

# The Current Expression of Traditional Culture in the Works of Chinese Female Artists from an International Perspective

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**Abstract:** The "Chinese fever" that has been sparked at international art exhibitions is the brilliance of the history of old shrines. The "5000 Year Civilization Exhibition of China" held by the Guggenheim Museum of Fine Arts only highlights the "ancient" and "modern" parts, canceling the "contemporary" part, in this way, it fully affirms the value of traditional culture. Therefore, avant-garde artistic creations after 1985 have all tended to destroy and subvert the spiritual value of cultural relics. The cultural relics that once symbolized power have been washed away from traditional values by artists, used as pure "materials" for expression, and extensively used as a consumable material, which to some extent aligns with the existing cognitive concepts of Western art consumers towards Chinese art. After recognizing and affirming traditional culture, Chinese female artists export works that are considered exotic, proficiently mastering the language barriers between transforming traditional culture and international aesthetics, no longer limited to graphic or decorative content. Its creation presents a chaotic state of mixed old and new, with a mixture of East and West, full of a strong vitality. They pursue a better material civilization life, break through the constraints of tradition on behavior, learn and master international ways of expression, achieve dual liberation of body and mind, and thus develop a comprehensive style. The renovation of traditional culture and the establishment of an international comprehensive style by artists are the ways for them to find uniqueness and entry in the many obstacles of "ism".

**Keywords:** International Perspective;  
Chinese Female Artists; Traditional  
Culture; Present Expression;

## Comprehensive Style

### 1. Introduction

In the second half of the 20th century, with the development of the civil rights movement and the feminist movement around the world, the creation of identity themes rose rapidly in the global art mechanism, and as a result, the concept of identity had an indispensable impact on artistic production. In fact, along with the process of changing the self-identity of Chinese female artists, the different ways in which Chinese female artists are facing the dual marginal identities of ethnic "other" and gender "other" have triggered a change in the way artists perceive images and creative concepts in the creation of artworks. Based on the in-depth investigation of this universal phenomenon, this paper finally decides to take the creation of Chinese women artists who have been active on the international stage since the 80s of the 20th century as the research object, and from the perspective of art sociology, taking the theory of identity as the starting point, postcolonial critical theory and feminist theory as the clue, and image theory as the analytical reference, to explore the relationship between the artistic production and social context of Chinese women artists in the 80s of the 20th century.

Contemporary artists generally seek to break free from tradition or explore it more deeply without being bound by it. Therefore, abandoning the traditional media she or he is accustomed to in order to better understand tradition is an important and effective way. Behind tradition, it actually represents a certain culture, and cultural mixing is always a product of cultural conflicts, and complexity is the result of immigration. During the process of cultural migration, different civilizations constantly

collide, conflict, compromise, and assimilate. People from the field of art are often regulated and constrained in the process of migration and communication due to identity issues, feeling forced differences. However, this cultural conflict often weakens over time, and second-generation Chinese female artists born and settled in the United States are able to more naturally integrate into the local culture. Part of the identity issues and biases are gradually being dissolved, replaced by a weak identity. Although new identity titles are shaped in different cultural, identity doubts still exist in the spiritual world. These will profoundly affect an individual's behavior and beliefs. Artists trace the origin of their identity in the spiritual world, and also express the mutual infiltration and mixed identity between different cultures in artistic creation.[1]

## **2. Expansion of Cognition of Traditional Cultural Media "Calligraphy"**

Calligraphy is not only a formal carrier of writing in the cultural memory of Chinese people, but also an independent art. "Chinese calligraphy is highly valued by the Chinese people." [2] Cui Fei (1970-), an artist who settled in New York after studying in the United States in 1996, used materials found in nature such as leaves, vines, seeds, and tree thorns to create relief paintings, which were then arranged in the composition of Chinese calligraphy. Her representative work, "Unmanned Scene", was created in 2013. Cui Fei accidentally discovered a small branch underground that resembled the strokes of Chinese calligraphy, and decided to use the branch as a device. Seeds, vine branches, and leaves, each material has its own unique attributes: seeds give hope, tree thorns are sharp and critical, and vine branch lines flow with elegant rhythms. She often chooses a clean white wall as her new canvas and improvises compositions based on the size and rules of the wall, then uses a pin to nail branches onto the wall. After completion, the work revealed a pure white stretch of black branches, which looked like Chinese cursive script from a distance, but up close, they were only natural shapes that

the branches could not have recognized. The most important commonality between Cui Fei's works and calligraphy is the traces of nature. Her calligraphy is no longer the outline and content of calligraphy, but the origin of calligraphy: the imprint of nature itself. Thus, "tracing the origin of art to its natural source". "The East has been Orientalized"[3] Becoming the core of Cui Fei's artistic creation.

