Fine Lines: The Subtleties of Cultural Translation and the *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*

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Abstract

Founded in 2002 and edited in Vancouver, British Columbia, the *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* is the first English-language journal devoted solely to the discussion of Chinese contemporary art and culture. This thesis argues that *Yishu*'s development as a publication, as well as recurrent strains of discourse throughout *Yishu,* concern the issue of cultural translation. Chinese contemporary artists and scholars must navigate the tensions of cross-cultural exchange in their work due to the influence of Western critical theory in Chinese contemporary art discourse, an unequal cultural dynamic within global scholarship which prioritizes the English language, and the Western-dominated international art world. The analysis of *Yishu*'s transcribed dialogues on the topic of Chinese art criticism, articles concerning the work of prolific Chinese artist Xu Bing, and documentation of the Long March Project, reveals that artists and scholars of contemporary Chinese art negotiate the binaries between Chinese and English, East and West, resistance and accommodation, universality and particularity, in order to locate a discursive space of cultural exchange that resists arbitrary categorization based on geopolitical boundaries and cultural imperialism.

Fondé en 2002 et édité à Vancouver, Colombie-Britannique, le *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* est le premier journal en anglais qui discute exclusivement l'art contemporain et la culture Chinoise. Cette thèse présente le développement du *Yishu* comme une publication concernant l'issue de la traduction culturelle. À cause de l'influence de la philosophie de l'Ouest dans le discours de l'art contemporain Chinois, la dynamique culturelle inégale qui privilège la langue anglaise et le marché de l'art dominé par le Ouest, les artistes et les érudits de l'art contemporain Chinois doivent se frayer un chemin parmi les tensions créées par cet échange interculturel. L'analyse des dialogues du *Yishu* envers la critique de l'art en Chine, les articles à propos de l'artiste prolifique Xu Bing et la documentation du projet Long March révèlent que les artistes et les érudits de l'art contemporain Chinois doivent négocier les oppositions entre le Chinois et l'Anglais, l'Est et l'Ouest, la résistance et l'adaptation, les aspects universels et les aspects particuliers pour localiser un espace interculturel de discours qui résiste la catégorisation arbitraire basé sur les limites géopolitiques et l'impérialisme culturel.

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Introduction

By the late 1990s the experimental, introspective and political art coming out of Chinese studios had reached critical mass, exploding onto the global art scene, and demanding the attention of art professionals worldwide. Art produced since the loosening of government censorship during the 1985 Avant-Garde Movement adopted a new artistic vocabulary, manipulating traditional calligraphy, using the cynical realist and political pop styles to create paintings critical of the government, and initiating performance art projects that portrayed images both intense and violent. Arresting in their cultural reinterpretations and social engagement, these art forms quickly came to represent contemporary Chinese art on the world stage. After the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, many artists chose life in the diaspora, emigrating to Western countries in search of opportunities. It appeared that China's creative isolation had ended, as many Chinese contemporary artists rapidly developed an international following, attracting art scholars and collectors to participate in the growing Chinese art world. Internationalism became a byword of Chinese contemporary art, and indeed set its course for the future.[1]

[1] Gao Minglu explains that 'contemporary' Chinese art refers to the art that emerged following the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The Cultural Revolution was a movement instigated by Mao Zedong in which tradition and capitalism were persecuted, and artistic creation was regarded as a valuable tool in serving the masses and promoting communist revolution. By the early 1980s, intellectual life in China began to flourish. The modernization of Chinese society was considered in light of the translated works of Western philosophy, history and aesthetics that had begun to circulate. In the Chinese art world, this intellectual opening ultimately resulted in the 1985 Avant-Garde Movement, which saw the growth of experimental art drawing from both Chinese tradition and Western art practices. During this period, the artistic styles of 'political pop' and 'cynical realism' emerged. Political pop paintings were modeled after American and Soviet pop art, and often tackled political topics. Cynical realist paintings explored existential issues, oftentimes through portraits that would distort the figures portrayed, as Gao Minglu states, in order to symbolize the "fundamental absurdity of reality." The 1985 Avant-Garde Movement came to an end with the Tiananmen Square Massacre (1989), after which intellectual life in China came to a halt for a number of years until China opened economically in the 1990s. Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 1, 65–66, 100–105, 255–266, 361. Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 18–20. Julia F. Andrews, "The Art of the Cultural Revolution," in *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966–76,* ed. Richard King (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 48–55. Melissa Chiu, *Breakout: Chinese Art Outside China* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 2006), 7–15.

The exhibition *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (1998), presented at the Asia Society Galleries in New York, epitomized the internationalism of Chinese contemporary art and illuminated a significant discursive shift in art criticism that had been culminating over the course of the 1990s. *Inside Out* was among the first major international exhibitions in the United States to exclusively showcase the works of Chinese artists created over the last two decades of the twentieth century. In addition to exploring works by artists from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, *Inside Out* shone the spotlight on artists who left greater China for the West, and whose expatriation resulted in increasingly complex formations of cultural identity. Curated by émigré Chinese curators Gao Minglu and Hou Hanru, the terms 'hybridity' and 'transnationalism,' emphasized by postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, were the exhibition's keywords; *Inside Out*'s curatorial project highlighted the trans-cultural realities that influenced the lives and work of many contemporary Chinese artists, and this postcolonial perspective established the discursive trajectory of contemporary Chinese art criticism that was to come.[2] From this moment forward, global interest in contemporary art emerging from China continued to increase in momentum, and rapidly so. After having been virtually non-existent on the international art market, by 2007 the domestic Chinese art market had already displayed substantial development, its global competence illustrated by the dominance of international contemporary art sales in 2011–2012.[3] The Chinese art world's monumental growth was

[2] Vishakha N. Desai and David A. Ross, "Foreword," in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art,* ed. Gao Minglu (Berkeley: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Asia Society Galleries, 1998), 7–8. Hou Hanru and Gao Minglu, "Strategies of Survival in the Third Space: A Conversation on the Situation of Overseas Chinese Artists in the 1990s," in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art,* ed. Gao Minglu (Berkeley: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Asia Society Galleries, 1998), 183–189. Paul Gladston, "'Besiege Wei to Rescue Zhao': Cultural Translation and the Spectral Condition(s) of Artistic Criticality in Contemporary China," *Modern China Studies* 23, Issue 1 (January 2016): 107–108.

[3] "2007 Art Market Trends," *Artprice,* http://imgpublic.artprice.com/pdf/trends2007.pdf (accessed 2 June 2016), 16–19. "Contemporary Art Market 2011/2012: The ArtPrice Annual Report," *Artprice,* http://imgpublic.artprice .com/pdf/artprice-contemporary-2011-2012-en.pdf (accessed 2 June 2016), 18. "The Art Market in 2012: A Dialogue Between East and West," *Artprice*, http://imgpublic.artprice.com/pdf/the_art_market2012_online_en.pdf

mirrored by an explosion of English-language discourse surrounding contemporary Chinese art. Amid this sea of discourse, the *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* has remained a respected voice among the cacophony of voices anxious to be heard.

Founded in 2002, *Yishu* is the first English-language journal devoted solely to the discussion of Chinese contemporary art and culture. Edited in Vancouver, British Columbia and inaugurated only a few years after *Inside Out*, *Yishu*'s founding editors, themselves members of the Chinese diaspora in Canada, were similarly committed to engaging with Chinese contemporary art through the lens of globalization. From the first issue, contemporary Chinese art was situated as a hybrid and transnational phenomenon steeped in a long history of cultural exchange, the specificities of each individual artist, art work and exhibition rich for further exploration.[4] Furthermore, *Yishu* was created to provide a space for theoretical discussion in an emerging Chinese art world which had so far lacked a sound critical environment; publisher Katy Hsiu-chih Chien outlined the mission of *Yishu* as filling this substantial void, writing in the inaugural issue that despite the growing interest in Chinese contemporary art worldwide, "little theoretical writing devoted to the discussion of Chinese contemporary art in an intellectual context" was being produced.[5] To this day, each issue includes a diverse collection of critical articles, ranging from exhibition and book reviews, interviews with artists and curators, conference proceedings, curatorial statements, as well as critical commentary and debate on a variety of topical subjects.[6]

(accessed 2 June 2016), 7–8. Tamar Yogev and Gokhan Ertug, "Global and Local Flows in the Contemporary Art Market: The Growing Prevalence of Asia," in *Cosmopolitan Canvases: The Globalization of Markets for Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 194–195.

[4] Ken Lum, "Editorial Statement," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 1, no. 1 (2010): 2–5. "About *Yishu*," *Yishu Online.* http://yishu-online.com/about-yishu/ (accessed 2 June 2016).

[5] Katy Hsiu-chih Chien, "Publisher's Letter: Katy Hsiu-chih Chien," *Yishu* 1, no. 1 (2002): 1. Pauline J. Yao, "Critical Horizons: On Art Criticism in China," *Asia Art Archive: Diaaalogue,* December 2008, http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/592 (accessed 2 June 2016).

[6] It is important to elucidate the difference between 'art criticism' and 'art history.' As Eleni Gemtou states, the

In 2011, after nearly a decade of reaching an exclusively English-speaking audience, a Chinese-language edition of *Yishu*, entitled *Diancang guoji ban wenxuan zhongwen ban* 典藏國際版文選 中文版 (hereafter *Diancang*) was released. The Chinese-language edition, which includes selected translations of articles from previous *Yishu* issues, was established in an attempt to engage a greater Chinese Mandarin-speaking audience. However, the trepidation with which *Yishu* approached this Chinese-speaking audience exemplifies the primary difficulty of working across cultures; *Diancang* was created nearly a decade after *Yishu* partially out of concern for the complexities of both linguistic and cultural translation. *Yishu's* founding Director and current Managing Editor Zheng Shengtian writes in "Why Publish a Chinese Edition? (*Weishenme chu zhongwen ban?* 为什么出中文版?)" in October 2011: "It is important to note that *Yishu* is directed towards an English-speaking readership, both in terms of content and approach, and therefore, is not necessarily suited to a Chinese-speaking audience. Another more practical reason is that we did not have an adequate grasp of the translation process."[7] Here, Zheng Shengtian states that the difficult task of translation between English and Chinese was a significant reason why *Yishu* editors were reluctant to commit to publishing a Chinese edition. Furthermore, he explains that *Yishu*'s content and overall approach had thus far been curated for

intellectual endeavors of 'art criticism' and 'art history,' while undeniably intertwined in the study and interpretation of art, are different in that the former generally entails the critical evaluation of contemporary art, often including the personal and subjective interpretations of the critic, and the latter involves the study of past artistic works using historical systems. Although *Yishu*'s content is predominantly critical, largely in order to investigate the subjective experiences of artists as well as the political and social implications of their work rather than from a formalist perspective, the journal also contains a variety of art historical articles. "About *Yishu*," http://yishu-online.com/about-yishu/. Eleni Gemtou, "Subjectivity in Art History and Art Criticism," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 2, No. 1 (January 2010): 2–3. Kerr Houston, *An Introduction to Art Criticism: Histories, Strategies, Voices* (New York: Pearson, 2013), 61–77.

[7] My English translation. Original Chinese text reads: "主要原因是《*Yishu*》的定向为英文读着，编辑的内容和方法都依此而设. 将同一盘菜端给中文读着其实未必合适. 另一个更实际的原因是我们对翻译的水平没有把握." Zheng Shengtian 郑胜天, "*Weishenme chu zhongwen ban?*" 为什么出中文版？[Why Publish a Chinese Edition?], *Diancang guoji ban wenxuan zhongwen ban* 典藏國際版文選 中文版 10, no. 1 (2011): 3.

an English-speaking readership, and therefore could not necessarily be expected to appeal to a culturally Chinese audience. *Yishu*'s careful navigation of language and culture in Chinese contemporary art criticism highlights a crucial matter that repeatedly appears throughout the publication's history: the issue of translation. The study of Chinese contemporary art reveals that translation, both linguistic and cultural, is a deeply imperfect paradigm, and that those who engage in cross-cultural communication must constantly toe a multitude of fine lines. However, translation is ubiquitous and utterly necessary in a globalized world where many consider their identity to be the sum of a variety of different ethnic backgrounds, cultural perspectives, and linguistic worlds.

Yishu is the world's longest standing internationally circulated journal of contemporary Chinese art, reaching English-speaking and Chinese-speaking audiences across the globe. Consequently, *Yishu*'s pages merit a critical discourse analysis in order to trace the discursive trends the publication both reflects and proliferates. However, the journal has yet to be explored in an in-depth study, and it is this gap in scholarship that this thesis addresses. This thesis argues that *Yishu*'s development as a publication, as well as recurrent strains of discourse throughout *Yishu,* are cogent examples of the issue of cultural translation. Due to the influence of Western critical theory in Chinese contemporary art discourse, an unequal cultural dynamic within global scholarship which prioritizes the English language, and the Western-dominated international art world, Chinese contemporary artists and scholars must navigate the tensions of cross-cultural exchange in their work. The analysis of *Yishu* reveals that artists and scholars of contemporary Chinese art and criticism navigate the binaries between Chinese and English, East and West, resistance and accommodation, universality and particularity, in order to locate a hybrid discursive space of cultural exchange that resists arbitrary categorization based on geopolitical

boundaries and cultural imperialism. By employing the method of a Foucauldian discourse analysis alongside Rey Chow's postcolonial framework of cultural linguistics, this examination of *Yishu* will be approached in three sections, each of which will address a strain of discussion in *Yishu*, exemplified by an in-depth Case Study. Section 1 explores dialogues transcribed in *Yishu* that concern the difficulties of cultural and linguistic translation in Chinese art criticism. The transcribed symposium entitled "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective" reveals that the difficulty of translating concepts between cultural-linguistic environments poses a significant obstacle to the growth of a domestic critical vocabulary for the Chinese-language art critic. In Section 2, the exploration of language and cultural exchange in the art of Xu Bing is analyzed through the numerous symposiums, interviews and critical articles that reference the artist in *Yishu.* A comparative analysis of the articles reveals that Xu Bing is an important artist for scholars of cross-cultural studies because his work is strongly influenced by the imperfect interplay between the discourses of Western theory, Chinese tradition, and the hybrid cultural space of the diaspora. Section 3 will analyze the documentation of the Long March Project in *Yishu* over the last decade and how discourse surrounding the Project is interpenetrated by the greater questions of globalization, transnational communities, and the structure of the nation-state. Through the full embrace of the ambivalence of cultural translation, the Long March Project participants take a step forward in determining how geopolitical and cultural borders may be physically and discursively flouted in contemporary art practice.

