cang Xin's works provided a dialectical site for the discussion of *guanxi* and relational aesthetics. Propaganda art helped to establish the cult of the spectacularisation of the masses by Mao. Works based on Tiananmen Square provided the avant-gardism of early Chinese contemporary art. Other artworks exemplify the use of slogans. All selected artworks also represent the *zeigiest* of the period coverd in this thesis, as well as sharing, with my own artwork, a sense of irony.

Artists from other Chinese cities and non-Chinese artists are referenced when necessary in order to inform the totality of the thesis. The selection is based on their seminal work that provide a view into an historical and global contextualisation of Chinese contemporary art. The pioneering role and influence of many other Chinese artists not mentioned are fully acknowledged here.

Photography as an analogy of the dialectic

Photography's inherent contradictions in being able to simultaneously embody the symbolic, literal and metonymic, makes it an excellent medium to interrogate the

spectacle as a tool and evidence of myth. Photography has the potential to both epitomise and highlight the hidden dialectic in Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*.

Photography is also an ideal tool for interrogation as it is historically ascribed with an interdisciplinary discourse, commenting on social, political and ethnological issues. Its interdisciplinarity is the essential quality within its dialectic. It holds such potential in representation, i.e. the subjectivity constituted within its meaning and all the variables such as intent, authorship and context. 'The dominant discourse of photography criticism is an uneasy and contradictory amalgam of Romantic, Realist and Modernist aesthetic theories' [43]. According to Roland Barthe, the photographic image has a polysemic character, a 'floating chain of significance, underlying the signifier' [44]. It is therefore open to appropriation by a range of texts with each new discourse generating its own set of messages.

The view that photography has an omnipresence in everyday social life and contributes to the production and dissemination of meaning is held by many writers such as Victor Burgin [45]. Its legacy of transparency, intrinsic truth, the attributes of being able to reproduce nature that it shared with art, clings on stubbornly [46]. Its legal status of document and testimonial all contribute to generate a mythic aura of neutrality around the photographic image [47]. However, it is the fallacy that photography reflects a fully comprehensible world of appearances and possesses a revelatory essence that forms the basis for interrogating Mao's socialist myth.

With its indexical and symbolic nature, the camera becomes a tool to penetrate into a greater level of truth, behind this complex web of relationship. Walter Benjamin proclaimed the power of the filmic medium in its ability to uncover the world of the Optical Unconscious, the vast realms of knowledge invisible to the naked eye; the hidden, the microscopic, the fast, and the unnoticed [48]. He was drawn to the idea that photography, with its fast shutters and devices of slow motion and enlargement, made it possible to 'exploit the proletariat with increasing intensity, but ultimately to create conditions which would make it possible to abolish capitalism itself' [49]. The Optical Unconscious adds another level of connotation and a hidden meaning to the

subjectification of a photographer's aim. This extra signification takes a step closer to unveiling the spectacle.

It is photography as a form of art practice that is the main consideration in this thesis. Photomedia with all its digital abilities, releases photography's initial burden of representation. The use of photomedia further amplifies the latency of photography, making it an ever-malleable tool for the interrogation of the idea of spectacle and the production of myth. The camera provides the ability to capture the changing spectacle of mythology, offering an insight into the condition of the dialectical movement between the utopia of communism and the actuality of contemporary everyday life that constitutes an inescapable condition of secular Modernity. Photography offers another embodiment of this dialectic, in a way of looking at everyday life, and has the power to turn even abject poverty into an object of enjoyment [50]. It represents the eyes of the *flaneur* as an integral part of Modernity as well as symbolising the *diaspora*'s view of the Homeland.

In the context of China, photography provides a representation of, as well as, a way of understanding its changing spectacle, as the visual embodiment of its ideology. It provides the dialectic between ideology as Walter Benjamin's Optical Unconscious or as Althusser's Misrecognition [51]. Photography is considered the saviour of Chinese contemporary art, releasing artists from the shackles of traditional painting and catapulting them from being denigrated as an 'analogue player in a digital world' [52].

Along with other time-based media, it carries relatively less cultural baggage than oil or ink paintings. It is the perfect tool for capturing and presenting a spectacle to explore everyday life as the site of contestation between the spectacle and relational and to produce new models of sociability. Chinese artists since the late 1990s have used urban photography to deconstruct Socialist realism whilst inheriting its iconographical spectacle of virtuality [53].

Footnotes to the Introduction

1. 'Asia represented then the unpleasant likelihood of a sudden eruption that would destroy 'our' world…' As John Buchan put it in 1922 (Said 2003: 251).
2. Leonard 2008: 5.
3. *Yishu,* Dec 2005: 81.
4. Gerardo Mosquera, 'Power and intercultural curating,' TRANS, no.1. Fall 1995, New York: 11 (Weiss 2000: 121).
5. 'Carrying a self and constructing his/her work out of the raw material of the local context' (Weiss 2000: 122).
6. As contended by Pierre Bourdieu, the far away ones have more credibility so art's autonomy decreases with the decreasing distance it takes from the wealth, power and legitimising process of the establishment. Andrea Fraser in addressing institutional sublimation over institutional repression, investigated how the heterogeneous domestic objects of a specific class member (from eyeglasses to Renoirs) are sublimated into the homogenous public culture of a general art museum (Foster 1996: 191).
7. 'Harald Szeeman. Curator as author: From Ljubljana to Lyon to Kwangju' (*Flash Art*, Summer 1997).
8. Belgian industrialist and art collector, Baron Guy Ullens sold a collection of Turner watercolours for £10.7 m at Sotheby's to help fund a new 1,300-piece collection of works by what have been described as 'passable' Chinese contemporary artists (*The Week*, 3 May 2008: 11).
9. Buck and Dodd 1991: 55.
10. John Clark in *A Spectacle of Questions* (Asian Art news, Jan/Feb 2006: 69).
11. Feng Boyi, 'About Chen Zhiguang's sculptural installation' (Art China 2005: 82).
12. Weiss 2000: 125.
13. International Council of Museums' 1995 Triennial Program was adopted by the ICOM general assembly, July 1995, Stavanger, Norway (Weiss 2000: 127).
14. Rachel Weiss used the example of the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition staged by Nazi officials to buttress certain ideological positions. 'Some notes on the agency of exhibitions' in Visual arts and culture, 2000, Vol. 2 (Weiss 2000: 118).
15. 2006 has been described as the year of the Asian biennials, with 3 being held concurrently in September, in Singapore, Gwangju and Shanghai, to attract the maximum number of globetrotters. 'Distance up close', Gregory Burke (Art Asia Pacific, Fall 06).
16. Dirlik 2000: 3.
17. Weiss 2000: 117-27.
18. Liu Kang (Jameson and Miyoshi 1999).
19. *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopaedia. 1 June 08.
20. Bourriaud 2002: 8.
21. Liu Kang, Associate Professor of Comparative literature at Pennsylvania State University in 'Is there an alternative to (capitalist) globalization? The debate about modernity in China' (Jameson and Miyoshi 1999: 165).
22. They have also been referred to by Chinese critic Yiying as 'the new academy group, crossroad of traditional and new wave'. He described the influential 'Great modern art exhibition' in China in 1990 as confused and derivative rather than groundbreaking. Chinese magazine *Fine art research,* 1990. Similarly, Chinese critic Lu Peng commented that 'What is modernity' is not important and that 'we should pay attention to modernity formed in history' (*Yishudangdai* (*Artnow*), translated and discussed with Miaomiao, Tue 27 sep 2006. This self awareness is also echoed by Chinese critic Wang Laoji when he wrote in *Today art museum: nonprofit* that the museum should be managed by curators inside China, whilst acknowledging that

although the aesthetic is presently following international rules, it should develop its own in the future (Li Xianting's *Art today*: 198. My translation with help from Li Yanling, CAFA student, Thu 5 Oct 2006).
23. Rey Chow, Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, describes Owen as possessing 'a sulking impotence' and 'the only claim to truth' (Chow 1995: 2).
24. The three main paradigms are impact-response, tradition-modern (the West plays beauty to China's beast), and the imperialism paradigm. This portrayed modernisation *qua* industrialisation as a positive good, saw Chinese society as being without the historical preconditions needed to produce industrial revolution on its own and therefore dependent directly or indirectly on the intrusion of the West to supply these preconditions and must be accompanied by genuine social revolutions. American Sinologists such as Paul Cohen and Haun Saussy suggested that a solution is possible only if we begin with Chinese problems set in a Chinese context (Cohen 1984: 59).
25. Clark commented that 'there would have to be more complex and much more profound and putatively 'benevolent' articulation between international 'catalysts' and local dynamics to allow for a form of autonomy for contemporary Chinese artists. He was referring to the rise of *yishu pipingjia* (art critics) as a specific role in China after 1989, when there was an increasing consciousness on the significance of criticism prevailing in the field of Chinese literature as well as culture. He quoted critic *Qian Zhijian*'s distinction that those advocating the official line of art in tune with Socialism preferred to be called art theoreticians and art commentators, whereas those pandering to modernist ideals preferred to be called *yishu pipingjia*. In fact, such factions between the traditionalists and modernists had already existed at the turn of the 20th century (Clark 2000).
26. Jameson and Miyoshi 1999.
27. Traditional Sinologists such as the American Stephen Owen and his beloved China (Chow 1995 (2): 2).
28. 'De-orientalising' in this context means freeing oneself of the shackles of the Orientalist gaze. Owen, writing about new poetry in *The New Republic* 'The anxiety of global influence: what is world poetry?' accused Bei Dao, the Chinese poet, for succumbing to the commodifying tendencies of transnational culture of 'self-interest' (Chow 1995: 1).
29. Chow 1995 (2): 14.
30. Such as Pili who recently started *Universal studios* in 2006 in Beijing new art district in the East End, *Caochangdi*, and similarly Sun Ning of *Platform China*, also opened in 2006.
31. Hou is a good example of a curator/critic who thinks art should be blind to nationalistic issues, political rhetoric and imperialistic tensions. Perhaps not disingenuous, but nonetheless naïve, Hou does not appear to acknowledge the power that he and others like him exert over the Chinese contemporary art scene. An interview with Hou Hanru by Zhu Di (Wu Hung's *Chinese art at the crossroads:* 251-3).
32. Saussy 2001: 115-130.
33. Clark 1984: 9.
34. Ibid: 12.
35. Leonard 2008: 86.
36. Self-exoticisation, can be a process of self-subalternisation through self-dramatisation, ie. authenticating their identity by identifying with poor peasant stock and therefore being identified as an 'authentic' radical third world representative (Chow 1995: 14).
37. For example, the Jiangnan cultural tradition is thought to be moving toward a marginalised alternative narrative although traditionally termed the 'New Southern

school'. Hank Bull used the term in 1998 on an exhibition of Jiangnan in Vancouver. The 'New Southern school' focusessed on the expression of personal feelings and the formality of art due to its aesthetic concerns. This distinguished them from the more political northern part of China where Cynical reality and Political pop were popular (*Poetic reality: Reread Jiangnan*: 86 and *Art now,* Zuo Jing, 'A local chronicle of art: the spatial nostalgia': 11).
38. 'On irony', Wang Xiaojian, (*Lixianting magazine*: 138, my translation with the help of Miaomiao, a student at Central Academy of fine art, Beijing. 25 Sep 2006).
39. 'Reinventing China' (V&A magazine, issue no. 15, Spring 2008: 41).
40. There are also 2 main reasons for privileging Beijing over Shanghai, firstly to focus on Beijing as the leading art centre in China and secondly to do with the Northern and Southern schools in China as historically distinct aesthetic regions, which in my opinion still holds sway today.
41. *798* was an ordnance factory in the 1950s and 60s, built by the Russians and designed by an East German architect but transformed in the hands of Chinese artists who combined it with traditional construction methods ('Hutong and the city of Beijing, Soldiers at the gate open forum', Beijing, October 2006).
42. Hal Foster warned in the mid 1990s that, 'the institution may overshadow the work...it becomes a spectacle...'. 'Artist as ethnographer' (Foster 1996: 198).
43. Burgin 1982: 3.
44. Ibid: 91.
45. Ibid: 2.
46. Allan Sekula quotes Baudelaire's famous dictum of photography (Ibid: 96).
47. Ibid: 86.
48. Benjamin 1979: 243 (Morris 1998: 344).
49. Benjamin 1936: 1.
50. Foster 1996: 275-note 2.
51. Burgin posits the question of the difference, if any, between Althusser's misrecognition and Marx's false consciousness. For Althusser, ideology is not Marx's 'false consciousness'- a set of illusions which will be dispelled after the revolution. Where Marxist humanism is about a free subject possessed of an irreducible human 'essence' with an empirical capability, but alienated under capitalism, in Althusserian terms, they are constituted in representations: the ISA (the ideological state apparatus) offer pictures of subjectivity in which the subject misrecognises itself, as if the pictures were mirrors, devoid of freedom and human essence (Burgin 1982: 7).
52. The term used by the consultant to the characters played by Brad Pitt and George Clooney in the movie, *Oceans 13*, Odeon cinema, Wimbledon, March 2007.
53. Gao 2005: 103.

PART I

Myth and spectacle

The seductive power of images fools us into believing a reality persists beyond a hyperreality where a modern society is captured, in which the spectacle defines, circumscribes, and becomes more real and seductive than reality itself.

Baudrillard [1]

The spectacle is the self-portrait of power. It unites what is separate, in its separateness, where spectators are linked by a one-way relationship to the centre that maintains their isolation from one another.

Debord 1992

Part 1 interrogates the role of Chinese contemporary art in the changing spectacle that forms China's myth.

Through the attempt to reconcile the fiction of the Communist Utopia and the reality of a deteriorating socialist structure in everyday life, China is consumed in a society of spectacle that can be described by the *Situationist* Guy Debord as 'the reigning social organization of a paralyzed history, of a paralyzed memory, of an abandonment of history founded in historical time' [2]. This concept is employed in this thesis to clarify China's changing myths through the spectacle.

The changing spectacle of Chinese contemporary art is a shift from the early utopia of nature as encapsulated in *shanshuihua* (literati ink painting), to the Maoist Socialist utopia and finally to its present urban utopia. The first utopia is characterised by literati art, the second early Socialist art, and the third Chinese contemporary art since the 1990s.



Fig. 1. *Blue Mao*, 2005. Voon Pow Bartlett. Digital print on canvas, 71 x 91 cm.

Myth is a type of speech chosen by history with its own mode of signification and system of communication. Mythology can only have an historical foundation and it is precisely because they are historical that myth can deprive the object of which it speaks of all history. Mythical concepts can change and permutate, they can come into being, alter and disappear completely. However paradoxical, myth hides nothing, its function is to distort and not to make disappear. It is read at once as true and unreal.

According to Debord, the spectacle takes over the field of vision leading to a separate world of images [3]. Although 'a false consciousness of time' [4], this spectacle is nonetheless a representation of 'all that once was directly lived' [5]. The spectacle is a representation of ideology, a visual embodiment of a social relationship between people that is mediated by images [6], where 'separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle' [7]. It gives the illusion of unity but in fact, people are entrapped by a central control that seeks to maintain a separation between individuals [8].

The spectacle epitomises the prevailing model of social life. It is omnipresent and serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant model of production. It is not something added to the real world, not a decorative element but the very heart of society's real unreality, such as news or propaganda, advertising or actual consumption of entertainment [9]. It alienates the subject from himself, so that he feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere [10].

The supremacy of this ideology is that it hides the fact that it is contingent, and therefore represents the individual's 'false consciousness', of his actual conditions of existence. It is an ideology that is the sum of 'taken-for-granted realties of everyday life', presenting itself as nature [11].

Blue Mao (VP 2005) (Fig. 1) comments on the spectacularisation of China's iconic imageries by contemporary Chinese artists and politicians alike to capture the

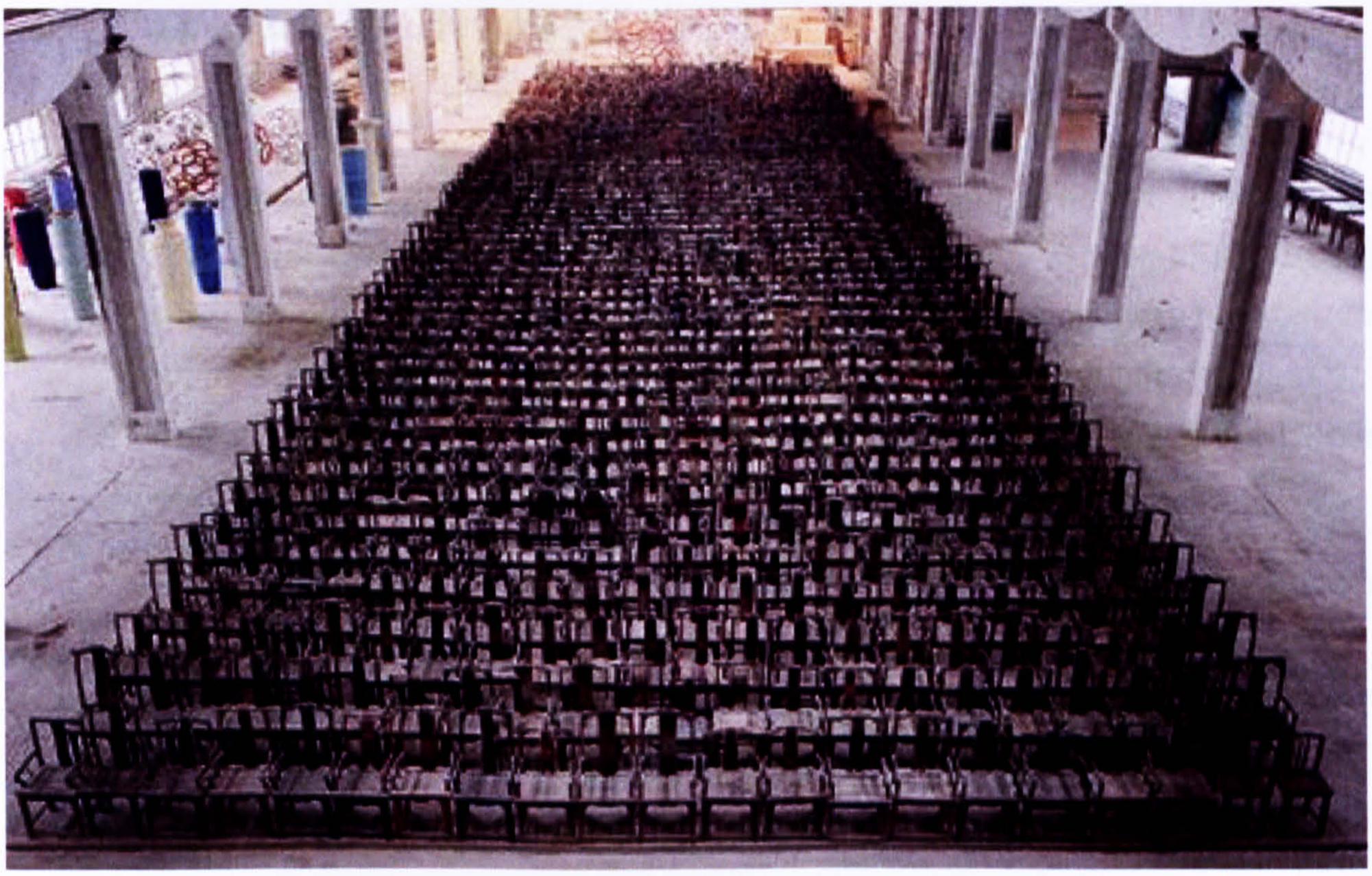


Fig. 2. *Fairytale, 2007*. Ai Weiwei. Installation.

world's audience hungry for the Chinese spectacle. For example, Ai Weiwei's *Fairy Tale,* 2007 (Fig. 2) is based on a manner of crowd control reminiscent of Mao, giving 1,001 people the chance of a lifetime whilst being hailed a local hero, ostensibly undertaking a charitable deed [12]. Prime minister Wen Jiabao is shown mimicking his former boss Zhao Ziyang in apologising by megaphone to a freezing crowd who have waited for days at a railway station to return home for the annual Chinese new year holiday [13].

Blue Mao represents a process of identification with the internalised struggle of the literati in China today, where 'a thinker in traditional China was above all an expounder of texts' [14]. It begs the question of the spectacle and the spectacular and conjectures that the spectacle as part of a myth is premised on the spectacular and the ideologically empty, as suggested by introduction speech at the 'Rethinking Spectacle' symposium [15].

Spectacle of communality

Chairman Mao dressed in a green Army uniform with a red star shining on his cap. Chairman Mao came through the Golden Water Bridge in front of the Gate into the masses, shaking hands with the masses…at that moment, the whole square was suffused, people raised Mao's books in their hands on high, jumped and acclaimed…and cried out, "Chairman Mao is coming to us! Long live Chairman Mao…"

Mao Zhuxi Tong Baiwan Qunzhong Gongqing Wenhua Da Geming (Chairman Mao celebrating the Cultural Revolution with millions of masses altogether
[16]

Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon for the broad masses of the people. It prepares the ground ideologically before the revolution comes and is an important, indeed essential, fighting front in the general revolutionary front during the revolution.

"On New Democracy" (January 1940), *Selected Works*, Vol, II, p 382. Quotations from Chairman Mao, 1966: 563.

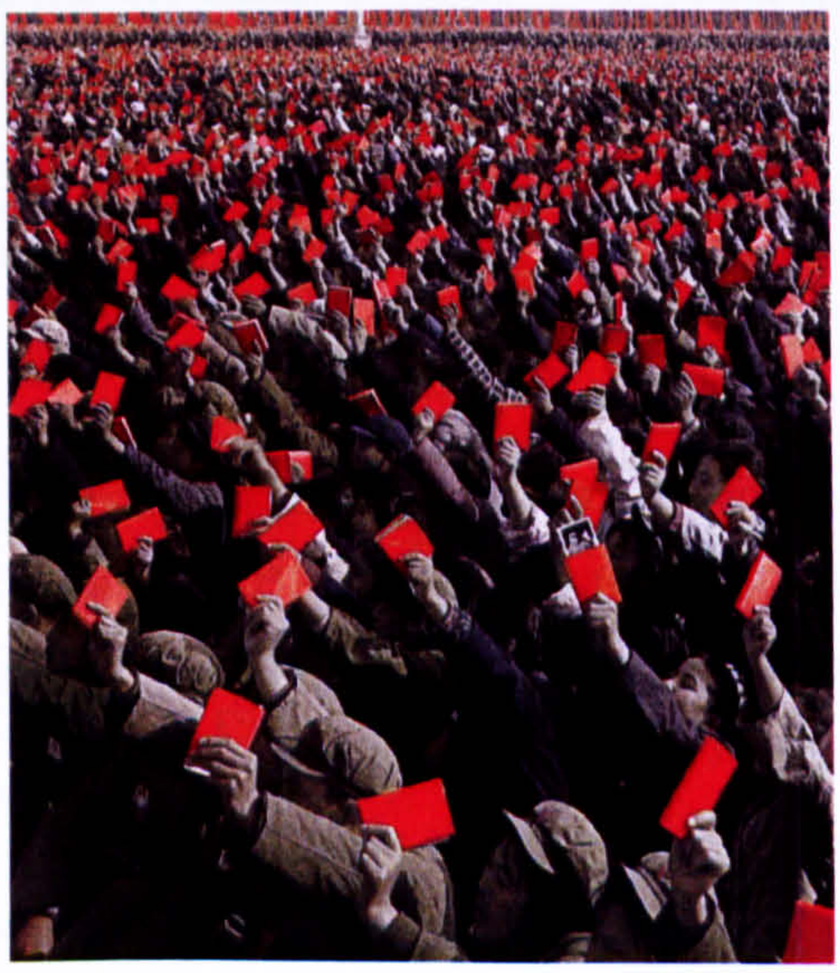


Fig. 3a. *The hearts of the revolutionary people are turned to the great leader Chairman Mao,* 1967. Photograph.

The discourse of Chinese history had a rude awakening in the form of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). For the diaspora Chinese, the route of academia is a way of obtaining an insight into the most written about chapter in the history of China. Providentially, as a master of subversion, Chairman Mao Zedong left behind a visual legacy that has a distinct characteristic of the spectacle. Mao can be upheld as the quintessence of Walter Benjamin's 'aestheticisation of politics' through processes of spectacularisation and massification (Fig. 3a-3f) [17]. His tactics were similar to the way China played to its strength at the opening of the 2008 Olympic Games, of rallying the solidarity of its 1.3 billions inhabitants, not just as the spectacle (Fig. 3b), but also as the spectators (Fig. 3c).



Fig. 3b. *Artists representing the age of Confucius at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing*, 8th August, 2008. Photograph.

China's recent history of Maoist communism consisted of a deeply embedded impulse of revolutionary culture in China's traditional system that valorised communality, hierarchy, and ideological homogeneity, and is thought to contribute to an impoverishment of everyday life [18]. This is expressed as a visual spectacle in the Maoist utopian longing for a full and complete life, the success of which (Maoist utopia) is paradoxically measured in its failure, in its negation by late 20th/21st centuries consumerism and mass culture [19]. This modernisation project that involved a standard according to world experience of 'marketisation,



3c. *8,800 flashcard-wielding spectators,* 1972-76. Photograph.



3d. *Workers performing synchronised exercises in the 1960s when 798 was a factory.* Photograph.

3e. *Pupils standing crisply to attention during a Sports Day ceremony at a Peking school.* Photograph.

industrialisation, and urbanisation' has been pitched against the alternative vision of a Third World modernity that is based on self-reliance, strategic industrialisation, and negation of market forces [20].

It is a contradictory situation that appears to have led to an ideological vacuum. 'There is a prevailing sense of discontinuity or a new beginning' as China's revolutionary hegemony of Marxism-Leninism-Maoist style thought appeared to have lost much of its grip and legitimacy during the 1990s [21]. It has been described as a postpolitics situation of power struggle without revolutionary ideology, seduced by Deng Xiaoping's socialist market economy [22]. The revival of the literati tradition has been purported to be an 'interbreeding of global civilizations' [23]. The global revival of Confucianism and the escalation of Asian values now provide an attractive substitute code of social discipline. The potential of Confucian moralism, previously thought 'feudalist junk', is closely related to *National learning* intended to help root out the influence of Western theories and to rouse patriotic passion among the people, and has been construed as a predicament of the intellectual elites overwhelmed by waves of commercialism.

Benjamin's idea of the Optical Unconscious facilitates a reading of Mao's philosophies to reside in the contradictory space between Marx and Althusser, respectively, that human subjects are 'alienated' under capitalism, and that culture did not reflect society but produced it [24].

The individual is, in Marxist terms, free and possessing of an irreducible essence, although alienated under capitalism. The Marxist tradition is that ideology is a complex web of values and beliefs which together organises the heterogeneous and contradictory elements of class society towards common goals, concealing from them the exploitative nature of class relations. It is also a False Consciousness of relations between ideological forms such as the legal, political, religious, aesthetic and philosophical. It is proposed by some of Marx's followers that after the revolutionary transformation of the mode of economic production, the very cause itself of the distorting ideologies will have been removed, and all men and women will see reality as it really is.

Althusser rejects a 'humanist' account of the individual- a free subject possessed of an irreducible human 'essence'. For him, ideology is not Marx's False Consciousness, a set of illusions which will be dispelled after the revolution – it is

inseparable from the practical social activities and relations of everyday life and therefore a necessary condition of any society whatsoever, including communist societies. According to him, ideology is a 'system of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, the ISAs - the ideological state apparatus) endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society which act on men and women 'by a process that escapes them' [25].

He also rejects an empiricist account of the way the individual acquires knowledge in experience, where the world simply presents itself via the senses 'for what it is'. Both subject and its experiences are constituted in representations: the ISAs, which offer 'pictures' of subjectivity in which the subject 'misrecognises' itself, as if the pictures were mirrors.

Mao's ideology has characteristics of both Marx's and Althusser's understanding of human essence. Ostensibly, he strived for a utopia that was both agrarian and modern, with an egalitarian commitment to social harmony and an almost aristocratic refusal of the mundane and the physical. In reality, not only were individuals alienated under his rule, they were also not free and at the same time subjected to a subliminal method of representations of images, myths, ideas and concepts.

Mao also engendered an illusion, with a system of representations (images, myths, ideas and concepts) that acted on the masses by a process that escaped them. In other words, he engendered a myth through the spectacle as a form of control. Ironically, although Mao was intent on dispensing with old ideas, his ideology possesses a predisposition towards Althusserian values that are akin to Confucianism, characterised by interdependency and reciprocal obligation rather than autonomy and contradiction [26].

In death as in life, Mao was the initiator of and also integral to the myth of his Socialist utopia. He was fascinated by the process of modernisation in the west and wanted to create a new China. Through the propaganda of mass reproduction and dissemination of images by photography and film, Mao 'colonise(d) the conscious

and unconscious processes through which the subject senses, desires and understands the visible world' [27]. He propagated myths like modern day brand building by introducing a new visual language such as propaganda art that adapted itself on folk art, slogans and portraiture [28]. He built on the hysterical excitement of mass assemblies, encouraging the carnival excitement of festivals akin to National Day Celebrations (Fig. 4). Mao turned the masses into their own propaganda through the use of mass media. He ensured that propaganda art was everywhere, in magazines, newspapers, on walls, even floors and sold in shops (Fig. 5a-5c). Traditional posters such as Door Gods were no longer permitted and were replaced by propaganda art for people to decorate their homes (Fig. 5b). Mao perfectly understood the power of the spectacle of communality.