Cui Fei's works value the ways and forms of information transmission. Since the end of the 20th century, from oil painting to installation art and photography, despite the constant changes in the forms of artistic expression, Cui Fei has maintained his consistent Chinese calligraphy characteristics in composition: a visual art that appears to be written but has no meaning, and even the content and timing of inscriptions and inscriptions are complete. In fact, this is clearly a way of integrating traditional Chinese culture into contemporary installation art. If we want to trace the origin of the development of contemporary Chinese installation art, we cannot avoid Wanman, the Bulgarian artist Martyn Varbanov (1932-1989) [4]. He studied abroad at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1953. In 1959, he returned to his hometown of Sofia with his Chinese wife Song Huaijia and daughter, and founded the Department of Dyeing and Weaving Art at the Sofia Academy of Fine Arts. In 1975, the Wanman family lived in Paris and gradually established an international reputation as a modern wall hanging artist in Europe. Wall hanging art, also known as soft sculpture or fiber art, is an important form of cross media art. In 1985, Wan Man returned to China again and was invited by the China Academy of Fine Arts (then known as Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts) to establish the Wan Man Wall Hanging Research Institute in Hangzhou in 1986. Wanman is an important intermediary force that brings Chinese artists to the international artistic perspective. In 1986, the 13th International Wall Hanging Biennale was held in Lausanne, Switzerland. Three large-scale wall hanging works completed under the guidance of Wan Man were selected, marking the first appearance of Chinese artists in the world

contemporary art world. The exhibited works are Gu Wenda's "Quiet, Ze, Sheng, Ling", Shi Hui and Zhu Wei's "Shou", and Liang Shaoji's "Sun Tzu's Art of War". These works weave the charm of Chinese culture into contemporary works, and this new installation concept has a profound impact on the development of contemporary Chinese art after the 1980s.

### **3. From Carrier to Subject: A New Cultural Translation of "Xuan Paper"**

As early as the 3rd to 4th century, when calligraphy flourished as an independent form of literary art, paper, especially rice paper, gradually replaced silk as the most commonly used material for Chinese calligraphy and painting, becoming one of the most culturally meaningful carriers among many media. The creation of Yan Lin, a Chinese artist who has lived in New York for many years, is based on the characteristics and significance of rice paper, a traditional Chinese painting medium. Lin Yan's works infuse the essence of Chinese culture into her installation works. Although she has not received training in traditional ink painting, she is always fascinated by the expressive power of paper and ink, and regards paper and ink as her personal material. "Whether a person is called a 'literati' depends on their literary talent and educational background. In the past, obtaining this title was a difficult achievement for most people because 'literati' played a very important role in society, culture." [5] Therefore, the enthusiasm of overseas Chinese artists for the medium of rice paper embodies their intention to explore the spirit of traditional literati. Lin Yan often creates installations based on the space at the exhibition site, responding to the actual space while interacting with it. Lin Yan's works pursue the ultimate simplicity in the use of materials, almost only using Chinese rice paper as materials, which is deeply influenced by the minimalist art style deeply rooted in the international artistic context. In his works of the 1990s, Lin Yan used more installation art language. Under the mixed influence of Eastern and Western cultures at different times, Lin Yan himself became a collection of Eastern and Western

cultures.

Lin Yan's parents, Pang Hua and Lin Gang, were the first generation of backbone forces cultivated by higher art education in New China. Among them, his father, Pang Hua, devoted his whole life to higher art education in New China. Starting from 2005, Lin Yan created a series of installation works using rice paper and ink as materials, using rubbings from sculptures. These works use different sizes, textures, colors, and textures of Su Xuan, overlapping and mounting on gypsum molds that have been turned from the steel plate floor of the former studio. Gypsum mold flipping and then rice paper pasting, rice paper contains very long fibers, so repeated rubbing will not easily damage it. By using rice paper rubbings, the time marks left by the increasing wear and tear on the steel plate are preserved, presenting a visual effect superimposed between the special texture, color, and shape of rice paper. Afterwards, Lin Yan continuously tried to extend and mutate this method, trying to soak rice paper with ink. After the same process of layer by layer pasting and attaching to different mold prototypes, a series of works rich in visual changes are obtained, such as the Monument series. Some of these mold prototypes come from gray tiles in ancient Chinese architecture, some from old bricks that she accidentally picked up on the streets of New York with decades of history, and some from the outer wall of the old Central Academy of Fine Arts dormitory building where she grew up.