A Note on Primary Sources and Art Criticism in Mainland China

The primary sources investigated in this thesis are chiefly the English-language *Yishu* and its Chinese-language counterpart, *Diancang*. Edited in Vancouver, British Columbia and

published in Taiwan, *Yishu* was inaugurated in 2002 by founding Editor Ken Lum, a Chinese-Canadian artist and scholar, and founding Director Zheng Shengtian, a Chinese émigré artist and scholar, both of whom are based in Vancouver.[8] At the moment, *Yishu*'s English-language editions are held worldwide by numerous prominent universities and art institutions, largely in North America, Europe and Asia.[9] However, the Chinese-language counterpart, *Diancang*, inaugurated in 2011, has yet to reach such levels of circulation. No libraries in North America currently carry the Chinese-language edition. Containing approximately eight to ten articles, *Diancang* was published and disseminated to Chinese universities and art institutions for free from October 2011 to March 2014, after which the format of the publication changed. From March 2014 forward, two to three translations of *Yishu* articles have been included as a special section in the mainland Chinese monthly art magazine *ArtCo China*, also known as *Diancang dutianxia jinyishu* 典藏读天下 今艺术.[10] Due to time and space constraints, this thesis will only

[8] Artist and scholar Ken Lum was born in Vancouver, British Columbia. He has exhibited widely, curated, and published many essays, in addition to teaching at the University of British Columbia (1990–2006), Bard College (2005–2007), and currently at the University of Pennsylvania. Artist, scholar, and curator Zheng Shengtian was born in Henan Province, China, graduating in 1958 from the Zhejiang Academy of Art in Hangzhou, where he worked for over thirty years as a professor and chair of the Oil Painting Department. He moved to Canada in 1990, soon after working as Secretary of the Annie Wong Art Foundation and Director of Art Beatus Gallery. In addition to teaching, Zheng Shengtian has curated many exhibitions and published a wide selection of essays. "Ken Lum," *PennDesign Website,* https://www.design.upenn.edu/fine-arts/graduate/people/ken-lum (accessed 30 November 2016). "Interview: Zheng Shengtian. Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980–1990," *Asia Art Archive Website,* http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/CollectionOnline/SpecialCollectionItem/12241 (accessed 30 November 2016).

[9] According to *Yishu*'s 2016 "Subscriber's List" and "Circulation Map," *Yishu*'s largest readership is in the USA, comprising 47% of all subscribers. Europe comprises 22%, Canada 14%, Asian countries including China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore comprise 10%, and the remaining 7% comprises other countries such as Australia and South Africa. *Yishu*'s subscribers are 40% University libraries, 28% professionals with personal subscriptions, 15% museums, 12% organizations, and 5% art galleries. The above-mentioned sources are available to the public and can be easily accessed by contacting *Yishu* staff. "Subscriber's List 2016," *Yishu* (unpublished document accessed 14 July 2016). "Circulation Map," *Yishu* (unpublished document accessed 14 July 2016).

[10] *ArtCo China* (*Diancang dutianxia jinyishu* 典藏读天下 今艺术), a simplified Chinese publication founded in 2013, distributed in mainland China, and published by Art & Collection Group (*Diancang yishu jiating* 典藏藝術家庭) out of Shanghai, China, is not to be confused with *ARTCO* (*Diancang jinyishu* 典藏今藝術), originally named *Art & Collection* (*Diancang* 典藏), a traditional Chinese publication founded in 1992 and published by Art & Collection Group out of Taipei, Taiwan. While published by the same publishing group (also the same publisher as *Yishu* and *Yishu* Chinese Edition *Diancang guoji ban wenxuan,* the latter a simplified Chinese publication), the two

focus on the close analysis of *Yishu* and *Diancang*, specifically between the years 2002–2015. An in-depth exploration of Chinese-language art critical publications and their divergences with *Yishu* and other English-language scholarship exploring Chinese contemporary art is a substantial project for a longer paper. Furthermore, although *Yishu* is adept at illuminating the distinct art worlds of Taiwan and Hong Kong, the discursive trends I will be analyzing in this thesis mainly pertain to the work of mainland Chinese artists and scholars.

It is important to address how *Yishu* is situated within the history of contemporary art criticism in China. Since the birth of the mainland Chinese contemporary art world following the Cultural Revolution, the shape of art criticism has fluctuated along with dramatic societal shifts. Peggy Wang provides an English-language overview of early art criticism, explaining that in the 1980s, Chinese art critical publications were entirely governed by the state and supported by government subsidies, which allowed editors to make a modest living without requiring their publications to turn a profit, removing the need for art writers to seek out financial support.[11] With the introduction of market reform and the opening of the Chinese art scene to the West in the 1990s, art critics turned to the market for financial support, requesting fees for their writing and curatorial work for the first time. In order to play both cultural evaluator and developer of a strong domestic market for contemporary art, early critics actively engaged the mainland

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are separate journals. "*ArtCo China,*" *Asia Art Archive,* http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/Details/53470 (accessed 28 July 2016). "*ARTCO,*" *Asia Art Archive,* http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/Details/4389 (accessed 28 July 2016).

[11] Peggy Wang asserts that although in the 1980s Chinese art critical publications were governed by the state, the open cultural atmosphere of the 1985 Avant-Garde Movement corresponded with the loosening of government control on publishing. The resultant social landscape gave rise to two publications, *The Trend of Art Thought* and *Fine Arts in China*, in which editors, often under pseudonyms for personal protection, began to publish critical articles on increasingly experimental contemporary art. It is important to note that even in the comparably open environment of the 1980s, these publications still struggled with censorship and were not able to publish potentially controversial critical essays for more than a few short years. In 1987, *The Trend of Art Thought* was terminated during the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign. *Fine Arts in China* met a similar demise in 1989 during post-Tiananmen crackdowns, leaving art critics with a lack of venues in which to voice their opinions on contemporary art in China. Peggy Wang, "Art Critics as Middlemen: Navigating State and Market in Contemporary Chinese Art, 1980s-1990s," *Art Journal* 72, Issue 1 (Spring 2013): 8–11.

Chinese business community through Art Fairs, thus situating themselves as the middlemen between art criticism and the art market.[12]

However, it is the aftermath of this early relationship between the commercial market and art criticism in China that scholars continue to grapple with today. In discussions concerning the current Chinese art critical environment, it is often contended that while the relationship between the critic and the commercial art world has been further solidified since the 1990s, critics' inclination to engage in scholarly criticism has steeply declined. Many scholars argue that the type of art writing frequently published in China cannot be considered truly critical as it is primarily motivated by commercial interests. For example, winner of the first CCAA Art Critic Award in 2007, Pauline J. Yao addresses this issue, reiterating the common complaints: "The publishing industry is flawed and too market-driven; the education system antiquated; the Chinese language ill-equipped; and the dominating presence of the market breeds indifference and slack ethics."[13]

Diancang was created in an attempt to appeal to a vast Mandarin-speaking audience, as well as provide a forum for developing art criticism in China. The editors purposefully select a series of articles recently published in *Yishu* that they believe will be most interesting in translated form to mainland Chinese readers.[14] Other current Chinese-language contemporary art

[12] Wang, "Art Critics as Middlemen," 12–16.

[13] Pauline J. Yao and Keith Wallace in their respective articles discuss a variety of issues with art criticism and the publishing industry in China. They argue that many figures who identify as 'art critics' compromise the integrity of their critical writing by accepting either money or artwork in exchange for articles, by only endorsing their friends, and by engaging in art dealing, as publishing and curating are inadequate to dramatically increase their wealth, all of which, Yao argues, "hinder the capacity for independent thinking." Wallace additionally notes that when dealing with domestic publications, many Chinese artists have to personally pay the writer or the publication to feature them. Yao, "Critical Horizons: On Art Criticism in China," http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/592. Keith Wallace, "Un-invested Investments: Critical Writing and Publishing in Mainland China," *Asia Art Archive: Diaaalogue,* March 2010, http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/807 (accessed 2 June 2016).

[14] While the purpose of *Diancang* is to publish translated articles first released in *Yishu* for a Chinese-speaking audience, there are a few Chinese-language articles that do not have English-language counterparts. The following is a comprehensive list of these articles: Zheng Shengtian 郑胜天, ed., "*Dangdai Zhongguo yu dangdai yishu*—*Xu Bing fangtan*" 当代中国与当代艺术 —徐冰访谈 [Contemporary China and Contemporary Art – An Interview with

journals include *Art Issue, Art Expert, Contemporary Art, Art China, Artmap, China-artist, Public Art China, Contemporary Art and Investment, Art Value, Art World, World Art, Hi-Art, Leap* and *ArtCo China*. However, it can be deduced by the small amount of literature currently on the topic of art criticism in China that the majority of these publications are not well-regarded by academics due to their tendency to cater to the market rather than offering insightful critical articles.[15] Furthermore, an issue that plagues the community of academic art critics working in China is that Chinese-language art criticism is rarely translated into English and therefore is not widely circulated internationally.[16]

Methodology

This thesis will contribute to critical writing on contemporary Chinese art which spans the disciplines of art history, cultural studies and critical theory. In addition, it will further explore the connection between the concept of cultural translation and contemporary Chinese art

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Xu Bing], *Diancang* 10, no. 1 (2011): 73–82; Yan Xiaoxiao 严潇潇, "*Huigui geti kan 'nianqing yishujia*'" 回归个体看 '年轻艺术家' [Return to the Individual 'Young Artists'], *Diancang* 12, no. 3 (2013): 69–71; Hao Jingban 郝敬班 and Guo Juan 郭娟, "*Zuowei dangdai yishu de guanzhong*" 作为当代艺术的观众 [Contemporary Art's Audience], *Diancang* 12, no. 4 (2013): 65–67.

[15] Yao lists many of the Chinese-language art publications named above, all of which she claims "present a dizzying array of verbiage on contemporary art, but pandering to popular demand (and therefore market interests) they can hardly constitute venues for art criticism." Wallace contextualizes these magazines and journals in his exploration of mass distributed publishing in mainland China, noting that in the 1990s, the most pivotal journals for criticism were published out of the West, such as *Art Asia Pacific* and *Third Text.* However, Wallace points out that the magazines Yao cites "did not arise out of a need for critical analysis in the first place but, instead, were born hand in hand with a burgeoning art market, existed because of the art market, and their role was primarily one of promoting art that fed into that market." Moreover, the above-mentioned articles were published before the bilingual magazine *Leap* (founded in 2010) and *ArtCo China* (founded in 2013) were established, both of which have displayed a commitment to providing a well-rounded critical voice. Keith Wallace, "Un-invested Investments," http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/807. Yao, "Critical Horizons: On Art Criticism in China," http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/592.

[16] A few notable exceptions that have recently published translated works of Chinese-language criticism are Wu Hung's monumental collection, *Contemporary Chinese Art Primary Documents* (2011) and *Asia Art Archive*'s online project providing video documentations of interviews with English subtitles. See Wu Hung and Peggy Wang eds., *Contemporary Chinese Art Primary Documents* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010); "Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980–1990," *Asia Art Archive Website,* http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/SpecialCollections/Details/11#SpecialAnchor23 (accessed 16 July 2016).

that Paul Gladston observes in his recent publications devoted to the exploration of Chinese visual culture through the discourse of cultural translation.[17] In my investigation of cultural translation, I will employ Foucault's method of discourse analysis through Chow's postcolonial framework as outlined in *Not Like A Native Speaker*. The concepts of 'culture,' 'translation,' and 'cultural translation,' as well as the notion of a critical 'discourse analysis' are crucial to my argument, and as a result, the terms beg to be unpacked in detail. Firstly, 'culture' is a concept without solid definition, as it is a term which Jere Paul Surber describes as context-specific and subject to change based on historical and conceptual perspectives.[18] Edward Burnett Tylor's well-cited anthropological definition of culture is a starting point that can be further complicated by postmodernist and postcolonialist perspectives; Tylor states that "culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[19] Clifford Geertz expands on this concept of culture, offering that culture creates "webs of significance," and thus produces meaning in the context of different time periods and societies.[20]

The notion of culture is strongly implicated in Michel Foucault's examination of the relationship between discourse and power. The Foucauldian notion of 'discourse' indicates not only a assemblage of things that have been stated, from which history is traced and knowledge is produced, but additionally, as Paul James Gee notes, non-language "ways of being in the world"

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[17] Paul Gladston, "'Besiege Wei to Rescue Zhao': Cultural Translation and the Spectral Condition(s) of Artistic Criticality in Contemporary China," 95–119; "Contemporary Chinese Visual Culture and Cultural Translation: Editorial," *Modern China Studies* 23, Issue 1 (January 2016): 1–5; *Deconstructing Contemporary Chinese Art: Selected Critical Writings and Conversations, 2007–2014* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2016), 55–64.
[18] Jere Paul Surber, *Culture and Critique: An Introduction to the Critical Discourses of Cultural Studies* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), 4–7.
[19] Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom,* vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1871), 1. Quoted in Surber, 5.
[20] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

that are based on a set of predefined cultural guidelines.[21] As Foucault states in *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* discourses are not merely "groups of signs," they are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" and are thus "irreducible to the language (*langue*) and to speech."[22] In this sense, according to Foucault, cultural discourse is both symptomatic and a creator of power; the discursive statements, as well as the languages, that are put to use in the majority subsequently marginalize others as discourses are passed along, constructing our societies and how we function within them. Consequently, the discourse analysis of a text is a way to discover how power has been produced and by whom in a particular context.[23] In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality,* Foucault broadens the notion of "archaeology" he explored in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* by examining the particular "rules" which determine how discourses emerge, transform, and are passed down in a society, thus aligning themselves with power. The "rules" that Foucault outlines are determined by the sayable ("what is it possible to speak of?"), conservation ("which utterances are put into circulation, and among what groups?"), memory (which utterances are valid and which "have been excluded as foreign?"), reactivation ("among discourses of previous epochs or of foreign cultures. . . what transformations are worked upon them?") and appropriation ("what individuals, what groups or classes have access to a particular kind of discourse? How is the relationship institutionalized between the discourse, speakers and its destined audience?. . . How is struggle for control of discourses conducted between classes, nations, linguistic, cultural or ethnic collectivities?"). The questions cited above provide a valuable framework through which cultural texts may be

[21] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language,* trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 14–16. Paul James Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (London: Routledge, 2001), 6–7.
[22] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 49.
[23] Surber, 18, 216. For a further exploration of the relationship between discourse and power see Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction,* vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

analyzed.[24] However, it has been noted extensively that Foucault's writings and theory of discourse are not without limitations. The notion of discourse itself, as well as Foucault's archaeological method of tracing discourses, are only loosely defined in Foucault's writings, and thus have the potential to result in slippery conclusions. Moreover, Foucault's works have been criticized at length by feminist and postcolonial scholars for their evident Eurocentrism, as well as a conspicuous lack of discussion specifically concerning women and gender constructs.[25] Consequently, Foucault's framework provides a starting point that must be supplemented by intersectional perspectives in order to fill these significant gaps.