Through his consummate skill in creating a spectacle, he employed mass images of solidarity, for example where everybody had to wear the 'Mao' suit, to undermine the very essence of a society. He understood the notion of a hyperreality where the spectacle becomes more real and seductive than reality itself, where the seductive power of images fools us into believing a reality persisted.

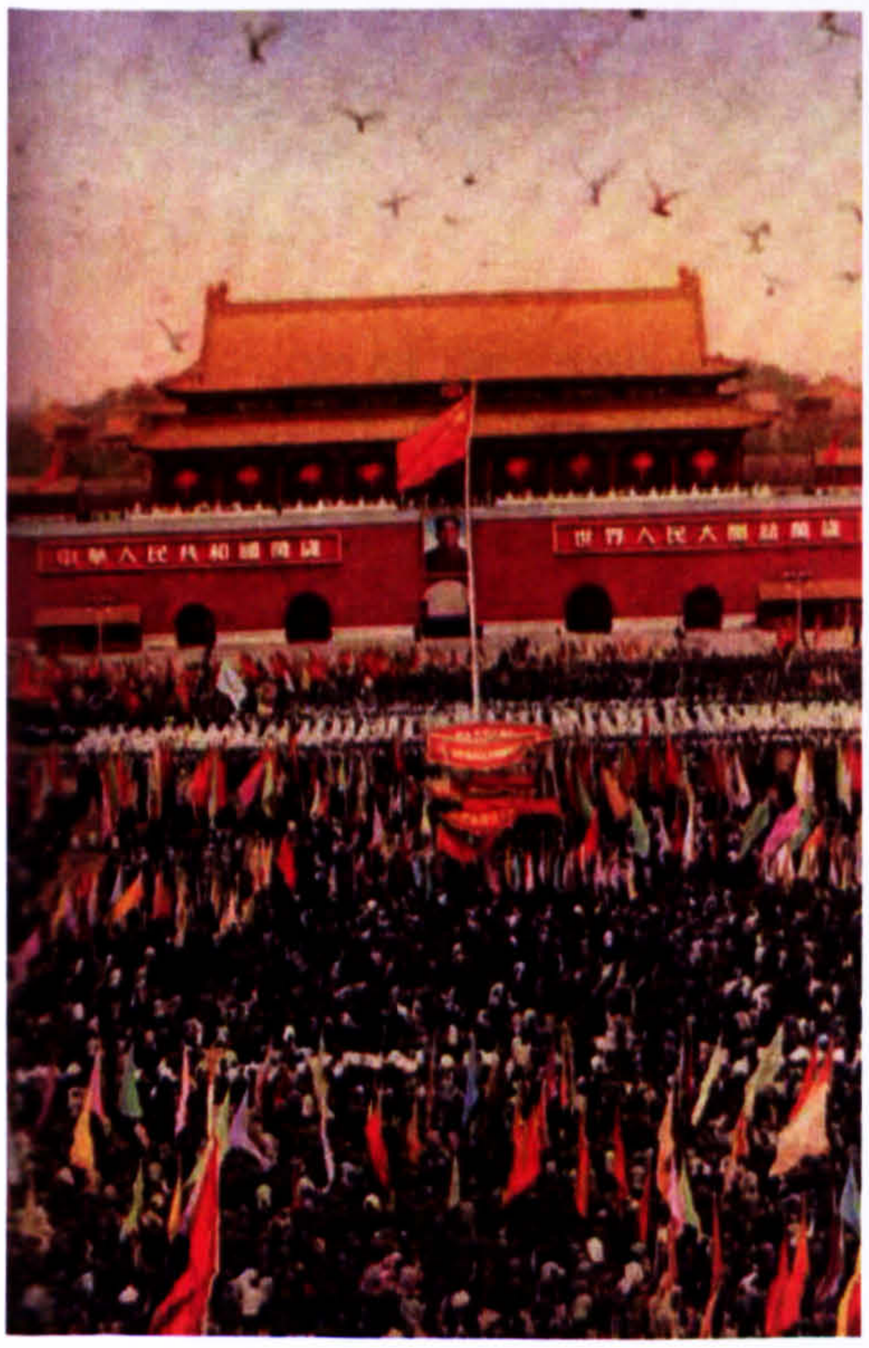


Fig. 4. *National Day celebration in Tiananmen Square*, 1 October, 1952. Oil painting, dimensions unknown.



祖国处处有亲人





Clockwise from top left

Fig. 5a. *A good physician for the peasants,* 1972. Poster, 77 x 53 cm.

Fig. 5b. *A nation of caring people,* 1973. Poster, 77 x 53 cm.

Fig. 5c. *Struggle for a good harvest and store food supplies everywhere,* 1973. Poster, 53 x 77 cm.

Tiananmen Square was transformed from an insulated Imperial quarter into a central space where a society can congregate, the People's Square, the symbolic heart of Chinese Communist power, with its Haussmann-like expanses and clear open lines of vision (Fig. 6a-6c). Mao destroyed historic Beijing for a new China justifying it with the basic tenet of the Chinese communist party which emphasised revolution over preservation, and transformation through destruction. Private palatial grounds reserved for dynastic rulers were made available to the commoners, the masses. Now surrounded by tall chimneys, Tiananmen has become another symbol of triumph, being the industrialisation that Mao had sought after.

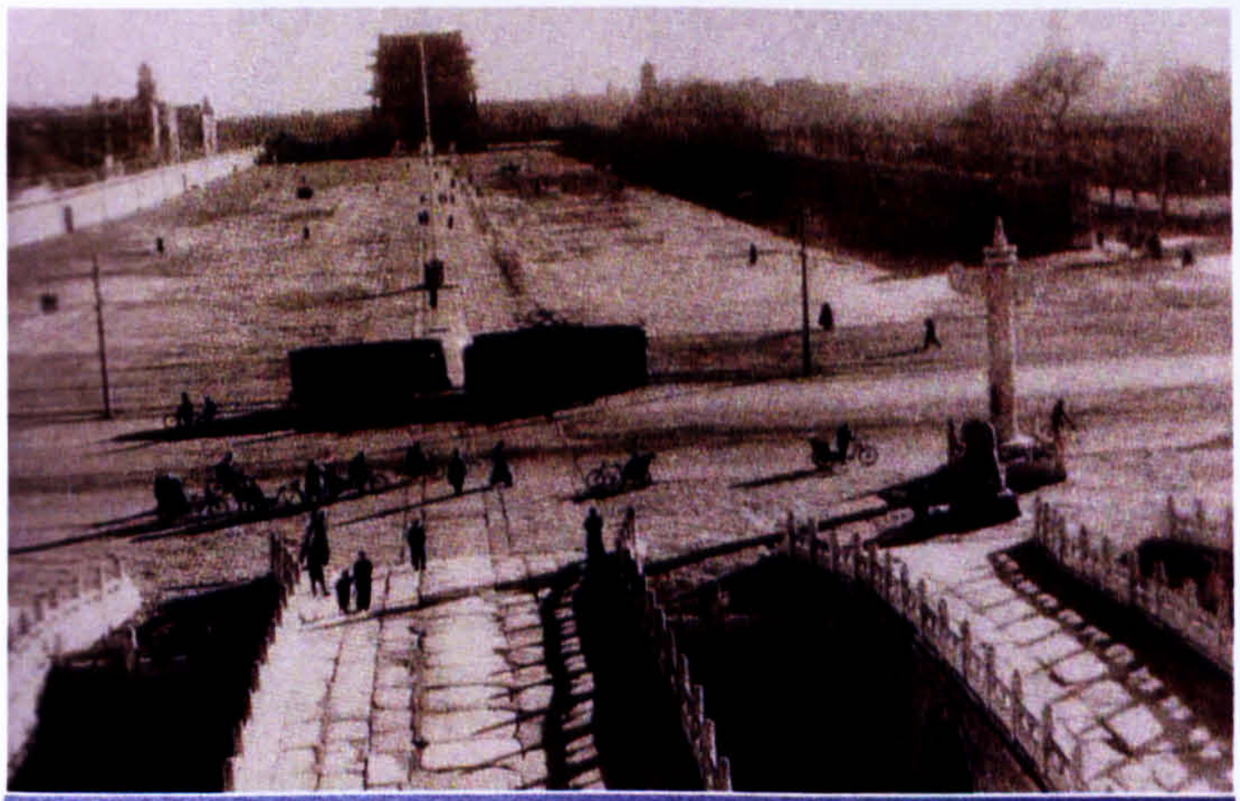


Fig. 6a. *Tiananmen Square with its Haussmann-like expanses and clear open lines of vision - before: A street car running along Chang'an Avenue, 1950.* Photograph.



Fig. 6b. *Tiananmen Square with its Haussmann-like expanses and clear open lines of vision - after : Chang'an Avenue after the expansion of 1959.* Photograph.



Fig. 6c. *Taxis in Tiananmen,* 2007, documentary photograph, VP Bartlett.



Fig. 7. *In Front of Tiananmen,* 1964. Sun Zixi. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.

To Chinese artists, Tiananmen Square with Mao's portrait has become a 'space of the avant-garde', to project the well-established genre of a communal spectacle. It signifies a public arena of political expression, occupied once by millions of Red Guards and more recently tens of thousands of protesting students, appearing like a Socialist update of the old Tiananmen [29]. Sun Zixi's *In front of Tiananmen* 1964 (Fig. 7) was the precursor of a long line of Tiananmen portraits. It was given Mao's approval and was singled out by the critics as an outstanding example of Socialist Realist art, and that it 'represent(ed) the people and express(ed) the thoughts of the new age...' [30].

In Sun's painting, Tiananmen constituted the figures' physical environment and provided the backdrop for their picture taking. The grouping and positioning signified a hierarchical structure internal to this collective social entity. At the centre of the painting are cadres, workers, peasants, students, men and women of different generations, smiling broadly. There is a small group to the right consisting of 6 sailors from the navy. The group to the left are people of ethnic minorities. Uniforms contrasted with colourful minority costumes but despite their differences in ethnicity, age, gender and occupation, they have all come to the square to take photos in front of Tiananmen.

Blue Mao also addresses the genre of the communal spectacle. Its vivid and vital element of the Mao blue cuts a spectacle on a crisp white canvas. It is a photographic print projecting a flat image on a blank canvas. The image is that of a terracotta soldier dressed in a blue Mao jacket to represent the uniform of the masses during Mao's years. It is in contrast to Sun's *Tiananmen* and uses the singular to connote the masses, the blue-collar workers, signifying a spectacle of the masses as Claude Lefort's people-as-one, a totalitarian social body [31]. It is about the ideological domination of the Chinese masses, caught in a web of temporal desynchronisation between Mao's legacy and contemporary China. The terracotta army is on a par with Tiananmen Square as the *crème de la crème* of Chinese spectacle, being an historical icon that has a long tradition with artistic dialogue. Whereas the meaning of Tiananmen altered dramatically since the protests and bloodshed of 1989, the terracotta soldier has become sacrosanct through antiquity, the bloodshed long forgotten and now stands as China's unrelinquishable trophy.

Slogans and captions

Mao left a legacy of art as a social tool, using both image and word that were the keystones of centuries old literati art, turning contemplation into function. Mao was the biggest adversary of the literati, as he wanted to break with tradition and to erase the elitism of China. His intentions were demonstrated none too subtly during the Cultural Revolution. He reduced everyone to the same level as the masses, perhaps more to demote the status of the literati than to raise the status of the peasants as he did not belong to the former. Political rhetoric is now the new aesthetic.

Mao was aware that visual communication was the key to reach a country with a low literacy rate, where according to published statistics of the China National Census, the rate of illiteracy in 1964 was over 57 per cent [32]. He supplied visual and literal imagery and propagandas (Fig. 5a-5c) in the form of posters, commercial posters with artworks and *dazibao* (big character posters) (Fig. 8), slogans, puns, poems, commentary and personal opinions. His edict was that art must serve the people. It must also extol workers and the glories of communism and call attention to the

wisdom of the Communist Party and its leadership. Slogans were meticulously phrased to glibly conjure up visual images. Mao virtually drowned 650 million people in visual propaganda, formulaic use of numbers and words, giving people what they wanted through subliminal sound bites, such as 'Serve the people', 'Tear out the roots', 'Thoroughly eradicate', 'Let a hundred flowers bloom', 'Smash all old things' (the four olds were old custom, old culture, old habits, and old ideas), the four 'Cleanups', 'Three threes', etc. [33]. His key phrases included these basic but fundamental five words, *yi, shi, zhu, yong, xing,* meaning clothing, food, housing, articles for daily use and transportation. His use of numbers were rhyming and corresponded to a jingle.



Fig. 8. *Dazibaos on the British Embassy walls, Peking 1957.* Riboud, Photograph.

Mao's brilliance in exploiting the proletariat through rhetoric is exemplified in his 'Little red book'. As well as the clever use of the colour red to denote and symbolise

communism, its trim size was perfect for a jacket or trousers pocket, its content is a compilation of aphorisms from Mao's speeches, entitled 'the Quotations from Chairman Mao' [34]. Furthermore, it was targeted at the masses, the lower level employees and soldiers and packed with managerial advice on training, motivations, evaluation and innovation, raising the game of the complacent manager with relentless self-criticisms.

His message bore no relation to his actions but it expressed precisely and succinctly what he should have been doing, and ultimately, what the people wanted. Politically little has changed and the current Chinese government appears to have inherited the same skill with rhetoric [35]. President Hu Jintao mentioned the word democracy more than 60 times in his two and a half hour speech during the weeklong party congress in Beijing on October 15 2007, and he also mentioned the word the same number of times in 2002. Despite Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao's promises to do more to bridge the widening gap between China's urban rich and rural poor, the people are not convinced that they have done anything in concrete policy terms [36].

The disparity between Mao's performance and his reputation is instructive in demonstrating the power of the spectacle. It was commonly thought that the functions of Mao's red book is to *xinao* (brainwash people) [37]. The Little red book, re-education circles and posters were all part of Mao's ruthless media manipulation of the spectacle. His message was constantly reinforced, 'where the broom does not reach, the dust will not vanish of itself'. He encouraged the masses to privilege the collective over the individual. Mao's strategy was to emphasise the concrete, the material and even the bodily functions, forms, and structures of the everyday, which were rooted in the textures, temporalities, and rhythms of Chinese peasant life [38].

Mao's self aggrandisement was often dismissed as a personality cult but shared many similarities with modern business practices of brand building. Mao made use of sycophantic journalists and hagiographies written by reporters whose careers were built on the access they had to him [39]. There is also an element of cognitive dissonance, the ability to make a compelling heartfelt case for one thing while doing another. It was about a clear utopian message, hammered home relentlessly. His

success was evidenced by millions of soldiers memorising his sayings, such that it became almost a 'full blown religion', elevating him into the cult of the Leader [40].

His success in propaganda is contrasted by a lack of legacy from Deng Xiaoping, the chief architect of China's present economic boom. Where Mao was respectfully referred to as the Chairman and his portrait is still today hung in Tiananmen Square and emblazoned on China's currency, bags, shirts, pins, watches etc., his immediate successor Deng did not even merit an image on a coin.

Being the successful designer of a blossoming economic situation is a thankless task and Deng appeared to have been relegated to the position of scapegoat. This can probably be attributed to his choice of words that lacked the hypocritical idealism and ingredients of myth of Mao's. Deng's slogan, 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' were thought to be vacuous and self contradictory and 'all this generates profound uneasiness with the Confucian oriented 'official nationalism'...and 'national learning', *guo xue*... construed as a thinly disguised expression of the predicament of the intellectual elite... rapidly relegated to social periphery and irrelevance due to commercialism...' [41].

To demonstrate Mao's aptitude for the spectacle and to parody the hollowness of his slogans, some of the visual texts of this thesis have adopted literal titles. Using the same image, different captions are applied to the series *Chinese woman in Beijing (CWIBJ)*, altering the meaning of the work to suit its purpose, ranging from *Hutong sisters, Serve the people, Miss Hybridity, Let a hundred flowers bloom and Le flaneur.*

This literalness is also evident in Chinese contemporary art practices that echo the metonymy and parody of great Chinese classics. In particular, it expounds the myth of rhetoric, a myth that is invested in the word, addressing the contradiction and irony between text and image. It is comparable to the functional relationship between the photographic image and its caption [42], where their interdependence can compromise the dominance of the visual [43].



Fig. 9. *CWIBJ (Serve the people)*, 2007. Voon Pow Bartlett. Photographic print on aluminium, 128 x 176 cm.

CWIBJ (Serve the people) (Fig. 9) references Mao's brilliance in justifying his actions through empty rhetoric, no matter how entirely self-serving, as being done for others. 'Serve the people' urged people to produce art to serve the people and ushered in a new propaganda art that parodied its form on folk art whilst subverting its content and spirit. By adopting this rhetoric, *CWIBJ (Serve the people)* demonstrates the ambiguous relationship between word and image and the power of the former to determine the latter. Additionally, photography's Optical Unconscious can help to reveal what the human eye cannot see, in other words, it lends itself to facilitate deception through the spectacle [44].

Specifically, contemporary artists have been indulging in the deceit of words and eruditions to propagate the myth of the literati and to reclaim the literati status. The craze to rename places and streets with revolutionary names such as *Study Chairman Mao Alley*, *Dongfanghong* (*East is red)* and *Posijiu* (*Smash the Four*

Olds), is now replaced by more contemplative names of the pre-revolutionary past, recalling such famous paintings as Zhao Mengfu's *The horse and groom in the wind, Old trees and unfettered horses* (14th century), Emperor Hui Tsung's *Sparrows in winter plum* (12th century), Ma Lin's *Sitting to watch the time the cloud arise*, *Swallows at dusk* (13th century), Liang Kai's *Strolling by a marshy bank*, Li Po's *Chanting poetry* (12th – 13th century), Tang Yin's *Drunken fisherman by a reed bank* (15th century), *Ma Yuan's Scholar by a waterfall* (13th century) and so on.

Using such rhetoric may satisfy the meditative tendencies of literati work, imbuing them with deeper cultural, political and philosophical meanings. This can however confound, frustrate and alienate the audience, not just non-Chinese, but also the illiterate and common people who may not possess the requisite level of sophistication.



Fig.10. *Bonsai,* 2000. Song Dong. Event and installation.

In *Bonsai* (Fig 10), Song Dong used a line of Chinese text reminiscent of a menu, its literal translation being *Fish and river mountain, The river and mountains are so full of beauty*, followed by a more detailed description, spelled out in perfect five-

character lines: 'three salmon heads, cooked in a microwave, and a little bit of skin, embellished with green cauliflower, pour on soy sauce, other seasonings, add to taste. May 14, 2000, Song Dong, London'. Critic Leng Lin's explanation confirmed the cultural barrier set up by Song, as he explained the difficulty, even for him, of translating the titles idiomatically. Fish and meat can also mean to treat something badly or even to devour, river and mountains are metonymy for China itself, and 'the river and mountains are so full of meat' is a play on Mao's famous poem, 'the river and mountains are so full of beauty'! One suspects that this barrier is not entirely created without relish.

The Myth of Mao and the culture fever

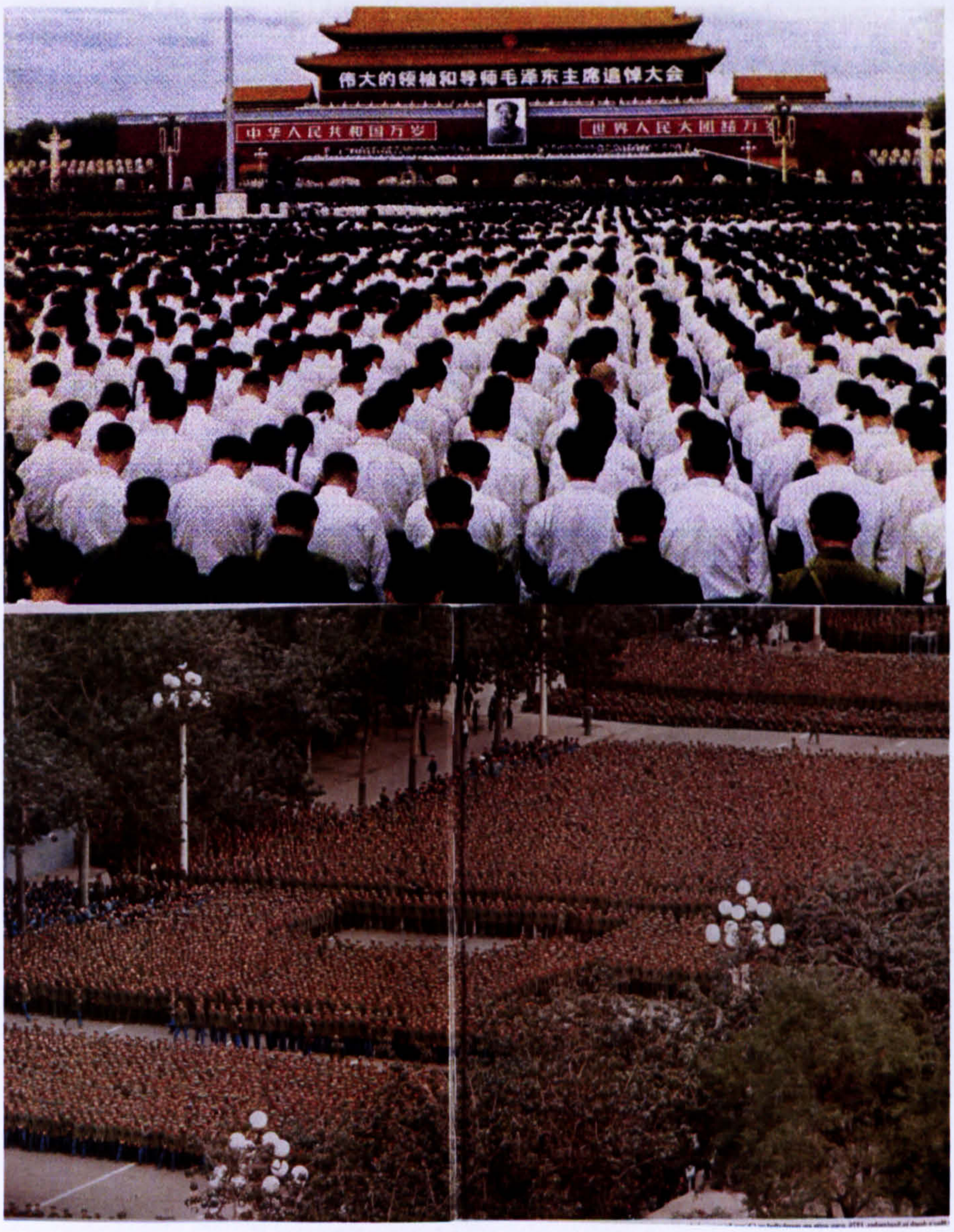


Fig. 11a. *Funeral of Chairman Mao at Tiananmen Square*, 1976. Photograph.

Fig. 11b. *Soldiers at the death of Mao,* Peking. 1978. Photograph.

The privileging of Mao is ubiquitous in Chinese contemporary art, beginning in his lifetime in Sun Zixi's *In front of Tiananmen* where he was carefully manoeuvred in centre place alongside Tiananmen, to dominate all the people in the square and to look straight into the eyes of the viewers. In the process of the most thorough exploitation of the mass media, Mao himself also became an iconic image [45]. The memory of him was especially mythified through the collective effervescence emanating from the culture craze that began in the 1980s soon after his demise in 1976. In life, Mao turned art into a social tool, and in death he has become an icon of aesthetic pleasure [46]. The images of a spectacle of mass mourning and solidarity at his funeral in 1976 are surely his just reward (Fig. 11a-11b).

In giving a 'face-lift' to the terracotta soldier of the Qin dynasty and referencing the 'Mao suit', a ubiquitous icon in contemporary Chinese art, *Blue Mao* shares in China's *Mao-re* (Mao craze/fever), the hero worship of Mao, referencing him as a major national myth [47]. The image of the blue jacket and the name *Blue Mao* recalls Mao's presence through absence, alluding to him by default, as probably the world's best-known political portrait.

Mao was the first leader to appear on Tiananmen on October 1, 1949 to announce the People's Republic of China. No other gesture could more effectively seal the title



Fig. 12. *Last Days of the Kuomintang*, 1949. Andre Bresson. Photograph.

of 'Peoples' Republic and an invocation of 'revolutionary mass culture' [48]. The singular and perfectly composed figure of a terracotta warrior is assigned a latent energy of the masses, a distillation of collective strength, in this case that of Emperor Qin's army (221-207 BC), commanded by him to protect China from its enemies. Behind the spectacle of one in *Blue Mao*, is a sense of a collective effervescence, balancing between control and euphoria, contained excitement and unrestrained anguish. A collective effervescence has the potential to 'lead to outlandish behaviour whilst people's passions unleashed, are so torrential that nothing can hold them' [49]. Andre Bresson's *Last days of the Kuomintang*, 1949 (Fig. 12) similarly captured the energy of the people's collective that did turn from conformity to hysteria, privileging a moment of panic caught in the impending doom of a financial crisis in 1948, just prior to the Communists taking control [50].

By using the superficiality of dressing up, *Blue Mao* highlights the shallowness of China's culture fever, where consumption and in particular consumption of culture itself, has become the main motive or object of social life and production. Mao, the deceased leader of the Cultural Revolution, is now the leader of a culture fever, the main motif and design of commercial products. China's *geming hangchuang de duoshou* (*Captain of the revolutionary boat*) [51], the once revered communist leader, is now ironically elevated to being a real Chairman, albeit posthumously, of a successful flagship of a contemporary Chinese market, which has spread worldwide.

The culture fever of the 1990s represented a shift from ideological integrity to material consumption. This has led to a decline of traditional aesthetics and the rise of popular culture, focussing on entertainment. 'Highbrow aesthetic ideals of the 1980s' such as epics, odes, tragedies, symphonic poetries are displaced by populist tastes' such as popular songs, comic acts and popular novels [52]. The fundamental change in China's aesthetic fever of the past is now imbued with 'Travesty, flirtation, pastiche, irony, parody, deformation' [53].

PART II

Hegemony, history and heritage

Archaic v modern

Part II interrogates how China's heritage and social fabric have influenced artistic strategies.

Blue Mao addresses the concerns within Chinese art discourse regarding the often disparate influences of modernity and history [54]. Although there is a pervasive use of popular culture to reference recent historical events, it is thought that Chinese contemporary art has lost touch with its heritage in favour of a wholesale appropriation of the west. *Blue Mao* engages with the canon of Chinese iconography as well as its present disjuncture from the past. Its content is historical yet its flatness and presentation provide a modern appearance. Its minimalism compels the audience to confront a single issue, that of the relationship between the traditional and the modern. It is a pastiche of different historical periods. The blue Sun Yatsen jacket, denoting the requisite uniform during Mao's reign, is specifically made to coincide with the original, in terms of cloth (cotton for wearability), colour (blue for working class), pockets (four for utility) and buttons (five for utility and formality). Additionally, *Blue Mao's* robe, once worn by the literati as recently as the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), distinguishes it from peasant trousers.

As a photo-painting, or a painting-photo, *Blue Mao* exhibits an ambivalence that provides an insight into the precarious suspension of contemporary Chinese art, between the demands of the spectacle and an aesthetic practice. The former is 'the mass cultural forms of representation that govern everyday life' and is a condition of global existence [55]. The latter held a promise of resistance similar to that offered by *Cynical Realism* but which has ironically started the floodgate of commercialism. Its ambivalence indicates that Chinese artists are grappling with an identity crisis, a disconnection brought on and exacerbated by the urban and economic situations.

Blue Mao sets up a tension and a demonstration of a progressive absorption of painting within the spectacle. The use of canvas references the 2,000-year traditions of literati painting, and specifically alludes to its demise. Its transformation to a mediated digital image on canvas addresses both screenprint and traditional oil painting, both of which were the media of the Cultural Revolution, the former denoting tradition and the latter the beginning of modern art in China. It simultaneously contravenes and questions the very historical awareness manifested through the combination of photography and painterly quality. It is 'a dialectic of the then and now, but neither simply inhabit the then of aesthetic modernism nor the now of spectacular appearance' [54].

Its use of mediation through photography engages in the current discussion in China of an acceptable art form, with photography criticised as a 'totalistic repudiation of Chinese tradition and blind westernization' or as the perfect 'violent language of displacement and appropriation' [56]. *Blue Mao* floats on the canvas, a hyperreal dressed-up doll as the essence of 2,000 years of history, from Qin to Mao. However, its depthlessness flattens and reduces, rather than reinforces the historical distance or aura that we need to commune such expanse of history. Its manner of representation calls forth a 'crisis of historicity', rendering ambiguous the context of past experience [57]. It brings into question the complexity of the spectacle in the realisation of a myth.

The use of photography further alludes to the progressive Chinese intellectuals who, since 1919, rejected Confucianism, traditional ink painting and calligraphy and vociferously demanded the introduction of western realist painting [58]. However, other groups such as *New Media* have adopted ink as well as photography and time-based media, as a complete disjuncture from the traditional. The 'death of Chinese painting', as proclaimed by the *New Wave* movement of the 1980s, has not stemmed the small coterie of ink artists who are trying to connect history with contemporary art, as testified by exhibitions entitled *New ink, Test ink, City ink* and *Contemporary ink* [59].