The artist's own life experience and the imprint of the changing times quietly blend into the shaping of the work. Whether in her past works, Lin Yan has turned over metal floors and brick walls, or in her new works, her dialogue with space is not only for the needs of formal decoration and texture effects, but more importantly, she is seeking symbolic spaces that represent her own journey of memory, time, and history. The work uses rice paper as the main medium to create installations and painting sculptures with architectural characteristics. Xuan paper is no longer just a carrier of flat painting, but can be shaped into a form with a strong sense of weight and hierarchy. The juxtaposition of black and white, hardness

and softness is like a Tai Chi that is compatible with reality, echoing the balance of yin and yang in traditional Chinese philosophical thought. Starting from space and combining it with architectural form, Lin Yan has endowed minimalism with an Eastern aesthetic dimension. In recent years, he has created many large on-site installations, creating a subtle contrast between the grandeur of his works and their close range tactile and handmade feel. In the all-encompassing contemporary art, Lin Yan calmly expresses the struggle and vitality of nature and culture, as well as the beauty and trauma, in the midst of social change and turbulence, using the oldest and simplest materials and concise and powerful unique language, attempting to recreate and strengthen the essence of ink and paper.

#### **4. International Visual Construction of "Paper Cuttings" Device**

Another artist living in New York, Song Xin (1970-), also created using paper as a medium. Based on the semi abstract generalization of images and the use of negative shapes in traditional Chinese Paper Cuttings, she added Western modern art techniques such as collage and installation to the capture of shapes and lines in Chinese Paper Cuttings, so that Paper Cuttings, a traditional Chinese folk art, can be translated into a new way of viewing in modern cities. Her lightbox installation work "Paper/Central Courtyard 100" on the basement level of the New York City Rapid Transit's Urban Design Department Central Station is permanently exhibited at the Bay Parkway subway station in Brooklyn, New York. The concept of the work comes from photos taken by Song Xin of the local people's living conditions on the streets around the station in different seasons. Regardless of where the artist comes from, their increasing familiarity and deepening understanding of the place of migration are a mutual relationship with the artist themselves, and Chinese artists constantly infiltrate the cultural construction of their respective regions in the form of works.

For example, artist Liu Hong, who lives in San Francisco, created a 160 foot long glass mural called "Departure and Return" at Oakland International Airport in California

in 2006. The work uses the traditional Chinese image of a crane to symbolize luck and auspiciousness, expressing good wishes for people on the journey. The crane has both the concern of "departure" and the expectation of "return", and its soaring wings are closely related to the theme of the airport. The circles in the picture symbolize "happiness" in abstract language. The glass firing and coloring of this work were completed in a glass factory in Germany, which further demonstrates that the current production of art is indeed a borderless act that transcends culture and geography.

In fact, in terms of specific administrative division, the United States is the broadest concept of administrative geography in national ideology. If we talk about introductions like "I am American" or "I am Chinese", it is definitely in a situation where different cultures are juxtaposed. So, what is being discussed here is actually the cultural origin carried by artists, which is cultural background rather than biological genes; [6] Therefore, regional titles can only represent a macro cultural context and atmosphere to a certain extent, specifically to actual geographical location division. Within the United States, regions such as New York or San Francisco have huge cultural and artistic differences. Just like in China, the art ecology of Beijing and Chengdu is completely different. Therefore, the study of "locality" that focuses on the social and cultural research methods of a specific region is also a popular academic path in recent years. From the geographical distribution of Chinese artists in the United States, New York and San Francisco are two relatively concentrated regions, and these two regions, due to their different cultural forms, also affect the appearance of local Chinese art to varying degrees, which is the "visual social construction", that is, the social context plays a role in the construction of visual art. [7] On the other hand, the "visual construction of society" is also occurring in parallel, that is, the visual art works created by artists in specific regional contexts, in turn, have a subtle impact on the social and cultural ecology. [8] Especially the works created by artists in public spaces have a wide-ranging impact on the public in their respective areas.