Additionally, the notions of 'translation' and 'cultural translation' are seminal to my discussion. Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial exploration of the 'Third Space' of cultural hybridity in *The Location of Culture* includes a discussion of 'cultural translation,' which Bhabha describes as a directly involved in the condition of cross-cultural migration.[26] From this perspective, 'translation' has two potential meanings; while 'translation' can indicate the linguistic process of translating one language to another, 'cultural translation' suggests the complex endeavor of elucidating, discussing, representing or simply interacting with the conceptual and contextual facets of a culture different than one's own, a situation that is all the more pervasive as globalization has caused a steep rise in international communication, travel and migration. Consequently, the process of cultural translation is closely related to the

[24] Michel Foucault, "Politics and the Study of Discourse," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality,* eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 59–60.
[25] Foucault's most extensive discussion of ethnicity and power can be found in his 1975-1976 lectures entitled "Society Must Be Defended," in which he explores the history of state racism. See Susan J. Hekman, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended:*" *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1976-1976,* eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003).
[26] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 226–228. Anthony Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2014), 138–143.

connection between discourse and power as discussed by Foucault. The cultural power dynamics that determine the proliferation of discourses are the focus of Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?," wherein Spivak concludes that the subaltern subject does not have a voice if they are being spoken for by those in a position of power using their particular cultural tropes.[27] As James Clifford states, "cross-cultural translation is never entirely neutral; it is enmeshed in relations of power. One enters the translation process from a specific location, from which one only partly escapes."[28]

The notion of 'cultural translation' is not removed from the realm of linguistics; rather, language carries, constructs and constitutes culture.[29] In *Not Like A Native Speaker,* Rey Chow grapples with how to approach the interrelated facets of language and culture as a postcolonial subject, referencing the argument between Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, who strategically chose to write in English in order to reach a wider readership, and Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who ultimately elected to stop writing in English and produce work in his mother tongue. Chow agrees with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o assertion that language and culture are linked to the point of inextricability; language is gradually formed based on specific cultural experiences, and specific cultural experiences are carried forward through language.[30] Chow provides an outline of the process of "languaging," defined as the process of how language mutates and

[27] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 74–82, 92–93, 103–104.
[28] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 182–183.
[29] Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasiński, *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis: A Dialogue on Language and Identity* (London: SAGE, 2001), 1.
[30] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues for the cultural importance of language, writing that "specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality, but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history… Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world." Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1981), 15–16. Quoted in part in Rey Chow, *Not Like A Native Speaker: On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 38–41.

transforms based on a Foucauldian conceptualization of cultural power dynamics.[31] Significantly, Chow points out that world languages are not necessarily equal, and that the "cultural translator," or the postcolonial subject who engages in cross-cultural communication, must often treat their original culture with "explicit betrayal" as the "impulse to modernize – so as to catch up with the West" proves overwhelming.[32] Exacerbated by globalization and migration, "languaging" is therefore the situation in which many postcolonial subjects currently find themselves as they feel strongly compelled or coerced into adapting to "the manner of self-expression deemed acceptable" by the dominant English-speaking group.[33]

It follows that in the context of my discussion, not all subjects can be unproblematically placed within "Chinese-speaking" or "English-speaking" boxes, meaning that the diasporic subject's experience is all the more difficult to elucidate. As a result, the hybrid 'Third Space' of contact in which cultural difference is negotiated is an important concept for those living in transnational situations.[34] For instance, Sonal Khullar cites Edward Said's concept of "affiliation" in order to contextualize the experiences of Indian artists creating art in transnational circumstances, thus simultaneously engaging with their local culture and Western art-making. According to Khullar, "affiliation" denotes a "historical process by which a national art world came together and became conjoined with an international art world," complicating conceptions of modern Indian art as separate from or derivative of Western modernism.[35] But as Ien Ang, a self-proclaimed "ethnic Chinese, Indonesian-born and European academic who now lives and works in Australia" argues, the notion of hybridity is a paradox; it "is a concept which

[31] Chow, *Not Like A Native Speaker,* 52–57.
[32] Chow, *Not Like A Native Speaker*, 67–69.
[33] Chow, *Not Like A Native Speaker,* 9–10, 17.
[34] Bhabha, 51–56.
[35] Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity, and Modernism in India, 1930-1990* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 13–14.

confronts and problematizes. . . boundaries, although it does not erase them."[36] Consequently, the diaporic intellectual's "impulse is to point to ambiguities, complexities and contradictions, to complicate matters rather than provide formulae for solutions, to blur distinctions between colonizer and colonized, dominant and subordinate, oppressor and oppressed," indicating that many transcultural studies do not provide solid conclusions, instead illuminating examples that refuse binary categorization in favor of the in-between.[37]

Section 1: Dialogues on the Ambivalence of Cultural Translation

The May 2002 inaugural issue of *Yishu* featured the transcription of a symposium entitled "Hangzhou Discussion."[38] The discussion documented events that took place in the spring of 2000, when a group of European and North American curators were invited by the Annie Wong Art Foundation on a two-week tour of Hong Kong, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Taipei. As Chinese contemporary art was rapidly gaining global interest, the tour was planned with the intention of introducing these international scholars to the flourishing greater

[36] Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 16–17.
[37] Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese*, 2–3.
[38] Like "Hangzhou Discussion," a number of the articles analyzed in this thesis take the form of verbal dialogues transcribed in *Yishu.* Keith Wallace notes that "considerable critical exchange in mainland China takes place in personal or small-scale meetings. . . while these kinds of meetings rarely emerge as published texts, they provide an unburdened forum for discussion and debate," and furthermore that "numerous symposia and panel discussions take place in China and they are among the most rigorous opportunities for critical ideas and discourse to play out." Paul Gladston and Katie Hill state that Chinese contemporary art and art criticism's growth has been continually affected by the tendency of the Party to suppress resistance to their authority, which has instilled many artists and writers with an undeniable sense of "self-surveillance/self-discipline." Art critic Wang Chunchen admits for instance that "gradually we've all been limited by our own self-censorship. And it is a subconscious thing that affects our critical writing, for example, there are certain vocabularies and terms that cannot be used in our writing. That's why we have issues developing independent thinking." While mainland Chinese editors oftentimes must exert a great deal of self-censorship in order to avoid trouble with Chinese authorities, as Wallace points out, public academic discussion cannot be censored in the same way. It is therefore understandable that verbal discussions and their transcriptions are given importance in the mainland Chinese art world, as well as in such publications as *Yishu*, and thus merit analysis. Wallace, "Un-invested Investments: Critical Writing and Publishing in Mainland China," http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/807. Paul Gladston and Katie Hill, "Contemporary Chinese Art and Criticality: From the General to the Particular," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 11, no. 2–3 (2012): 109. Gao Minglu, Bao Dong, Sheng Wei et al., "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective: Xi'an Art Museum, September 10, 2010," *Yishu* 10, no. 3 (2011): 18.

Chinese art world. Symposia were organized in each city, providing the participating curators with a forum to discuss their experiences in China with local scholars.[39] Ten years later, a Chinese-language translation of "Hangzhou Discussion" appeared in the April 2012 issue of *Yishu*'s newly established *Diancang*. At first glance, the inclusion of "Hangzhou Discussion" (*Hangzhou zuotanhui* 杭州座谈会) in *Yishu*'s Chinese-language edition is not particularly noteworthy. However, after analyzing the breadth of articles selected for translation in *Diancang*, "Hangzhou Discussion" stands out, as the overwhelming majority of the remaining articles were taken from recently published issues of *Yishu,* typically from 2010 forward.[40] Out of all of the *Diancang* issues, "Hangzhou Discussion" is the only article that reaches this far back into *Yishu*'s history to revisit a discussion. Why, out of the dozens of articles published during the first decade of *Yishu*, was "Hangzhou Discussion" specifically selected to be translated for a Chinese-speaking audience? I argue "Hangzhou Discussion" was chosen because it is in this forum that the problem of cultural translation was first discussed, an issue which would continue to be a primary focus of *Yishu* over the next decade.

In the discussion that took place at Hangzhou, the difficulty of curating across cultures in a globalized but unequal art world is explored through a series of stories and personal experiences shared by the participating Western art professionals. Curator of the international exhibition Documenta XI (2002), Okwui Enwezor, initiates the discussion by suggesting that

[39] Okwui Enwezor, Lynne Cooke, Sarat Maharaj et al., "Hangzhou Discussion," *Yishu* 1, no. 1 (2002): 24. Participants of the Hangzhou symposium included curators based the the West Okwui Enwezor, Suzanne Ghez, Lynne Cooke, Dr. Sebastian Lopez, Chris Dercon, Jessica Bradley, and Dr. Sarat Maharaj, Chinese curator Gao Tianming, as well as the Annie Wong Art Foundation Board members Ken Lum, Richard Yiu and Zheng Shengtian.
[40] The only other exception is the translation of the 2006 article "Eager Paintings, Empathetic Products: Liu Ding's Critical Complicity," which appeared in the October 2010 issue of *Diancang*. See David Spalding, "Eager Paintings, Empathetic Products: Liu Ding's Critical Complicity," *Yishu* 5, no. 4 (2006): 69–72; David Spalding 丁达韦, "*Wujia de tuxiang wuxin de huihua: Liu Ding de pipan yu gongmou*" 无价的图像 无心的绘画：刘鼎的批判与共谋 [Eager Paintings, Empathetic Products: Liu Ding's Critical Complicity], *Diancang* 10, no.1 (2011): 103–108.

"the possibility of mistranslation and misinterpretation" is the principal struggle faced by those who live and work across cultures.[41] In response, fellow Documenta XI curator Sarat Maharaj proposes that there may be "moments of mistranslation that can be quite creative and produce new lines of thinking and invention and new forms of culture."[42] However, Maharaj is careful to note that some moments are simply misunderstandings, as "mistranslation can either be a genuine mistake or a springboard to new kinds of creativity."[43]

Subsequently, the Hangzhou panel unfolds as the participants contemplate their own transnational curatorial experiences that deal with the issue of mistranslation (*wuyi* 误译) and misinterpretation (*wushi* 误释).[44] A notable example was expounded by curator Chris Dercon, who described a curatorial trip to Brazil in which he made "mistakes and enemies" by attempting to collaborate with the European artist Lothar Baumgarten in an exhibition of Amazonian objects, as he thought Baumgarten's curatorial perspective would provide "an interesting translation." Ultimately, both the local Brazilian collectors of Amazonian artifacts and Baumgarten elected not to participate in the collaboration as they each saw Dercon as providing a misreading of their work.[45] The above-mentioned example illustrates both the hopeful optimism of these international curators, as well as the problematic dimensions of the notion of 'creative mistranslation' proposed by Enwezor and Maharaj. Although mistranslation provides fruitful grounds for the appropriation and reinterpretation of Western concepts within postcolonial environments, as well as for artists' work exploring globalization and cross-cultural communications, there is an irrefutably destructive force to cultural mistranslation. Specifically,

[41] Enwezor et al., "Hangzhou Discussion," 25–26.
[42] Enwezor et al., "Hangzhou Discussion," 27.
[43] Enwezor et al., "Hangzhou Discussion," 28.
[44] Enwezor, Okwui, Lynne Cooke, Sarat Maharaj et al., "*Hangzhou zuotanhui*" 杭州座谈会 [Hangzhou Discussion], *Diancang* 11, no. 1 (2012): 77.
[45] Enwezor et al., "Hangzhou Discussion," 28–29.

it is significant that in this particular article, the examples of 'creative mistranslation' the curators cite largely involve Western concepts interpreted in new cultural environments, or artists exploring their own identities and heritage. For instance, the work of the Amsterdam-based artist Fiona Tan is mentioned, whose complex heritage led her back to her hometown in Indonesia where she produced a short film exploring the issue of identity. In addition, Maharaj presents an example of how 'creative mistranslation' has influenced art history; he describes the movement of Marcel Duchamp's 'conceptual art' practice outside of the West, where through a type of productive mistranslation, the notion of 'conceptual art' was transformed into 'conceptualism' in the art practice of new cultural environments. The instances of genuine mistranslation however, involve Western art professionals attempting to reinterpret a culture that is not their own, and the people frustrated by the mistranslation of their culture are local and aboriginal individuals in different national contexts. Evidently, cultural translation becomes an instance of mistranslation primarily when it is not being actively employed by the postcolonial subject.[46]

The issue of translation is of particular relevance in the investigation of Chinese art criticism. The predicament of cross-cultural translation illuminated by the "Hangzhou Discussion" takes unique form in the Chinese context due to the internationalism that has influenced the development of domestic contemporary art and criticism. Many *Yishu* articles explore contemporary Chinese art criticism, such as Joni Low's "A Critique of Criticism: Deconstructing Reviews of Between Past and Future" (2005), Gao Minglu's "The Intellectual's Voice: The Third Space in Contemporary Chinese Art" (2009) and "A Crisis of Contemporary Art in China?" (2011), Fiona He's "Observing Contemporary Chinese Art Through Writing"

[46] Enwezor et al., "Hangzhou Discussion," 26–30.

(2009), and Sheng Wei's "Defending Criticism" (2010). While Joni Low points out in "A Critique of Criticism" that cultural imperialism is often evident in the critical writings of Western intellectuals, it is clear from the above-mentioned articles that Western academic voices have appeared to fill the void in China's slow-growing domestic critical environment, which has been created in part by state censorship and in part by the dominance of the market. Furthermore, these articles reveal that contemporary art criticism in China has seen a measure of internationalization since its inception in the 1980s when translations of Western critical theory began making the rounds.[47] Consequently, present-day Chinese-language art criticism is illustrative of a close engagement with the Western art historical tradition.[48] As the vocabulary of

[47] Joni Low, "A Critique of Criticism: Deconstructing Reviews of Between Past and Future," *Yishu* 4, no. 3 (2005): 97–103. Gao Minglu, "The Intellectual's Voice: The Third Space in Contemporary Chinese Art," *Yishu* 8, no. 3 (2009): 30–32. Gao Minglu, "A Crisis of Contemporary Art in China?," *Yishu* 10, no. 5 (2011): 11–18. Fiona He, "Observing Contemporary Chinese Art Through Writing," *Yishu* 8, no. 4 (2009): 6–17. Sheng Wei, "Defending Criticism," *Yishu* 9, no. 6 (2010): 20–24. Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde,* 65–66, 100–101, 255–266.