Blue Mao also alludes to the powerful domination of history to determine an individual's cultural heritage and consciousness, to authenticate and to affirm a sense of self-identity. This issue was explored by Wang Anyi in her groundbreaking Chinese novel, *Reality and fiction*, where she constructed a cultural identity that is based on a specific ethnicity, implying purity, (such as Han) instead of an overarching 'Chineseness', implying a homogeneous national identity [60]. As part of the *zhiqing* (intellectual youngsters) and one of the most influential writers in China today, Wang exemplified her generation, the educated elites who have a reflexive relationship with China's literati tradition [61]. She addressed the individual's position in society, tradition and history through a very private and personal perspective, and challenged the powerful domain of Chinese history [62]. The book contained allegorical aspects as a 'struggle between her search for an authentic identity and her identity in relation to the society at large' [63].

As Wang trivialised and personalised national history and nationalised private history in her historical novel, *Blue Mao* is about unravelling a paternal network and a perception of a father's attempt to construct a credible and respectable persona for his daughter. The jigsaw puzzle becomes a patchwork, not with predetermined pieces, but self-made ones, selective childhood tales, retellings from relatives and friends and old photographs, whose only criteria were to contribute to an acceptable, attractive and respectable whole.

Wang's fancy for heroism traced her ancestors to a fictional Han Chinese with a distinguished bureaucratic career, rather than a basket weaver tribe with an ordinary background. *Blue Mao* however, clung ideologically to the heroic and worthy roles assigned to a personal history. The imperative for Wang was the 'wondrous experiences of those years simply because she could do whatever she wanted', but *Blue Mao* is about an esteemable reconciliation with a father (now his memory) and therefore a personal identity.

Wang vacillated between histories and a flamboyant reliance on fabrication in order to arrive at a socially and culturally acceptable and respectable truth, whereas *Blue Mao* manipulates disparate histories and uses the 'truth' of photography to

authenticate. However, the combination of a soldier and a uniform two thousand years apart can create a myth of its own existence, one that questions the writing of history and its authenticity regarding historical fact and fiction.

Art after the Cultural Revolution is a complex engagement with the transnational and global as well as home grown historicist issues. To identify with a 'hegemonic cultural identity' such as a Han Chinese is also to be rooted in the long and relatively undisrupted Confucian discourse of Chinese history [64]. Wang expressed what contemporary Chinese intellectuals and urbanites faced, especially in the cosmopolitan cities where the new concerns are about adopting alternative cultural identities within the dominant discourse of an orthodox history and national heritage. *Blue Mao* expresses another form of struggle, especially for the diaspora Chinese, to lay claim to an authenticity that resides between the archaic and the modern.

Nostalgia and amnesia

The Cultural Revolution was a period of revolutionary zeal and its paraphernalia were especially commodified and artistic works became cultural fast food, vying for attention alongside the decadent, the sensual and the sensational. It has even been seen as analogous with the effervescence of a huge rock'n'roll party [65]. Chinese contemporary art reflects the condition of a persistent nostalgia that is indicative of a collective anxiety as well as a remedy for the trauma of the Cultural Revolution, with the indications of *Mao-re* (Mao fever) as only one of its symptoms. Nostalgia has also given rise to a return to traditional discourse of the intellectual circles, such as the contemporary Confucian revival in the guise of Neo Confucianism [66].

Blue Mao addresses the irony of much of the intellectual thought surrounding nostalgia. Nostalgic representation has become a substitute for historical consciousness, not as a trend of thought or even a form of resistance to the destructive forces of modernisation and commercialisation, but as a fashion [67]. There are also references to ancient materials such as imperial lacquer, to comment on the get-rich-quick society. Culture is commodified 'to contain and dissolve the anxiety of everyday life, to translate collective concerns into consumer desires, by

which means even the revolutionary past may be made profitable' [68]. The irony is that although the intellectuals resist the commodification of a culture craze, nostalgia has become the most marketable of cultural commodities [69], in art as well as films, novels, TV soaps and folk songs [70]. Nostalgia is like an 'alluring commercial packaging..., a fashionable culture' [71].

Nostalgia comes in many guises, as remembrance and mourning, as strategy, as resistance, as commodification, as a search for authenticity. Such nostalgia exhibits an ambivalence between modernity and the ideological utopia. During the recent critical dialogue about Beijing's urban development called 'Beijing and *beljing*' organised by UNESCO in Beijing in 2005, it was evident that Beijingers were torn between two utopias, one of modernisation, and the other nostalgia for the past [72]. The modernisation utopia reflects a modernist discourse of progress and was thought to give the Chinese a clean slate on which to build a new Beijing but also contained a persistent doubt inherent in the critique and repulsion of stainless steel and glass walls [73]. The nostalgic revolutionary utopia appeared to not only deny Beijing further progress but also lead to a rupture from its own history.

Nostalgia can also come in a counter guise of amnesia. The term amnesia is used loosely rather than clinically, to denote the condition of the have-nots, the younger generation born after the 1970s who did not experience the Cultural Revolution first hand. It is also widely believed that they have not been given access to information relating to the Cultural Revolution. Amnesia is also a useful strategy for those who did not wish to remember the days when thinking for oneself can result in imprisonment, as well as to assuage the predicament of the breakneck pace.

Chinese art critics are interested in the effect of a national collective memory loss on individual consciousness. This situation formed a significant area of interest in Chinese contemporary art and was a prime focus for the Selection Committee for the Shanghai Triennial, the *Archaeology of the future* in 2005 [74]. Interestingly, the Selection Committee of the exhibition similarly affirmed a state of amnesia, describing it as a 'diachronic discontinuity' [75], 'fictional memory' [76] or a state of

being with 'traces, gaps, discontinuities and disrupted evidences of ideas and cultures discarded by traditional historiography' [77].

Conversely, there is a view that the state of amnesia is maintained and encouraged by those in power in China who sought to monopolise and control the writing of history. A government document issued in 1976, entitled 'Resolution on a few historical problems' confirmed this view as a 'conclusive account' of events that 'could not be altered, questioned, or discussed' [78]. It was clear from the opening message of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing that the Chinese government has written off, not surprisingly, the Cultural Revolution years. The overriding message, spectacularly delivered through visual spectacle, in full knowledge of a viewing figure of some 4 billion people worldwide, clearly emphasised a friendly gesture of Confucian peace and harmony and a careful selection from history of innovations, artistic excellence and global engagement.

This situation is illuminated by a definition of postmodernism, where capitalism's 'relentless emphasis on novelty, construct(ing) a schizophrenic mode of attention, divorced from historical continuity, in which the past is only accessed through the pastiche or retro style' [79]. It is also one of the characteristics of the spectacle, to paralyse memory, akin to a global order characterised by an incessant technological renewal and an 'eternal present', ie., an impoverishment of memory [80].



Fig. 13. *CWIBJ (Hutong Sisters)*, 2007. Courtesy of Voon Pow Bartlett. Digital print on newsprint, 53 x 77 cm.

Empirical hutong

To facilitate the transition from the academic and the abstract *Blue Mao*, *CWIBJ* (*Hutong sisters*) (Fig. 13) employs an empirical engagement with the Chinese. It is a series of collaborative reconciliations to elucidate the ambivalent position of being caught between a western artistic practice and to explore and engage with one's heritage of birth. *CWIBJ* (*Hutong sisters*) is a collaboration with the inhabitants of the *hutong* (low cost housing meant for workers) of my birthplace, through the patriarchal line. The identity that was selected by them was to present me as a

Chinese woman in a black Olympic t-shirt and a red armband worn during local patrols, also a vestige of Mao's communal days. The t-shirt is a manifestation of China's pride in winning the Olympic venue and the armband reminiscent of Mao's Red Guards of the 1960s and 70s, a wry mixture of pride and humiliation, and also of temporal desynchronisation.

The search for a self-identity is posited in a dialectical movement with Histories, the grand history of China and history, a personal one, where 'national identity is never naturally given but is rather discursively constructed, invented and imagined' [81]. Acting as both narrator-artist and character, and as a *wailaihu* (outsider), a Chinese woman from outside China, the search for a cultural identity requires a determination by another cultural heritage, such as that of the collective, as part of the *hutong*, or personal, with inherited friends and contacts. Fragments of memory and recollection are brought to the fore, however faint, are clutched at, preserved and even mythified into a quest for exploring the possibility for an individual's subjectivity to be grounded in personal experiences and imagination. There is a high reliance on the elevated purpose of offering new knowledge, of uncovering a hidden truth, of conserving a vanishing past. The mundane and ordinary, the places and people become the most enthralling of subjects. The banal channels directly into the sublime and the humanistic.

In order to demythify any pre-established Orientalist position, (*Hutong sisters*) subverts the reservations of the Beijing locals on the prospect of an insight that may be gained by outsiders. The compulsion to photograph as an experience, as a way of seeing into a country, the patronising and perpetual affirmation of an Orientalist, are transformed with the exaggerated techniques of *Cynical Realism.* The brightness of resolution is heightened to occlude its emotiveness, clarity is dulled and characters homogenised through strong colours. However, no amount of clarification or artificiality, whether serendipitous, awkward, naive, sincere, shoddy or slick, can occlude a fascination for the exotic. This fascination is captured in the seductive use of colours that is meant to unravel the seductiveness of the spectacle.

Born again Chinese

It doesn't matter what colour a cat is as long as it catches mice.

Deng Xiaoping, 1978 [82]

Deng's reputation is at least redeemed by his famous saying, which has become a prophecy to China's galloping and mesmerising rise, 'a non-western power (is) in the global premier league' [83].

Whilst not suggesting a transcendental personal experience, 'Born again' is a useful term borrowed from Christianity to describe how some artists have taken Deng's advice to heart in order to capture 15 minutes of fame and indeed the irony has not escaped my own practice [84]. In particular, the term serves to describe many diaspora Chinese who appear to behave more Chinese than Mainland Chinese.

CWIBJ (Hutong sisters) is predicated on a process of identification through a harmonious interaction with residents of Beijing. The native, in this case, the *hutong* inhabitants were valorised with the central role in order to reverse the terms of the old colonialist discourse where even an increasingly 'reflexive anthropology still over privileges the role of the west as the one needing and producing critique' [85]. However, the table was turned and the act of artistic patronage, ostensibly through an act of camaraderie and *guanxi,* was met with a categoric affirmation of our difference. That difference is derived from a confidence reserved for those born into and brought up in imperial cultures as well as a solidarity of citizenship and in particular the baptism of the Cultural Revolution.

Borrowing an identity through clothing is not the same as an artist identifying with his subject, and the latter act in fact alienates the subject, and furthermore, confirms rather than closes the gap between the two. It would appear that ideological patronage cannot dissociate from a reductive and idealistic representation nor the

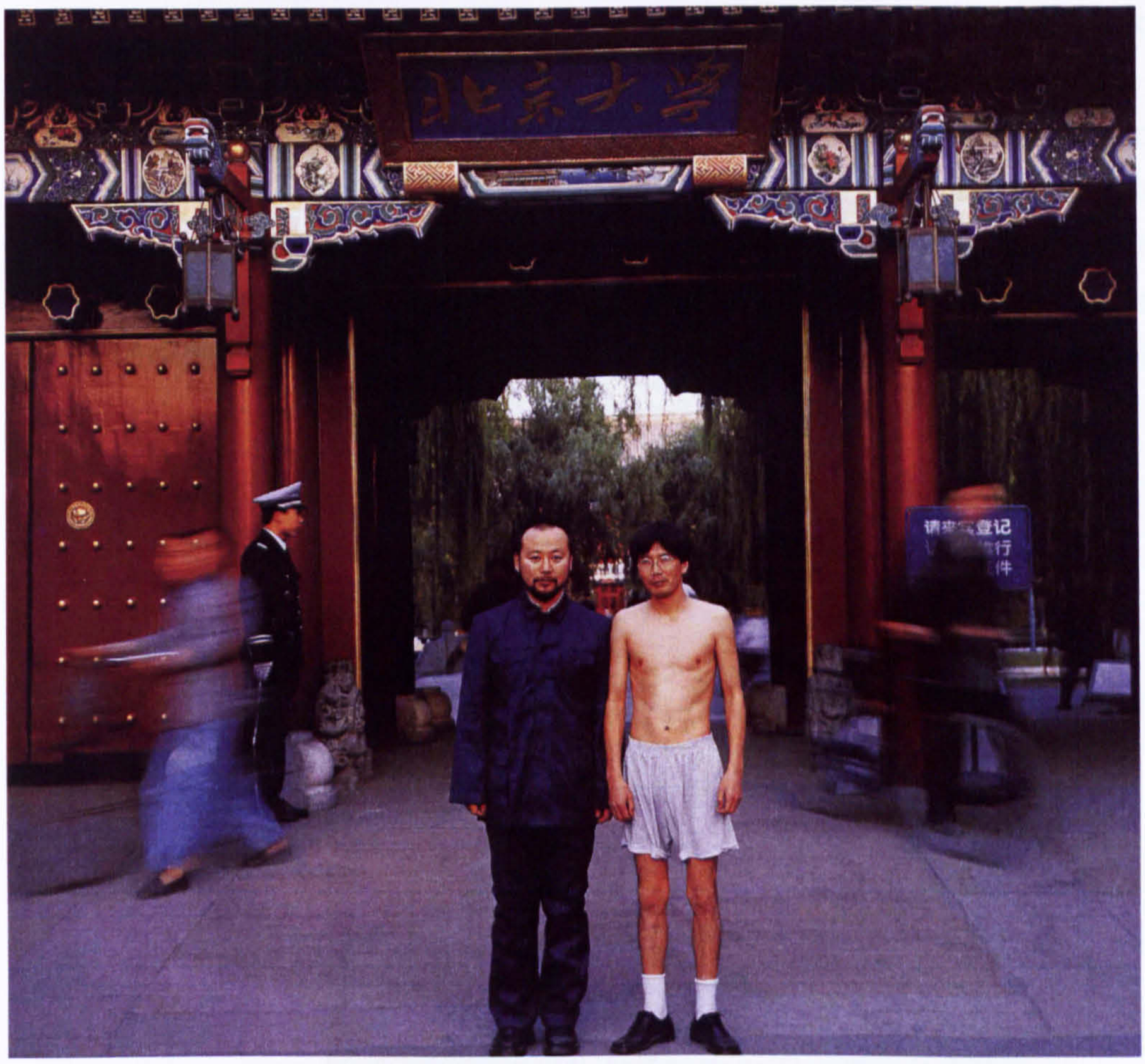


Fig. 14. *Identity exchange - University Professor,* 2002-6. Cang Xin. Photography.

conflict of being assigned too many roles, that of the native, informant as well as the ethnographer [86].

This ethnographer paradigm is evident in Cang Xin's *Identity exchange* (Fig. 14 and 17), where he selected his supposed oppressed subalterns from an array of rubbish collectors, waitresses, mental patients, farmers, steelworkers, construction workers, etc. Standing next to his chosen subjects, Cang invoked the problem of identity versus identification, highlighting the autonomy of the artist and the artificiality of the performance. The structure of the participant standing side-by-side with the artist in control, almost screamed of silence, literally exerting 'the silent presence of another person' [87].

Song Dong's *Dancing with Farmer workers* (Fig. 15) took on a similar form of ethnographic realism and brought a large gathering of real farmers into the equation. The work depended on its presence within a gallery to differentiate it from entertainment. Song's work exposed the strategy of using exploitation to expose exploitation. However, it treaded a fine line between disrupting the art audience's sense of identity, which is founded precisely on unspoken racial and class exclusions, as well as possibly veiling disingenuous pecuniary agendas [88].



Fig. 15. *Dancing with Farmer workers, 2001.* Song Dong. Performance and photograph.

Double domination, double celebration

First, we must be ruthless to our enemies, we must overpower and annihilate them. Second, we must be kind to our own, to the people, to our comrades and to our superiors and subordinates, and unite with them.

Quotations from Chairman Mao 1966: 283

Although China is not the Saidian Orient, nonetheless, the principle is to reconstitute the integrity of China as something other than 'a stage affixed to Europe' or indeed as a homogeneous part of the Orient, as perfidious as they are!

Said 2003: 90 [89]

The various processes of identification and the intention to capture the experience of helplessness and alienation in China's urban environment is unfortunately eclipsed by a double domination that complicates either a celebration of the mobility of culture or the authenticity of being Chinese. The diaspora Chinese have the perennial problem of having to consider the colonial shadow and to challenge the binary and subordinate position between purity and mixture. Their assignation to a third space is under a similarly long shadow from China itself.

Chinese artists from the Mainland are now getting a taste of the colonial gaze, having to negotiate from a secondary position in the global artworld (albeit with recent success) where previously they occupied the self-made pedestal of the literati in their own country. The success of Chinese contemporary art demonstrated an irony of how they not merely but so eloquently, when required, acknowledged and turned to advantage, to exoticise, their own hybrid situation of a nation consisting of 56 ethnic minorities.

The situation of uneasiness between the Chinese on the Mainland and the diaspora can be attributed to the recent history before China's economic success, where every Chinese in the diaspora has the memory of sending gifts and money to the Homeland. This unfortunate fiduciary indebtedness is the crux of a breakdown in relationship. Instead of strengthening diasporic ties, this indebtedness sometimes diminishes into an antagonistic refusal of *guanxi*, a denial of past relations that is not so much about the anticipation of reciprocation but not wanting to be indebted. A feeling of responsibility is assigned to the web of interconnectedness of a *guanxi* network where indebtedness is couched in terms of a state of loss and independence. This is encapsulated in a Chinese saying, '*hao shuo hua, shuo hao*



Fig. 16. *(CWIBJ) Miss Hybridity,* photographically printed aluminium, 2007. Courtesy of Voon Pow Bartlett.

hua' (*Mouths that have eaten and hands that have taken become (easy to persuade) and likely to (speak well) of their hosts to others, especially their superiors)* [90]. For example, accepting a gift is putting oneself in a state of indebtedness. It is also a loss of face, identity and self-respect, which can only be restored when the debt is repaid, either to restore the balance of the relationship or to create a new asymmetry by giving back more than was first given [91].

CWIBJ (*Miss hybridity)* (Fig. 16) manifests the difficulty of being part of the Chinese diaspora, of not being able to lay claim to purity nor authenticity as the only route to identify with the Chinese. By privileging the individuals in a digital separation, each individual image has been retained as a clear and distinct entity to represent true differences, a tactical co-mingling of different elements whose separate characteristics are not dissolved within their alliance [92]. It is an attempt to affirm

the notion of hybridity with a positive value rather than taint or dilution. It resists such questions as authenticity, challenges the myths of belonging and rejects the binary between purity and mixture [93].

(*Miss hybridity)* also explores the meaning of a hybrid cultural identity as one of a constant state of flux and change instead of within the scope of eternal values [94]. It attempts to circumvent a hybridity that is often 'represented as lacking in culture' [95] and does not 'reinforce the fixity of a notion of national identity' [96]. It is an allegory of urban alienation, a relational exercise where the artist is constantly interpreting a relationship between the self and other, engaging in a new encrypting and decoding of order, equality, social strata, chaos and power relation. It comments on the understanding between cultures, seeking out possible channels for communication, the translatable and the untranslatable within the different cultural spaces and social contexts [97].

(Miss hybridity) questions the notion of hybridity for 'its reductive racialised premises' [98]. It shares with *Hutong sisters* in the attempt to relate to the culture of birth from a diasporic point of view, involving multiple homelands, from which one is temporally and spatially removed. It involves a singular and personal identity imbued with a sense of 'pride and legitimacy' through a complex outcome of temporal and spatial displacements, rather than a collective one [99]. It is about using hybridity as a tool to question the conditions of belonging, the politics of difference, the inequalities and exclusions that are established in the guise of cultural purity [100].

The criticality of the term hybridity from the Chinese forum is more about being reduced to a form of resistance conditioned by the West. For the diaspora Chinese, the term is derogatory with an implied subjugation to purity [101]. Hybridity has the capacity to counter exclusivist notions of an imagined community, as well as the essentialism and ethnic absolutism involved in ideas of cultural purity thereby creating a third space referred to by such as Homi Bhabha [102]. It is also a term forever affixed to his idea of a postcolonialist space that the Chinese regard with disdain, a space with no identifiable or credible source [103]. The language engaged

in these discussions is unsatisfactory as they are predicated on European values, referred to by Sarat Maharaj as a tool of colonialism and carries the double danger of disseminating homogeneity [104].

The critical challenge of the term hybridity is not about an unending celebration and display of difference but rather a critique of the conditions that constrained the complexities and excluded the totality of cultural exchange [105]. Syncretism may be a preferred term to hybridity as it connotes a harmonious cultural translation and has the capacity to ascribe Chinese artists with the dignity and strength warranted of a long established culture.

Fusion has also become a voguish expression in the contemporary climate that 'embraces diversity and hybridity' [106]. This situation embodies as well as reflects the rapid development of China's cities and its temporal desynchronisation. Fusion has the useful function of occluding the Western cultural model which demanded purity and authenticity in the construction of the Other. The incumbent assumptions of the hybrid are that the Other, or the primordial authentic ethnic have become one and been ossified and frozen in time and thereby also remained pure and escaped progress and development [107]. Fusion's hybrid form however addresses the capacity of the term hybridity to impute an originating purity and authenticity of racial or cultural identity.

The flip side of double domination is a celebratory receptacle of diversity, a double happiness from two vibrant cultures. Instead of being bound by labels, it seeks to examine the dialectic between cultural fragmentation and critical reaffirmation and to interrogate hybridity as a cultural process rather than a fixed object. It is also suggesting that cultural hybridity can constitute a form of ideological soft power, consistent with the Communist party's mode of governance.

The visual texts of this research are described as a synthesis of an identity that is circumstantial, temporal and spatial, and existing in the tension between domination

and celebration. The multiplicity of identity that arises out of a formulation based on history, the transcultural and the global involve a critique of hybridity. The notion of a hybrid form should be the paradigm for creating something new using historical precedents without collapsing into sentimentality or conservative retrograde. Its ultimate goal is a two-way fusion that will look back on tradition and open up new horizons. It is about examining Chinese contemporary art in the context of within and without the discourse of Orientalism and to interrogate the very way that knowledge is produced [108].

The pursuit of utopia, at least for the Chinese, should be about maintaining a cultural diversity that reflects the Eastern aesthetics of the Third World. This cultural diversity is the embodiment of regional and national identity and the ultimate motivations for cultural communications, and perhaps even the precondition for the existence of the global world. If modernity is to be characterised by the practice of hybrid forms of art practice, then the interaction with local and traditional models will necessitate a reformulation of its conditions or a culturally specific understanding that can be better applied to China.

'Terminator of the kinship system'

[109]

The spectacle is not a collection of images, rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.

Debord 1992 [110]

In order to rule a country of millions of people gelled in solidarity through the powerful domain of *guanxi* and to safeguard for himself the dominant father figure in the hierarchical Confucian society, Mao had to destabilise this ingrained myth and

people's trust in each other. He ruthlessly flattened Chinese society by persecuting the educated bourgeoisie. He knew that collectivism stimulated a regression to the mean. It has been speculated that due to the importance of *guanxi* and a concern for losing control over his agents, Mao might have launched the Cultural Revolution [111]. Attacks were instigated on people in positions of authority. City dwellers, intellectuals and officials were sent to the countryside to learn from the peasants and to the factories to do manual labour. His Red Guards also performed ignorant and indiscriminate acts of violence, burning books, smashing antique artworks and tearing down thousands of temples.

The strategy to negotiate a space and an identity during challenging times can be understood as a form of *la perruque* that necessitates a process of hybridisation. It is a subversive strategy to adapt, appropriate, change, simulate and perform, according to the situation, that 'a weak power in the face of the strong that nonetheless alters the conditions of the everyday life in favour of the oppressed' [112]. This is a testament to many Chinese who survived under the shadow of the Cultural Revolution.

Guanxi is a good example of a form of *la perruque* against a communistic lifestyle, occupying 'new territories created by the market economy' [113]. *La perruque* is a way to construct a buffer zone between the people and the state, made up of kinship, friendship and *guanxi* networks (see section entitled '*Guanxi and relational*'). It is a form of resistance to the increased surveillance power of the Communist state. New connections are used to widen opportunities. Another way is having the opportunity to reclaim a way of life that has been lost during the Cultural Revolution. In the affluent regions of South China, owners of stores prided themselves in using an ordinary space such as the supermarket and mundane activities such as daily grocery shopping, to achieve what was not possible before, such as cultivating the tastes of China's emerging middle class [114].

On account of its naturalness as a system of communication rooted in history, *guanxi* is a spectacle of relatedness, a sophisticated visual language of myth as well as a myth making process [115]. It is the social relationship between people that is mediated by actions and by images. It is a form of social demand exerted by

individuals to produce a 'complex behaviour syndrome consisting of social conformity, inoffensive strategies and submission to social expectations and authority' [116]. As part of the social fabric in China, it also constitutes a soft power (rather than military), and can be compared to contemporary strategies employed by Chinese artists that constituted a networking strategy as well as resistance.

Guanxi is an essential fabric of Chinese society, consisting of a network of interpersonal relationships or personal connections, across the board to include businesses, personal connections and the art world, like the ancient pilgrimage where adjacent countries paid homage to China laden with gifts in order to receive reciprocal protection, without written agreements or contracts. *Guanxi* is traced to ancient forms of ritual and kinship government before the instigation of a centralised and bureaucratic state [117]. This pervasive system is unlike the western social system and is based on Confucian ethics and considered almost a science [118].

Mao had the insight that *guanxi* possesses its own inbuilt self-destructive mechanism, through a profound understanding of *guanxi* in terms of its spectacle-ness, where 'separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle' [119]. He understood that intrinsically, *guanxi* unites what is separate, in its separateness, where people are linked by a one-way relationship to the centre that maintains their isolation from one another [120]. Personal and private ends are attained ironically through a process and ethics that break up any unitary construction of the individual by stressing obligation, indebtedness and interpersonal loyalty [121].

Guanxi is about interpersonal obligations through a process of legitimation and affirmation by others in a society of collectivism rather than an ethic of individualism. However, Mao encouraged a self-identity with an intrinsic substance revolving around a pivotal state icon, a rhizomatic *guanxi* that works through a 'conjunctive process of addition' to create an outward expanding network of lateral relationships [122]. *Guanxi* can lay claim to a highly organised social bond, where human relations are channelled towards a sophisticated hierarchical network. The old Confucian society involved a diffusion of power through the ranks and a hierarchical

patriarchical structure that Mao turned into power through comradeship, well, at least in his rhetoric.

The Cultural Revolution was the straw that broke the camel's back, fuelling distrusts amongst families and neighbours that have left its repercussions today. Sons informed on parents, wives informed on husbands, students informed on teachers. It played an equally crucial role in shaping Chinese contemporary art and China's phenomenal growth. Generations have been affected by the Cultural Revolution, with the most vociferous being the 'sent-down' generation, who were then mainly in their 20s-30s, in the middle of their college years or early careers, whose lives were severely disrupted when they were sent to the countryside to work. Many of them consider that they have lost 10 years of their lives, their youth and their hopes [123].

As the self-proclaimed 'Chairman', Mao carried this business-like title whilst running China from 1949 until dying in office in 1976, having 'jailed, killed or psychologically cursed a succession of likely replacements' amongst his list of crimes [124]. 'Terminator of the kinship system' is probably a more suitable title [125].

Guanxi and the Relational

...the liveliest factor that is played out on the chess board of art has to do with interactive, user-friendly and relational concepts.

Nicolas Bourriaud (2002)

This chapter compares the similarities between *guanxi* and Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. They both privilege the social. The former is a network of social relationships between people that is mediated by a centuries old Confucian code of conduct and the latter eschews the idea of the spectacle in favour of the primacy of relationships.

Guanxi is part of a Confucian tradition that creates solidarity for the masses and a power that Mao thought threatening enough to launch the Cultural Revolution [126]. It involves a diffusion of power through the ranks but developed into power through comradeship later in the communist era (although the power was mainly for Mao himself, as he tried to break down this *guanxi*). The thesis suggests that despite Mao, *guanxi* has remained integral to the social fabric of Chinese society and that it is a myth systematically constructed through the spectacle of human relationships. It operates in the space between people and the individuals and society. In the present turmoil of urban China it operates as a vital element to link a fragmenting society. It is a derivative product of Confucian relational and kinship ethics, where 'relationships of ethics (*lunli guanxi*) (are) also relationships of mutual favours, that is to say, there is a relationship of mutual obligation' [127].

Instead of serving society or being subsumed into its universal and abstract principles, the persons in the art of *guanxi* are subject to the control of concrete and particular other persons in a network through relations of indebtedness [128]. The notions of connectedness, familiarity, obligation, reciprocity, mutual assistance, generosity and indebtedness are the kinship principles retained in the art of *guanxi*.

Guanxixue involves the exchange of gifts, favours, banquets, the cultivation of personal relationships, networks of mutual dependence and the manufacturing of obligations and indebtedness. What informs these practices and their native descriptions is the conception of the primacy and binding power of personal relationships and their importance in meeting the needs and desires of everyday life.