### **5. Seeking a Balance between Chinese and Western Cultures in Architectural Art**

Maya Lin is a second-generation Chinese American female artist born in Athens, USA. Her parents immigrated to the United States in the 1940s. Due to Lin Ying's outstanding creativity and international influence, as well as her cultural and identity background from both the East and the West, in 2010, at the sincere invitation of the Shantou University Board of Directors and Li Ka shing, Lin Ying took on the design task of the new campus gate and the Truth Bell Tower of Shantou University. The new gate of Shantou University and the Truth Bell Tower are the only architectural works of Lin Ying in China.

Lin Ying's architectural works are actually more like outdoor installation works with functional use. Her works have a unique, ultimate, and beautiful formal language, but form is not her only pursuit. She has always resisted and refused to create works through the explicit theory of visual and psychological impact.[9]Her pursuit is to stimulate and mobilize the audience's subjective experience through potential ideological order, allowing the subject to perceive the essential, human, and eternal connections hidden in the work.

The design of the new gate of Shantou University and the Truth Bell Tower is an organic whole in form and space, which is a work between architecture, monument, and art. The new gate of Shantou University is located at the end of the school's central axis, closely connected to the main road of the city. The new school gate is rooted in the urban environment with an elegant, simple, and modern curved stone wall. The stone wall is built to form a semi-circular concave campus square, forming a transitional square space that divides the boundaries and spatial relationships between the campus and the city. The enclosed campus square provides a place for people entering the campus to stay and engage in activities, while also alleviating the hustle and bustle of the city. The simple and modern stone walls showcase a tolerant and friendly atmosphere and temperament. The determination of the new school gate and entrance square sets a coordinate

standard and position for the "ubiquitous" location. Due to the existence of this position, the school gate, as the "building of establishment," is anchored in the specific terrain, forming a unique overall gathering that is different from other things, and establishing a meaningful place. And thus regulate the existence of various landscapes, buildings, and roads. Centrality connects a person's body, emotions, space, and events through pathways, creating a sense of direction, identity, and belonging. People begin to understand and master the spatial relationships, spatial order, scale, and direction around them. At this point, the centrality of the subject is established, and a poetic existence relationship is established between people and the surrounding environment, buildings, and things in the environment.

In the design of the new school gate, Lin Ying cleverly applied modernist design concepts, methods, and formal language, as well as Eastern aesthetic characteristics and cultural spirit, finding a subtle balance between Eastern and Western cultures and natural environments. In terms of form, the design of the new school gate breaks the inherent solemn, tall, and rational framework of the school gate. Lin Ying used a minimalist approach to reject all unnecessary expressions that interfere with the subject, and gave sufficient attention to elements such as wall form, structure, materials, size, proportion, volume, void, light, air, and sound. She carefully studied them, felt the rich and subtle experiences they conveyed to people, and made these elements exist truly and independently. The main body of the new school gate is an arc-shaped wall constructed with gray granite blocks. The perfect proportion and real material characteristics showcase the pure beauty of simplicity, simplicity, and modernity in the contrast of sunlight and gravity. It has both the modern and minimalist characteristics of the West, as well as the light and agile charm of the East. The school gate exists independently in its extraordinary and unique form, like an unfolding mysterious scroll that attracts people's attention and guides them into a beautiful and peaceful campus.

The Truth Bell Tower, like the Vietnam

War Memorial, is neither a pure architectural work nor a complete artistic work. It is a bridge and passage between architecture and art. Lin Ying's architecture and monuments are always closely related to her artistic works. In her art and sculpture works, people can feel her rational thinking and perception as an architect, and her architectural works often incorporate the sensibility and artistic temperament of sculpture and art. Although architectural works do not convey clear intentions like paintings, sculptures, and monuments, and are limited by factors such as function, structure, site, and technology, they all establish profound connections with the world through extraordinary creativity and intuition. This profound connection is established through physical perception and experience, based on the exploration of the essential characteristics of things and the creation of the spirit of the place.