[48] The history of art and traditional approaches to the discipline of art history differ in the European and Chinese contexts. Put most simply, the 'Western art historical tradition' indicates the study of ancient Greek and Roman art practice, European painting beginning in the sixteenth century, the emergence of modernism in the twentieth century, and the contemporary art of recent decades. While there is no singular school of thought in Western art history, the practice is said to have been founded in sixteenth-century Europe by Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), evolving to focus in large part on formal aesthetics over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The discipline of art history as we know it today began in the nineteenth century with the Hegelian assertion that aesthetic phenomena can be regarded in terms of both their 'forms' and their 'contents,' or their meanings and contexts. With the rise of modernism and later postmodernism, theoretical inquiry grew to be an important aspect of art historical investigation over the twentieth century. From the late-twentieth century onwards, deconstruction, feminism, and postcolonialism would be important perspectives in the discipline of art history. The 'Chinese art historical tradition' indicates the commentary on and practice of literati painters, who would choose a past master on which to model their works and then create a copy, in such genres as for example, calligraphy, portraits, flowers and birds, architecture, landscapes, plum blossom, and bamboo. Beginning in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) with the theoretical writing of Dong Qichang (1555–1636), the goal of imitation in art became to eventually develop a personal artistic identity. The earliest art historical writings classifying painting genres, ranking artists, and providing descriptions of their works, date as far back as the sixth century and continued well into the fourteenth century. In the fourteenth century, writings providing ranking and classification declined, to be replaced by texts and manuals exploring genres in their particularity. A great deal of these writings evaluated works of art on whether or not the art works had successfully captured the *xing* (form) and *shen* (essence) of the original, among other criteria. This traditional practice of art-making and art writing would continue well into the Republican Era (1912–1949), even with the modernization of Chinese society and the introduction of Japanese and Western artistic influences. The general climate of art and art writing would change after the Communist Revolution (1949), after which all art was conceived as a tool to further the goals of the Communist Party, complicating how many regarded traditional Chinese art. Martin Kemp ed., *The Oxford History of Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4–8, 410. Donald Preziosi, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13, 55–56, 116–117, 271–272, 318–319, 403–405. Richard Vinograd, "Classification, Canon, and Genre," in *A Companion*

traditional Chinese art history is often deemed lacking when attempting to describe the new visual languages of contemporary art, translated terminology from Western critical theory is referenced instead. However, the translation of terminology culturally rooted in Western critical theory introduces a new set of problems: oftentimes these theories are incomprehensible to Chinese-language audiences or are considered inappropriate to evaluate artistic practices that have emerged within the Chinese cultural context.[49]

The issue of cultural translation and mistranslation continues to be an issue worthy of attention in the "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective: Xi'an Art Museum, September 10, 2010" symposium, published in *Yishu* nearly a decade after "Hangzhou Discussion," as the Chinese-speaking panel participants discuss how the destructive potential of mistranslation affects their work as art critics.[50] The English-language translation and the Chinese-language transcription of the symposium reveal that while the lucrative commercial art market undeniably serves as an obstacle to the expansion of art criticism in China, many of the issues Chinese critics currently face are consequences of the discursive problems of language, culture, and translation in an academic art critical environment that is strongly influenced by the Western art historical

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to Chinese Art, eds. Martin Joseph Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), 254–258, 270–273. Ronald Egan, "Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective," in *A Companion to Chinese Art,* eds. Martin Joseph Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), 277–278. Ginger Cheng-chi Hsü, "Imitation and Originality, Theory and Practice," in *A Companion to Chinese Art* eds. Martin Joseph Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), 293–295, 300. Ralph Croizier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906–1951* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), 1–5. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China,* 110–111.

[49] Yao, "Critical Horizons: On Art Criticism in China," http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/592. Wallace, "Un-invested Investments," http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/807.

[50] The article was published in the May/June 2011 issue of *Yishu,* and the original Chinese transcription "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective – 'Yishu Awards for Critical Writing on Contemporary Chinese Art' First Public Forum" (*Bendi qingjing xia de yishu pinglun – 'Yishu xuekan zhongguo dangdai yishu jiang' shoujie zhuti luntan yanjiang jilu* 本地情境下的艺术评论－"Yishu 学刊中国当代艺术评奖" 首届主题论坛演讲记录) was published in the October 2011 issue of *Diancang*. These transcriptions recount the discussion that took place during the academic conference held at the Xi'an Art Museum in association with the first annual Yishu Awards for Critical Writing. "Yishu Awards for Critical Writing on Contemporary Chinese Art," http://yishu-online.com/2010/08/yishu-awards-for-critical-writing-on-contemporary-chinese-art/ (accessed 12 November 2015).

tradition. If Chinese art historical traditions cannot necessarily be relied upon as a framework for analyzing contemporary art, and it is equally difficult to work entirely within an academic framework that has been translated from a foreign cultural and linguistic environment, where does that leave the Chinese art critic?

Case Study: Questions of Translation in "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective"

In the transcript of "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective," moderator Gao Minglu and the four panel participants, Bao Dong, Wang Chunchen, Sheng Wei and Jason Chia Chi Wang discuss the problem of establishing a domestic critical language, specifically in relation to the obstacle of linguistic and cultural translation. As the panel members assess the changing art critical environment in China, they unanimously agree that while traditional Chinese art terminology is inadequate in the context of contemporary art criticism, the pervasive presence of Western critical theory in Chinese-language art criticism introduces a series of issues. Taiwanese critic Jason Chia Chi Wang argues for instance that since the growth of art criticism as an academic discipline in Taiwan, the tendency to emphasize theory over art practice has grown increasingly pervasive, a phenomenon Bao Dong, Wang Chunchen and Sheng Wei attest is evident in mainland Chinese academia as well.[51] The result, Jason Chia Chi Wang continues, is that "this tendency has created a lot of reading blocks for readers and art collectors, especially when a writer makes extensive references to cultural theory."[52] Jason Chia Chi Wang explains that the difficulty of comprehending references to critical theory and philosophy is closely connected to the issue of translation, asserting that "this problem is most evident when one has to translate some special terminology from French into Chinese," or in other words,

[51] Gao Minglu et al., "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective," 6–14.
[52] Gao Minglu et al., "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective," 10–11.

terminology produced in a specific cultural-linguistic context.[53] Beijing-based curator and critic Sheng Wei concurs that some "Western concepts and terminology, if applied to the Chinese context, will dramatically alter their original meaning," arguing that consequently, the "issue of the theorization of art writing is an imperative concern."[54] Sheng Wei states that while in the 1980s and 1990s, the development of contemporary Chinese art was encouraged by employing new theories from the West, "the transplantation of ideas and theories has created a vast semantic discrepancy that makes reading a difficult experience." Furthermore, the impulse to include reference to cultural theories in order to engage in global art critical discourse oftentimes makes the "art form seem to have no relevance in art writing."[55] Ultimately, Gao Minglu states in his conclusion that "one can attribute the problem of art criticism to the absence of an independent system of discourse that allows critics to examine the complex nature of Chinese reality."[56] While the notion of an 'independent system of discourse' is left without explicit definition in the conversation, Gao Minglu seems to describe a critical framework that employs terminology formulated in the Chinese cultural-linguistic context, and in direct reference to art emerging from China, without entirely foregoing engagement with global flows of art critical discourse.

However, it is inaccurate to posit that intellectual exchange between China and the West has only been prevalent since the 1980s; rather, such issues of translation are steeped in a lengthy history of cross-cultural communication and reciprocal influence. Specifically, the practice of translation has long been present in China, and as scholars argue, has played an important role in the formation of modern China. Michael Hill analyzes the popular works of prolific translator Lin Shu, who translated a series of European texts in the late Qing dynasty (1895-1911) and

[53] Gao Minglu et al., "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective," 11.
[54] Gao Minglu et al., "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective," 9, 12.
[55] Gao Minglu et al., "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective," 12.
[56] Gao Minglu et al., "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective," 16.

early Republic (1912-1927). Although Lin Shu did not personally know any foreign languages, he produced the Chinese-language translations of such classic texts as *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Aesop's Fables* and *Oliver Twist,* by documenting the sentence by sentence oral translations of the original text by his many assistants.[57] Lin Shu's translation projects played a role in forming a Chinese national language that incorporated ancient-style prose with terms associated with Western learning. Terms associated with Western knowledge, such as *qun* 群 (community or society) and *gongli* 公理 (universal principle or universal justice) shifted in meaning by the twentieth century as the concept of the nation-state became crucial to intellectuals committed to resisting foreign imperialism and developing their identity as national subjects.[58] Similarly, Lydia Liu argues that the formation of the modern Chinese language was contaminated by foreign discursive traditions, as by the mid-nineteenth century, there had been consistent interaction between Chinese, Japanese and modern European languages. It is exposure to these languages that led to numerous innovations of the Chinese prose style in concert with the growth of linguistic equivalents between Chinese and other languages. The classical Chinese language mutated into the modern Chinese language used today as hundreds of neologisms were "borrowed from Japanese *kanji* (Chinese character) translations of European words, mainly English."[59]

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[57] Due to Lin Shu's translation method, Hill operates under the assumption that drastic alterations were made to the text in the translation process. Rather than measuring the fidelity of the translation to the original, Hill seeks to investigate how the translator's manipulation of the text relates to the political and cultural climate of the time. Lin Shu's translations constructed the readers' knowledge of Western societies, and in addition, China's place on the world stage, as Lin Shu would alter the content of the original text in order to resonate with a Chinese readership. For instance, in Lin Shu's translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* direct parallels are drawn between the African slaves referenced in the story and exploitive Chinese coolie labour that was taking place worldwide. Michael Hill, *Lin Shu, Inc.: Translation and the Making of Modern Chinese Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2–3, 10–15, 19–20, 52–53.

[58] Hill, 60–61, 68–69, 89–92.

[59] Lydia He Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity – China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 3–8, 17–18.

Hill and Liu's respective works illustrate not only that the modern Chinese language was formed within an environment of intercultural exchange, but furthermore, that striking the balance between incorporating knowledge from the West and resisting cultural imperialism has consistently been a long-standing issue in the history of modern China. The resistance to theorization displayed by Chinese scholars is notably reminiscent of the resistance to theorization in literature and art expressed by the Western academy, specifically in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s.[60] However, it is evident that the resistance to theory expressed in "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective" is subtly different in that it reflects the power dynamic between linguistic and cultural systems that has long played a role in the development of the modern Chinese nation-state.

Interestingly, slight divergences between the Chinese original "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective" (*Bendi qingjing xia de yishu pinglun* 本地情境下的艺术评论) and the English translation "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective" highlight a number of the issues the panel set out to discuss, namely problems of translation and the insufficiencies of the cross-cultural use of theory. It is important to note that the majority of the translation is close to the original because the discussion is directly engaged with Western art historical traditions and terminology. However, the hand of the translator still comes into play; a conspicuous example is the exclusion of certain pieces of information in the English-language translation, in all likelihood due to the historical and cultural context of the references. For instance, in "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective" (*Bendi qingjing xia de yishu pinglun* 本地情境下的艺术评论), Sheng Wei states:

[60] See Paul De Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3–20; Sande Cohen, "Theory and Resistance to Theory in Contemporary Art and Historiography," *International Social Science Journal* 63, no. 207–209 (March–June 2012): 127–139.

> 今天，我们在英文当中用到一些词和概念，跟在中文语境下使用的时候，意义发生了很大的变化，高老师也曾专门讨论过 “Performance Art” 和 “行为艺术” 的差异。这种情况下，我觉得很多词的描述方式值得不断去关注。因此，我希望中国的艺术批评除讨论 “理论” 自身以外，还能更多地讨论艺术现象及其问题，以及艺术家，艺术作品在这些具体，微观语境中的位置和作用.[61]

The English translation included in *Yishu* reads:

> Some of the Western concepts and terminology, if applied to Chinese contexts, will dramatically alter their original meaning. That's why I think it's important to study these different forms of discourse. And in the case of China, as I've just mentioned earlier, what makes our art writing distinctive is that the focus is not placed on the individual artists but on asking a series of questions. It is through these questions that one's investigation begins.[62]

In the Chinese-language paragraph, Sheng Wei asserts that English-language terminology when used in the Chinese linguistic context has the potential to take on a different meaning or significance, and thus needs to be closely scrutinized. Consequently, Sheng Wei ultimately calls for a decrease in the use of theory in favor of making an artistic phenomenon, or the specific affect of an artwork or artist, the focus of research questions in Chinese-language criticism. As an example of discrepancies in cultural terminology, he points out that critic Gao Minglu has explored the difference between 'performance art' and "*xingwei yishu* 行为艺术," or 'behavior art,' in Chinese contemporary art. Here, Sheng Wei makes an interesting observation by drawing out a divergence in vocabulary that became an integral part of Chinese art critical discourse in the late 1980s. Considering the Western art historical term 'performance art' insufficient to encapsulate the body art that was emerging from China, the term '*xingwei yishu* 行为艺术,' or 'behavior art' was innovated by mainland Chinese artists and scholars.[63] The English version of

[61] Gao Minglu 高明潞, Bao Dong 鲍栋, Sheng Wei 盛葳 et al., "*Bendi qingjing xia de yishu pinglun – 'Yishu xuekan zhongguo dangdai yishu jiang' shoujie zhuti luntan yanjiang jilu*" 本地情境下的艺术评论－"Yishu 学刊中国当代艺术评奖" 首届主题论坛演讲记录 [Critical Writing from a Local Perspective – "Yishu Awards for Critical Art Writing on Contemporary Chinese Art" First Public Forum], *Diancang* 10, no. 1 (2011): 11.
[62] Gao Minglu et al., "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective," 9.
[63] Thomas J. Berghuis explains that "*xingwei* marks the 'behavioral' aspect or 'conduct' (*pinxing*) of a meaningful 'action' (*wei*) that is articulated in art (*yishu*)." Thomas J. Berghuis, *Performance Art in China* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2006), 38.

"Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective" however, leaves out this valuable example of Gao Minglu's exploration of terminology for the English-speaking audience, an interesting choice considering that it is innovations in Chinese artistic language such as '*xingwei yishu* 行为艺术 (behavior art)' that contributes to the construction of a domestic art critical discourse in China.[64] This omission suggests that it is assumed the English-language audience of Chinese contemporary art is unreceptive to incorporating terminology innovated in postcolonial cultural contexts due to the deep-seated dominance of the Western canon.