The relational according to Nicolas Bourriaud is a way of understanding contemporary art based on inter-human relations and its ability to enter into a dialogue with the audience, be they literal or hypothetical. He defined it as an aesthetic theory consisting of judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt. He also referred to a co-existence-criterion to measure if a work of art produces a model of sociability, which transposed reality or might be conveyed in it.

Bourriaud qualified work in its ability to permit an audience to enter into dialogue, a chance to complement the work and an imagined space that allowed for his/her to exist within the defined space of the work. Relational aesthetic is therefore art as a social form where the audience could produce its own work and positive human relationships, and therefore, according to him, is automatically political in implication and emancipatory in effect.

Relational art's emphasis on use rather than contemplation, Bourriaud stressed, 'in no way celebrates immateriality' [129]. Bourriaud considered relational art to be 'a direct response to the shift from a goods to a service-based economy' [130]. Relational art's preference is for 'open-endedness' and disavows any act of exclusion [131]. It is also ambivalent, evoking, 'an impossibility of 'microtopia'.

Bourriaud used the term Laboratory to signify a shift in Europe from the White Cube model [132]. He described the bare and unfinished walls of the *Palais de Tokyo* as 'more laboratory than museum' [133]. This sentiment is echoed by Hans Ulrich Obrist, a major player in the global circuit, who said, 'the truly contemporary

exhibition with its striking quality of unfinishedness and incompleteness would trigger *pars pro toto* participations [134].

With the influence of relational aesthetics from the West, some Chinese artists have turned from eremitic contemplators to be observers of life and social commentators. Hermit artists of the past have come out of their caves to adopt a peripatetic life. They appear to have given up the search for the meaning of life to be in the physical world as professional artists. The reality is firmly rooted in an existing network of social relations, exceeding self-promotion and self-colonisation and serves as a critique of the microtopia of the current Chinese art world.

Whilst Chinese artists are posturing towards the West and appropriating Western styles, *CWIBJ (Hutong sisters)* (Fig. 13) reflects certain sections of the diasporic Chinese community's tendency to connect with Mainland Chinese. This is indicative of a desire to return to one's original culture, that of an Eastern ontological technology of self as a departure from the poststructuralist 'western ethical tradition' [135]. The former deciphers the self as to what it already is, as seen in the tradition of meditative art in China. The latter is where the self is mainly constituted with the other, an example being illuminated by relational aesthetics.

CWIBJ (Hutong sisters) explores the interplay between *guanxi* and Bourriaud's relational aesthetics as a new mode of sociability. The hundred layers of digital manipulations represent the conventions regulated by *guanxi*, and elucidate the correlation between communism's utopian illusion and democracy's virtual reality. Although it is about the here and now, its pragmatism does not have room for idealistic microtopias. It highlights the requisite quality of *guanxi* in Chinese society and demonstrates an awareness of the current dependency of Chinese artists on western institutional systems and discourses [136]. The decision on the part of the *hutong* inhabitants to collaborate reveals and is dependent upon a level of camaraderie that is a manifestation of *guanxi*. It is a demonstration of the individual-centred and individual-de-centered condition where autonomy can be gained at the expense of being more socially dependent on the generosity and help of the network, to complete and constitute a relation with others [137].

CWIBJ (*Hutong sisters)* is imbricated in both forms of soft power. Its image obscured by distinct and opaque colours references a relational artform that masks or impedes any real social intercourse, and in a set of standardised behaviours and endless cycle of customary gift giving that are integral to a *guanxi* network. For the gift to succeed as a gift, it must follow the social norms that usually prescribed that it be unconditional. Gifts are given in a way that precludes the mention of favours. A gift that is clearly an exchange for another is considered insulting by the receiver. There is also no space to allow for a discussion of the flow of favours. In reality, mutuality presides over non-reciprocation. The gifts in this case may appear ameliorative but are essentially long-term *guanxi* cultivations regulated and incarcerated by a set of moral obligations and local customs, eg. the givers are giving face to the receiver [138].

Some Chinese artists have advocated taking the relational route as a way of breaking free. Some have produced artworks that were a conceptual representation of the consumer society, incorporating everyday commodities. They hoped to form a relationship with their society by making art more accessible to the general public and tended towards a conviviality that included working with the audience, friends, family and ordinary people. Artist Xu Zhen's (*Shout*) [139] was chosen as the winner of CCAA, Chinese contemporary art awards in 2004 and involved members of the public and the audience [140]. Similarly, Ai Weiwei's contribution to *Documenta* 12 2007, *Fairytale,* transported 1,001 farmers, laid-off workers, street vendors, minority people, students, rock singers, and white collar workers to the German town of Kassel, where he met people, conducted interviews, and undertook some cooking and hairdressing [141]. It is a testament to Ai Weiwei's social skills that he was able to raise 3.1 million Euros ($4.1 million) through two Swiss foundations, the Leister Foundation and the Erlenmeyer Foundation [142].

Other artists engaged in an alternative model that emphasised the role of dialogue and negotiation, but without collapsing these relationships into the work's content. This in fact rendered the relational element false and fictional where the artists retained control and the collaborators simply allowed themselves to be orchestrated into the photograph, eg. artist Cang Xin's *Identity exchange* (Fig. 14 and 17). Similarly, Song Dong's *Dancing with Farmer workers* (Fig. 15) was not about

conviviality but revealed the artificiality of the choreographed relationships amongst people, between the artists, the participants and the audience. Cao Fei, probably the most written about young female artist, provided a relational venue for fantasy to overcome alienation from traditional values in the frenzied development of new cities. Her 'performance games' were merely politically correct and involved people from the street, the young and old, actors, strangers and friends [143].

Bourriaud's idea of the relational is redolent of President Hu Jintao's signature tune of a 'harmonious society' [144], where interpersonal relationships are considered to be its most significant underlying features [145]. It is a way of understanding how Chinese artists engage in a dialectic between the ability to compete on the world's stage and to enter into a dialogue with the audience, be they literal or hypothetical [146]. However, this relational strategy when coupled with the trend of the spectacular, sometimes resembles political rhetoric and approaches simulation. Curator and art critic Hou Hanru wrote on the 2007 Chinese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale that the 'spectacular', 'the obsession with quantity and material efficiency...causes some problematic concerns regarding social harmony' [147]. However, privileging the relational has certainly afforded success to some Chinese artists and curators as evidenced by their ubiquity in international forums such as the innumerable Biennales [148].

Spectacularity is the antithesis of relational aesthetics and is often to the detriment of contemplativeness. This highlights the antagonistic situation in Chinese contemporary art where producing spectacular art is considered to conspire against the ideology of Chinese intellectuals and is disparaged by some critics as inane, derivative and commercial.

The open-ended nature of much of contemporary work 'installs a new relationship between the contemplation and the utilisation of a work of art' and in fact its ambiguity 'does not represent an imperfection in the nature of existence or in that of consciousness; it is its very definition' [149]. The bright colours of *CWIBJ (Hutong sisters)* is an attempt to posit the redundancy of the disparity between utility and

high-minded contemplativeness. Privileging optical contemplation does not necessarily occlude function.

Cang Xin's interaction with the audience, of inviting them to pose in different outfits in *Identity exchange*, highlighted the relationship between 'the contemplation and the utilisation of a work of art'. However, one would not describe Cang's performance photographs as transcending Bourriaud's idea of audience participation, conviviality and interactivity. Nor did it empower the audience with the wherewithal to create a community, or even a microtopia. It was about the work of art as an edifying reflection of the conditions of our existence in a fragmented modern culture. The critique of the work, corresponding to the artist's own, alluded to belonging, nature of existence and spirituality, in other words, contemplative as well as a social critique [150].

It was about a 'detached opticality' rather than positing itself in a social interstice [151]. In all probability, subjects were chosen randomly to represent a certain community, mainly the subalterns, the blue collar, from restaurants, hospitals or the streets. The artist's own autonomy was maintained, as well as art's autonomy. Cang himself remained the protagonist as he donned various costumes, whilst the 'subjects' were literally stripped of their clothes and hence their identities (not to mention dignity!) (Fig. 17). For Cang the structure was a tool, not the subject matter and therefore not transformative in a relational or even a *guanxi* sense.



Fig 17. *Identity exchange: waitress*, 2002-6. Cang Xin. Photography.

CWIBJ (Hutong sisters) creates a critical distance in order to disparage both the artificiality of relational aesthetics and a sense of futility involved in the often duplicitous and unreal *guanxi*. The attempt to establish *guanxi* with my *hutong* contacts is represented by a series of layering and editing of a photograph, swathing it in a deep wash of colours and rendering the faces and the *hutong* almost unrecognisable. Although a photograph of 5 women, stereotypes of exotic female sexuality are confounded by parodying the propaganda art of the Socialist days, with dark outlines and cheerful colours, parodying the 'Real thing', a term recently coined to refer to the authenticity of China's counterfeit merchandise [152].

Song Dong's *Father and son in the ancestral temple* (Fig. 18) explored the foremost *guanxi* of the Confucian legacy, that of the father and the son [153]. This also formed part of the critique of Chairman Mao as the nominal father figure, with the famous example of Luo Zhongli's oil painting, *Father* (Fig. 19), another landmark in the history of Chinese contemporary art, portraying an image of an ordinary



Fig. 18. *Father and son in the ancestral temple,* 1997- 8. Song Dong. Video still.



Fig. 19. *Father,* 1980. Luo Zhongli. Oil painting, dimensions unknown.

peasant in a monumental style previously reserved for Chairman Mao. Luo's painting in 1980 engendered a moving sentiment and was controversial at the time as it posed a challenge to Mao's identification as the Father of China [154]. It became the focus of a heated debate in post-Cultural Revolution China and its popular support extended to people asking for it to replace Mao's portrait in Tiananmen. Some critics considered it heretical, others praised it as a profound representation of the Chinese nation and its people.

In reality, artworks of a relational nature in China tend to be more pragmatic. *Father and son* would not have been possible without being dependent on a personal relationship with the curator, his personal and official contacts, amidst political and global intrigues [155]. An interesting anecdote came out of Wu Hung's interview with Leng Lin, and a good indication of how *guanxi* operates, where Leng divulged that the closest relationship he had was with an artist who owned a car and could provide transport for the artworks [156]!

(*Hutong sisters*) shares elements of the above in the collaboration with Beijing contacts. Through the palpable use of layers of colours, it confounds and challenges the uneasy relationship between function and contemplation, drawing attention to the levels of optical contemplation. Instead of the New *Wenrenhua* movement where scholars produced work of a contemplative quality appealing to an elitist audience sharing the same elite education, it is not 'predicated on the exclusion of those who hinder or prevent its realisation', whether it is the neighbours, the public or 2,000 year old ink paintings [157]. The vibrant and almost gaudy surface acts as a screen to a deeper feeling of alienation and estrangement and signifies the universal experience of generations of the Chinese diaspora. It reveals an ambivalence in the process of identification with China, involving a complex set of *guanxi* that is not necessarily in accord with the relational aesthetics of the West.

CWIBJ (*Hutong sisters)* is also about exploring identity constructions and relationships between art and life, a combination of *guanxi* and relational aesthetics. It recalls Song Dong's collaboration with his mother, *Waste not*, (2000) which reflected a social engagement as part of an everyday experience and its state of

impermanence [158]. Song appeared to have adopted a relational formula, low impact in appearance, where daily life is merged with art's materiality, artists' identities, and the incorporation of the audience. The artworks consisted of his mother's collection of daily ephemera accumulated over the course of her life, and the artists themselves who were there to socialise with the audience. The relational aspects moved from the interpersonal to the formulation of identities through ownership and possession, as well as the transformation of objects through space. It was intended to be a relational experience that was about people and their environment, the audience with the artist and his mother, but also a mother-son relationship, the latter echoing another deep Confucian familial tradition. Although not necessarily propounding Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, Song was of the view that 'the aim of cooperation and test have surpassed the narrow sense of art', and also, 'under the name of art, to emphasise family tradition which is deep in Chinese family moral/ethical culture' [159]. Song's astuteness frustrated being labelled as self-exoticising through claiming cultural superiority, whilst also exploiting his 15 minutes of fame (Song is an artist who has had over 150 exhibitions since 1987 and 140 of those over the last 10 years, that is on average 14 exhibitions per year)!

This seemingly cosy hothouse of art production in Chinese contemporary art involves more than 'provide(ing) a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one other' [160]. It is importantly a survival technique that enables the negotiation of Chinese as well as western paradigms to produce work that are relational in function, *guanxi* in integrity and antagonistic in intent.

Unfortunately, establishing a connection with the global art world has been disparaged as living in 'the nation of others' [161]. Some observers of Chinese contemporary art are repulsed by this tasteless, commercial art which in their opinion is not only elitist, escapist and self-indulgent [162], but also an ideological imprisonment [163]. Disgust with consumerism has led to attempts by some artists to explore the possibilities of non-ideological, non-narrative and non-conceptual art in time-based and site-specific set-ups. Gaudy art was coined by the Godfather of Chinese art, Li Xianting in 1996, to parody the ugliness of the new era and satirised the tacky tastes of the emerging consumer society, especially the ostentatious

nouveau riche. The *Post-sense sensibility* movement in the late 1990s, offering gratuitous violence, was notorious for the use of human bodies, live animals and dead foetuses [164]. The scandals surrounding performances such as Zhu Yu's live consumption led to the unfortunate fallacy that performance art must be bloody and brutal. There is also the spectacular use of new media as the cheapest way to transport art is via a DVD, eg., at the Chinese Battersea Power station exhibition in 2006 where the majority of artists all used videos [165]. Inevitably, virtual and anti-social art are harder to market than pop images of Mao or *Cynical Realism*.

The relational element of *guanxi* cannot be reduced to a critique of 'living in the nation of others'. For example, in *CWIBJ (Hutong sisters*), the gift relation cannot be reduced to a matter of personal greed and corruption or of a loss of autonomy [166]. The gift of a t-shirt and armband is more complex than a straightforward give and take. It is about an amelioration of a relationship, in order not to *dezul* (offend). It is also a *fait accompli* from the moment a request is made as a gracious acceptance is often the only option. Writer Yang Mayfair Mei-hui explained that accepting gifts, whether ideas or goods, is more than about personal gain. It signifies numerous inferences such as the desire to maintain the association as well as extending an assurance of continuing support in order for the contacts to be able to *fangxin* (be at peace), knowing you will *zhaogu tamen* (look after them) [167].

CWIBJ (Hutong sisters) is characteristic of this new model of sociability, which exists in this giant joint venture that drives Chinese contemporary art [168]. It is generally acknowledged that the success of Chinese contemporary art is attributable less to its home audience than to the global world, through biennales, galleries, auction houses and curators. Chinese critic Leng Lin has given recognition to the role of foreign culture as China's partner in development and British critic, Philip Dodd, similarly believes it is the network of people that make China what it is now and not one or two star names [169].

Chinese writers and critics are divided in their views on the role of the social in art. Mayfair Yang argued that the discourse of civil society in the west that was propelled by individual rights and that has gained ground in urban areas since the early 20th

century, cannot in the long term replace the formation of a social realm fuelled by a discourse of relatedness and obligations (ie. *guanxi*). Whilst some 'socially relevant art' have been labelled as using 'foreign-pleasing formulas', there is no simple or easy answer to this relational-*guanxi* dialectic [170].

In the final analysis, *CWIBJ (Hutong sisters)* is a reflection of the conditions of the urban city of Beijing, against the backdrop of a totalitarian past and massive social changes. It highlights the need for an exchange not based on institutions but on the individual [171], as demonstrated by some Chinese experimental artists who are beginning to generate a degree of social responsibility by holding open-ended art exhibitions that incorporate multiple agencies [172]. It is about the ambiguous nature of the subjectivity of perception and representation, making a space for the diaspora Chinese as for any postcolonial subjects, to create a legitimate identity, or to reconstruct a new one in place of the old [173]. This process incorporates a range of methodologies and co-collaborators as well as their acquiescence.

Two-facedness

The ever malleable qualities of *guanxi* illuminate the distortion and ambivalence engendered by myths. A good example is *mianzi*, or face work power games played by the Chinese people as part of *guanxi* [174]. In a heavily hierarchically structured network of social relations in which people are embedded, by the public nature of obligations of intense *bao* (norms of reciprocity), obligations are incurred over a long period through a self-conscious manipulation of face and related symbols. The concept of face work actually means impression management through the projection of a self-image. Face is a symbolic capital for developing good *guanxi*. This social capital includes obligation (although not debt in the economic, legally enforceable sense), the advantages of connections or social position, and trust [175]. In other words it is a social capital that can be utilised to influence the behaviours of others and to achieve the desired goals.

The *Mattel* case in 2008 provided a poignant example. Zhang Shuhong's suicide in response to the toy-maker *Mattel*'s announcement to recall the flawed toys that he had made in his factories demonstrated the significance of face in Chinese society [176]. This was followed by a public apology from *Mattel*, engineered by Chinese officials for unfair accusations of shoddy production, where the condition for the apology was that it was made in the presence of journalists [177].

Instead of improving relations with the locals, *CWIBJ (Hutong sisters)* in fact revealed the vacuity in the quest for an exchange as it did not provide insight behind people's faces. Instead, they were linked to an almost automaton relationship of mutual dependence, where one calls upon another to supply or to assist in gaining access to goods and services that would otherwise not be available. The resultant image of a Chinese woman from the West, originally wearing a black Olympic t-shirt and a red armband standing in comradeship with her *hutong* contacts, now transformed into a masquerade, approaches parody and reverses the artist/ audience relationship, thus frustrating the process of *guanxi* and relational aesthetics.

CWIBJ (Serve the people) (Fig. 9) relinquished the relational/*guanxi* dialectics of *(Hutong sisters)* that has elucidated elements of disingenuity. Back views, interpreted as 'backstage behaviour' [178], through a refusal of the reciprocity of the gaze can be symbolic of a refusal of reciprocity of *guanxi*. It is also an attempt to undermine the Socialist myth of happy smiling faces, where 'Mao's *HR* policies meant Happy Revolutionaries', touching on the taboo subject of having lost face in the Cultural Revolution, as illustrated by the *Cynical Realists'* large contorted faces or grinning grimaces [179]. Fang Lijun's jubilant colours exposes the double nature of face, concealing none other but the fact of its own insincerity. It also highlights the disappearance of individuality behind the revolutionary fervour during Mao's rule. Zhang Xiaogang's *Da Jiating,* 1993 (Fig. 20) illustrated an effect of *zoushen*, a blankness of lost expression where the standard family portrait was rendered non-expressive. Father, mother and child staring ahead, emphasised by a ray of light falling on the faces like birthmarks to highlight the absurdity of the impersonal expressionlessness.



Fig. 20. *Da Jiating*, 1993. Zhang Xiaogang. Oil painting, 200 x 300 cm.

The necessity of cultivating *guanxi* is, in fact, obligated by its economic, social and political functions in everyday life. The rise in *guanxi*'s instrumentality has led to a heavier reliance on *guanxi* networks, especially for Chinese village residents since Decollectivisation in the 1970s, for their agricultural production and for personal, mutual assistance and cooperation [180]. People who lack power or good *guanxi* will suffer the consequences of their bad fortune or inappropriate conduct. In times of adversity, some have noted 'a change in warmth or coolness in the attitudes of their associates' and that *renqing* (human emotions) is 'as thin as a piece of paper' [181]. A retreat from *guanxi* cultivation can imply unavailability. In the moral world of *guanxi*, this approach to self-isolation will reveal its cost when the need for others arises [182].

Although Confucian ethics emphasise the idea that one should help other people without any expectation of reciprocation, that concept basically remains the ideal of sages, in other words a myth. To ordinary people, Chinese ethics provide a positive

value to the obligation of reciprocation and lay heavy stress on the practice of such maxims as 'do not forget what other people have done for you' and 'do not forget the beneficence done to you, even if it is small'. The reality is that the majority of situations where the Chinese are motivated to do *renqing* or favours for another is regulated mainly to keep face and/or their anticipation of repayment.

PART III

Art and modernity

The present! It is unfolding before our very eyes, when stepping out the door, one sees there the spectacle in our here. Still more, it is contemporary custom one sees everywhere people go, in the multitude of households themselves, in the diverse places people congregate, in the parks and gardens…and yet this now is, in actuality, moving.

Kon Wajiro (1929) [183]

Part III interrogates the way Chinese contemporary art engages with China's *zeitgeist* in the urban quotidian as well as interprets and adapts to modernity. The visual texts reflect the everyday as a philosophical site of consciousness, a strategy that uses the ability of the banal to accommodate the sublime, or the Chinese classical paradigm of 'using the small to see the large' [184].

Everyday life

Everyday life is a crust of earth over the tunnels and caves of the unconscious and against a skyline of uncertainty and illusion that we call modernity… the unconscious is only consciousness ignoring its own laws…and in this respect everyday life is indeed modernity's unconscious.

[185]

Chinese contemporary art appears to hold a tension, where there is a constant negotiation between the archaic and the modern, the communal and the individual. The visual spectacle of Socialist China and the embodiment of the Maoist utopian longing for a full and complete life form much of the critique by Chinese artists [186].

Perhaps, 'the heterogeneous forms of everyday life can be transcended or emerged from only when they are endowed with the content of homogenised social relations and pursuits' [187]. Using peasant figures, the *Cynical Realists* of the 1990s represented the first signs of this ambiguous schism, produced by the tension between city and countryside, also a useful metaphor for the interaction between the relational of the West and traditional *guanxi* [188]. They represented the tension between the urban modern and rural historical, and at the same time represented the mass experience of a Western modernity [189]. They captured the first major identification with their generation through the depiction of the money hungry generation created by Deng Xiaoping's consumer society.

Everyday life provides the overarching dialectic with its qualities of the banal, boring and insignificant. It provides the basis with which to explore the everyday life of the communist era, especially in Mao's days and the mass experience of a Western modernity in the daily reality of urban China. In the West, the humanist culture of modernity affirms a full human life 'in terms of labour and production on the one hand and marriage and family life on the other [190]. Its modernisation process acknowledges the desacralisation of the human and a secular ordinary life as indispensable to human identity. In China, society during Mao's rule similarly emphasised the need for labour but lacked political freedom and a full social life [191]. Therefore, an integral part of the socialist movement in modern China is a collective desire to resist the inertia of the everyday life.

CWIBJ (*Le Flaneur*) (Fig. 21) negotiated a shift from the grand themes of history in *Blue Mao* to the little narratives in life, the everyday life of ordinary Beijingers. It interrogates how the idea of the good life has changed, from the industrialisation of an agrarian society, from an egalitarian commitment to social harmony, to having freedom and choice in the heterogeneous life of today [192].



Fig. 21. *CWIBJ (Le Flaneur)*, 2007. Voon Pow Bartlett. Photographic print on aluminium, 82 x 48 cm.

The Revolutionary mass culture of the 1960-70s co-existed with other practices such as revolutionary model theatre, public square meetings and massive parades. The official style in art was predominantly perspectival and panoramic [193], as detail, immediacy and particularity would swamp any effort to overcome the daily routine. Typical artworks from the revolutionary period were represented by *A nation of caring people*, 1973 (Fig. 5b) [194]. They were approved and instigated by Mao and were made into posters and published by the government's media such as *Beijing People's Publishing House*.

In today's intensely visual age, everyday life, especially in the urban arena, is visual culture and has largely replaced propagandist work, or those overly nationalistic or based on dissent. Artists are now engaging with social commentary on everyday life subjects such as social inequality, human rights, and freedom of speech ranging from coal miners to brothels, club cultures to construction workers.

CWIBJ (*Le Flaneur*) reflects the current interest in everyday life, not perspectival and panoramic but intimate, ephemeral moments, 'little scenes with little people', indicating a loss of the metaphysical and a spectacular pursuit of the future world that was associated with the Mao years [195]. It focuses on the perception of a Chinese woman, an ordinary Chinese woman mingling with the crowds of Beijing. Clicking the camera almost mechanically and on impulse, watching, bearing a form of ameliorative witnessing to minimise subjectivity and interpretation [196].

CWIBJ (*Le Flaneur*) represents the spectacle as the colonisation of the everyday life, where 'capital is accumulated until it becomes an image' [197]. Its fascination with the beginning of modern life in Beijing involves a voyeuristic examination of the impact on the inhabitants of Beijing's much contested jarring developments, the low cost housing and the salubrious highrise condominiums. It explores the idea of the everyday as a relationship between the seeing and not seeing, where, 'two connected, correlated phenomena that are neither absolutes nor entities: everyday life and modernity, the one crowning and concealing the other, revealing it and veiling it' [198].

Digital technologies appear to have produced a genetic modification of amoebic interaction where a pose is struck in simultaneity with the detection of a camera. Back views thus circumvent the veil of civilised behaviour, masquerades, poses, *ennui* and gender issues. The separation of each image in *CWIBJ* (*Le Flaneur*), through a *Photoshop* composition of 100 images, confronts the cultural disjunction of everyday reality, Beijing's past and its present transformation. Furthermore, backgrounds are blurred, ironically, by the use of real city smog in Beijing. There is no attempt to propagate a bourgeois myth about Beijing's past or to present a *belle époque*, or 'to mask the present by exculpating the bourgeoisie' [199]. *CWIBJ* (*Le Flaneur*) does not attempt to invoke the past or fall into nostalgia, lament for a paradise lost, or romanticise the past or present. It is a serendipitous pursuance articulated in the interest in ordinary people, antiheroes rather than grandiosity and heroism.

With its reflective surface and an almost sterile aluminium frame, the simplicity in the presentation of *CWIBJ* (*Le Flaneur*) may echo a revolutionary aesthetics of scale, of simplicity and order. Yet on closer inspection, one is drawn to the lives of the 100 individuals living in this ostensibly inscrutable nation. It is a framing of a rich pattern of texture and detail that transforms snapshots of the daily lives of the masses into an immutable tapestry of everyday life. It is not satire but realism.

The process of making this work unveils the incongruity of the spectacle and how easily visual material can participate in a myth. Furthermore, in *CWIBJ* (*Le Flaneur*), the myth of photography, its deceit and serendipity, serves to elucidate a bigger myth. Digital manipulation illuminates the ongoing fascination with contrivance, and challenges what was really there. In other words it challenges the regime of truth that dictated the meaning behind a photograph [200]. The inevitable power relation between the photographer and the subject is questioned, the protagonist and victim, the surveyor in surveillance and the surveyed as spectacle.

Myth of the family

CWIBJ (*Le Flaneur*)(Fig. 21) confronts the myth of happy families where seeking a better life can lead to the disintegration of family life. Opportunity and choice in China's rising economy have brought on the endeavour to earn more money and the inevitability of frustration, discontent and feelings of injustice. Simultaneously, the pursuit and drudgery of work can often lead to separation, family conflict and disharmony. The reassuring and the everyday are now swathed in a giant blanket of solitude, as overwhelming as the Beijing fog. Private solitude becomes public solitude, private emotions become requisite sharing with other disconnected individuals.

The actors in *CWIBJ* (*Le Flaneur*) have been saved the effort to compete with their surroundings. Fragility of nature and monumentality of towering architecture, a manifestation of the power of China's economic status, are erased from the equation. What remains are the people, confronted by and confronting only themselves, 'looking out...to the edge of the world'...' [201]. It is a stage set, frozen

in time, the actors equipped only with their blank robotic backs, facing one direction, as if waiting for someone to arrive or something to happen. The attainment of individual freedom becomes the trappings of new and rising bourgeois recreations. However, it can also be at the expense of familiar routines, solitude and family conflicts. It is a situation between normal life and a hyperreal reality where meaning is illusive and alienation is the only affirmative and ubiquitous comfort [202]. It engenders a spectacle as the image of separation.

The painstaking digital effort of building up a community in *CWIBJ* (*Le Flaneur*) reflects the rebuilding of the nebulous network of interpersonal relationships and families after the destruction of the Cultural Revolution. Its digital image manipulation recalls the Socialist method of control where private images of family portraits were undermined in order to conform to a public standard through a process of hand rendering [203]. The use of 100 individual photographs points to the consequence of individualism deriving from the effects of commercialisation and globalisation.

The myth of the happy family was propagated on the standardisation of family shots governed by common rules laid down by the authorities during the Socialist era. The father was always positioned on the right-hand side, the mother on the left and the child in the middle. There was also a standard criteria for positioning their body, gestures and expressions, to conform to an idealistic model of society. Mao maintained a strict control over this powerful propagandist tool and he also had no qualms in erasing from commissioned paintings people he had usurped and deposed to present an updated version of history.

In reality, the traditional family model had also been irrevocably changed by the one-child policy during Mao's rule, referred to as the 'no other solution solution' [204]. For example, the 'Little emperor syndrome' is a derogatory slur on boys born in the 1980s. As an only child and of the preferred gender, they were so doted on by grandparents and parents that many believed, lacked a work ethic [205]. Another momentous event that had a lasting impact on families was the massacre of 1989 that changed forever images of mass assemblies which reached a climax during the

Cultural Revolution. Many in China are of the opinion that 'without the Cultural Revolution, one might have a completely different understanding of individuality and uniformity, dispersion and assembly, private and public, family and society' [206]. These relations and conflicts form much of the exploration of Chinese artists.