Palasma believed that "architecture is a dramatic presentation created by stillness in objects, space, and light. Ultimately, architecture is a petrified art of silence."; "All images are signs, and the discipline that should study them is not perceptual psychology, as I once thought, but semiotics, the science of signs"[10] Architecture, like other arts, can help people understand that life is inherently lonely and lonely. Architecture is also a carrier of time, which can separate people from their current state and feel the slow and real existence of time. The sense of time in the Truth Bell Tower comes from the time imprints carried by materials, scales, forms, and construction processes, and the existence of time is closely related to the specific location of the bell tower. The Truth Bell Tower designed by Lin Ying has made this experience a reality through its unique location and extraordinary artistic form. An open space, isolated and firm upward form, and a beautiful and quiet environment make it easier for people to feel the essence of loneliness and solitude in life. Architecture focuses people's attention on their true existence, and they begin to perceive the powerful power brought by eternal silence and infinite peace. The experience of time is not only related to the existence of the object, but also to the perception of the

subject, which is very personalized. Palasma believes that the experience of a work of art is a private and secret dialogue between the work and the viewer, which shields other activities.

## **6. Conclusion**

This article presents an exploration of the representation of cultural identity by Chinese female artists, which actually originates from the "cultural determinacy" under the mechanism of global information dissemination. This is not only due to the Western tourist like cultural imagination of the East, the United States of China, and white people of the yellow race, but also from the declaration of specific cultural ownership by the suzerain country itself. As an important means of cultural transmission, image text naturally becomes an aspect that is potentially influenced by social power. Therefore, all images are ideological images, and the symbolic use of images and media with traditional Chinese cultural symbols by Chinese female artists is also based on this semantic background.

From the perspective of analyzing the application of traditional Chinese culture, this article summarizes the exploration process of representative Chinese female artists based on traditional culture. Among them, Cui Fei simulated the pattern composition of calligraphy by picking up objects in nature; Lin Yan used rice paper as the main material for rubbings, changing the traditional usage of rice paper and showcasing installation works rich in Eastern philosophical contemplation; Based on the traditional Chinese Paper Cuttings technique, Song Xin mixes the treatment of color and shape in pop art, and creates images with strong decorative meaning according to the social scene of the region. Her Paper Cuttings has removed the mythical color of Paper Cuttings itself, and has jumped out of the traditional Chinese folk Paper Cuttings characteristics; Liu Hong's glass paintings at Auckland Airport not only utilize but also deconstruct the metaphor of cranes in traditional Chinese painting, taking the intuitive meaning of their flight to construct a common intuitive perception mode of visual culture understanding for both Eastern and Western

viewers; Although Lin Ying was born in the United States and received an elite North American education, her conceptual structure was completely Western, and she had the rigorous and rational characteristics unique to the field of architecture. However, during her upbringing, she was influenced by the subtle influence of daily family life, and her understanding of Eastern aesthetics was relatively more delicate and vivid. She also distinguished herself from the superficial way of representing cultural symbols, She strives to explore the mysteries of materialism within the realm of aesthetics, and her large-scale outdoor installation art in public spaces often serves as both practical buildings and artistic works that can shake the human soul. And her only permanent public installation in China is the new gate of Shantou University and the clock tower symbolizing truth within the campus, which is discussed in this chapter. She interweaves and collides the texture and shape of the materials with the natural light and shadow, forming the solemnity and intelligence of the work from the inside out, which is in line with the atmosphere of the site and the humanistic value borne by the work itself. Culture serves as the soul that serves as internal support in Lin Ying's works.

The inherent logic of the individual cases of these artists involved in this article is actually a progressive presentation of several major cultural identity representations that currently exist in the art world. Firstly, the appearance of early Chinese artists in the international art world inevitably carries a label of cultural identity. Secondly, after becoming increasingly proficient in appearance and training, Chinese artists gradually shifted their focus to further thinking about traditional culture, and combined with their local experiences and observations at the time, used methods similar to "mixing" and "sampling" in music to create works with cultural diversity characteristics. At this point, the cultural labels covered by identity gradually become a trace of spiritual charm that guides thinking. Finally, a group of Chinese artists with a more international perspective completely liberate their material properties from the regulated cultural specimens,

stimulating human visual, tactile, auditory, taste, memory, emotion, and other perceptual systems through the energy of the objects themselves, creating pure embodied emotions in their works and people.

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