Comparably, in the same way that it is potentially difficult for Chinese-language scholars to understand Western art historical or theoretical references, the English translation of "Critical Writing from a Local Perspective" illustrates that it is equally difficult for English-speaking readers to understand references that are grounded in Chinese culture and history. In "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective" (*Bendi qingjing xia de yishu pinglun* 本地情境下的艺术评论), Sheng Wei addresses the influx of Western criticism that took place during the 1980s and the 1990s, offering that interest in these sources was in part "a modern take on the tradition of 'learning skills from the foreigners to strengthen ourselves.'"[65] This idiom refers to the tradition of learning from the West that was originally put forth by the academic Wei Yuan in the nineteenth century, who argued that 'learning skills from the foreigners to strengthen ourselves' was actually an effective method of resisting foreign encroachment.[66] However, in the English-language of "Critical Writing from a Local Perspective," this idiomatic reference is nowhere to

[64] Gao Minglu et al., "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective," 9.
[65] My translation. The original Chinese text reads: "'师夷长技以自强' 的现代洋务派的传统." Gao Minglu 高明潞 et al., "*Bendi qingjing xia de yishu pinglun*" 本地情境下的艺术评论 [Critical Writing from a Local Perspective], 14.
[66] *DictALL* 词都 "*shiyichangjiyizhiyi* 师夷长技以制夷," http://www.dictall.com/indu/332/331394541ED.htm (accessed 13 December 2015).

be found, and it is important to question why.

While it is possible that the translator's decision to exclude this reference may have been due page limits, or because of the sheer difficulty of translating and elucidating Chinese idioms in a small amount of space, it can be argued that there is more at work behind this decision. The removal of this idiom over other information strongly implies that it was due to its cultural content and the knowledge that the translation was intended for an English-speaking readership. Regardless, it highlights the cultural power dynamic at work in the process of cultural-linguistic translation which Chinese-language critics currently face. Rey Chow's sketch of the process of "languaging" in *Not Like A Native Speaker* captures in part the experience of the Chinese-speaking critic; the critic is often compelled to adopt the language and cultural traditions of Western academia in order to participate in a global dialogue, even if it means forsaking the discursive specificities that only the language of their culture can provide, a problem that is exacerbated by the lack of a strong domestic cultural-linguistic framework for critical writing. The establishment of a domestic critical vocabulary with which Chinese-language critics may explore contemporary art is additionally impeded by the unequal academic system which prioritizes languages and concepts of Western origin, and consequently, the difficult task of translating terminology grounded in Western cultural contexts to use in Chinese-language works. The exclusion of culturally-specific references rooted in Chinese history is illustrative of an overarching Western-dominated system which displays stubborn resistance to the incorporation of concepts created in other cultural contexts. While this dynamic is undeniably evident is the international art world, it is additionally evident in academia, wherein the Western canon is given prevalence and voices outside of this canon are only beginning to be heard with the

introduction of postcolonial, subaltern, feminist and queer studies.[67]

Section 2: Chinese Art through the Lens of Diaspora Studies

In the *Yishu* article "Orientalism and the Landscape of Contemporary Chinese Art," American art critic and curator Danielle Shang addresses an issue that has plagued Chinese contemporary art since its global emergence. Shang asserts that Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, the "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient," is inherently entwined in the international consumption of Chinese contemporary art.[68] Shang argues that "when it comes to contemporary Chinese art, Orientalism is about Western visions of China, narrating Chinese history according to Western perceptions and the desire for primitive, Western-art-reminiscent, and exotic Chinese art."[69] She continues:

> Many collectors, curators, scholars, and dealers in the West look for the codes of Chineseness in Chinese art - Mao, Tian'anmen, concubine-looking young women, and metaphors for suppressed individuality. . . The curatorial approach to contemporary Chinese art in the West has exercised a double-standard by placing the narrative of politics and the image of an exotic China above the merits of art. It seems that Chinese art must be politically motivated and scarred by its revolutionary history; it must be sadomasochistic and sexy; it must be anti-communist and anti-collectivist. Clearly, contemporary Chinese art has been in vogue during the past few years, and its popularity encouraged Orientalist attitudes both from within China and from the West.[70]

Exacerbated by the Western-dominated art world, in which curators and buyers seek out stereotypical cultural imagery in the art works they exhibit and consume, Shang further points out that many artists are complicit in proliferating this view of Chinese art as they actively create

[67] It is important to note that the Western artistic and literary canon has been extensively criticized since the 1970s from both feminist and postcolonial perspectives. Kemp, 410. Pelagia Goulimari, *Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 203–219. See Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader,* ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), 229–233; Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard eds., *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982).
[68] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage Edition Random House, 1979), 1–3.
[69] Danielle Shang, "Orientalism and the Landscape of Contemporary Chinese Art," *Yishu* 8, no. 6 (2009): 41.
[70] Shang, 41–42.

work that harnesses cultural symbols of 'Chineseness,' such as traditional Chinese imagery and references to communism, for financial gain and international fame.[71]

Shang's discussion is particularly relevant when discussing the wave of Chinese artists who voluntarily emigrated to the West in the late 1980s and early 1990s in pursuit of professional opportunities, and the imagery reminiscent of both Eastern and Western influences that often characterizes their work. Many of these artists have since returned to the mainland to visit, create and exhibit, illustrating the complex cultural relationship experienced by those living and working in the diaspora.[72] In this context, it often remains unclear to what extent the use of such imagery is reflective of the artist's personal experience, and to what extent quintessentially 'Chinese' imagery is being employed as a type of marketing 'strategy.' For instance, the prospect of Chinese artists pandering to popular demand was a topic of discussion in the critical articles that accompanied the *Inside Out* exhibition, which in large part highlighted the culturally hybrid works of art produced by Chinese artists in the diaspora. Hou Hanru posits in his conversation with Gao Minglu that promoting the image of a transnational artist could be seen as a type of "strategy." He further suggests that Chinese artists who highlight their cultural background in their works may be "aware that introducing Chinese or eastern elements will increase the chances of their work appearing in international art institutions, markets, and media."[73]

[71] As Chinese art critic Yi Ying explains, many critics accuse Chinese contemporary artists of pandering to the international art market, in which Western audiences seek culturally exotic and thus recognizable signifiers of 'Chineseness.' On the other hand, many critics accuse Western curators of exclusively selecting artists with provocative, ideological topics instead of providing a well-rounded image of contemporary Chinese art in their exhibitions. Yi Ying, "Criticism on Chinese Experimental Art in the 1990s (2002)," in *Contemporary Chinese Art Primary Documents,* eds. Wu Hung and Peggy Wang (Museum of Modern Art: New York, 2010), 319–321. Shang, 43–47, 50

[72] Chiu, *Breakout*, 8–10.

[73] Hou Hanru, "Strategies of Survival in the Third Space," 184–185.

The predicament of the Chinese artist in the context of globalization can be further elucidated by studies of the diaspora.[74] Rasheed Araeen asserts that the postcolonial artist is oftentimes pressured into putting their cultural identity in the forefront of their work. He argues that the postcolonial artist "must carry the burden of the culture from which they have originated, and they must indicate this in their works before they can be recognized and legitimated" by the global art world.[75] Similarly, Deborah L. Madsen offers that the label of 'diasporic subject' is oftentimes claimed for individuals in multicultural societies "as a rhetorical strategy of exclusion from the dominant culture."[76] Ien Ang recognizes this impulse in her own personal experience, writing that although she has grown up in the West, her ethnicity frequently leads to assumptions concerning her personal identity, a factor that has caused her to have a complicated relationship with her supposed 'Chineseness.' Ultimately, she states: "If I am inescapably Chinese by *descent*, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent,*" indicating that her ties with China are often determined for her.[77] This perspective is echoed in Rey Chow's seminal work, *The Protestant*

[74] As Shuang Liu states in her exploration of cultural hybridity in the Chinese diaspora, the term 'diaspora' was at one time employed in order to describe the forced dispersion of Jewish communities from their homeland, resulting in exile, alienation, and a strong connection to the place they were forced to leave. However, the term is now used in reference to those who leave their place of origin in order to live within new cultural environments. The notion of hybridity plays a strong role in how the diasporic subject's identity is conceptualized; Liu explains, "diasporas constantly negotiate a sense of here and there, past and present, homeland and hostland and self and other," as those living across cultures are both engaged with their cultural roots and the new society in which they live. Consequently, James Clifford posits that "contemporary diasporic practices cannot be reduced to epiphenomena of the nation-state or of global capitalism." While "defined and constrained by these structures, they also exceed and criticize them." Shuang Liu, *Identity, Hybridity and Cultural Home: Chinese Migrants and Diaspora in Multicultural Societies* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015), 87. Clifford, 244.

[75] Rasheed Araeen, "Art and Postcolonial Society," in *Globalization and Contemporary Art,* ed. Jonathan Harris (Cornwall, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 372–373.

[76] Deborah L. Madsen, "Diaspora, Sojourn, Migration: The Transnational Dynamics of 'Chineseness,'" in *Diasporic Histories: Cultural Archives of Chinese Transnationalism,* eds. Andrea Riemenschnitter and Deborah L. Madsen (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 44, 48.

[77] Ang argues that the notion of diaspora is too limiting for many living across cultures as the concept reinforces the borders of the nation-state as much as it reveals them to be porous. While the diaspora is meant to signify a dynamic space within the borders of nation-states, in which multifarious presentations of hybrid identities are expressed in their complexity, Ang argues that the notion of diaspora is "reductive" in that it is not "transnational enough," pointing out that "far from reaching beyond the national, the discourse of diaspora itself is ultimately nationalist;" however, rather than territorial boundaries, the border that establishes who is included and excluded from the diasporic community is an essentialist view of ethnicity. Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese*, 23–24*,* 36, 77. Ien Ang,

Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Chow argues that within Western societies, ethnic individuals are "expected to come to resemble what is recognizably ethnic" to the dominant culture, and are thus coerced into adapting their identities to the stereotypical imaginings of their cultural background, which are encapsulated within essentialist discursive constructs such as 'Chineseness.'[78]

Discourse surrounding Chinese artists in the diaspora was especially plentiful over the first decade of the 2000s, and *Yishu* followed this dialogue closely. For instance, the September 2004 issue of *Yishu* was devoted almost entirely to the "Mutations<>Connections: Cultural (Ex)Changes in Asian Diasporas" symposium, which included papers that explored the hybrid art of Chinese overseas artists, Asian-Canadian identities, and how to introduce an increased amount of multiculturalism into the classroom, among other topics.[79] The June 2005 issue saw the proceedings of the conference "Displacements: Transcultural Encounters in Contemporary Chinese Art," held in conjunction with *On the Edge: Contemporary Chinese Artists Encounter the West,* an exhibition devoted to exploring the work of Chinese artists in the diaspora.[80] The

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"No Longer Chinese? Residual Chineseness after the Rise of China," in *Diasporic Chineseness After the Rise of China: Communities and Cultural Production,* eds. Julia Kuehn, Kam Louie and David M. Pomfret (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 20–24, 31.

[78] Chow is highly critical of the problematic term 'Chineseness,' asserting that the term is a culturally essentialist discursive construct that "draws an imaginary boundary between China and the rest of the world" from two perspectives: first, the perspective of the Eurocentric subject who categorizes the 'Other' by "ethnic labeling," as well as the perspective of the Chinese intellectual who indulges the Sinocentric "compulsion to emphasize the Chinese dimension to all universal questions." Chow points out that the concept of 'Chineseness' is destabilized by studies of the Chinese diaspora which complicate visions of an essentialized Chinese cultural identity, as well as China studies which reveal the vast multiculturalism within China's geographical borders. Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 97–100, 106–107. Rey Chow, "On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," *boundary 2* 25, no. 3 "Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field" (Autumn 1998): 5–10.

[79] See Alice Ming Wei Jim, "Mutations<>Connections: Cultural (Ex)Changes in Asian Diasporas," *Yishu* 3, no. 3 (2004): 32–33; Melissa Chiu, "Different Homes/Different Diasporas: Strategies of Survival for Chinese Overseas Artists," *Yishu* 3, no. 3 (2004): 34–39; Eleanor Ty, "Representation of Asian Canadian Identities in the Twenty-First Century," *Yishu* 3, no. 3 (2004): 50–56; Ming Tiampo, "Hyphen-Nation: Building Multicultural Narratives in the Classroom," *Yishu* 3, no. 3 (2004): 57–61.

[80] See Richard Vinograd, "Re-Placing Contemporary Chinese Art," *Yishu* 4, no. 2 (2005): 6–9; Qing Pan, "Review of *On the Edge: Contemporary Chinese Artists Encounter the West*," *Yishu* 4, no. 2 (2005): 99–105.

exhibition curated by Gao Minglu entitled *The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art,* which explored 'Chineseness' as a overarching concept that unites artists who work both in China and in the diaspora, was covered in detail by *Yishu* from 2006–2007; *Yishu*'s coverage of the exhibition even included a lively debate between curator Gao Minglu and critic Paul Gladston about the potential of essentializing Chinese culture by employing the notion of 'Chineseness.'[81] The summer of 2009 covered the *Outside In: Chinese x American x Contemporary Art* exhibition, a direct response to *Inside Out*, which attempted to display a complex rendering of reciprocal cultural exchange between China and the West as it manifests in contemporary art.[82] These examples, while in no way exhaustive, illustrate the wealth of discourse concerning contemporary Chinese art in the diaspora, specifically within an English-language context.

The internationally renowned artist Xu Bing (b. 1955) is a frequently cited example of an overseas Chinese artist who employs traditional art forms in his work – specifically calligraphy, woodblock prints and ink painting – in order to explore the complexities of cross-cultural exchange. Although Xu Bing is by no means the only artist discussed in *Yishu* in relation to the concept of artistic hybridity, he is one of the most frequently referenced, appearing in a number of articles from the years 2002–2015. A Chinese-born artist who emigrated to the United States following the Tiananmen Square protests, Xu Bing's substantial body of work deals explicitly with the interrelated issues of language, culture, and translation in situations of cross-cultural exchange. The many critical articles, symposia, exhibition reviews and interviews investigating

[81] See Zhou Yan, "Chinese Brand and Chinese Method: On the Exhibition *The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art,*" *Yishu* 5, no. 1 (2006): 6–16; Paul Gladston, "Writing on *The Wall* (and *Entry Gate*): A Critical Response to Recent Curatorial Meditations on the 'Chineseness' of Contemporary Chinese Visual Art," *Yishu* 6, no. 1 (2007): 26–33; Gao Minglu, "Who is Pounding The Wall? A Response to Paul Gladston's 'Writing on *The Wall* (and *Entry Gate*): A Critical Response to Recent Curatorial Meditations on the 'Chineseness' of Contemporary Chinese Visual Art,'" *Yishu* 6, no. 2 (2007): 106.
[82] See Sohl Lee, "*Outside In: Chinese x American x Contemporary Art*," *Yishu* 8, no. 4 (2009): 88–97.

the work of Xu Bing in *Yishu* reveal the importance attributed to his work within greater discussions of cultural politics. Xu Bing's exploration of cultural-linguistic misunderstandings through an artistic vocabulary shaped in both Chinese and Western contexts, provides insightful examples of Enwezor and Maharaj's notion of 'creative mistranslation,' as the artist opens a culturally hybrid visual and discursive space.