Zhang Xiaogang's interest in old family photographs during the Cultural Revolution culminated in *Da Jiating*, 1993 (*Big family*) (Fig. 20). He mocked the spectacle of a small, happy family during the Mao era, showing a sombre looking couple with a boy revealing his genitals. The repetition of 200 photographs of one-child families in Wang Jinsong's *Biaozhun Jiating* (Fig. 22) diminishes the significance of each family. Yang Zhenzhong *Lucky family* (Fig. 23), a family portrait of chickens where a father and mother were proudly surrounded by their 26 chicks, raises intriguing question about 'the possibility of individuality...in a country encouraging rampant foreign (capitalist) investment, but still communist at heart' [207].



Fig. 22. *Biaozhun Jiating (Standard family)*, 1996. Wang Jinsong. Photography.



Fig. 23. *Lucky family*, 1995. Yang Zhenzhong. Photography.

Myth of the flaneur and individualism

The flaneur is that character who retains his individuality while all around are losing theirs…he derives his pleasure from his location within the crowd…the 'crowd' is a veil which conceals the 'mass' from the flaneur...so that like Baudelaire, the flaneur 'becomes their accomplice even as he dissociates himself from them'.

Charles Baudelaire [208]

The rising urban class in China today is not unlike 19th century Paris when the urban *petit bourgeoisie* became the core of the city [209]. Photography represented then a utopian claim of the cosmos [210], asserting the primacy of the world through realism, and displacing the primacy of the author in the period of Romanticism [211]. The spectacle of modern urban life in Beijing is reminiscent of the art historian TJ Clark's description of the visual method used by the French *Impressionists* to capture the urban scenes of Paris [212]. It forms part of the critique of the ideology of the rising bourgeois society in China, of the Marxist-inspired Bartheian myth, presented as nature [213].

CWIBJ (*Le Flaneur*) (Fig. 21) offers an idea of the Chinese spectacle, a reflection of Beijing, opening up a vista of private spaces and private journeys. The serendipity of photography provides the conditions that the *flaneur* finds in his/her journey and as a refined consumer of the 21st century, of commodities, time and freedom. Instead of a *petit bourgeois* single Parisian male pursuing the 'reveries of a solitary stroller' [214], *CWIBJ* (*Le Flaneur*) presents the activities of the *flaneur* in Beijing that presupposes their cultivation as the highest form of freedom, many of which we may take for granted in the western world. It is a new class of *nouveau riche*, businessmen and successful artists, the ubiquitous leisure walkers and shoppers. The middle class *flaneurs* hop into taxis and drive cars, the *nouveau riche* wives walk their *Pekinese*, the elderly ladies and retired men and families go for after dinner strolls, students enjoy a lunch break, friends enjoy a private chat. Even the working class, the migrants, appear to have access to the new freedom and mobility of Chinese cities. The commodity of time has acquired a new status as a forgotten luxury and an unexpected bonus.

CWIBJ (*Le Flaneur*)'s strategy is about harnessing a freedom of expression to explore the myth of individualism. The rising consciousness of individual freedom can involve estrangement from traditional ties. Those lacking economic means to attain the trappings of consumer culture can lapse into helpless isolation. The digital layering of 100 individuals in this vacuous and embryonic condition is the antithesis of that employed for *Blue Mao*, having eliminated highly charged cultural icons. There is a resonance between *CWIBJ* (*Le Flaneur*) and the spectacular society of Paris in the late 1860s. In *The painting of modern life* (1984), Clark discussed the 'invasion and restructuring of whole areas of free time, private life, leisure and personal expression' in Manet's *Music in the Tuileries* in 1862 (Fig. 24). He pointed out a jostling, disorganised crowd, in a hybrid public space in which social identification became a matter of complex negotiation.



Fig. 24. *Music in the Tuileries*, 1862. Manet. Oil on canvas, 76 x 118 cm.



Fig. 25. View of the *Exposition Universelle*, 1867. Manet. Oil on canvas, 108 x 196.5 cm.

Five years later in 1867, *Exposition Universelle* (Fig. 25) revealed the emergence of a new social configuration, a disconnected panoply of consumers, clearly demarcated by costumes and behaviours. It is about a spectacular totalising quality of market colonisation and a profusion of institutionalisations.

Just as *Exposition* was held together by mere vision and design, (*Le Flaneur*) connotes disconnection and denied contacts between individuals through the erasure of backgrounds. Where *Exposition* convincingly represented real life through painting, (*Le Flaneur*) is the antithesis of reality and betrays the truth of photography. The randomness and artificiality of the pastiche suggest relationships and intrigue shaped by invoked built environments. Stillness jostles with hustle and bustle, social spaces are inferred on anonymous places. The attire of the people nonetheless instils a commonplace prosaicness, inscribed with an acute lack of glamour, of people getting on with life in mechanical unison, out of an expectation of life, rather than their own aspiration and ideology. It is a new banality of imagined desolation, challenging the discord between what is seen by the eye and what has been captured by the camera's Optical Unconscious [215].

The Chinese *flaneur* may have arrived at a level of enlightenment in his everyday life and his aspirations. However, the irony is that his individuality and therefore his identity can be a myth and as with the rest of his community, have been constructed by popular culture, just as unstable as the image of *CWIBJ (Le Flaneur)*. A masquerade is conjured up by merely adopting a different colour of yellow for the background. The colour yellow is also meant to signal an aspect of mass culture where conformity of a collective could turn into hysteria [216]. Many young artists remembered the assemblies in Tiananmen Square during the Cultural Revolution, not as tragic but as a dream world, of a 'liveliness and boisterousness consistent with Chinese traditional festivities' or 'carnivals with nationalistic excitement liberated or transformed from conformity but at the same time, within conformity' [217]. The fanatical energy behind conformity was exhaustively expressed and widely documented. These included Mao ascending Tiananmen 8 times to inspect his Red Guards in the summer of 1966 and Red Guard youths shouting Mao slogans and waving their little red books.

The bloodshed associated with the 1989 massacre has eclipsed layers of narratives of the Cultural Revolution. It was a complex network of cross-cultural phenomena that challenges the notion that it was an isolated decade of extremism, since examples of parallel mass movements also happened in the West. In fact, the radical movements of the 1960s heralded a decade of cultural experimentations that were worldwide [218].

Nightmare cities

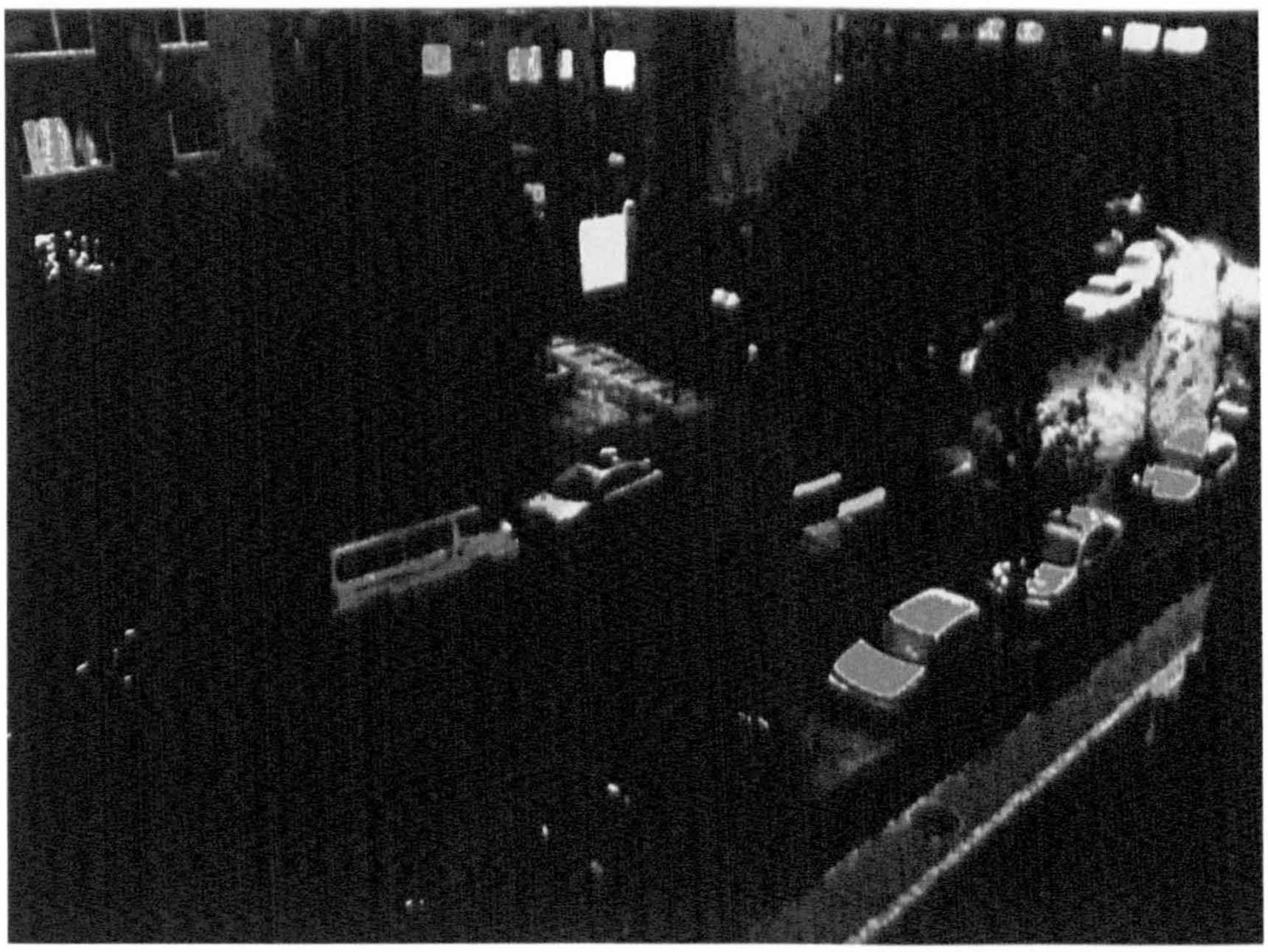


Fig. 26. *LIBJ (Nighttime Beijing)*, 2006. Voon Pow Bartlett. Digital print on photographic paper, 100 x 150 cm.

LIBJ (Nighttime Beijing) (VP, 2006) (Fig. 26) also critiques the utopian vision of urban China and its impact on its inhabitants. The series (comprising of *Peeping Beijing*, *Nighttime Beijing*, *Maid in China*, *Watching TV*) critiques the modernity in urban cities that has driven people behind closed doors, caught in or willingly enslaved to this urban jungle. We catch glimpses of people contained in drab, unreal

or even surreal environments. The situation is made more complex by a temporal desynchronisation, the many layers of life coexisting in the same time frame [219]. It seeks to understand the visual consequence of this amazing metamorphosis of mass culture from its socialist past which has been cannibalised by an increasingly voracious consumerism [220].

Beijing has developed beyond recognition, spreading from the 2nd ring road of the 1980s to the 4th, 5th and 6th (Olympics stadium). Old architecture and streets have been sacrificed to pursue new styles. Existing spaces have been carved up and rearranged to suit the government's requirements. Consequently, the feeling of a city as a living and organic being is but a distant and poignant memory. The private and the public reflect 'a dissociation that reveals specific social relations, those of bourgeois society and the capitalist mode of production' [221]. The real Beijing, the traditional Beijing and the homes of Beijingers, are the subject of ongoing and heated debate and some have argued, have been *Disneyfied* to suit global requirements [222]. More than a confused memory of junctions, directions and functions, Beijing has become a sought after array of spaces that are described differently by powerful social and political groups.

(Nighttime Beijing) displays the loneliness of modern life. It is an urban spectacle of perverse and disorienting alienation. It conjures up inhabitants of highrises caught in desperation and *ennui* in an architectural prison. The ever-sprouting highrises conceal from visitors and passers-by the reality of everyday life in Beijing. It has been referred to as a 'spreading pancake', a socialist utopia now transformed into a category of dystopia without coherence [223]. Urban activities and sociability of community and family are now replaced by remoteness (physical and digital), commercialised areas and shops.



Fig. 27. *The man with nothing to do and the dying rabbit,* 2001. Liu Xiaodong. Oil on canvas, 198 x 198 cm.

Artists portray the disconnection from society, accentuated by urban development and consumerism. Liu Xiaodong's *The man with nothing to do and the dying rabbit,* 2001 (Fig. 27) was a dramatic allusion to modern alienation and solitude. The subtle and careful selection of dress, appearance as well as gaits and gestures demonstrated clearly the vast divide between the *nouveau riche* businessmen and idle peasants squatting on the roadside [224].

Xing Danwen's *Urban fiction* (Fig. 28) used model-like metropolises to echo the shimmering steel and glass structures that have become 'a monument to the transient, trend-driven age of global capitalism' [225]. Xing digitally manipulated photographs of architectural maquettes taken in real estate offices, expose the underbelly of manufacturing industries through elements of simulacra with a Hollywood aura, reducing to a minimum the final image of local characteristics and human life.

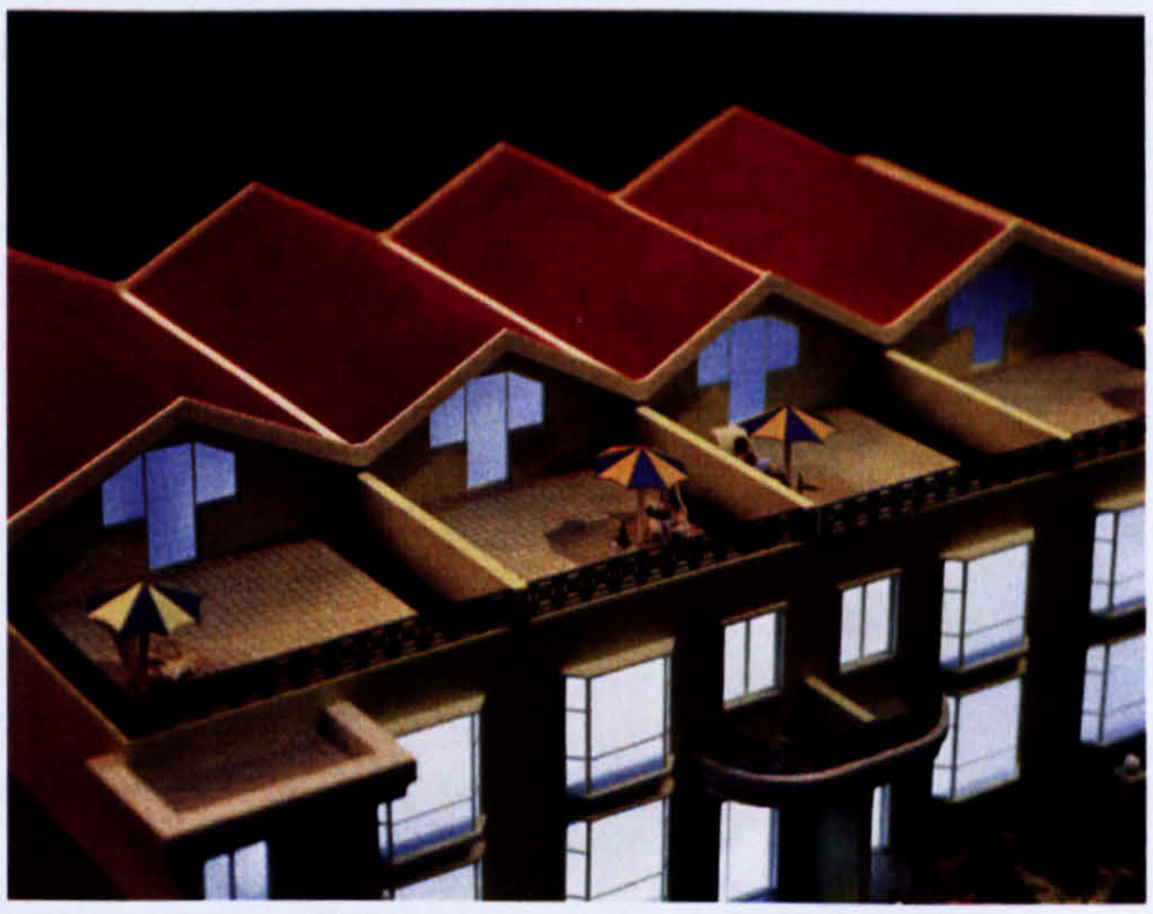


Fig. 28. *Urban fiction,* 2004-5. Xing Danwen. C-print photography, 90.2 x 120 cm.

The fate of the *hutongs* (low cost housing for the workers of Beijing) has undergone momentous events, resulting in a change of demographics which many believe has affected the fabric of society. Although homes to ordinary Beijingers for many centuries, they have been designated by the government to have passed their sell-by-date and have been subjected to numerous imperial urban planning, government

edicts, commercial wrangling and heroic individual efforts to ensure their preservation.

The *hutongs* have been described as an ingenious invention of the 13th century, high density but comfortable living spaces separated by thin layers. The *Disneyfication* of these *hutong* homes into theme parks has only benefitted the construction industry, the tourists, the *nouveau riche* and the foreigners.

Mao's opening up of Tiananmen has unwittingly reduced a city that was custom-built for the emperor to a tourist destination. The private space of the *hutong* that represented each person's own particular world, has now been commodified. The problem with this modernisation process is a dead end for many Beijingers, with the inevitable choices of becoming prisoners of highrises or remaining as slum dwellers. The jarring blend of structures in the *hutong* (Fig. 29), alternating with broad monumental avenues and narrow backstreets of drab, low-rise, utilitarian work communes now project a latent violence and repression similar to destitute housing areas. Housing issues have become a major embarrassment for the Government.



Fig. 29. *Beijing's traditional "hutongs"*, 2008. Photograph.

The façade of the highrises and the *hutongs* are very different from those of prestige and power such as Tiananmen. To the ordinary Chinese the streets are still an extension of their home, their life. The whole drama is played out in the streets. You can skulk and loiter, play and eat, fight and relax, sell and barter [226]. Marc Riboud's *Suburbs of Peking*, 1957 (Fig. 30) captured this rare moment of freedom in the wake of communism, revealing vulnerability yet privacy. Fifty years on in 2007, Mao's communal life is reduced to being incarcerated in suspended matchbox flats. The past spectacle of communal life in China, which was conducted in open communal spaces, is now concealed behind the façade of a modernist spectacle. Street life has disappeared behind closed doors, the open communal life of *hutongs* and courtyard houses have turned into watching television and one's neighbours through the closed doors of highrise flats.

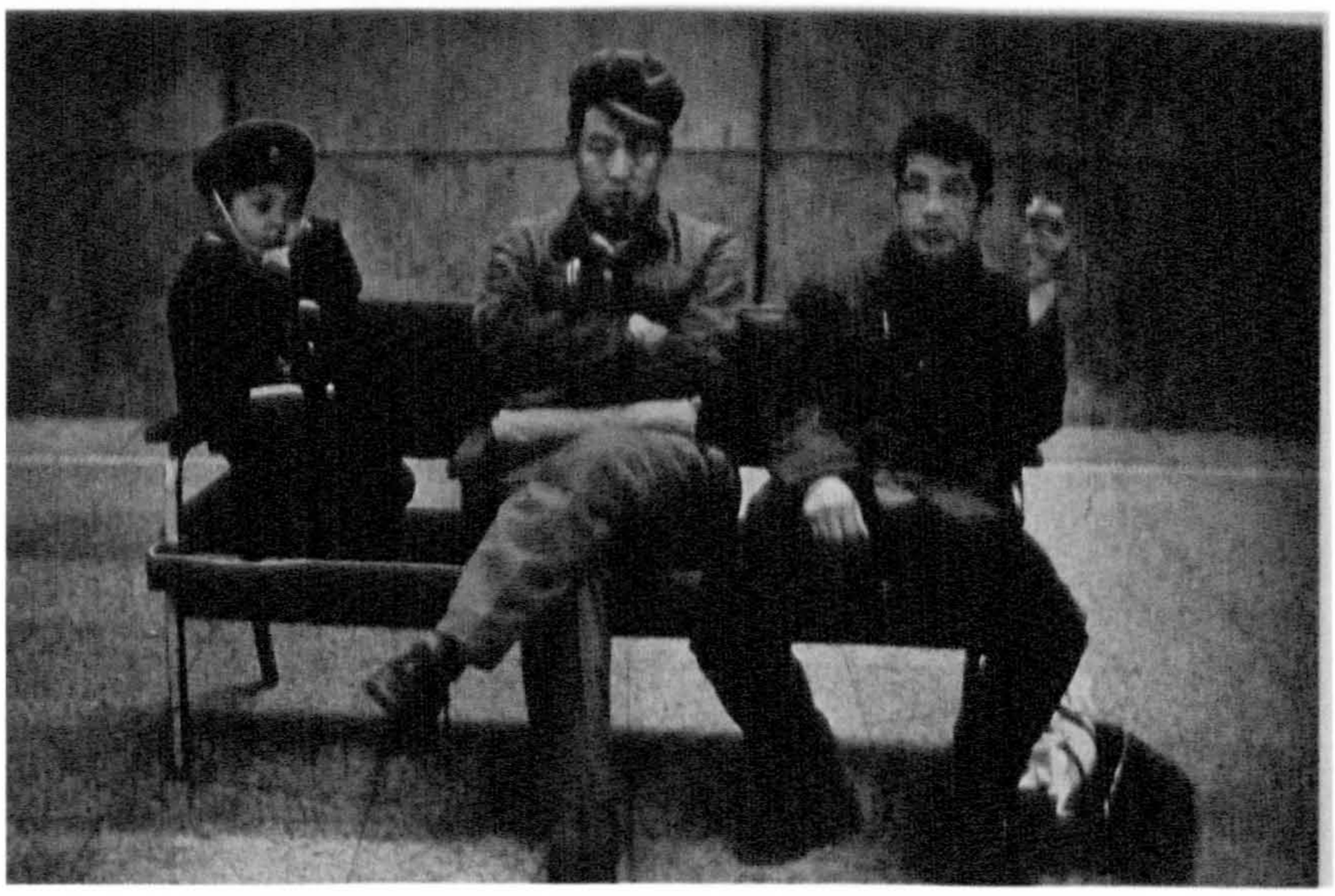


Fig. 30. *Suburbs of Peking*, 1957. Marc Riboud. Photograph.

The carefree life in supposedly spacious *hutongs* is equally a myth. This was portrayed by Director Tian Zhuangzhuang's film, *Blue Kite*, 1991, which evoked in almost real-time, the everyday life of a Beijing *hutong*. The painfully meticulous narration brought to life the reality during the political and social upheavals of the 1950s and 1960s. The slow build up in the film of the changes wrought by the Cultural Revolution imposed an irony on the Communist rhetoric. For communality, read lack of privacy, for rustic simplicity, read living on the bread-line, for ideology, read excuse for persecution and power.

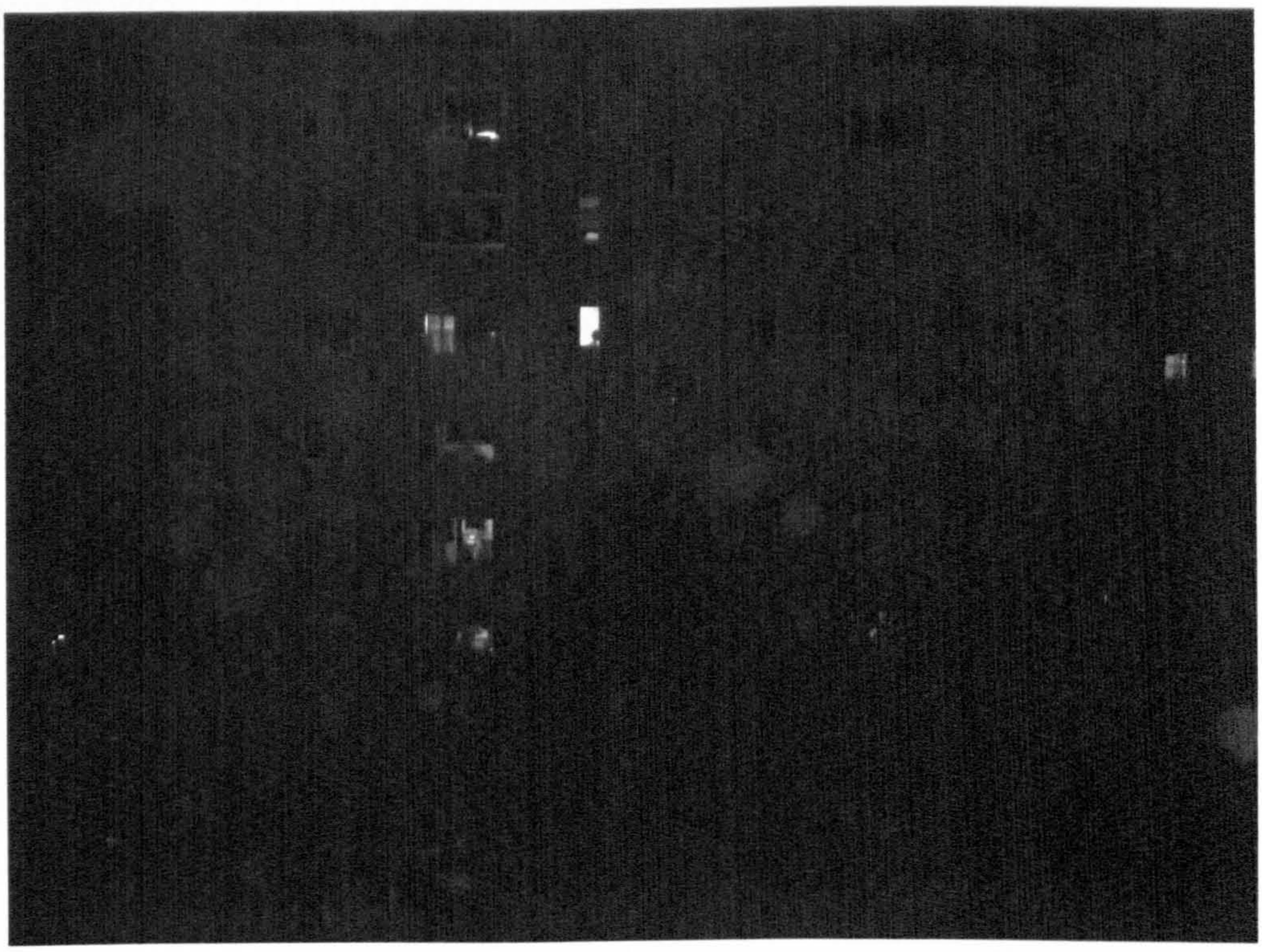


Fig. 31. *Maid in China*, 2006. Voon Pow Bartlett. Digital print on photographic paper, 100 x 150 cm.

The digital manipulations of *CWIBJ* (*Le Flaneur*) may reflect the individuals living in the city but in fact occludes the majority of China's population. *Maid in China* (Fig. 31) exposes the lie behind the façade, the reality of Mao's communist utopia premised on the primacy and contentment of the working class in China, endorsed by images of a multitude of happy smiling faces. It is a life that is 'infra-everyday', different from normal people, but yet everyday, that is adapted to poverty [227]. Mao's hero workers such as the *dagongmei* are now a burden to the state. These young migrant working women in the 21st century, having been accustomed to the Maoist *danwei* (work unit) which gave them guarantees of life-long employment, are now ironically considered in the eyes of the state and the elites, deeply enmeshed in a dependency on Maoist social welfare. They are now affixed with the signification of 'an internal lack, potentially hindering China from attaining some form of modernity, because they bring the past into the present of their very existence' [228].

Maids are not just indicative of the dispersion of families but also China's growing migrant problems. By official estimates the influx of rural labour into the cities between 2001 and 2005 reached an average of 8.4 million, the size of London, bringing the total to around 120 million [229]. The reforms that Deng Xiaoping first launched in China's countryside have led to three decades of 'get rich quick', a widening gap between China's urban rich and its stagnating rural communities [230].

Maids may be an embarrassment to the government but the irony is that the situation is now reversed. Mao's *dagongmei* in fact provide a support system to the growing elite *nouveau riche* class, visitors and tourists. They work in highrise luxury flats that are inaccessible to them except as cleaners, babyminders and domestic help. Instead of depending on the state, the 'iron rice bowl' era of Maoist days when jobs were for life, they are now the vital cogs of an affluent society [231]. Instead of hindering China from reaching modernity, they are in fact integral and indispensable model citizens.

The OrientX

China's breakneck pace is like a moving reality. By 2010 over half of the Chinese population is expected to live in urban areas [232]. Familiar journeys made by a dying breed of workers have now undergone major transformation. Bicycling to work from central city locations of *hutongs* has been replaced by waiting in freezing bus and train stations, as the subways are too costly [233]. The dispersion of families is made worse by the lack of a good and available transport system, the inadequacy of disaster response mechanisms and the refusal of the government to tackle basic structural problems [234].

The *OrientX* (Fig. 32) is a view of Beijing Xizhan (Beijing West Railway Station). The sea of heads provide a glimpse of nightmare journeys home for migrant workers during public holidays, the only time they will see their families. It also highlights the bizarre invisibility of migrant workers that further conceals their view on the 'fast trains for the rich' [235]. Train journeys are constantly aggravated by weather conditions and the sheer numbers of travellers. For example, on Labour Day, 1 May,



Fig. 32. *The OrientX*, 2005. Voon Pow Bartlett. Digital print on newsprint, 53 x 77 cm.

2007, a staggering 500,000 strong crowd, equivalent to the population of Manchester, waited at the train station [236]. It was on one of these occasions that led to the rare megaphone apology by Prime minister Wen Jiabao in February 2008. All the same, in a one-party dictatorship, where power has traditionally meant never having to say you're sorry, Mr Wen's humility is a welcome nod towards accountability. It forms part of a broader awareness on the part of China's leaders of the discontented grumbling of those who feel left behind in the breakneck dash for growth. On a cynical note, it was perhaps the spectacle of snow, rain and storm and a minister apologising that prompted both ministers' actions [237].

By manipulating its saturation, sharpness and contrast to privilege the saturation of travellers, the *OrientX* provides the dialectical site for the discussion of the spectacle (how to make more spectacular) and the relational (process of making). Its spectacle-ness arises from the masses, an image of communality, united in solidarity, in the survival of daily lives. In highlighting China's transport crisis and the fragility of China's infrastructure, the ambiguity of the infra-everyday life of the

dagongmei and their counterparts present yet another new embarrassment to the Chinese government. Cities can be great levelers, congested streets and immobile trains encroach upon the lives of both the rich and the poor but at least the migrants have the opportunity to seek a better life elsewhere [238].

It is not surprising then that trains are a popular imagery for artists. Li Zhanyang's *Train station* (Fig. 32) explored the crowded and boisterous scene of the train station, which he considered to be a microcosm of the entire society and a stage for the lower classes. It represented an historical significance firstly for China's unprecedented tides of migrant labourers and secondly the Cultural Revolution when trains were the bearers of Red Guards, expeditions and transportation for the intellectual youths who were sent down to the countryside.



Fig. 33. *Train station,* 2004. Li Zhanyang. Coloured fibreglass, 205 x 105 x 43 cm.

The conflict of the literati tradition

In a state which has no God, the Olympics has been a religion.

BBC Sport - the Olympic Broadcaster, 24 August 2008 [239]

For the duration of China's long history, the literati has occupied the pedestal. As a form of power to embellish what society could not offer, *shanshuihua* (literati paintings) as the archaic spectacle is probably the closest alternative form of establishing a similar social division of labour and formation of classes. It was probably beneficial for the literati to supplant religion to prevent it from offering a form of liberation to the lower classes. The literati now face an unprecedented challenge of sustaining the global interest, winning over the home audience as well as maintaining the separation. In other words, keeping the myth alive.

For the literati (Chinese artists have traditionally been referred to as intellectuals, or literati), who struggled with the anguish of the 1980s and the repression of the 1990s, there is a need for a spiritual space for imagining and for consolation. This situation is blithely encapsulated by Sadie Plant who wrote in *The Most Radical Gesture*, that 'when talk of revolution becomes embarrassing and the suggestion that history has ended is embraced with open relief' [240].

Some critics have asserted the precedence of literati art on the contemporary scene, such as claiming that the strategy of cynicism and *ennui* in Cynical Realism were typical of those adopted by literati during periods of strong political control. For example, the literati of the 4th century, between the Wei and Jin dynasties, were often portrayed as self-derisive and crazed rogues. Plays and essays produced during the 13th century Yuan Dynasty were filled with examples of *ennui* and self-derision, it was claimed [241]. Fang Lijun's irreverent figures have been compared to the popular Buddha figure, called 'Mi-le Buddha', showing the religious icon in a good humoured laughter, a form of escapism for the literati in dark political times.

China's modernisation process has also taken on the literati's vision of the world, privileging the rational and linear, speedy, …the efficient and utopian' as well as some of the old perspectives adopted in art [242]. The main social organisations have remained essentially male-centric and are enforced by a reality that systematically pursues material growth. Although leading to clearly visible economic and cultural progress, it is causing some concerns regarding social harmony. Monumentality is a signature tune of Chinese contemporary art on the international forum which are large scale in their spectacularity. Art historian and curator Wu Hung used the metaphorical and physical properties of the legendary *9 tripods* to explain how its monumentality at the time was conveyed by a change of scale, material, shape, decoration and inscription [243]. With its historical grounding, *9 tripods'* monumentality and repute rested entirely on the myth surrounding it [244]. 'It is precisely because they are historical that history can very easily suppress them [245]. As in myth, it hides nothing and flaunts nothing, its function is to distort and not to make disappear [246].

Ai Weiwei's *Working progress* (*Fountain of light*) (Fig. 34), projecting its grandiose bulk of glass and steel onto the waterfront of the Liverpool Tate museum, has been pronounced as ambitious and culturally weighted due to its inspiration by



Fig. 34. *Fountain of Light,* 2007. Ai Weiwei. Installation, 7,000 x 5,448 cm.

the Tatlin's monument to the Third international [247]. Xu Zhen's *8848 Minus 1.86*, 2005, was similarly impressive, being a reproduction of the summit of Everest, encased in a large glass refrigerator (Fig. 35).



Fig. 35. *8848 minus 1.86*, 2005. Xu Zhen. Installation.

The spectacular urban expansion of skyscrapers is a good example. Xing Danwen's *Urban Fiction* (Fig. 28) encapsulated China's capacity for growth as well as recalling archaic perspectives. Photographs were taken as if from the angle of the rooftop, reminiscent of old Chinese paintings with the perspective of a bird's eye view.



Fig. 36. *Four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter,* 1991. Li Dahong. Oil on canvas. dimensions unknown.

Chinese contemporary art has also requisitioned ancestor worship art, previously consigned as unworthy craft and commercial art, and later, during Mao's days, banned as feudalist, evil and belonging to the old society. Li Dahong's *Four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter*, 1991 (Fig. 36), used the format of *nianhua* and folk art to present a kitsch format to satirise the changing fashion.

The literati artists of today may be contributing to the discourse of individuality and identity, but seldom without a personal agenda. For example, Cang Xin acknowledged that the main aspects of his *Identity exchange* series (Fig. 14 and 17) were about the social, deriving not from the alienation of the virtual world, but the ghettoised environment of his earlier living conditions. The "East Village', an artist community on the eastern outskirts of Beijing, encountered frequent high profile run-ins with the police [248]. This period of uncertainty and political danger produced an anxious depression in Cang, which led to an urge to make contact, beginning with inanimate objects in his *Licking* series to the *Identity exchange* series.

By embracing the modernisation project, there is a rising consciousness that can provide the individual in urban cities an awareness to indulge in the absolute space previously enjoyed by intellectuals, not as a time and chance to develop a deeper awareness of human relations, but to be transformed [249]. The totality of everyday

life such as the workplace, the homes, the streets, supplied relief. An eloquent description can be found in the work of the Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa, 'A ray of sunlight falling endlessly into the dead office, a street cry that soars up to the window of my room…the terrifying objectivity of the world' [250]. The detail of everyday life that structured and colonised the lived experience now offers the opportunity of consolation.

Mournfully, solitude is no longer the preserve of the intellectuals separated by 'abstraction and bourgeois scholasticism'. It is possible that human solitude can now be a rare and ambivalent mixture of alienation and joy. They are not necessarily 'torn from…reality', or even 'placed outside it' [251]. Whether this solitude should be deep or metaphysical is a deceit. The deceit is the alibi used by the intellectuals, the alibi of the myth of solitude.

Chinese modernity

In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine.

"Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art" (May 1942), *Selected Works*, Vol, III. P 86 (Quotations from Chairman Mao, 1966: 563)

Discussions of Chinese modernity have mainly eclipsed the long and deeply rooted kinship mode of power and discourse, as well as the recent heritage of art, as seen from the above quote [252]. *Guanxi*, the traditional Confucian code of conduct that is a deep-rooted ritual of everyday life is not a new phenomenon in China. What is new is the recent increase in instrumentality, cynicism and utilitarianism in interpersonal relations, which has revived these concepts and brought them back into vogue after Mao [253]. The 1980s and 1990s have seen an explosion in academic discussions

on this phenomenon [254]. Although the May 4th iconoclastic discourse of the 1920's attacked the Confucian family and kinship constructions of person and substituted westernised individual essence of free will in the rapidly commercialising society, 'the art of *guanxi* does not retreat' [255].

Chinese contemporary art has to negotiate with the very complicated and unique context in which Chinese consumer mass culture exists, contending with many forces called the *3 olds*, old cadres, bosses(*laoban*) and masses(*laobaixing*) [256], i.e. market relationships, government interference and consumer expectations. It is about achieving a fine balance between the devil and the deep blue sea, by not accommodating the government official line, one will be extricated from the system but by doing so one estranges the market and consumers.

Many artists have skilfully adapted to global demand through new media such as photography and work of a relational nature to negotiate with their own society and their idea of modernity. This is, it has been asserted, in order to breath life into a cold, frigid and emotionless, industrial society made up of steel bars and concrete [257]. Yang Zhenzhong used photography to express his pre-occupation with China's intrinsic disharmony and severe contrasts. *922 Grains of rice*, 2000 (Fig. 37) used the imagery of chickens to challenge normative notions of social behavior, showing a hen and a cockerel pecking the rice grains greedily, against the background of a woman's voice counting the grains eaten by the hen and a man's voice those eaten by the cockerel. Song Dong's relational theme involved working



Fig. 37. *922 Grains of rice*, 2000. Yang Zhenzhong. Video still.

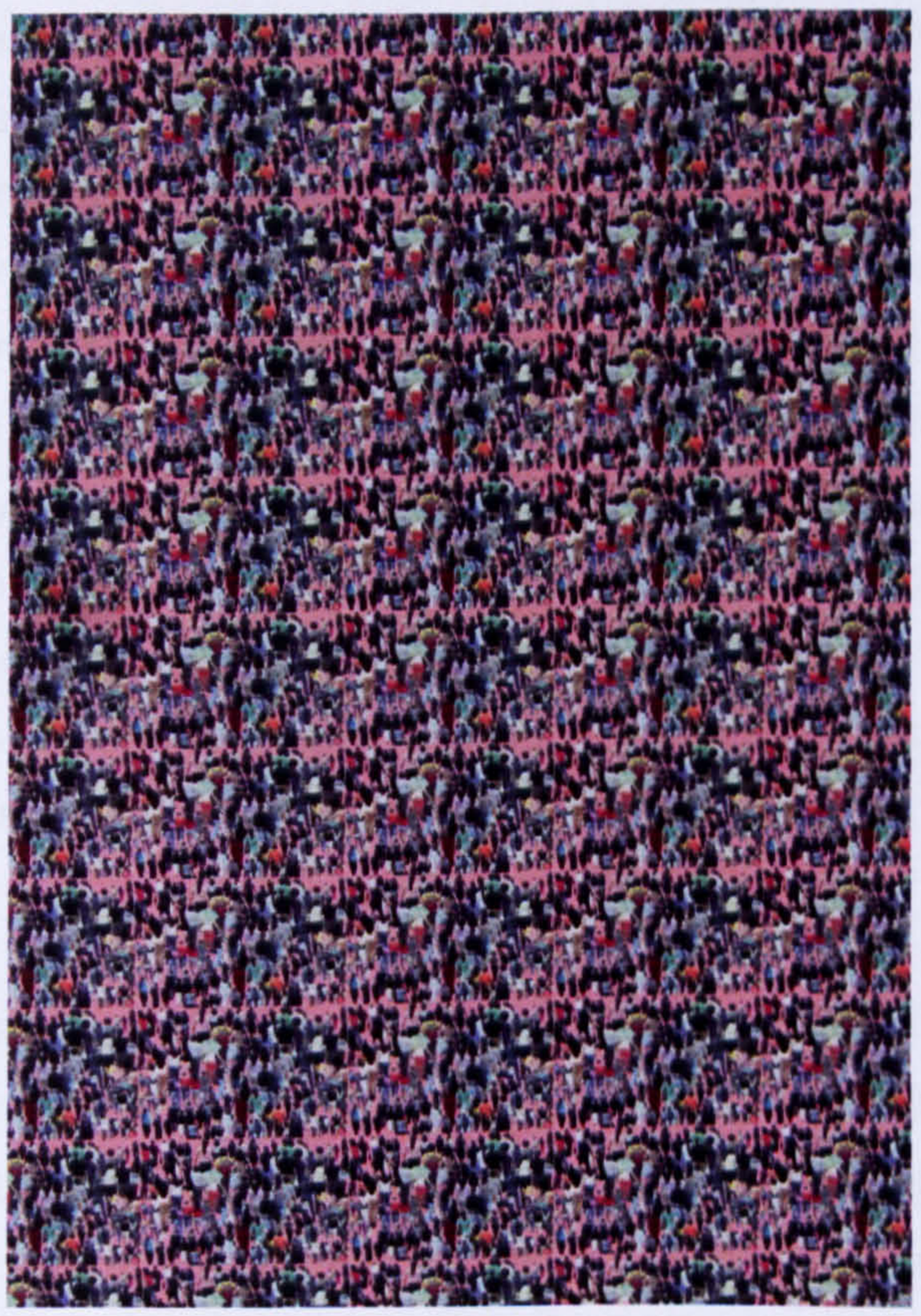


Fig. 38. *Let a hundred flowers bloom*, 2007. Courtesy of Voon Pow Bartlett. Photographic print on laminated paper, 143 x 171 cm.

with Chinese white collar workers from the countryside such as *Dancing with Farmer workers,* 2001 (Fig. 15), where they were invited to participate and to watch his videos. The everyday (night!) activity of the farmers was relocated from the streets (public squares) to an exhibition hall to become a spectacle with which to confront identity dislocation in China, where urban migration has become an urgent issue [258]. In *Fairytale* (Fig. 2), Ai Weiwei transported 1,000 ordinary folks from all over China to *Documenta 12*. Cang Xin's *Identity exchange* (Fig. 14 and 17), delved into China's urban social conditions with the new social strata from the countryside, to show the possibility of the destabilisation of identities through the get-rich-quick myths described as an 'ironic portrayal of social reality and a depiction of the fate of humanity in a period of social transition' [259].

By entitling a piece of work in another of Mao's empty rhetoric, *CWIBJ* (*Let a hundred flowers bloom)* (Fig. 38), explores the subject of the spectacle and engages

with the current debate on the relationship between art and society [260]. 'A desire for more physical and face-to-face interaction between people prompted by the virtual relationships of the internet and globalisation' that has inspired artists 'to adopt a do-it-yourself approach and model their own possible universes' [261] pales in comparison to a 'skilful and strategic giving of gifts and cultivation of obligation, indebtedness and reciprocity that underlies everyday social relationships in contemporary China' (262). Woefully, artists in the West using the relational strategy to consider their place in society, sounds almost mortifyingly disingenuous and simulated when compared to a sophisticated art of social relationships. This *guanxi*, suggested Laitin, editor of *Gifts, Favors & Banquets*, operates not only to resist the power of the state but also to defuse and subvert it [263].

Zhang Xiaogang, one of China's top selling *Cynical Realists*, is one of the rare established artists to have stepped outside the mainstream of contemporary Chinese art, to overtly support a contemporary style using the traditional, with an emphasis on finding a language accepted and understood by the masses, particularly his countrymen. *New wave* embraced the contemporary using new *wenrenhua* (new paintings of the literati) and emphasised techniques of drawing over concept [264]. *The Garden visiting* (Fig. 39) by Zhu Xinjian used ink to rework



Fig. 39. *The Garden visiting, 2005.* Zhu Xinjian. Ink painting, 66 x 65 cm.



Fig. 40. *Beautiful life,* 2005. Chen Wenling. Sculpture, dimensions unknown.

traditional motifs and compositions such as the *Peking Opera* and calligraphy [265]. Others used materials to refer to China's rich and illustrious past, such as the elitist lacquer in Chen Wenling's *Beautiful life* (Fig. 40). The return to tradition is also echoed in other disciplines such as architects Herzog & de Meuron's Olympic Bird's Nest Stadium that was built along the Imperial axis, architects MAD's concept for rejuvenating the *hutongs* and furniture designer Shao Fan's use of Ming dynasty furniture.

CWIBJ (Let a hundred flowers bloom) engenders the ambiguity of Chinese contemporary art as spectacle. It is a pastiche of crowds and empty spaces, multiplied endlessly on a minute scale to resemble a bed of one hundred blooming flowers on a spring day. Reality is made more elusive and ambiguous through the mediation of digital photography. The overbearing and almost futile repetition of the crowd introduces and reflects the idea of an isolated and fragmented masses who are 'seduced, dominated without agency, and unable to articulate resistance to the world of commodities' [266]. Each of the numerous figures depicted in the photograph can be taken to represent a non-event in the social calendar. There is a sense of a 'meaninglessness of life, seeing, feeling, remembering, forgetting were

all one, …' [267]. Human contact, an integral part of life, might be glimpsed at, can only be imagined.

CWIBJ (*Let a hundred flowers bloom)* is a representation of a consumer society that has been seduced and blinded with an excess of choice and material wealth. The people depicted invariably carry a shopping bag and represent the mundanity of life. Materialism has now become a basic necessity of life, commanding an entirely new lifestyle. The new aesthetics are all pervasive and superficial, from streets to shopping malls to online shopping, to TV commercials and advertising billboards [268]. Youngsters especially derive their status symbol and ideas from imported goods, Hollywood films, MTV and high street fashion brands… 'only too eager to declare their modernity by, say, hanging out at the *Song Bar*…and rubbing shoulders with up-and-coming artists, photographers, architects and designers' [269].

CWIBJ (*Let a hundred flowers bloom)* is also about contemporary Chinese art caught in the act of propagating and subverting the characteristics of an imported modernity. It is a spectacle associated with the abundance of commodities, signifying the deterioration of the aesthetic supremacy and artistic autonomy of the 1980s and the past [270]. The fragments making up the whole spectacle allude to the fragments of a commodity heaven, which Debord considered to lack any of the quality ascribed to the whole [271]. It is a spectacle of temporal desynchronisation, capturing a shift from communalism to a form of capitalism. This situation has been described as a contradiction of the revolutionary culture of the masses (*Qunzhong wenyi*) and commercial popular culture [272]. However, beneath the philosophy of 'take things as they come is the desperate feeling of nihilism' [273]. Just as photography lacks the 360 degrees of vision as the panopticon, the promise of continual material progress and endless progress associated with a Western modernity add to the mystifications. The city is not home to critical thought, but to the false consciousness engendered by the myth of a modernity [274].

Footnotes to the main thesis

1. Baudrillard (Plant 1992 (1987): 6).
2. Debord 2006: 114.
3. Professor Ina Bloom, Tate Modern symposium on *Rethinking Spectacle*, March 2007, my transcription, 20 April 2007: 7-8.
4. Debord 2006: 114.
5. Ibid: 12.
6. Debord 1992: 12/4.
7. Ibid: 20/25.
8. Ibid: 12/4.
9. Ibid: 13/6.
10. Ibid: 23/30.
11. Burgin 1982: 46-7.
12. 'The basic concept behind the work is to create a condition which encourages self experience and extends people's participation of art'. Ai said the number 1,001 doesn't have any special meaning, but is just a number easy to remember. He publicised the news for the recruitment on his personal blog, http://blog.sina.com.cn/aiweiwei on February 26, and received some 3,000 applications within three day (www.chinadaily.webarchive.17 Feb 2008).
13. 'Snowbound China - megaphone apology'. Unfortunately, Zhao Ziyang's apology did not avert the Tiananmen massacre of 1989 nor save his career (*The Economist*, 9 Feb 2008: 12).
14. Saussy 2001: 21.
15. Claire Bishop and Mark Godfrey. Introduction: 'Spectacularisation of contemporary art', Tate Modern symposium on 'Rethinking Spectacle'. Tate Modern, 31 Mar 2007 (My transcription on 20 April 2007).
16. *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), 19 August 1966, pp1-2 (Jiang 2007: 25).
17. Harris 2003: 29.
18. Tang 2000: 279.
19. Which helps to retroactively release the utopian potency of a revolutionary tradition, ie. consumerism makes them wish for revolution!
20. Tang 2000: 275.
21. Ibid: 1.
22. Chinese writer Liu Kang (Dirlik and Zhang, 2000).
23. 'Chineseness of contemporary art' (*Yishu* Jun 07: 115 and Mar 07: 28).
24. Bishop 2004: 61-3.
25. Burgin 1982: 5-7.
26. Yang 1994: 44.
27. Ibid: 43.
28. 'Mao and the art of management', *The Economist*, Dec 22 2007: 123-4.
29. Dutton 1998: 1.
30. Zhou Yang, a principal spokesman on cultural policies at the time (Wu Hung 2005: 187).
31. Wu quoting Lefort (Wu Hung 2005 (1): 176).
32. Cushing and Tompkins 2007: 10.
33. Firstly to promote three 'isms' of collectivism, patriotism and socialism, the second to oppose three bad styles'- the capitalist, the feudal, and the extravagant, the third to implement the 'three necessities' of building socialism, the 'four olds', loving the collective and operating communes 'democratically and frugally' (Spence 1999: 561 and A54).
34. The collection was compiled in 1963 from Mao's speeches by Lin Biao, the then new Minister of Defence and *de facto* head of the People's Liberation Army. Artist

Zhang Xiaogang also acknowledged the role of the colour red to signify national collectivisation.
35. 'The mysterious Mr. Hu' (*The Economist* 20 Oct 2007: 78).
36. 'China's weather - frozen assets' (*The Economist*, 9 Feb 2008: 62).
37. Jin 2005: 72.
38. Dirlik and Zhang 2000.
39. Jung Chang and Jon Halliday's 'Mao, the unknown story' unashamedly use the man they are castigating to climb their own ladder. According to them, no other 20th century leader was responsible for more than 70m deaths. Only Qin Shihuang, who started building the Great Wall (in which each brick is said to have cost a life), and at least he built something.
40. 'Mao a life', Thurs 24 May 07, Philip Short, BBC1.
41. Jameson and Miyoshi 1999 (1998): 174.
42. Burgin discusses Walter Benjamin (Burgin 1982: 12).
43. Christian Metz, *Language and cinema*, Mouton 1974 276-7 (Burgin 1982: 82).
44. In his 1931 'A Small History of Photography', and in 1936, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin talked about the Optical Unconscious, and made the connection between photography and psychoanalysis. 'It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis'. He made the connection with Muybridge and Marey's chronometries, celebrated as revelations of the stilled secrets of animal and human locomotion. At the time, his comment was taken as an odd, even superficial, analogy. It evoked the sense of astonishment at the curtain suddenly going up on two wonderlands, one material, the other fabulous, yet opaque beneath the thick veil of our physical and psychic limitations (Smith, Terry (Terry E.)*The Optical Unconscious*. Modernism/modernity - Volume 2, Number 1,The John Hopkins University Press. Modernism/ Modernity, 2.1 (1995): 193-196 Book Review, The Optical Unconscious. Rosalind E. Krauss. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993: 353).
45. 'figures featured in propaganda art were mostly the generic worker-peasant-soldier with anonymous grinning faces; the one immediately recognizable face...was that of Chairman Mao,...' (Jiang 2007: 60).
46. *The revenge of the crystal (*Baudrillard 1993: 6.60).
47. Chen 2006: 32.
48. Tang 2000: 3.
49. Durkheim (Jiang 2007: 24).
50. Shanghai citizens trying to reach a bank to change their depreciating currency, December 1948 (Spence 1999: 484).
51. Jin 2005: 4.
52. According to authors Jin Yuanpu and Tao Dongfeng (Jin 2005: 8).
53. Jin 2005: 108.
54. Expressed by Lu Peng the Chinese critic in *Artnow/Yishudangdai* (My translation in Beijing with CAFA student, Miaomiao on Tue 27 Sep 2006).
55. Harris 2003: 112-4.
56. Gao 2005: 212.
57. Tang 2000: 242.
58. The introduction of western realist painting emerged as Revolutionary Realism in 1949 (Cohen 1984: 33).
59. About exhibition '*Today. Mainland*' (Art China: 98).
60. Chen 2006: 43.
61. Ibid: 37.
62. Ibid: 38.
63. Ibid: 42.

64. Chen 2006: 41.
65. 'China rock roots in Mao's rebellious permanent revolutionary ideology' (Huot 2000: 144).
66. The origins of Neo Confucianism go back to the eighties, when a group of young philosophy teachers in Beijing set up an independent Academy of Chinese Culture in early 1985. At that time renewed interest in Confucianism was part of a wider quest for the cultural resources to assist national modernisation. In the crackdown after June Fourth 1989, the Academy was suspended, resuming its activities only in 1993. Meanwhile the recent economic success of the 'Little Dragons' of East Asia had given rise to much overseas discussion on the role of 'Asian values' in fast regional growth. In October 1994 an International Confucian Association was founded in Beijing, at a conference addressed by such prominent dignitaries of the CCP and graced by the hospitality of President Jiang Zemin. With the decay of official Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought, the potential of Confucian moralism as a substitute code of social discipline was increasingly attractive to the ruling party. Private businesses also showed a keen interest for their own reasons. Neo Confucians grasped the essence of things, and stressed that inner wisdom lied at the core of Chinese culture. It was popular in explaining the economic success of the so-called 'Four little dragons' of East Asia in the 1980s and early 1990s. It was challenged by writers invoking the Song-Ming (1000 -1644) neo-Confucian ideal of 'inner sagehood leading to external kingship' (*nei sheng wai wang*) and its modern applications. The Neo Confucians now face a dilemma of how their inner sagehood can expand outwards to a new external kingship, one that comprises democracy, science and a modern economic order (Wang 2005 (2003) and 'Mourning and nostalgia', *Poetic reality* 2006: 9).
67. Dai Jinhua (Dirlik and Zhang 2000: 206).
68. Films by Zhang Yimou (Shanghai triad) or Chen Kaige, (*Searching for roots, Homecoming fever*).
69. Dirlik and Zhang 2000: 209.
70. Tang 2000: 283.
71. Dai Jinhua (Dirlik and Zhang 2000: 206).
72. The second word '*beijing*' shares the same sound as the city but means background (My notes taken in Beijing on May 19 2006, at the *Soldiers at the gate* Open Forum).
73. 'Imagined nostalgia', Dai Jinhua (Dirlik and Zhang 2000: 206).
74. 'Archaeology of the Future' (catalogue for the Shanghai triennial in 2005: 95-196).
75. *Archaeology of the Future* catalogue 2005: 96.
76. *Archaeology of the Future* catalogue 2005: 105.
77. *Archaeology of the Future* catalogue 2005: 96.
78. Wang 2005: 293.
79. Fredric Jameson (Bishop in *Rethinking spectacle*, 2007, Tate modern symposium (My transc., 20 April 2007).
80. Zhu Qi, *The game of being low and shallow. The rising of the cartoon generation contemporary art exhibition* (3818 Cool gallery catalogue 2005: 28-34).
81. Hobsbawm and Ranger, Anderson 1983: 174.
82. Clark 2000.
83. Leonard 2008: 5.
84. The term 'born again' is used loosely to denote a form of regeneration where regeneration is synonymous with spiritual rebirth and salvation, most frequently used by the Evangelical, Fundamentalist, Pentecostal and some mainline branches of Protestant Christianity. The term is sometimes applied by extension to other phenomena outside Christianity; for example, a *transcendent personal experience* (*Wikipaedia* on 21 Dec 07 and www.Famous 'Born Again' Christians, 21 Dec 07).

85. Yang 1994: 32.
86. Foster 1996: 174.
87. Bishop on Santiago Sierra in his Chechnyan refugee work (Bishop 2004: 79).
88. This is reminiscent of Santiago Sierra's *160cm line tattooed on four people* (2000), a person paid for 360 continuous working hours.
89. Said 2003: 90.
90. *Chi ren zui ruan, na ren shou duan* ('eating from others, ones mouth becomes soft, taking from others, ones hand becomes short'...*guanxi* based on mutuality') (Yan 2006: 362).
91. Yan 2006: 197.
92. Syncretism originated in the political philosophy of Plutarch and literally meant the attempt to construct a politically unified Crete through the coming together of its culturally and geographically distinct peoples. Close to Gramsci's notion of hegemony, recognition that an alliance of peoples does not mean a simple identity to or unification of them, but rather a tactical 'co-mingling' of different elements whose separate characteristics are not dissolved within their alliance. *Tropicalia,* 1967 in Asbury Michael, 2003. 'Tracing Hybrid strategies in Brazilian Modern Art' (Harris 2003: 139-170).
93. Papastergiadis 2005: 2.
94. Jin 2005: 72.
95. Papastergiadis 2005: 19.
96. Asbury 2003: 139-170.
97. Andrew Maerkle, *Xing Danwen's Chinese fantasy* (Asia Art Pacific, Autumn 2006: 22-3).
98. Nobil (Bull & Black 2003: 410).
99. Chen 2006: 4.
100. Papatergiadis 2005: 4.
101.Huangdu, the Chinese critic, is of the view that hybridity is conditioned by the west (Thomas 1994: 56-7 in Iwabuchi 2002).
102. Bhabha 1990 (Iwabuchi 2002: 211).
103. Bhabha's definition of a third space is a 'hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges (Chambers 1995: 67).
104. 'Perfidious fidelity-the untranslatability of the other' (Gaiger 2003: 299).
105. Papastergiadis 2005: 17.
106. Bailey 2005.
107. Bull & Black 2003: 411.
108. Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 2001: 68.
109. This title has been borrowed from Chen 2006: 159.
110. Debord 2006 (1992, 1967): 12/4.
111. So and Walker 2006: 138.
112. *La perruque* also known as 'the wig', employed by French workers, such as writing a letter in company time, using factory tool for domestic task, etc.
Michel de Certeau (1984) asserted *La perruque* as the way in which workers exhibited a power of the oppressed in everyday life that is far from the regulated flow of procedures. It 'actually diverts time...' from the repetitive boredom of regular employment. De Certeau saw the unknown and unknowable domain of the consumer such as moving about, speaking, reading, shopping and cooking, now accurately and simply mapped by producers using ATMs, credit card records and check out scanners; even walking is recorded by CCTV (Mirzoeff 2000: 127).
113. *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), 19 August 1966, pp1-2 (Jiang 2007: 25).
114. Jing Wang 2005: 22.
115. Barthes 1993: 132, 109.
116. Hwang 2006: 316-329.
117. Yang 1994.