Case Study: Cultural Misunderstandings in the Art of Xu Bing

Through a close examination of Xu Bing's work *Wu Street* (1993), in "*Wu Street*: Tracing Lineages of the Internationalization of the Art World," curator and scholar of Asian contemporary art, Orianna Cacchione, discusses the relationship between contemporary Chinese art and the international art world.[83] Cacchione describes *Wu Street* as a discursive joke with multiple layers, composed by several instances of cultural mistranslation. Furthermore, she argues that due to the circulation of the art piece throughout both the United States and China in 1994, "the work produces two distinct audiences, and each audience is implicated differently within the work's joke."[84] *Wu Street* consists of two parts: firstly, a falsified Chinese translation of a critical article reviewing the work of American abstract artist Jonathan Lasker, wherein the artist's name is replaced with the name of a fictitious artist, Jason Jones; secondly, Lasker's works are replaced with paintings Xu Bing did not create, but found abandoned on a sidewalk in New York and accredited to the non-existent painter Jason Jones. The fake Chinese translation of the critical review entitled "Jason Jones: Planning Painting" was then published in 1994 in the

[83] This paper was originally presented in October 2011 as part of the Songzhuang International Academic Forum entitled "Criticism, Translation, and Art Exchanges: The International Presentation of Chinese Contemporary Art," and was later published in the January/February 2012 issue of *Yishu.* Orianna Cacchione, "*Wu Street*: Tracing Lineages of the Internationalization of the Art World," *Yishu* 11, no. 1 (2012): 6.
[84] Cacchione, 6–7.

Chinese art magazine *Shijie Meishu* (World Art), and the same year, Xu Bing exhibited the paintings at his solo exhibition at the Bronx Museum.[85] Moreover, as Cacchione further explains, the title of the work itself is a play on words: "The work's title is taken from the street where the paintings were supposedly found – Wu Street. Wu Street's Chinese transliteration, *wujie,* means both Wu Street and 'misunderstanding.'"[86] Through the numerous misunderstandings it generates, Cacchione's analysis reveals that *Wu Street* exemplifies several problems of the international art world, in many ways echoing the critiques leveled by the Chinese critics in "Critical Writing from a Local Perspective," such as the oftentimes distant relationship between critical texts and art works, confusion among Chinese audiences reading translated works of English criticism, and misunderstandings concerning the cultural significance of Chinese art when viewed in Western contexts.[87]

There are a few conditions of cross-cultural exchange at play in Xu Bing's *Wu Street* that are mirrored throughout his many other works; *Wu Street* harnesses not only the Chinese language, but additionally the practice of art critical writing common in the Western-dominated art world, the Western practice of abstract painting, and furthermore, his personal experience living in New York. The many influences discernible in Xu Bing's art elucidate the complexities of global exchange in the era of transnationalism, illuminating the imperfect process of cultural translation by emphasizing moments of misunderstanding. English-language discourse often situates Xu Bing's work within debates concerning the employment of Chinese cultural signifiers in art consumed in large part by the West.[88] However, the critical articles, symposiums and

[85] Cacchione, 6–7.
[86] Cacchione, 7.
[87] Cacchione, 7–14.
[88] For instance, Cacchione cites the article "Olivia is not the Savior of Chinese Art (1993)" in which Wang Lin argues that by only selecting Xu Bing's *Book From the Sky* and the works of 10 political pop artists to be included in the 1993 Venice Biennale, curator Achille Bonito Oliva provided a stereotypical portrayal of Chinese contemporary art to Western viewers who seek cultural exoticism in their consumption of contemporary Chinese art. Wang Lin,

interviews included in *Yishu* reveal that Xu Bing's works cannot be easily reduced to an expression of 'Chineseness' or a derivation of modern Western art, nor can it be described as entirely illustrative of either 'Chinese or 'Euro-American' culture. Xu Bing's works are deeply enmeshed in the discourses of Western cultural theory and art history, as well as Chinese philosophical and art historical traditions.

Xu Bing first gained international attention for his monumental installation, *Book from the Sky* (1987–1991), which tackles the arduous task of deconstructing the Chinese calligraphic character.[89] Xu Bing harnessed the traditional practices of calligraphy and woodblock printing in order to produce enormous works of calligraphy. However, under closer inspection, Xu Bing mutated what appear at first glance to be Chinese traditional characters to the point of incomprehension, creating instead words devoid of meaning.[90] Xu Bing states across a series of interviews featured in *Yishu* that growing up in China, his relationship with the Chinese written language was both intimate and fraught with continuous transformation. Exposed to the ancient art of calligraphy in his early years, the artist would go on to employ his knowledge in order to support the revolutionary cause during the Cultural Revolution by creating propaganda posters and teaching calligraphy to those who lived in the countryside when he was a sent-down youth. Xu Bing experienced first-hand the gradual shift from the institutional use of traditional Chinese

"Oliva is not the Savior of Chinese Art (1993)," in *Contemporary Chinese Art Primary Documents,* eds. Wu Hung and Peggy Wang (Museum of Modern Art: New York, 2010), 366. Cited in Cacchione, 14.

[89] Britta Erickson, "The Contemporary Artistic Deconstruction – and Reconstruction – of Brush and Ink Painting," *Yishu* 2, no. 2 (2003): 82.

[90] In the tense Chinese political climate of the late 1980s, Xu Bing explains that *Book from the Sky*, impossible to understand and yet "meticulous, rigorous, and monumental in effect," was singled out for critique by the Chinese government, a factor which contributed in part to Xu Bing's decision to leave China for the United States to work as an honorary fellow at the University of Wisconsin. Scott Albright, "Xu Bing: Transcending Culture," *Yishu* 10, no. 5 (2011): 46. Xu Bing and Nick Kaldis, "Trans-boundary Experiences: A Conversation between Xu Bing and Nick Kaldis," *Yishu* 6, no. 2 (2007): 76–78, 85. April Liu, "An Interview with Xu Bing: Nonsensical Spaces and Cultural Tattoos," *Yishu* 4, no. 5 (2005): 89. "*Book from the Sky* 天书 (1987–1991)," *Xu Bing Official Website*, http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/projects/year/1987/book_from_the_sky (accessed 14 July 2016).

characters to simplified Chinese characters, a reform instituted by Mao Zedong in order to increase literacy in China, explaining that after carefully memorizing traditional characters, he and his classmates were told to relearn simplified characters only a year later.[91] This experience revealed to him both the manipulability and cultural depth of language. Arguing that Mao Zedong carried out the simplification of the Chinese character because "he wanted the revolution to burst forward from the depth of people's souls," Xu Bing states that he explores language through his work because "language is a most fundamental element of human culture."[92] Furthermore, the written language carries particular importance in the Chinese context. As Richard Kraus explains, the Chinese writing system has always been closely entwined with relations of power, from the oldest form of Chinese characters which were employed by imperial diviners to search for "heaven's will," to modern Chinese politicians who utilize their recognizable script to spread their influence, the Chinese character provides a sense of "national unity" in an immense and diverse country.[93] Similarly, Xu Bing highlights the "spiritual reverence" of the written language that has persisted throughout China's history, explaining that characters are considered a creation of the "realm of the divine;" consequently, "once characters are altered, the foundations of culture are disrupted and revolution is facilitated."[94]

While the history of the Chinese calligraphic tradition, as well as Chan Buddhist philosophy are cited as Xu Bing's influences for *Book from the Sky*, the artist was additionally influenced by the influx of Western postmodernist theories into China in the 1980s.[95] In a 2005

[91] Albright, 38. Xu Bing, "Trans-boundary Experiences," 83–85.
[92] Liu, "An Interview with Xu Bing: Nonsensical Spaces and Cultural Tattoos," 90.
[93] Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 4–6, 11–14.
[94] Liu, "An Interview with Xu Bing: Nonsensical Spaces and Cultural Tattoos," 90.
[95] Albright explains that "the work was inspired by Chan Buddhist philosophy, which calls for one to abandon following the strict guidelines of religious texts and to seek enlightenment through illogical forms of thought." Albright, 46.

interview, he stated that the surge in the discussion of culture in China following the Cultural Revolution, experienced in tandem with the introduction of new but culturally ungrounded Western theories, led him to feel that "culture was meaningless" and that he was lost amidst this wave of information.[96] Even before Xu Bing left China, his exposure to transcultural intellectual exchange was overwhelming, which strongly informed his deconstruction of the Chinese character.[97] Xu Bing revisited the topic of language after a stretch of living in the United States in his work *Square Word Calligraphy* (1994–1997), a work that melds the Chinese and English written languages. Set up like a classroom, Xu Bing invites the audience to practice the calligraphic system the artist invented, in which English words are composed in a square format in order to closely resemble a Chinese character. While the character is a readable English word, the audience is instructed to follow traditional calligraphic methods in writing it. In melding two writing systems, Xu Bing utilizes the experience of misunderstanding in order to produce an imperfect, but optimistic vision of cultural hybridity, as two linguistic traditions are practiced in unison.[98] Later, Xu Bing continued his meditation on language within situations of cultural exchange in *Book from the Ground* (2006). In this piece, Xu Bing parlays his interest in mistranslation between cultures and linguistic systems into the project of creating a universal language that transcends culture, ethnicity, and nation-state. As Xu Bing explains in his statement published in *Yishu*, *Book from the Ground* is a novel written in a language of computer-generated icons, images which "one should be able to understand. . . as long as one is

[96] Liu, "An Interview with Xu Bing: Nonsensical Spaces and Cultural Tattoos," 88–89.
[97] Albright, 46.
[98] Similarly, in Xu Bing's 1994 performance entitled *A Case Study of Transference,* a female pig printed with Chinese characters and a male pig printed with English letters fornicated in front of a public audience, a symbolic mixing of Chinese and Western languages and culture. While the gendered component of the performance could be interpreted as a symbol for the dominance of Western languages and culture over China, Xu Bing explains that he was attempting to illustrate an "integration of cultures." Albright, 45. Britta Erickson, "Xu Bing's *Square Word Calligraphy*," *Xu Bing Official Website*, http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/texts/xu_bings_square_work_calligraphy/ (accessed 14 July 2016).

thoroughly entangled in modern life."[99] This form of communication was created by Xu Bing in search of a "universal script" which surpasses the "inconvenience of language and miscommunication" in a globalized world where language is based on the intermingling factors of geography, ethnicity, and culture.[100]

Xu Bing's explorations of language and culture in *Book from the Sky, Square Word Calligraphy,* and *Book from the Ground,* as well as his exposé of the complications of working in an international art world rife with incidents of cultural mistranslation in *Wu Street,* epitomize the complexities of cultural hybridity, and it is clear that Xu Bing's conceptual approach in creating these works has been thoroughly enmeshed in cross-cultural exchange. For instance, in response to the question about what it is like to be a 'trans-boundary' artist who works across the geographical borders of multiple nation states, Xu Bing responds:

> From the time I was creating *Book from the Sky,* I was already interested in cultural misunderstanding and quite sensitive to the mistakes that occur in the transition from one culture to another, especially the misreadings and misunderstandings that result. After I arrived in America, these questions had become a significant topic of cultural and intellectual debate, as well as the reality I myself was facing. So I felt that my art easily fit into the larger context of those discussions. Now, as you've mentioned, I divide my time between the two countries and travel a lot, which further exacerbates these language problems, but I feel that the combination of limitations and the freedom of transnational travel, to a degree, strengthen certain tendencies in one's art. Traveling between different countries and cultures makes me even more sensitive to the themes that I am concerned with. Take my *Square Word Calligraphy* as an example; if I had continued living in China, I don't think I would have had any reason to make such a work that deals with English. Right now I am living in-between, in a special space that straddles different cultures.[101]

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[99] Xu Bing, "Regarding *Book from the Ground*," *Yishu* 6, no. 2 (2007): 70–71.
[100] Xu Bing, "Regarding *Book from the Ground*," 71, 75.
[101] Considering that Xu Bing does not speak English, and consequently all the articles included in *Yishu* are English translations, it should be questioned to what extent the translator took liberties in translating Xu Bing's words to resonate with the discourse of the diaspora common among an English-speaking readership. While none of the *Yishu* articles discussed were selected for translation in the Chinese-language edition, it is noteworthy that the inaugural issue of *Diancang* includes a Chinese-language 2011 interview with Xu Bing that does not have an English-language counterpart in *Yishu*. In this article, a great deal of the conversation is devoted to exploring changes to China's art world, and how Xu Bing compares these changes to the West, where he lived for many years. The frequent reference to his transnational existence in the answers Xu Bing shares is thus consistent with other articles found in *Yishu* in which the artist's experience in the diaspora is emphasized. Zheng Shengtian 郑胜天 ed., "*Dangdai Zhongguo yu dangdai yishu*—*Xu Bing fangtan*" 当代中国与当代艺术 —徐冰访谈 [Contemporary China and Contemporary Art – An Interview with Xu Bing], 73–79. Xu Bing, "Trans-boundary Experiences," 87.

Evidently, Xu Bing's experiences growing up in China, adjusting to life in the diaspora and subsequent travel back to China, have all informed his identity as a transnational subject, and the artistic vocabulary he employs when exploring linguistic and cultural misunderstandings in his art works have been influenced by this hybrid space. It is also important to note that Xu Bing situates himself within English-language "cultural and intellectual debate" concerning life in the diaspora, and his art within "the larger context of those discussions."[102] Owing to Xu Bing's close engagement with the discourse of diaspora studies, it follows that Xu Bing's works are a frequent topic of conversation amongst scholars of cross-cultural studies, interested in resolving issues of mistranslation and cultural inequity in the art world and in academic scholarship.