118. Chau 2006: 316.
119. Yan 2006: 197.
120. Debord 1992: 12/4.
121. Yang 1994: 309.
122. Deleuze and Guattarai 1987:25.
123.Tang pointed out in his book that some middle aged 'budding tycoons…dining on peasant fare like cornmeal cakes and rice gruel in one of several new Beijing restaurants serving Cultural Revolution (CR) cuisine. Zhu Kunnian, the owner of a husk-strewn CR style restaurant says, 'we are not nostalgic for Mao, we are nostalgic for our youth' (Tang 2000: 273).
124. 'Mao and the art of management' (*The Economist*, 22 Dec 2007: 123-4).
125. Author Zhu Tianwen's title (Chen 2006: 159).
126. So and Walker 2006: 138.
127. Liang in Yang 1994: 296.
128. *Second hand reality* (Today art gallery, Gu Zhenqing 2003: 178).
129. Bishop 2004: 55 and Bourriaud 2002: 47.
130. Ibid: 54.
131. Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist said, 'Cao is the model of the artist as inventor and exlorer who with infinite curiosity acts as a witness of her time', *Global player, One on one* by Carolee Thea (*Art Asia pacific*, Fall 06: 66).
132. This term has been applied to many international artists' work such as Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija.
133. Quoted in 'Public relations: Bennett Simpson talks with Nicolas Bourriaud' (*Artforum* April 2001: 48).
134. *Pars pro toto* is Latin for taking a part for the whole. It means that something is named after a part of it. E.g. "glasses" is a 'pars pro toto' name for something that consists of more than just two pieces of glass (*Wikipaedia*, 16 March 08 and Bishop 2004: 51-79).
135. Explained by Chen as an epistemological technology of the self (Chen 2006: 45-6).
136. 'But (sic) Homi Bhabha has an ominous warning about these Chinese artists: "Despite the claims to [what is] a spurious rhetoric of 'internationalism'", the relationship between Chinese artists and the post-modern art world is that "they live in 'the nation of others'"'. Tsao Hsingyuan in "A Dialogue on contemporary Chinese Art: The one day workshop "Meaning, image, and word" held at the University of British Columbia (*Yishu* Dec 2005: 81).
137. Yang 1994: 297.
138. Yan 2006: 357.
139. Xu's work simultaneously critiqued the idea of an archetypal human behaviour as well as the formal aestheticism of Chinese contemporary art. *Rainbow*, (made in 1998 but shown in 2004) a video of a performance, showed a red and raw naked back which has been slapped without actually showing the action of slapping.
140. CCAA awards were given to Chinese artists who show particular talent in artistic creation- to encourage their development, and to enhance awareness and appreciation of a wider public for what Chinese artists contribute to contemporary culture. It has been awarded every 2 years since 1998. The 2004 jury members were Ai Weiwei, Hou Hanru, Alanna Heiss, Uli Sigg, the late Harald Szeeman and Gu Zhenqing.
141. flickr.webarchive, 19th June 2007.
142. Ai Weiwei's *Fairy Tale*. No less than 1,001 farmers, laid-off workers, street vendors, minority people, students, rock singers, and white collar workers will travel free to the tiny German town of Kassel for *Documenta12*. *Fairy Tale* is one of the largest-scale art works Ai has done. It will cost 3.1 million Euro ($4.1 million), which mostly covers the traveling and accommodation costs of the 1,001 people. Ai's

gallery owner Urs Meile raised the money through two Swiss foundations, the Leister Foundation and the Erlenmeyer Foundation.www.chinadaily.webarchive.17 Feb 2008.
143. Bishop 2004: 72.
144. 'If you've got it, don't flaunt it' (*The Economist* 2 June 07: 78) and 'Violence in China's schools – Hard lessons' (*The Economist* 22 Sep 2007: 74).
145. Chau 2006: 316.
146. Bishop 2004: 61.
147. Hou on *Everyday Miracles* with Four Woman Artists in the Chinese Pavilion (Venice Biennale 2007 website on 21 July 2007).
148. There was no Chinese pavilion before the 2005 Venice Biennale!
149. Eco 1962: 22-23.
150. Cangxin 2002: 19.
151. Bishop 2007: 61.
152. 'Yes again, and this time it's for real': an interview with Simon Groom and Karen Smith by Nav Haq (*Yishu* Jun 07: 55).
153. This work confronted his relationship with his father, the love and estrangement in their relationship arising from his long absence in several reform-through-labour-camps during the Cultural Revolution. Although Wu Hung thought that the work seemed to 'reconfirm' rather than 'reconcile' the gap between him and his father.
154. Gao 2005: 90.
155. It was organised in 1998 by Leng Lin, curator and now owner of the *Beijing Commune* (Song's latest exhibition in 2007 is at Leng's Beijing Commune), who Song Dong has been working closely with. Leng had to go through unofficial channels to organise a public exhibition at the Main Ritual hall of the Ancestral Temple for Song, at a time when all installations and performances attracted intense reaction.
156. *Exhibiting Experimental art in China:* 102.
157. Bishop 2004: 67-68.
158. Yang 1994: 298.
159. Song Dong interviewed about *Waste not,* Li Xianting magazine: 200 (My translation from Chinese in Beijing with the help of CAFA student Li Yanling on Thursday 5/10/06).
160. Bishop 2004: 79.
161. 'A dialogue on contemporary Chinese art: the one day workshop "meaning, image and word"' (*Yishu,* Dec 2005: 81).
162. Gao 1998: 106.
163. The one day symposium 'Meaning, image and word: Resourcing 'word play' in Chinese cultural discourse' at the University of Columbia in March 2005.
164. 'Fragmented memory and energy: Chinese contemporary art and its multiple layers of ideology', Carol Lu's paper at the International symposium, 'Cultural memory: House of world cultures', March 25, Berlin (*Yishu,* Jun 2006: 20-27).
165. Claire Bishop and Mark Godfrey. Introduction: 'Spectacularisation of contemporary art', Tate Modern symposium on 'Rethinking Spectacle'. Tate Modern, 31 Mar 2007 (My transcription, 20 April 2007).
166. Yang 1994: 107.
167. Ibid.
168. *Yishu*, Sep 2005: 39.
169. *Catching moonbeam in water 2007: 3.*
170. Fenichel Feb 2006: 16.
171. Manuela Ammer on Ai Weiwei's *Fairytale* performance (*Documenta12* catalogue 2007).
172. *Yishu*, Mar 2007: 85. *Documenta*12 magazine feature on education: 'Some thoughts on art game: an experience of agency in contemporary art'. Yu Christina

Yu.
173. Chen 2006: 47, 170.
174. Hwang 2006: 329, 334 and 419.
175. Smart 2006: 409.
176. 'Face value. China's toxic toymaker' (*The Economist,* 18 August 07: 57).
177. 'Chinese manufacturing - plenty of blame to go around. Mattel tried to rescue its relationship with its Chinese suppliers' (The Economist 29 Sep 2007: 78).
178. Front stage behaviour is that deliberately performed in front of other people, whereas backstage behaviour can only be revealed to those within a closer circle (Goffman 1955: 59, 67).
179. 'Mao and the art of management' (*The Economist*, 22 Dec 2007: 123-4).
180. Mao Zedong (1893–1976) shared the Marxists' goal of eventually eliminating private ownership of land and achieving Socialist Collectivisation as the only way for Chinese peasants to escape poverty (Yan 2006: 362).
181. Hwang 2006: 331.
182. Feuerbach, preface to the second edition of *The essence of Christianity* (Debord 1995: 11).
183. Harootunian 2000: 1.
184. Gao 2005: 221.
185. Tani E. Barlow, 'Pornographic City' (Wang 2005: 190).
186. Chen 2006: 37.
187. Bishop 2007: 10.
188. Cynical realists are part of the *New Generation*. The artists are themselves mainly from the countryside. eg. Fang Lijun, the leading Cynical Realist artist, Liu Wei, Zeng Hao. They make use of the distortion of realistic details, particularly those of human figures, to represent the fundamental absurdity of reality (Gao 2005: 110).
189. Partly because many of them were raised in the countryside such as Fang Lijun (Gao 2005).
190. Charles Taylor (Tang 2000: 280).
191. This is a contextualising of Lefebvre's *The critique of everyday life* and Goldstein's definition of the common people in *Everyday modernity in China.*
192. Tang 2000: 280.
193. Ellen Johnston Laing in 'the winking owl: Art in the Peoples Republic of China'. Berkeley: University of California press 1988 (Tang 2000: 280-281).
194. Cushing and Tompkins 2007.
195. Luckett 2007: 12.
196. Video screened at Chelsea College of art on Tuesday 18 March 2008 of the Keynote lecture given by Homi Bhabha at Berlin *Re-imagining Asia* exhibition in March 2008.
197. A description of the spectacle by the Situationist International (Debord 1992: 24).
198. Lefebvre 1971: 24.
199. Ibid (Elden 2003: 158).
200. Rose 2001: 140.
201. Antony Gormley on *Another Place*, his iron men on the Liverpool seafront. Interviewed by Phil Tufnel on *The One show* (BBC1 on 18 Feb 2008).
202. Baudrillard (Plant 1992: 6).
203. Jiang 2007: 22.
204. Ibid.
205. 'Briefing Asia's skills shortage – Capturing talent' (*The Economist* 18 August 07: 59).
206. Jiang 2007: 21.
207. Jonathan Watkins writing in Yang's exhibition catalogue (Jiang 2007: 28).
208. Gilloch 1997: 153.

209. Gao 2005: 212.
210. For Walter Benjamin, with the invention of the *Daguerreotype* on 2.1.1839
211. Burgin 1982: 10.
212. *The painting of modern life. Paris in the art of Manet and his followers* Clark, TJ., 1989 (1984).
213. Barthes (Burgin 1982: 47).
214. Lefebvre (Elden 2003: 152).
215. Benjamin 1979: 243 (Morris 1998: 344).
216. Jiang 2007: 24.
217. Ibid.
218. Jiang offered examples of parallel mass movements of liberation such as Paris 1968, Beatle mania and images of screaming teenagers. He thought that these images are iconic visual documentations of the historical era following the immediate post-war period of the 1940s and the fanaticism in the 1960s (Jiang 2007: 72).
219. Dirlik and Zhang 2000: 126.
220. Tang 2000: 3.
221. Lefebvre (Elden 2003: 156).
222. Zhang Zhijun, editor of Sanlin bookstore, summed up in 'Civil, Civility and Civilisation', Beijing's priority as being about building a real modern city and society (My notes on Soldiers at the gate open forum on '*Hutong* and the city of Beijing, the historic centre - protection and development", Beijing, May 19 2006).
223. Hou Hanru's paper, 'The expanding future' is from my notes taken at the Conference on *Soldiers at the gate* open forum on '*Hutong* and the city of Beijing, The historic centre- protection and development', Beijing, May 19 2006.
224. Gao 2005: 221.
225. Cangxin 2002: 13.
226. Dyer 2005: 123.
227. Lefebvre (Elden 2003: 158).
228. Goldstein 2006: 232.
229. 'China's migrant workers. No place to call home (Economist.com Jun 7 2007).
230. 'The party congress in China. China, beware' (Economist.com Oct 11 2007).
231. 'China's new labour law' (Economist.com Dec 6 2007).
232. *China Design Now* pamphlet by the V&A, 2008, 'Beijing Future City'.
233. According to Zhangjie, Chinese critic (My notes on *Soldiers at the gate open forum* on 'Hutong and the city of Beijing', The historic centre- protection and development, May 19 2006).
234. 'Snowbound China - megaphone apology' (*The Economist* 9 Feb 2008: 12).
235. On the first day of the peak May holiday week, China's railways carried 5.2m passengers. With a quarter of the world's rail transport loaded on to 6% of the world's track, the network is among the most heavily used on the planet (*The Economist*, May 17 2007).
236. 'Chinese trains, Bullet time' (*The Economist.com*, May 17 2007).
237. 'Snowbound China- megaphone apology. Unfortunately, Zhao Ziyang's apology did not avert the Tiananmen massacre of 1989 nor improve his career (*The Economist*, 9 Feb 2008: 12).
238. 'China's bleak mid-winter - A cold coming' (*The Economist* Jan 31 2008).
239. 'Beijing Olympics come to an end', 24 Aug 08, James Reynolds, BBC sport website, accessed 25 Aug 08, UK.
240. Plant 1992: 185.
241. Clark 2000: 82. C51.
242. Hou Hanru in the Venice Biennale 2007 website on 21 July 2007, on *Everyday Miracles* with Four Woman Artists in the Chinese Pavilion at the Arsenale and Vergini Gardens.

243. Wu Hung 1995: 6.
244. Barthes 1993: 11.
245. Ibid: 110, 120.
246. Ibid: 129.
247. According to Karen Smith, an independent curator (Tate Liverpool catalogue 2007: 36).
248. Cang Xin catalogue 2002: 27.
249. 'Critique of everyday life', Lefebvre (Gaiger 2003: 97).
250. *The Book of Disquiet* (Harootunian 2000: 50-1).
251. 'Critique of everyday life', Lefebvre (Gaiger 2003: 97-98).
252. Yang 1994: 43.
253. Yan 2006: 351, 362-371.
254. This is the view of the Chinese critic, Huangdu. Thomas 1994:56-7 in Iwabuchi 2002.
255. Yang 1994: 167.
256. Jin 2005: 82.
257. This is the view of Huang Liangyuan, owner of Beijing ArtNow gallery. *Lightness of reality* (BANG exhibition catalogue 2006: 8).
258. By 2020, the population of migrant labourers in cities in China will reach 3-5 hundred million, compared to 4.5 million Irish immigrants going to the US from 1820-1930 (Gao 2005: 218).
259. According to Gu Zhengqing this myth was created by the Mainland's rich list which has led to many holding 2 jobs, and floods of migrant workers escaping the labours of the soil to be in the cities (Cang Xin catalogue 2002: 25).
260. The *Hundred Flowers movement* was a brief period of liberalisation begun in May 1957, when Mao encouraged the 'blooming of a hundred flowers and the contending of a hundred schools of thought' and called for the nation's intellectuals to criticise the Communist party. The resultant outpouring of expression was swiftly cut off by the end of June, when an 'anti-rightist campaign' was launched against those who had spoken out.
261. Bishop 2004: 13, 54.
262. David Laitin, editor of the Wilder House Series in politics, history and culture, which published *Gifts favors and banquets: the art of social relationships in China* (Yang 1994: back cover).
263. Laitin, back cover of Yang 1994.
264. It is only in 1992 that people started to use the word contemporary art.
265. Zuo 2006: 107.
266. Claire Bishop, 'Spectacle and participation', Tate Modern symposium on *Rethinking Spectacle*, 31 Mar 2007 (My transcription, 20 April 2007: 7).
267. Fernando Pessoa (Harootunian 2000: 2).
268. Jin 2005: 8.
269. V&A magazine, Spring 2008: 40.
270. Jin 2005: 4.
271. Debord 1992: 43.
272. 'Popular culture and the culture of the masses in contemporary China', Liu Kang (Dirlik 2000:126).
273. Jin 2005: 122.
274. Gillock 1997: 12.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has concluded that Chinese contemporary art contains elements of contradiction, complicity and ambivalence that have arisen from a situation of temporal desynchronisation. The situation is attributed to a transition between a legacy of the Maoist era, China's heritage and social fabric such as *guanxi*, global influences such as relational aesthetics and its urban quotidian.

The conclusion summarises the research on Chinese contemporary art in terms of its legacy on Chinese modernity and the global arena. As China is still undergoing a period of phenomenal growth, there is a brief reference to the future direction of Chinese contemporary art and China's urban quotidian.

Chinese modernity

Spectacle of contradiction

The ambivalence in Chinese contemporary art is encapsulated in a spectacle of contradiction, caught between the discreet, bland and meditative literati art and the spectacularity of the contemporary, between the communality of *guanxi* and

Confucianism and the search for self identity. Finally it is a spectacle of temporal desynchronisation and of contradiction. There is a tension in the dialogue between the present and the past, the local and the *glocal,* the urban and the rural.

There now appears to be a crisis where traditional aesthetics have lost their emancipatory role and have become a tool of consumer culture, threatening the supremacy of the intellectual class. The spectacularisation of art in China has been attributed as well as led to the decline of traditional Chinese aesthetics [1]. Even the keeper of the Chinese tradition, the conservative National Art Museum in Beijing, housing the national treasures of China, has allowed a show of some spectacular contemporary Chinese photography and video art in its 'hallowed halls' [2]. In other words the spectacle created by contemporary Chinese art has encroached upon the traditional myth of the elite and elitist traditional Chinese art.

Mao's ideology is premised on modernity and on the energy of the spectacle. His legacy rendered contemporary art as a form of soft power in the form of the spectacle, utilised by artists and the government alike. The spectacle, however, is its own sign and should not be considered synonymous with modernity nor capitalism. It is more than a tool of modernity or capitalism but part of a totalising ideological frame. It pervades over a lack of dialogue and connectivity. Appearance is privileged over being and people are dominated without agency to articulate resistance despite comprehending an utter emptiness [3]. The spectacle produces pseudo-community shared experience mediated by images, where citizens are united only in their separation from each other. The spectacle does not necessarily signify the presence of modernity just as TJ Clark's *Painting of modern life* dated the origin of spectacular society to late 1860s Paris and contended that it is spectacular rather than modern or capitalist. Spectacular Chinese urban cities and contemporary art are not necessarily a sign of Western modernity.

The contradictions of the Chinese spectacle are between *guanxi* and relational aesthetics, the spectacular and anti-spectacular, the perplexing similarity between the search for Utopia and the Society of the Spectacle and the commerciality of literati art.

The political claims of participatory art be they founded upon *guanxi* or relational aesthetics, are inherently oppositional to the spectacle. However, involving people or images of the communal masses, in all eventualities, collapses into being a spectacle. Insodoing and in meeting global demand, the spectacle is being increasingly asserted as the privileged solution.

Participatory art is also antagonistic to the spectacular, resisting the call to spectacularisation by art galleries brimming with glossy photographic prints and spectacular videos and 'spectacular museums that demand spectacular interventions' [4]. Yet another irony, spectacularity shares resonances with literati legacy such as masculinity, monumentality and perspective. This quality has won over the global audience by embodying a vision celebrating the spectacular, as colossal and shocking. For the local audience, it is probably the only redeeming feature of Chinese contemporary art.

The spectacle also promotes a seeking of utopia as an idealistic and romantic form, through the aestheticisation of politics, as Mao did. Similarly, Chinese artists pay tribute or at least lip service to the spectacle of modernity where its demand is also driven by that of politics and mass media. The spectacle of Chinese contemporary art serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy and as a crucial indicator of the Society of Spectacle. For example, the urban landscapes of Chinese contemporary art are not reproductions of reality, but rather a mix of memories and historical and spatial displacements that manifest a unique experience of the spectacle of globalisation. The spectacle of change reflects and resides in the success of a society and is also the sign of its vitality, shared experience, communities and fragmentation.

The final contradiction is the moral high ground adopted by the literati artists, as referenced by *Blue Mao*. Their aspiration to retain their elite status is embarrassingly contradicted in the large massive consumption arena of the art market where art's once non-commercial status is now measured by spectator numbers and by those whose very livelihoods depended upon it. The high-minded stance of blandness and meditativeness adopted by some of the literati are tinged with irony when commerciality and bespoke work are the order of the day.

Complicity

The success of Chinese contemporary art has been attributed to a process of self-exoticisation, a relational exercise that exploited the spectacle of Orientalism and spectacularity. Encompassing western ideas can contain political implications of ceding autonomy and the meaning of the work to curators, art market and collectors. It has been conjectured that 'the relationship between art and society in China today has now become simply a search for novelty', appealing to the overseas and not the domestic audience, rather than a search for identity [5].

It is a situation of temporal desynchronisation, displaying ambiguous signs of modernity, premodernity and anti-modernity, not unlike capitalism with Chinese characteristics. This condition of cultural hybridity is thought to be characteristic of Chinese postmodernity, not necessarily as a legitimate art movement but indicative of a complicity that is part of an ideological coercion [6]. It is also a cultural mercantilism as a form of *la perruque*, kowtowing to its nemesis of 'the factory of the world', supplying bespoke art that can be understood in the global arena and in response to global demand [7].

The hegemony and integrity of the Chinese contemporary art systems are thus contested and further complicated with the Chinese government being accused of using art to stimulate the economy in the short term, perhaps until the 2008 Olympics. 'Is it official China that uses contemporary art, or is it the global contemporary art system that uses official China? Or is the emerging official system of contemporary art biennials in China just one more joint venture, and who is holding the 51% stake' [8].

The complicity of Chinese contemporary art is the explication of a Chinese modernity, one that has been suggested as largely a western imposition, and has been compared to the western understanding of Neo-Confucianism [9]. In achieving a harmonious reconciliation with institutions, Chinese contemporary art has become a reductive, celebratory term. The very complicity of Chinese contemporary art

makes it a spectacle, as the latter is a tool of a dominant ideology.

The ambivalence of Chinese contemporary art

Letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is the policy for promoting the progress of the arts and the sciences and a flourishing socialist culture in our land. Different forms and styles in art should develop freely and different schools in science should contend freely. We think that it is harmful to the growth of art and science if administrative measures are used to impose one particular style of art or school of thought and to ban another. Questions of right and wrong in the arts and sciences should be settled through free discussion in artistic and scientific circles and through practical work in these fields. They should not be settled in summary fashion.

On the correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People (February 27, 1957), 1st pocket ed., pp. 49-50 (Quotations from Chairman Mao, 1966: 569)

Chinese contemporary art is situated in an ambivalent collision between a communist utopia and a modernising process. The ambivalence and anxiety is seen as an attempt to reconcile the past and the present. It is also an attempt to construct an identity in the midst of a fluid interchangeability due to the vast migrations from the rural to the urban as well as on a global scale [10]. China's ambivalence exposes the seemingly progressive choices that China is confronted with; either 'a vast breeding ground of urban unrest' [11] or 'a new era of younger more energetic and more colourful society' [12].

Chinese artists occupy an uncomfortable space between paying tribute to the spectacle of modernity, and engaged in a search for tradition and human values in an age of upheaval, just as Baudelaire's Romanticism arose in opposition to the vulgar interest of the middle class brought on by modern civilisation. They appear to be adopting a fluid interplay between an idealisation of subjectivity and a negotiation

of representation, involving a doubleness and in-betweenness of national and cultural identity formation that is enmeshed in a *guanxi* network.

There is a widespread fear that Chinese contemporary art has failed to develop its own modern discourse and that the 'inability to speak with our own language has become characteristic of Chinese contemporary art'. Channeling ideas through the imported language of modernity [13] has been castigated as borrowing indiscriminately [14]. The alternative would be a situation of dead-end protectionism or a revisionist attitude [15]. The irony is that with either approach, they are invariably incriminated with their own deprecation, ie. of Western models of purity and authenticity.

Although in pursuit of a socially, artistically and commercially alternative status, the majority of Chinese artists have a problem connecting with the average domestic audience from whom they have 'so long been disengaged' [16]. They have been accused of selling out and 'turning away from Chinese audience' [17]. It is lamented that art's ability to comment on life and society has not been fully utilised and unfortunately 'The Chinese experience of art has departed from the common people' [18]. Such detachment of contemporary art and its 'distance from mass taste' arose for many reasons. In addition to its complicity with global demand, it is also exploratory and rebellious in nature and represents a form of resistance to the current official Chinese artistic system. The stagnation of art education in China is also a major factor [19].

On the other hand, some have attributed to it a unique and distinctive language, such as the revival of the *wenren* tradition that is manifested in the current neo-Confucianist movement as indicative of a reaction against the homogenising effects of global culture.

Legacy or burden?

The pride of being Chinese

Chinese contemporary art may have undergone many changes since the inception of the underground and ideological status of the *Stars group* in 1979. However, in choosing to establish an artist commune at *Yuanmingyuan*, the Qing dynasty *Gardens of Perfect Brightness* in Beijing, sacked by the British and French armies in 1860, artists are still confronting the 'century of humiliation' and a symbol of foreign aggression, impacting on the Chinese psyche in a similar way as *Ground Zero* in New York City [20]. It is clear that artists today share the weight of historical responsibility and seek to create an environment for modern art in a society in which modernity is not a foreign imposition, but of a Chinese formulation, bestowing self-esteem and reflecting the pride of being Chinese.

The legacy of the Communist utopia

Mao's ultimate goal of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was to convert the country into a new visionary world order. Consequently, his quest for utopia, faith in modernity, subversion of tradition and desire to stimulate social change have also become important features of Chinese contemporary art [21]. This similarity between Maoism, modernisation and westernisation is a major component contributing to the feeling of ambivalence. However, there is potency in the sentiment that 'what is modernity is not important - we should pay attention to modernity formed in history' [22]. Others have espoused the view of discounting the agency of modern art in order to create a new face of contemporary art in China [23].

The legacy of the Cultural Revolution is complex, and categorical and outright condemnations do not allow for a redemptive space where people can account for having given their lives in one form or another to the Communist cause. However, art should not be predicated on social harmony, regardless of Confucian legacy or

political mandate, but should maintain a relational antagonism on exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony. The making of *(Hutong sisters)* exactly exposed the tension in sustaining a harmony that is detrimental to representation, establishing a relationship between art and society as mutually exclusive spheres. It has also brought to the fore the ubiquity of stereotypes as well as the power of the subalterns to take control.

Collective participation in the guise of relational work can be a rehumanisation of an atomised society, restructuring social bonds and providing a space for authentic creativity and communication. However, it would appear that the spectacle is the backdrop against which all discussion of collective production is staged, such as de-politicisation arising from a complicity with the dominant ideology, or indeed *la perruque* within the entrenched *guanxi* network.

The irony is that the utopian potency of the revolutionary tradition, of rustic simplicity and authenticity now seems peculiarly to possess a greater attraction compared to a life of material excess in the global urban environment. The homogenised social relations and pursuits of the Mao era were thought to impoverish everyday life through a ritualised content of pious passion, moralising feelings and social relations. This impoverishment however, is thought to be paradoxically sustained by an immense richness in political activities, captured in this slogan, '*linghun shenchu nao geming*', or 'make a revolution in the depth of your soul' [24]. Therefore, although the new Socialist market economy produced a heterogeneity that ostensibly offers unthought-of opportunities and abounding materialism, this has not managed to replace Mao's ideology or the ideological void of today.

The evidence of a fantastical historical spectacle is indicative of a need, on the part of Chinese artists, to claim a different history than that of the past forty years. Nonetheless, the Cultural Revolution has not been discounted as a cultural desert, rather a cultural complex giving birth to a significant visual legacy of Chinese art in today's global context [25].

Guanxi as alibi

Essentially, *guanxi* embodies a contradiction, of unity but also of separation. Both *guanxi* and the spectacle proclaim the predominance of appearances and assert that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance, or face [26]. It is another form of spectacle that is mediated by actions. It is also a form of soft power, with a social form and a set of etiquette that are about conformity and demands. *Guanxi* facilitates the spectacle and the practice of the spectacular as a cultivated social space, where it involves not only 'instrumentality and rational calculation', 'but also sociability, morality, intentionality and affection' [27].

Guanxi is insidious in quietly corroding away the state edifice through deflecting its ethics and diverting state distribution. It is the perfect alibi that provides justification for many forms of social intercourse as well as its lack. In adopting similar spectacular strategies as Mao, Chinese artists are implementing a totalitarian method to satisfy institutional appetites. '*Guanxi* is not a static structure but … to be defined and redefined repeatedly through active participation in social exchanges' [28]. It is a supply and demand situation where most successful Chinese artists are similar to seasoned businessmen who have identified the spectacular as being a sought after commodity. The necessity of cultivating *guanxi* is manifested and reinforced by its economic, social and political functions in everyday life.

Although it affords an informal, soft power, it cannot be reduced to any modern western notions of business dealings or corruption because the personal qualities of obligation, indebtedness and reciprocity are seen to prevail over transactions in material benefit. Chinese artists are very aware of the need to negotiate *guanxi* carefully in order to benefit from an indispensable and close working relationship with curators, critics and other art establishments. Conveniently, the relational element that *guanxi* shares with the socially aware art in the west, ostensibly giving primacy to the ordinary people, is akin to the original socialist utopian ideal.

Whereas *Blue Mao* references and confronts history to underscore its vacillations

and to challenge the reality of the present moment, *CWIBJ* departs from *Blue Mao* to initiate a relationship with Beijing's quotidian and in the process uncovers the implacability of *guanxi*. However, the artificiality of collaboration with local inhabitants and artists led to a moment of reflection, without recourse to the agency of the spectacle and subsequently to *LIBJ,* that privileged the urban quotidian.

Mao in fact failed as a terminator. *Guanxi* appears to have survived the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. The bond of solidarity between individuals instigated by *guanxi* is now united towards a new direction, where the metaphysical pursuit of the end and the 'spectacular prospect' of the future world are no longer stressed [29]. Instead it is a pursuit of a 'quality of existence' and the 'eternal present' that is characteristic of the Society of the Spectacle [30].

Guanxi is still the ruling structure that keeps the myth of the communal in action. It in fact perfectly suits the meaning of myths, evidenced in a whole vocabulary of words, images, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, belief and perception. They are 'the way things are', as people in a particular society believe them to be [31]. The building up of social capital has functioned as a noose and artists are equally embedded by the public nature of obligations incurred though a self-conscious manipulation of face and related symbols [32].

CWIBJ, on the other hand, indicates a refusal of reciprocity and the rejection felt by being part of the diaspora. Face to face encounters are frustrated, indicating rejection, an act of refusal to bear witness to a connectedness; a refusal to communicate, an inscrutability and a departure from the norm. Additionally, the lack of baptism from the Cultural Revolution has increased the feeling of rejection on the part of the diaspora, be it real or imagined. They can only seek consolation in being able to resort to a somewhat privileged vantage point of distance, a wealth of hybridised and cross-cultural strategies; a position that is now, ironically, also occupied by the Mainland Chinese.

Confucianism

Dealings with the gentleman are as bland as water, while dealings with the small man are as pleasing to the taste as new wine.

Zhuangzi jishi [33]

Confucianism impacts upon *guanxi* as the dominant code of conduct in Chinese society, and on the literati artists to define the nature of a cultivated person. Since the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), every Confucian subject has always been defined not by essence but by context. The interconnectedness of *guanxi* derives from the Confucian code of conduct, where the character for *ren*, the Confucian virtue of 'humanity' or 'humaneness' is written with a 'human' radical and the sign for 'two', designating the primordial form of human–relatedness. What is thought of as humane is never thought of in the singular. Thus the focus is neither the intrinsic rights of the individuals nor the good of the society, but one that occupies the space between self and society.

Confucian ethics place emphasis on the importance of human relationships and portray a Confucian gentleman as someone who would value human harmony and seek interpersonal accommodation [34]. It is also a source of an inscrutability misconstrued by some observers of China as indifference, passive terrorism or invisible aggression [35]. This is based on the perception of a fundamental neutrality of all nature and man, the ineluctable blandness that is the mark of the *shenren* (sage) [36]. This may transpire into a strategy of non-interference, such as keeping away from another country's internal affairs, and non-engagement, such as the meaning of face, or silence as a form of philosophical speech [37].

Literati artists of today have to negotiate with the demands of global requirements which contradict the Confucian ethics of humaneness and harmony. The competitiveness of the global arena applauds individualism and personal discord is often the price to pay. The irony is that although Mao attempted to renew Chinese society through the destruction of the old including Confucianism, he has been revered on the level of Confucius, along with Laozi, Marx and Buddha etc. [38].

The revival of Confucianism is symptomatic of a return to history to counter the urban disconnected way of living and hedonistic consumerism. A good explication of the Confucian code of conduct is the comparison between the opulence of the *Palais de Versailles* in Paris and the austerity of Chinese palaces, where literati artists adopted eremitism and a strong work ethic in the renunciation of earthly possessions. This Asian identity, sometimes dismissed as a *nouveau riche* Asianness, is considered affirmative and forward thinking. Confucianism appears to have found sympathetic ears among First World dialogues looking to relieve the crisis of capitalism. This revival also serves the purpose of a rising Chinese hegemony where many Chinese critics are of the opinion that China should reposition itself to target Asian audiences and expand on this new Confucianism that is intimately related to the so called East Asian economic miracle [39].

The urban quotidian

Art and society

But certainly for their present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence… illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.

Feuerbach, Preface to the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity* [40]

The industrialisation of China appears to have turned its citizens into image-junkies, a most irresistible form of mental pollution [41]. China resembles a modern society in the West, defined and dominated by an integrated spectacle which becomes more real and seductive than reality itself, and contemporary art is part of that spectacle [42]. China has arrived at a stage akin to western bureaucratic capitalism, yet retaining some elements of the totalitarian concentrated spectacle [43]. It is colonised by a hyperreality where you can no longer interrogate the reality or

unreality, the truth or falsity of something. Debord's 'integrated spectacle' of 1988 is a good description of China's present condition, its characteristics of eternal present captured China's impoverishment of memory, divorced from historical continuity, in which the past is only accessed through pastiche or retro styles. Its idea of passivity also fully reflects China's masses, dominated by microeconomics. It affirms an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted, where reality is continually affirmed and experience enhanced.

The visual belies the reality of cultural politics in China today. Materialism and newly acquired financial power project a happy face but in reality do not offer democratic freedom. The commodification of Mao and other Cultural Revolution relics can be read as a collective anxiety of China's Socialist form of capitalism [44]. For example, *Mao-re* may be a popular longing for the charismatic leader in an age of growing institutionalisation but is also a collective voyeurism into the forbidden realm of politics [45].

It is a situation of temporal desynchronisation where China is catching up with itself. Contemporary art in China is thought to have a self-proclaimed identity, owing much of its existence in the microtopia of the international art community. Its popularity is more a reflection of the global international circuit than its home ground. Personal and private ends are often attained without recourse to ethics, tradition or society, antagonism or democracy.

However, the vision of the good life has changed from the Romantic and Utopian valorising of completeness, transcendence and the communal to the heterogeneous life of today [46]. The ambivalence of Chinese contemporary art echoes that of its society, a situation where comfort and choice do not completely dispel discontent. Pioneers of this sensibility often present mundane aspects of everyday life in which they appear to have lost all faith [47]. They highlighted a 'paradox of an inner emptiness in the face of the pursuit of individualism of the late 20th century society' [48].

The ambivalent and contradictory situation of Chinese contemporary art rides on the roller coaster of China's escalating transformation. Global influences impacts on its society and individuals in the form of another Cultural Revolution. Chinese contemporary art will inevitably continue to be shaped by the future, and residing within that are personal development and digital technologies.

The future

The core of the self

In the pursuit of an economic success, China has given communism a new meaning and may appear to be adopting the ideology of non-ideology [49]. However, such an ideological void is a myth. Having renounced communism's utopian illusion, the Chinese have come face to face with globalism's virtual reality. Having discovered the self, Confucianism comes along with its intrinsic properties of egalitarianism! The loss of traditional culture and the rupture of personal living spaces from the onset of a disrupted path of the opening up of China have made this material utopia into a mirage [50].

In 1949, an overwhelming 99 percent of Chinese people would treat the notion of 'individualism' (*geren zhuyi*) as a term for selfishness and self-gain [51]. This has left a deep imprint on popular habits and attitudes. More than 50 years on, the issue of the self appeared to gather primacy and 'self-image appeared as a deeply meaningful part of contemporary art…' [52].

The iconographical characteristics of new movements such as that of the *New Generation*, the individual's daily routine, self-portraits and portraits of urban life may be read as a shift from collectivism to individualism. However, as we have seen in the concluding sections on Confucianism and *guanxi,* humanity for the Chinese is never in the singular and is about the relationship between the self and society [53]. There are many exhibitions that acknowledge the rising consciousness of individual existence and the ambiguous and unstable nature of a new society.

Song Dong's *We are together, comrade rural workers* held in Beijing in 2004, addresses the antagonistic relationship between the self and the social phenomenon of *mingong* (migrant workers) [54]. Although the primary focus of Wang Anyi appears to remain on herself, gathering historical sources and recording her everyday life in fact reveal an obsession with her environment and heritage.

The realisation of the impossibility of utopia and the futile search for the good life of modernism appear to return to the self. However, the perfect everyday life that is now sought by the majority in China is a combination of the archaic and the modern, the egalitarian, communal and ideological meeting the secular and commercial, not unlike the pursuits of modernity in the west. The secular utopia of the postmodern era may have largely fixed its new location in the solitary, private, individual body such as the private kingdom of the *flaneur* but there is an inevitable anxiety in meeting 'the epistemological maze of the postmodern world' [55].

The issue of the self for the diasporic Chinese, is a dialectical negotiation of a hybrid cultural identity authenticated by more than race, ethnicity or nationality. The nomadic nature of many diasporic Chinese does not necessarily represent a rootless existence, nor is the identification with China about a confinement to traditional boundaries. Ultimately the core that is the self cannot be fabricated nor deconstructed. The basis of identity thus rests on the individual and their negotiation with the many manifestations of the collective [56].

Second Cultural Revolution

Cyber-guanxi, generation gap and the www.

The term Second Cultural Revolution is now widely used to describe the changes in China, from the westernisation of Chinese contemporary life to the Tibet issue, to the vibrancy of Chinese contemporary art and the virtual world [57].

The return to the self has been read as an indication of artists' inability to relate to their society at large, taking refuge in a fantasy world of the *Internet* and computer games, especially for the younger generation born after the 1970s. Not only is memory only of the eternal present, it has also become virtual. It is a situation of temporal desynchronisation where the memory is largely image based, isolated, fragmented, temporary, unstable, distorted and confusing. Digital technology has made it possible to 'replace and manipulate and fabricate memory so that it is not a continuum but a fluid and highly variable experience' [58].

It has been said that the younger generation worships the west [59]. The process of westernisation in China is perhaps more appropriately called Americanisation, with youngsters particularly drawn to the American way of life; American education and speech, cinema and food such as *McDonald's*, *Kentucky Fried Chicken* and *Starbucks*. It is generally thought that Chinese society has undergone a factitious separation and disconnection of generations over the last 100 years. The aftermath of the Cultural Revolution has confirmed the collapse of the Socialist utopia and a lapse in history [60]. The young in China are considered to be the main part of the future of society because their 'second' culture often expresses a special character and is treated as an important forecast for the future [61].

The Second Cultural Revolution is also about the virtual world of digital communications. The reality and consequences of globalisation in China has led to 'the upscaling of social space from the corporeal to the virtual', in terms of distance learning, online shopping, teleconferencing and surfing the net. Even primary schoolchildren have been given individual email addresses. This virtuality and the continuously migrating position that is the new option for many Chinese is the embodiment of a new identity of the *glocal* citizen [62].

China will soon boast more *Internet* users than any other country. Despite its relative youth and its attendant censorship, China's *Internet* community is a world unto itself, with more than 70% under the age of thirty. Often they are single children with no siblings, searching for virtual friendships. Paradoxically it is the limitations that make the *Internet* so popular in China, offering the challenge of *la perruque*. There is also

an enormous pent up demand for entertainment, amusement and social interaction and the *Internet* fills gaps and provides what is unavailable elsewhere [63].

This collectivist revolution superficially empowers the masses, giving them freedom to publish and communicate, recalling the first poster, the *Fifth Modernization* in 1978 that openly advocated further individual liberties. It caused a spectacle as it espoused that freedom was the only modernisation that really mattered, rather than improved living standards [64]. It would appear that the ruling party has started to pay better heed to the grievances of China's urban masses. Urbanites have won greater freedom to spend their rising income as they wish, although the grassroots experiments in greater village democracy seems to have disappeared. Ostensibly, with access to the *Internet* and mobile phones, China's middle classes have the tools to organise and to oppose. The rural communities, on the other hand, are less fortunate, and thousands of village protests were thought to be ignored or suppressed [65].

Some fear that the information superhighway is a breeding ground for anti-intellectualism and narcissism. The cyberspace is thought of as an enormously encouraging democratic field open to all users [66]. *Wikipedia*, *MySpace, Facebook* and *Blogger* assimilate individual voices and personalities. The search engines eliminate context and perspective. However, online communities lack any natural checks against destructive anti-social behaviour which can be fostered by anonymity. They also serve as an averaging function that can suppress excellence and elevate the commonplace. 'What I've seen is a loss of insight and subtlety, a disregard for the nuances of considered opinions, and an increased tendency to enshrine the official or normative beliefs of an organization' [67].

As online interaction grows, it is feared that older forms of communication and community will be supplanted. Ironically, this can constitute another collectivist activity, a cyber-Maoist ideology, or cyber-*guanxi*, another form of *la perruque* with a new platform for social networking. It is feared that what Mao started forty years ago is now bloodlessly enforced with technological measures [68]. Online collectivism transcends national boundaries and the spectacle has traversed into the virtual

realm.

In the postmodernist imagination, alienation is everywhere and is therefore nowhere, power is dispersed and so impossible to seize. The individuals in the global community will only ever feel at home, liberated and content if they give up looking for a world more real, a social organisation more free and a happiness more profound than those that surround them now. Ambiguities must be allowed to coexist. The search and analysis could be continued to be refined to attain a meeting of the mythic, the ideological and the utopian [69], or could contend with the fact that there is no Elysian field on the other side of the barricade [70], in other words to see through the myth of the spectacle!

But this spectacle belongs to a new era, that of marketisation in the guise of freedom and equality. *Socialism with Chinese characteristics* has its own agenda. The New Leftist scholar, Wang Hui suggested that the tanks that suppressed the hopeful intellectual flourishings of the 1980s were working on behalf of market fundamentalism rather than Maoism, contrary to the view of the repression as a reassertion of Maoist ideology [71]. The authoritarianism was acting to silence workers' anxieties about inequality by repackaging Marx and Mao with economists such as Milton Friedman and Friedrick Hayek [72]. Ultimately, attending to the self involves freedom. Or does it? Many western viewers may be surprised that the theme of director Zhang Yimou's blockbuster film *Hero* is a defence of totalitarianism against the chaos and insecurity of freedom.

As artist He Jinwei said in the 2006 *Long March Yan'an Project*, 'To represent a historical period is not simply to copy its zeitgeist or to emulate the rest of the world, but to pursue an historical memory in reconsidering the state of contemporary art,... its transition from creation to consumption and to identify its contradictions, problems and possibilities' [73].

Footnotes to Conclusion

1. Jin 2005: 8.
2. Xenia Tetmajer Von Przerwa writing for 'Zooming into focus': Chinese contemporary photography and video from the Haudenschild collection at the national art museum of China, Beijing. It was collected by Eloise and Chris Haudenschild in late 1990s. This is the first retrospective ever held there. The collection débuted at San Diego State and University Art gallery in October 2003. *Yishu.* Mar 06: 112. Other critics who appear to agree with this definition of 'spectacular' include William Wood (University of British Columbia) who asserted that 'contemporary Chinese art is spectacle and spectacular culture forms. Particularly, they are so spectacular and therefore worth looking at'. 'A dialogue on contemporary Chinese art: the one day workshop "meaning, image, and word'. *Yishu*, Dec 2006: 86. Serge Guilbaut a delegate at the same conference suggested that contemporary Chinese artists were under the patronage and influence of this particular social issue (spectacularity). Even the keeper of tradition, the conservative National art museum in Beijing, housing the national treasures of China, has allowed a show in Nov 5- 20 2005, of some spectacular contemporary Chinese photography and video art in its 'hallowed halls', as Xenia Tetmajer Von Przerwa wrote in *Yishu.*
3. 'Spectacle and participation', Claire Bishop, *Rethinking spectacle*, Tate modern 31 Mar 2007 (My transc 20 April 2007: 7).
4. Even major Chinese museums in Beijing such as the contemporary Today and Songzhuan New Museums, and the traditional Agricultural Hall are raising their stakes to keep up with their western counterparts such as Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao and the impending Herzog de Meuron extension to Tate Modern, London (Andrea Fraser's 'Spectacle and museum', *Rethinking spectacle* symposium at the Tate Modern, 31 Mar 2007).
5. *Art Asia Pacific*, Fall 06: 66. Huang Lingyuan, owner of the commercial gallery Bang (*Beijing Art Now Gallery*) is of the opinion that art collecting in China is still so new that it has hardly reached the level of 'collecting', rather it is still in the period of 'buying and selling art' (*The lightness of reality* BANG catalogue). The critic Huangzhuan is of the opinion that Chinese contemporary art should be careful when entering the international arena so that they are able to retain a real meaning in their identity. 'What is modernity is not important- we should pay attention to modernity formed in history. Lu Peng critic (My translation with *Yishudangdai* (*Artnow*). Tue. 27 Sep 2006 with Miaomiao, a student at Central Academy of fine art, Beijing).
6. Jin 2005: 69.
7. Ming Tiampo of Carleton University, speaking at a conference in Chelsea College of art, May, 2008.
8. Writer Felix Schober (*Yishu.* Sep 2005: 26).
9. *Confucius envy: the burden of the Chinese commentator to shape the sage*, Professor Rudolf G. Wagner, Heidelberg University, 14 April 2008. 'Faces of Confucius' International lecture series, Edinburgh, Confucius institute.
10. Critic Huang Yan writing on artist Cang Xin's *Identity exchange.*
11. George Wehrfritz, 'Nightmare cities'. Newsweek, 26 Dec 1994: 106-8.
12. Tang 2000: 278.
13. 'Occidentalism: A theory of counter discourse in post Mao China' (Chen 2006: 156).
14. Zuo Jing, *Poetic reality: Rereading Jiangnan*: 86. *Art now* (also in conjunction with the catalogue 'Poetic reality').
15. Including critics Zuo Jing and Gao Minglu.
16. 'Some thoughts on art game: an experience of agency in contemporary art' by Yu Christina Yu. *Yishu*, Mar 2007: 85. *Documenta*12 magazines feature on education.

17. 'Zhong Biao and the "Grobal" Imagination' by Paul Manfredi. *Yishu*, Dec 2007: 72-83.
18. One of them is Feng boyi. He described his experience of Japans art education in 2000. Together with artists Xubing and Zhang Peili, they worked with young students who are allowed easy access to contemporary art resulting in a freedom of thought and an understanding of art's relationship with life and society. 'About the recreational experience of contemporary art', *Art China*, translated in Beijing, with Li Yanling, 4/10/06.
19. Feng Boyi quoted by Yu Christina Yu in 'Some thoughts on art game: an experience of agency in contemporary art', the *Documenta12* magazine feature on education (Yishu Mar 2007: 85).
20. This period began from China's defeat in the Opium wars of 1840 through the loss of Taiwan, the various Japanese invasions and the civil war right until the Communist Revolution of 1949. The Imperial Gardens were entirely destroyed by troops from Britain and France in 1860 (Leonard 2008: 10. Mark Leonard is executive director of the European Council on Foreign relations. Previously, he was the director of Foreign policy at the centre fro European Reform on transatlantic relations, the middle East and EU-China relations).
21. Jiang 2007: 58-64.
22. Lu Peng, art critic (My translation of *Artnow* (*Yishudangdai*) 27 Sep 06 with Miaomiao, student at CAFA).
23. Wang Guangyi, artist. (My translation of *Artnow* (*Yishudangdai*) 27 Sep 06 with Miaomiao, student at CAFA).
24. Tang 2000: 278.
25. Jiang 2007: 32.
26. Yan 2006: 351.
27. Feuerbach, preface to the second edition of *The essence of Christianity* (Debord 1995: 11).
28. Debord 1994: 10/14.
29. Jin 2005: 4.
30. Bishop 2007: 10.
31. 'Toward the demythification of US images in Chinese first person books'. Lu Liu, Purdue University (1980: xv) (Heisey 2000: 87).].
32. 'Face and favor: the Chinese power game', Kwang-kuo Hwang (Chau 2006-7: 316-329).
33. 'Outer chapter 20: *Shanmu*', *Zhuzi jicheng*, vol. 3:300 (Jullien 2004: 55).
34. 'Face and favor: the Chinese power game', Kwang-kuo Hwang (Chau 2006-7: 316).
35. Heisey 2000: 47.
36. Blandness is a banal virtue, it is invisible, it is that through which all is realised, it is the goal most difficult to maintain also the most ordinary of ideals, within the reach of the 'everyday couple' (Jullien 2004: 50).
37. 'Kenya and China – the sound of silence' (The Economist 9 Feb 2008: 58).
38. Barme 1996: 20.
39. Jameson and Miyoshi 1999: 14.
40. Feuerbach, preface to the second edition of *The essence of Christianity* (Debord 1995: 11).
41. Sontag 1979: 24. Notwithstanding 'individual predispositions towards passivity, dependency and waste produced the conditions that give rise to industrial societies' (David Cross 2007), and not the remit of this paper.
42. Baudrillard in Plant 1992: 6.
43. Debord 2006: 8.
44. Chen 2006: 32.
45. According to Chinese sociologist Wang Yanzhong (Tang 2000: 283).

46. Tang 2000: 283.
47. Gao 2005: 375.
48. Which helps to retroactively release the utopian potency of a revolutionary tradition, ie. consumerism makes them wish for revolution!
49. Alan Hudson, 12th July, 2008, Director of the Department for continuing education. 'Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy: the pursuit of modernity in China', Leadership programmes for China, University of Oxford, at the *Battle for China* conference, Norton Rose LLP, 3 More London Riverside, SE1 2AQ.
50. Gao 2005: 230.
51. Confucian philosopher Liang Shuming argued in his book in 1949 that China has a 'relationship-based' (*guanxi benwei*) social order as opposed to say the British and American's 'individual-based' and the former Soviet Union's 'society-based' societies. *The Essential meanings of Chinese culture* 1949: 50 (Yang 1994: 295).
52. Critic Leng Lin is of the opinion that Song Dong's works are all related to self-perception (*Yishu*, Mar 2007: 85).
53. Curator Lenglin's exhibition *It's me* in the Worker's Cultural Palace inside the Confucius temple, Beijing in 2000 was one of the earliest initiatives. The fact that it was closed down indicates its non-reception from the officialdom. 'Fragmented memory and energy: Chinese contemporary art and its multiple layers of ideology, Carol Lu's paper at Cultural memory: an international symposium', March 25, House of world cultures, Berlin (Yishu, Jun 2006: 20-27).
54. Critic Leng Lin is of the opinion that Song Dong's works are all related to self-perception (*Yishu*, Mar 2007: 85).
55. Chen 2006: 160.
56. Ibid: 46.
57. Savetibet.com.
58. 'Fragmented memory and energy: Chinese contemporary art and its multiple layers of ideology', Carol Lu, *International symposium on cultural memory*, March 25, House of world cultures, Berlin (Yishu Jun 2006: 20-27).
59. 'The Culture Show goes to China' BBC 2, 4 Aug 2008, 7-8pm.
60. Tang 2000: 4.
61. 'A manifestation of the future', on the second nationwide art academy of oil painting department graduation show: 166. Feng Boyi. *Art today* (My translation with Li Yanling, CAFA student, Beijing, Thursday 5th October 2006).
62. Glocal is a term used by curator Hou Hanru when describing one of the four women Chinese artists, Shen Yuan, at the 2007 Venice Biennale, who lives in Europe and China. Venice Biennale 2007 website on 21 July 2007, on *Everyday Miracles* with Four Woman Artists in the Chinese Pavilion at the *Arsenale* and *Vergini Gardens*.
63. The biggest market involves the delivery of mobile internet content to mobile phones, with over half a billion mobile phone users. More than half of them use their phones to buy ringtone jokes and pictures. Hard news are constrained but Internet sites such as *Sina* and *Sohu* provide a steady supply of gossip, features, dabs of propaganda and slightly salacious stories and photos. *Tencent* offers instant messaging service and *Myspace* (The Economist, Feb 2 2008: 69).
64. 'The party congress in China, China, beware' (*The Economist* print edition, Oct 11 2007).
65. Ibid.
66. Said, Edward, August 4, 2003. It was his view that the world wide protests before the war began in Iraq would not have been possible if not for the existence of these worldwide alternative communities, Counterpunch, www. Counterpunch. Org. (Tate handouts at the symposium 'Orientalism Revisited: Art and the politics of representation', June 2008).
67. 'Martial development: *Wushu* and the Second Cultural Revolution' website,

Jaron Lanier. No posting date, accessed 26 June 08.
68. Ibid.
69. Lefebvre 1971: 104.
70. Plant 1992: 6-7.
71. Leonard 2008: 30.
72. Ibid: 31.
73. This is a quote from 'Artworks for the Long March Yan'an Project' by Chen Shaofeng (*Yishu* Sep 2006: 101).

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GLOSSARY

Bao

To repay, reciprocity.

Double Happiness

Double Happiness is a Chinese character that is made up of the doubling of the character meaning happiness, traditionally written as black type on red paper. It originated in the ancient Tang Dynasty, where a young couple met and married under very propitious circumstances. They therefore decided to double the happiness character to represent their feelings on a red piece of paper and put it on the wall to express the happiness for the two events, the wedding and the groom's examination success. The word is now in general use (About.com. 7 January 2008).

Four olds

The 'four olds' referred to by Mao were, old custom, old culture, old habits, and old ideas (*Wikipedia*, 20 Jan 08).

Guanxi

In his book *The Essential meanings of Chinese culture*, published in 1949, Confucian philosopher Liang Shuming argued that China has a 'relationship-based' (*guanxi benwei*) social order as opposed to say the British and American's 'individual-based' and the former Soviet Union's 'society-based' societies (Yang 1994: 295).

The art of *guanxi* can be seen as a dominant theme of the Chinese *minjian*, operating not as 2 separate groups of people, but 'two dimensions of social existence' in 'a transitional space between the state and fully developed self-organising social formation' (Yang 1994: 289).

The link between *guanxixue* and kinship can be made only if we take kinship in its broadest sense, which Meyer Fortes defined as a system of social classification and

fiduciary morality in which can be found 'the mutual dependence of person on person in a network of dyadic reciprocities' (Farates 1969, 'Kinship and the axiom of amity' in *Kinship and the social order*, Chicago, Aldine). The genealogy of *guanxixue* was traced to ancient forms of ritual and kinship government before the eruption of the centralised and bureaucratic state.

The art of *guanxi* has a rhizome form and uncentered and meandering growth that quickly makes itself a nuisance in the centripetal 'arboresecent' structure of the sate (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:3-25). Rhizomatic *guanxi* are 'non- hierarchical, horizontal multiplicities which cannot be subsumed within a unified structure, whose components form random, unregulated networks in which any element may be connected with any other element' (Bogue 1989: 107 and Yang 1994: 308).

Guanxixue

The study or art of *guanxi*. Many writers including Yang also believe that the excesses of the Cultural Revolution started the onset of *guanxixue* (Yang: 203).

Hutongs

Historic lanes in Beijing known as the 'veins of the city', lined with grey, ancient single storey courtyard housing built for the ordinary people in Beijing. They marked the historical vicissitudes and features of different stages, and contained a rich cultural flavour. They are like museums of folk customs and popular charms, and preserved the stamped brands of people's social life...like an encyclopaedia about Beijing. The constructions were a continuation of rammed earth houses since the beginning of time. Surviving houses were probably built around the Yuan (1260-1368) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties. The longitudinal and latitudinal lines observed ancient divine Imperial rites such as Zhou Li (the Rites of Zhou).

Mianzi

Mianzi means face, a function of perceived social position and prestige within one's social network. It denotes an individual's social position gained by successfully performing one or more specific social roles that are well recognised by others. It is

crucial for the Chinese to maintain *mianzi* (face) and do 'face work' in front of others within the same social network. *Mianzi* can be derived from socially ascribed status such as sex, physical appearance, family background, status, personal qualities of knowledge, strength, ability, social or non-personal factors of wealth, authority and social connections (Hwang 2006: 333).

Minjian

Minjian is a realm of sociable people-to-people relationships, also known as the 'people's realm', which arose in the 1980s referring to an autonomous realm of social activity which is non-governmental and separate from formal bureaucratic channels. It is 'where the ethics of kinship, friendship, and reciprocity have since ancient times, enjoyed a canonical status in both Confucian and peasant traditions' (Yang 1994: 203, 287). It is also where *guanxi* operates not as 2 separate groups of people, but 'two dimensions of social existence' in 'a transitional space between the state and fully developed self-organising social formation' (Yang 1994: 289).

Renqing

Human feelings, human sentiments, personal tie of affect, obligation and favour. *Renqing* emphasises the informal, unselfish and sympathetic give-and-take that governs relationships and social exchanges. However, the recipient of *renqing* is expected to pay back the debt of gratitude, and in actuality, accounts are kept rather strict. Debts of *renqing* are remembered in detail and enforced by feelings of guilt and shame in those who fail to fulfil the obligations. Therefore *renqing* is more than emotional feelings and involves social exchanges. As the Chinese proverb illustrates, 'if you have received a drop of beneficence from other people, you should return to them a fountain of beneficence' (Heisey 2000: 49).

Siqing (four cleanups)

Action to eradicate rural corruption in the areas of accounting, granary supplies, property accumulation, and work-point allocation. Part of the *Socialist Education*

Campaign begun in 1963 by Mao and others in the CCP to re-establish socialist morality in the countryside.

Wenren

They are a select and self-selecting group of literati, also known as scholar-painters, to distinguish from and to raise themselves above professional painters. The latter trained as portrait painters and decorative artists, produced a wide range of work intended for private houses, palaces and temples, and worked in ateliers. Their names are very rarely recorded and their work was not collected or preserved.

The literati, on the other hand, is a member of the exclusive, educated class, who rose within the examination system to official rank in the administration of the country. They were educated in calligraphy and often also in painting, which ranked high among the cultural concerns of this group. By tradition they did not sell their works, which were shown and given to friends. They prided themselves in a style which is understated in colours, content and brush strokes. There is a tradition of literati as recluses and their leisure time was often spent in the seclusion of their studies in a quiet garden with a few congenial friends to discuss calligraphy, music, poetry, and painting.