Xu Bing's ability to take diverse cultural influences and leverage moments of misunderstanding into products of 'creative mistranslation' has led the artist to become a significant part of discussions concerning Chinese artists in the diaspora, hybrid artistic expressions, and the navigation of difference in a culturally unequal international art world. For instance, a symposium held at the University of British Columbia entitled "A Dialogue on Contemporary Chinese Art: The One-Day Workshop 'Meaning, Image, and Word,'" documented in the December 2005 issue of *Yishu,* chose Xu Bing as the primary focus. The symposium was organized in order to explore how Xu Bing has negotiated transnationalism in his art, establishing a liminal 'Third Space' from which he employs "Western ideas and expressions to address centuries-old Chinese cultural issues," and furthermore, how his work informs cross-cultural studies in disciplines that exceed art history.[103] Tsao Hsingyuan explains that *A Book From the Sky* was frequently highlighted throughout the symposium because it is a

[102] Xu Bing, "Trans-boundary Experiences," 87.
[103] Tsao Hsingyuan, "A Dialogue on Contemporary Chinese Art: The One-Day Workshop 'Meaning, Image, and Word,'" *Yishu* 4, no. 5 (2005): 81–82.

work that allows Western art scholars to investigate how contemporary Chinese art as a whole may be contextualized, considering its investment in both Chinese tradition and Western postmodernism. Ultimately, Tsao Hsingyuan argues that the visual signifiers of culture that Xu Bing presents in his work must be read from a combination of both Western and Chinese discursive perspectives, thus transcending the binary separation of the two intellectual approaches. In conclusion, Tsao Hsingyuan suggests that Xu Bing's *A Book From the Sky* is compelling to scholars of postcolonial and cross-cultural studies because it is conceptually situated in a space where "language, word, or script cannot be claimed by any specific culture," even though language is an undeniably crucial component of "one's cultural being," illustrating the deep-seated nature of cultural hybridity.[104] "A Dialogue on Contemporary Chinese Art" highlights the extent to which Xu Bing's work is evocative of both Western and Chinese discursive traditions, thus providing a valuable framework for how notions of essentialist culture may be conceptually transcended.

Section 3: Globalization, the Nation-State, and Hybrid Sites of Contact

In July of 2002, fourteen female Chinese artists traveled to Lugu Lake in Yunnan, a locality known for the matrilineal minority culture of the Mosuo Chinese, in order to meet the famous American feminist artist Judy Chicago and realize a series of art activities. Organized in association with The Long March Project's first chapter, entitled A Walking Visual Display, the activity at Lugu Lake was planned by curators, Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, as one of the many stops

[104] The artist was present for the symposium proceedings, which included scholars from a variety of fields, such as Roger Ames, April Liu, Kazuko Kameda-Madar, Kuan-Hung Chen, Timothy Brook, Gu Xiong, Hank Bull, Zheng Shengtian, Jerome Silbergeld, Richard Vinograd, Alice Ming Wai Jim, William Wood and Tsao Hsingyuan. Tsao Hsingyuan, 82–86.

on the five-month traveling exhibition.[105] Documentation of the Lugu Lake proceedings was published in the November 2002 issue of *Yishu,* and according to Sasha S. Welland, the dialogue that took place between Judy Chicago and the participating artists was nothing short of "charged."[106] Conflict first arose when the artists involved questioned the apparent cultural hierarchy of the project, as the cost of bringing Judy Chicago to China was covered without question, while the Chinese artists were expected to cover their own costs in traveling to Lugu Lake. Once the group arrived at Lugu Lake, the artists rejected Chicago's initial project proposal offering instead a plan of their own, to which Chicago agreed, visibly hurt by their criticism.[107] Finally, in Zhang Lun's performance piece, in which fifty Mosuo residents were to be poured a cup of tea by Chicago as each exchange was photographically captured, Chicago left in frustration after the twelfth cup was poured. As Welland states, "perhaps this moment of breakdown, marked by the sudden disappearance of Judy Chicago in Zhang's series of images. . . best demonstrates the dialogue at Lugu Lake. Just as no Chinese women have a place set for them at her famous *The Dinner Party,* her absence now also troubles this hearth and all essentialist visions, no matter how well meaning, of a single universalist feminism."[108]

The Long March Project's "Dialogue with Judy Chicago" illuminates a variety of cultural power dynamics, such as the interaction between local Chinese artists and the Western-dominated international art world, as well as the limits of universalism as the culturally-specific

[105] Sasha S. Welland, "The Long March to Lugu Lake: A Dialogue with Judy Chicago," *Yishu* 1, no. 3 (2002): 69–70.
[106] Welland, 71.
[107] Chicago proposed that the artists all stage their works at the inn where she was staying, in an exhibition modeled after the *Womanhouse* exhibition she and Miriam Schapiro staged in a Los Angeles mansion in 1972. However, the Chinese artists took issue with the idea of adopting an exhibition framework shaped by the feminist movement in the United States of the 1970s, rather than one that was developed in the context of the Chinese women's movement. Welland, 70–74.
[108] Welland, 75.

concept of feminism is explored in the Chinese context.[109] The cross-cultural art activity that took place on this particular stop of the Long March Project was rife with conflict, causing curator Liu Jie to thoughtfully conclude that the attempted dialogue "failed."[110] However, Liu Jie suggests that the prospect of "failure is the beauty of Long March;" the Long March Project was after all conceived as an ongoing process "of movement through space, time, or thought without a fixed beginning or end, particularly one that involves excessive hardship or multiple transformations."[111] Similarly, participants of the Long March Ho Chi Minh Trail Project 2008–2010, Ngyuen Nhu Huy and Viet Le, muse that the process of the Project itself is "an act of translation."[112] They continue: "As with any cultural exchange, there are mistranslations and gaps. Translation is almost always a failure – there is a world of difference between the sign and the signifier. But in these gaps and fissures lie opportunities as well."[113] Consequently, like the Long March Project, "translation is an open-ended path, a journey."[114] In the Long March Project, as various circumstances of cross-cultural exchange are assessed, it is expected that the obstacle of mistranslation will inevitably be encountered.

The Long March Project, first imagined by Western-educated Chinese curator Lu Jie in 1999, was set into motion in 2002.[115] The curatorial premise of the Project's first chapter, A Walking Visual Exhibition (2002), was to follow the historic Red Army Trek once traveled by the Chinese Communist Party during their legendary Long March (1934–1935), stopping in over

[109] Welland, 70–71.
[110] Philip Tinari, "A Conversation with Liu Jie," *Yishu* 1, no. 3 (2002): 65.
[111] Tinari, 65, 68.
[112] Ngyuen Nhu Huy and Viet Le, "Transnationalism in Translation (A Tracing)," *Yishu* 10, no. 2 (2011): 53.
[113] Ngyuen, 53.
[114] Ngyuen, 54.
[115] *Yishu,* which also released its first publication in 2002, has covered the Project since its early beginnings. The first chapter of the Long March Project entitled A Walking Visual Exhibition was introduced by the curators, Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, in the November 2002 issue of *Yishu*. The Long March Project was allotted a full issue once in September 2006 with the conclusion of the Yan'an Project, and again in March/April 2011 as the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project came to an end.

twenty local communities to erect exhibitions with the involvement of over two hundred and fifty local and international artists and scholars. The Long March Project was conceived in part to explore the Maoist Era's ongoing influence on visual culture in China, as well as multiculturalism within the borders of the nation. In addition, it was also seen as an attempt to reexamine the relationship between Chinese artists and the Western-dominated global contemporary art world. In holding a series of grassroots exhibitions in public spaces outside the traditional gallery space, the curators rejected the commercialization of the international art market, situating A Walking Visual Exhibition as a "critique of contemporary mainstream exhibition culture," which at this point in 2002 was largely Western, as the domestic Chinese art market was only beginning to take form. Curators Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie argue in their curatorial statement that the introduction of Chinese artists into this system has led to the damaging practice of "self-stereotyping" in their works in order to achieve success internationally, illustrating the frustration with the global art world that in part shaped that Long March Project.[116] Furthermore, the Project was conceived as "an ongoing investigation of critical discourse surrounding art and culture," echoing the desire of many Chinese-language art professionals to develop a critical discourse that, despite its profound entanglement with global contemporary art discourses, provides a departure in order to represent Chinese culture in its specificity.[117]

[116] *Yishu* covered the next chapter of the Long March Project in 2006 entitled the Yan'an Project. The Yan'an Project explored the present state and future of art education in China through a series of forums and exhibitions in Yan'an, the final destination of the historic Long March and the place where Mao Zedong gave his famous lecture on socialist art and literature. Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, "Long March: A Walking Visual Exhibition," *Yishu* 1, no. 3 (2002): 55–59. Lu Jie and Jia Bu, "From 'Urban to Rural' to 'Rural to Urban.' The Long March Project: The Great Survey of Paper-cuttings in Yanchuan County," *Yishu* 3, no. 4 (2004): 102–103. Lu Jie, "Long March Yan'an Project," *Yishu* 5, no. 3 (2006): 5–8.
[117] Keith Wallace, "Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail 2008–2010," *Yishu* 10, no. 2 (2011): 94.

The focus of the 2008–2010 chapter, entitled the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project, is significant in that it focuses on expanding critical discourse rather than producing and exhibiting art works.[118] While there are numerous articles and transcriptions documenting the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project in Chinese and English, it is conspicuously difficult to locate any works of art that may have been inspired by the experience, or even details on the final "performances/actions" promised in the curatorial proposal.[119] The full March/April 2011 issue of *Yishu,* documenting the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project through curatorial statements, reflective essays, interviews and discussions, as well as the three articles selected for the inaugural October 2011 issue of *Diancang*, "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth (*Chuangjie 'hongdeng gongtongti'* 创建'黄灯共同体')," "On the Ho Chi Minh Trail (*Zou zai Hu Zhiming xiaodao shang* 走在胡志明小道上)," and "Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail (*Changzheng jihua – Hu Zhiming xiaodao* 长征计划－胡志明小道)" illustrate the extent to which the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project was an extended exercise of art criticism.[120] Chinese art critic Wang Chunchen emphasizes that the significance of the Long March Project within the domestic Chinese art world lies in its commitment to engaging local Chinese communities, demonstrating the close relationship

[118] The Ho Chi Minh Trail Project 2008–2010 included over seventy-five forums, five education workshops, two curatorial residencies hosting artists and art professionals from across Southeast Asia, China, and the United States, four research trips, a month-long journey throughout China, Vietnam Cambodia and Laos, a series of theatre "rehearsals" or "performances/actions" carried out in Beijing and Shanghai, and an online archive. Keith Wallace, "Introduction: Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail Project," *Yishu* 10, no. 2 (2011): 4–5. Wallace, "Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail 2008–2010," 94–97.

[119] See section "D. Theatre" on page 96 of "Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail 2008–2010." Wallace, "Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail 2008–2010," 96. *Long Marchers on the Road: Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail*, http://www.hochiminhtrailproject.com/html/e-main0.html (accessed 28 October 2015). Long March Space *Changzheng kongjian* 长征空间, "*Changzheng jihua – Hu Zhiming xiaodao*" 长征计划－胡志明小道 [Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail], *Diancang* 10, no. 1 (2011): 58.

[120] Because "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth" was a conversation between largely Chinese and Vietnamese artists and scholars, "On the Ho Chi Minh Trail" was written by Chinese scholar Gao Shiming, and "Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail" was composed by employees of the Long March Space in Beijing, it can be deduced that the original transcriptions of the documents were Chinese translated into English for the March/April 2011 publication of *Yishu.*

between art and social action.[121] However, the above-mentioned articles reveal that the Project reaches beyond local issues, in order to explore the interplay between nation-states, the mutual influence of Chinese contemporary art and the global capitalist art market, and ultimately, questions of cultural translation as the borders between nation-states are purposefully flouted.

Case Study: Negotiating Boundaries through the Long March Project

The Ho Chi Minh Trail Project 2008–2010 provided a departure from previous Long March Projects, each of which had been purposefully carried out in communities across mainland China, as it focused on the strategic supply route of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. During the Second Indo-China War (1964–1975), the Ho Chi Minh Trail linked China with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, ultimately assisting in the victory of the communist Viet Cong. The Ho Chi Minh Trail Project, based on a path that itself once surpassed national boundaries, served as an avenue to explore the historical connections and present-day relationship between China and Southeast Asia, and how Chinese and Southeast Asian artists continue to be influenced by the intertwined histories of their nations. In addition, the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project also allowed participants to come together to discuss an issue that had motivated the Long March Project since its inception: the complicated and oftentimes forced relationship between artists, global capitalism, and the Western-dominated international art market. After a series of art activities, the Project culminated with a month-long journey through China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in order to trace the historic Ho Chi Minh Trail.[122]

[121] Wang Chunchen, *Yishu jieru shehui: yi zhong xin yishu guanxi* 艺术介入社会：一种新艺术关系 [Art Intervenes in Society – A New Artistic Relationship] (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2010), 40–44.
[122] Wallace, "Introduction: Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail Project," 4–5. Wallace, "Long March Project – Ho Chi Minh Trail 2008–2010," 94–97.

The documentation of the Project in *Yishu*'s March/April 2011 issue is interesting not only because the articles reveal the unique discursive framework of the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project, but additionally because they investigate how the structure of the nation-state and transnational exchanges across national borders have influenced discussions of inter-Asian communities, and their relationship with the international contemporary art world. As Lu Xinghua explains, it was the ambition of the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project to explore how to "transcend culture and nationality;" consequently, the participants navigated the fine lines between nationalism and transnationalism, as well as cultural acceptance and the resistance of cultural imperialism, as they are presented in the internationalized art world.[123] It follows that these articles illustrate the inclination of the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project towards art activities outside the structure of the art gallery exhibition. In discussing the difference between "community (*shetuan* 社团)" and "commonwealth (*gonggongti* 共同体)," "rehearsal (*paiyan* 排演)" and "event (*shijian* 事件)," an uneasiness in evaluating the significance of borders is revealed, resulting in open-ended discussions without consensus, and the use of terms that resist the absolute and instead dwell in the in-between.

In "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth" and the Chinese-language counterpart, the transcription of a six-hour conversation which took place in Ho Chi Minh City between artists and art professionals from across China, Southeast Asia and the United States, the terms "community (*shetuan* 社团)" and "commonwealth (*gonggongti* 共同体)," are discussed in relation to inter-Asian connections and the formation of trans-border communities within the art world. Curator of the Long March Project Lu Jie wonders: "Regardless of artist-run or commercial, how can we construct this *gongtongti*, a commonwealth, which is different from the

[123] Lu Xinghua, "How Can Artists Be Politically Radical?," *Yishu* 10, no. 2 (2011): 70–71.

idea of a community?"[124] The difference between the terms that the translator highlights, and that Lu Jie emphasizes by preferring the term "commonwealth (*gonggongti* 共同体)" to "community (*shetuan* 社团)," is the role of the nation-state; in this word choice, Lu Jie accentuates that they, the participants in the Project, are a group of people brought together by a commonality across nation-states.[125] Gao Shiming, in offering that the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project can "bring us together as a commonwealth," assents to the idea that "each country or person has a different narration of local or personal issues," and that "these categories of art and their narratives are confined within the logic of nation-states." However, considering how the shared history of the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project crosses the borders of nation-states, he wonders if the Project could potentially help the participants "move away from an obsession with the nation-state category."[126] The discussion then turns to whether or not the Project is inherently nationalistic seeing as the names themselves, the Long March Project and the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project each heavily rely on local histories of nation building. However no consensus on the issue is reached, the conversation left largely open-ended and inconclusive.[127]

The exploration of an inter-Asian "commonwealth (*gonggongti* 共同体)" in "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth," highlights the complexities involved in reevaluating the significance of geopolitical boundaries in order to both physically and conceptually transcend national borders. Inevitably plagued with issues and contradictions considering the thorough

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[124] The Chinese original transcription reads: "无论是艺术家自主运作或商业化操作，我们怎样才能一个不同于'社团'概念的'共同体?'" Lu Jie 卢 杰, "*Chuangjie 'Hongdeng gongtongti'*" 创建 "黄灯共同体" [Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth], *Diancang* 10, no. 1 (2011): 64–65. Wallace, "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth," 19–20.
[125] *Miriam Webster Dictionary Online,* n. "commonwealth," http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/commonwealth (accessed 28 October 2015). *Miriam Webster Dictionary Online,* n. "community," http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community (accessed 28 October 2015).
[126] Wallace, "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth," 20.
[127] Wallace, "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth," 24–25.

entrenchment of the notion of the nation-state, participants in this discussion eventually settled into a provisional in-between space, a "Yellow Light Commonwealth (*hongdeng gongtongti* 黄灯共同体)," to encapsulate their dissatisfaction with the present discursive environment and their hope for future action to alter it. First mentioned as a metaphor for the uncertain terms between the Vietnamese government and artists, who like their Chinese counterparts often encounter censorship and other obstacles in creating and exhibiting work, Chinese artist Wang Jianwei wonders if the "yellow light (*hongdeng* 黄灯)" is also a fitting metaphor for the group; the yellow light is a liminal state, somewhere between a complete stop and unimpeded movement. He states: "Can we construct a yellow light commonwealth? At a green light we refuse the red light, and vice versa. A yellow light brings uncertainty and also a feeling of caution and awareness."[128] The state between the red and green light is cautious, unstable, practical, and honest about its insufficiencies, but moving nonetheless. The metaphor of the "yellow light (*hongdeng* 黄灯)" thus captures both the caution these artists perform when interacting with their nation-states, and the uncertainty with which they explore the convoluted nature of transnational cultural exchanges and cross-border communities, while simultaneously recognizing the momentum created in pushing these issues forward through discussion.

The use of language in curator and scholar Gao Shiming's accompanying piece "On the Ho Chi Minh Trail," additionally alludes to the in-between in his ideas of "rehearsal (*paiyan* 排演)" and "event (*shijian* 事件)." In "On the Ho Chi Minh Trail," written during his month-long journey through China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos with the group, Gao Shiming reflects on what the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project means to him. In addition to expressing frustration about

[128] Wallace, "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth," 23. Lu Jie, "*Chuangjie 'Hongdeng gongtongti'*" 创建 "黄灯共同体" [Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth], 67–68.

limitations in freedom of expression imposed by the Chinese government, he rejects the overarching structure of the global contemporary art world, claiming it to be a capitalist importation from the West, and thus insufficient for artistic innovation in the Chinese context.[129] He recognizes that many cultures are now thoroughly steeped in capitalist discourses due to rapid globalization, and despite the world of contemporary art is itself being thoroughly implicated in these processes, he ends by proposing that the Ho Chi Minh Project and artists in general have the potential to overcome the internalization of global capitalist discourses.[130]

Gao Shiming offers that the Ho Chi Minh Project is a "rehearsal (*paiyan* 排演)," further stating that "during a rehearsal, one faces continuous interruption, missed cues, and self-observation. A rehearsal is a process of simultaneous assembly, performance, observation, and dissemination. . . It is a preparation for participation in some kind of 'event.'"[131] He continues: "In this manner, we are forced to turn our attention from artwork to art practice, or rather, to art 'activity.' An art activity is a temporary theatre, the eye of one of the storms that sweeps up artists, artwork, and everything else in its path. It is a product not of the self, but of action."[132] According to Gao Shiming's definition, the "rehearsal (*paiyan* 排演)" is in-between the conception of the art "event (*shijian* 事件)" and the official "event (*shijian* 事件);" it is a plan that has been set in motion but the "event (shijian 事件)" has yet to occur. While full of mistakes and missteps, this preparatory movement allows for an "activity (*huodong* 活动)" within society, a transient societal action, perhaps devoid of material traces, that both opens up the space for

[129] Gao Shiming, "On the Ho Chi Minh Trail," *Yishu* 10, no. 2 (2011): 72–73, 78.
[130] Gao Shiming, "On the Ho Chi Minh Trail," 72–73, 78. Gao Shiming 高士明, "*Zou zai Hu Zhiming xiaodao shang*" 走在胡志明小道上 [On the Ho Chi Minh Trail], *Diancang* 10, no. 1 (2011): 61.
[131] Gao Shiming, "On the Ho Chi Minh Trail," 73. Gao Shiming, "*Zou zai Hu Zhiming xiaodao shang*" 走在胡志明小道上 [On the Ho Chi Minh Trail], 62.
[132] Gao Shiming, "On the Ho Chi Minh Trail," 73. Gao Shiming, "*Zou zai Hu Zhiming xiaodao shang*" 走在胡志明小道上 [On the Ho Chi Minh Trail], 62.

social and artistic engagement, and resists the materialistic forces of capitalism that govern the contemporary art market. This temporary "theatre (*juchang* 剧场)" also rests in the uneasy in-between; somewhere between action and acting, theatre and reality, spectatorship and participation, preparation and performance. It seems that the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project pushes for a profound internal discursive shift, while the ground for an anxiously awaited outward "event (*shijian* 事件)" set to occur in the future, another border to cross, is slowly prepared.

The movement across borders alluded to in the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project's discussions paints a decidedly complex picture of trans-border exchanges, and the relationship between these currents of communication and contemporary Chinese art. During the "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth" discussion, Chinese artist Wang Jiahao suggests:

> No matter how different China and Vietnam are in terms of social and material conditions, globalized capital and community bypass our boundaries. On that level we want to create a commonwealth. If the idea of nation is not strong enough to hold out again the giant of globalized capitalism, what is the point of insisting on the boundaries of a nation?[133]

Here, Wang Jiahao points out that despite the inclination to rely on national discourse, both "globalized capital and community bypass [the] boundaries" between China and Vietnam, and that this transgression of borders is a solid basis on which to create a transnational "commonwealth (*gonggongti* 共同体)," as it reveals the porous nature of nation-states, and thus provides an entryway to "get beyond the idea of nation" and begin new significant conversations.[134] Wang Jiahao's statement calls to mind postcolonial theorist Arjun Appadurai's outline of the complex web of global exchange. Appadurai complicates the dichotomies of the local/global and the center/periphery as he explores the current state of globalism by tracing various forms of trans-border movement: the global flow of persons, media images, technology,

[133] Wallace, "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth," 23–24.
[134] Wallace, "Building a Yellow Light Commonwealth," 24.

capital and ideologies which move in vast and unpredictable ways across national borders.[135] Using Appadurai's model, perhaps the complex trans-border flow of communities and capital that Wang Jiahao highlights is the basis on which the nation-state can be conceptually transcended. If migrants, visitors, and artists can cross national borders, bringing media, worldviews and ideas with them, these flows are how national affiliations can be momentarily suspended, and a "commonwealth" created.

The Ho Chi Minh Trail discussions each explore the permeable borders of nation-states, the formation of trans-border communities and the nearly unavoidable internalization of global capitalist discourses and systems instigated by globalization. Discussions of these issues are fraught with contradictions as the artists and scholars involved grapple with the monumental question of how to transcend the concept of the nation-state in discussions of contemporary art and transnational artistic connections. National borders between China and Southeast Asian countries are upheld in the formation of a transnational "commonwealth (*gonggongti* 共同体)," as the dismantling of conceptual borders between nation-states is simultaneously plotted. All the while, nationalistic borders between "East" and "West" are continually maintained, as the issues of forced contact with global capitalism and the encroachment of Western systems of thought are situated as obstructions to the growth of socially impactful art, and a local discursive framework, in China and Southeast Asia. The factors of history, culture, politics, ideology and power remain insurmountable roadblocks in the attempt to surpass the need for the discourse of the nation-state. The discursive results are allusions to the in-between space; the yellow light between

[135] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *The Cultural Studies Reader,* ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1999), 221–225, 227.

lunging forward headlong and a full stop, the stumbling moments between an event's conception and its eventual realization.

Conclusion

The analysis of *Yishu* reveals that varied instances of cultural translation and mistranslation are common points of discussion in the realm of contemporary Chinese art and criticism. Chinese critics must navigate the rocky waters of cultural translation on multiple levels, in no small part due to the pervasiveness of Western critical theory and philosophy in Chinese art scholarship. Their work is influenced not only by the imperfect process of linguistic translation, but furthermore by the process of translating ideas and concepts that were formed within specific cultural contexts. The pressure to incorporate Western theoretical traditions into Chinese-language art critical writing and dissatisfaction with the flawed results of translation have resulted in an ineffective system of discourse with which to examine contemporary Chinese art from a Chinese-language perspective. At the same time as these discursive issues are explicitly addressed in the "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective" discussion, they are additionally exemplified in the subtle differences between the original Chinese transcription and the English-language translation, specifically in the exclusion of information considered too culturally specific by the translator. Although the commercialization of the Chinese art world is without question a significant factor in the slow growth of art criticism in China, in "Critical Art Writing from a Local Perspective," the scholars ultimately agree that the greatest obstacle to the Chinese-language critic is the problem of discourse.

Similarly, Xu Bing's work provides valuable insight into misunderstandings caused by cultural translation, and furthermore how Xu Bing situates himself within an international art

world plagued by inequity. The discourse surrounding Xu Bing's work since the late-1980s has been informed by studies of the diaspora, focusing on the artist's employment of Chinese cultural signifiers in tandem with Western modern art forms in his art consumed in large part by the West. However, Xu Bing's investigation of language, culture, and translation complicates the argument that works of Chinese art may be analyzed based on binary cultural perspectives that polarize influences from the East and the West. The critical articles, symposiums and interviews included in *Yishu* reveal that Xu Bing's works are informed by both the discourses of Western cultural theory and art history, as well as Chinese philosophical and art historical traditions, and his particular experience living across cultures. Xu Bing's art, while conscious of cultural imperialism in the art world, illuminates the complexities of cultural exchange in the age of globalization by highlighting moments of cultural-linguistic misunderstanding and the potential of these moments to produce a transnational, hybrid conception of culture.

Finally, the documentation of the Long March Project in *Yishu* echoes Xu Bing's attempt to transcend notions of cultural difference while simultaneously resisting cultural imperialism. The Long March's Ho Chi Minh Trail Project explores the shared histories that cross the borders of nation-states and bring individuals of different cultural backgrounds into conversation. By accepting the course of intercultural exchange as a process of translation in which mistakes are inevitably made, the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project participants sought to explore the significance of the nation-state, as well as the mutual influence of Chinese contemporary art and the global capitalist art market. The transnational "Yellow Light Commonwealth (*hongdeng gongtongti* 黄灯共同体)" of which the Ho Chi Minh Trail Project participants conceive highlights the unsure, in-between state – between nations, cultures and art worlds – in which many postcolonial artists find themselves. Furthermore, the Project exposes a curatorial approach that eschews the

Western-dominated capitalist art market by organizing art events outside of the gallery space and de-emphasizing the production of commodities, harnessing instead the opportunity to create new strains of discourse.

The above-mentioned Case Studies illustrate that contemporary Chinese art and criticism are situated in a culturally unequal international art world, in which art historical traditions and languages from the West continue to be given prevalence. In the accommodation of and resistance to the influence of foreign languages, cultures and intellectual traditions, scholars of Chinese contemporary art toe a multitude of fine lines. Consequently, the inescapabilty of cultural mistranslation is of interest to many artists and art professionals, as *Yishu* illustrates both in its patterns of publication and distribution, and its frequent discussions of domestic Chinese art criticism, the work of diasporic artists such as the prolific Xu Bing, and the transnational Long March Project. In addition to complex situations of transnational exchange and cultural hybridity, issues of linguistic translation are of primary concern, chiefly to Chinese-language artists and critics engaging with the Western-dominated global art world, and dealing with terminology translated from Western critical theory. The discussions highlighted in *Yishu* bring up significant issues of cultural translation, however no firm conclusions or resolutions are reached. Evidently, discourse surrounding contemporary Chinese art is at a critical point of development as it is being intensely analyzed and gradually transformed.

Cultural translation is inevitable in an increasingly globalized world, introducing both manifold problems and opportunities for growth. The potential of translation to be both destructive and creative is illustrated in Xu Bing thoughtful work entitled "*Telephone* (1996-2006)," a translation project in which a Chinese passage written by scholar Lydia H. Liu was translated into English, then from English into French, and eventually into Russian, German,

Spanish, Japanese, and Thai, before being translated back into Chinese. Xu Bing's work, in which the vast disparities between the original and the final translation illustrate the deficiencies of translation, additionally exemplifies the productive potential of translation in creating new perspectives and insightful observations.[136] Accordingly, *Yishu* is accepting of the limitations of cross-cultural translation, and optimistic concerning its creative potential. In *Diancang*'s inaugural issue, Zheng Shengtian in his statement "Why Publish a Chinese Edition?" provides a Chinese-language translation of a passage of Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator."[137] The English-language translation of this passage reads: "It is evident that no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original. Nonetheless, it does stand in the closest relationship to the original by virtue of the original's translatability."[138] As Benjamin argues, translations cannot be copies, nor can they be equated with the original work due to the impossibility of translating concepts between cultural-linguistic worlds verbatim. Consequently, the task of the translator is to practice openness to distinctive linguistic systems and cultural perspectives in order to capture the significance of the original and pass it forward.[139] By providing a space for the discourse of contemporary Chinese art criticism to unfold in both transnational English-language circles and increasingly in Chinese-language settings, *Yishu* brings issues of culture in contemporary Chinese art to light, and contributes to the development a system of art critical discourse in the West that is accommodating to diverse perspectives and intellectual traditions.

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[136] Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel, eds., *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), 450. "*Telephone* (1996-2006)," *Xu Bing Official Website.* http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/projects/year/2006/translate_language (accessed 6 August 2016).
[137] The original Chinese quotation reads: "译作无论多么完善，也无法取代原作的重要性，但原作却可以通过可译性而同译作紧密地联系在一起." Zheng Shengtian, "*Weishenme chu zhongwen ban?*" 为什么出中文版？[Why Publish a Chinese Edition?], 3.
[138] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926,* eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 254.
[139] Benjamin, 259-260.

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