A Contemporary Interpretation of Daoism
and Installation Art Practice

An exegesis submitted for
the degree of Doctor of Fine Art (DFA)

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Alvina Lee Chui Ping
23rd March, 2014
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Abstract:

In 1985 at the China Art Gallery (now known as the National Art Museum of China), American artist Robert Rauschenberg held the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI). It was the first time in the past 50 years that the Chinese authorities permitted a foreigner to hold an art exhibition on its land. Since then, Rauschenberg’s novel method of employing “ready-made” objects to create his installation artworks has sparked an interest in installation art among many Chinese artists.

Western installation art has evolved from an art form unbeknown to the Chinese society into an essential existence in contemporary Chinese art forms in a matter of less than three decades. In the course of the development of installation art in China, Chinese artists have proceeded from emulating the Western forms to exploring the malleability and multifariousness of this art form, and enriching their artworks on occasion with traditional Chinese academic and religious thinking such as that of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. Many of these artists have created artworks that have been inspired by Daoist thinking and concepts.

Installation art has constituted the major part of my creative art experience. This relates to the many years I spent working on stage arts. Like installation art, stage arts are highly focused on the relationship between space, setting and audience. These dynamic qualities of stage arts appealed to me strongly and helped me develop my sense of aesthetics in my professional life. To bring out the essence of a theatrical work through stage art, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of the literary script and its socio-historical, economic and philosophical context. I have attempted to apply this method to the making of installation art by studying the approach of Western installation art; development of the art form in China; the changes in form and content of different Chinese artists’ installation works in different times as well as political, economical and cultural conditions. With this reference material in mind, I created a series of Daoism-related installation art works with the theme “The Awakening of Dao” to explore contemporary ways to present Dao and it’s relationship between “implicit” and “explicit”.
Since installation art comes in a multitude of shapes and is highly flexible and accommodates a variety of forms and concepts, I have aimed in my creative work to use art forms from the West as a vehicle for expressing and giving concrete form to more abstract Daoist philosophy from the East. I have attempted to re-interpret the Daoist way of following the flow and essence of both nature and the human heart, in order to give the audience a comfortable experience and encourage them to ‘follow their heart’. This aesthetic and affective experience is designed to ease them of daily cares and worries through visual and tactile elements in the installation, which purposefully combine mixed media and varying approaches to spatial awareness.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

(A) Foreword

Thanks to the effort of artists, both within China and travelling abroad, Chinese installation art has gained recognition and attention from the international art circle. Exhibitions and new works by established artists especially those such as Xu Bing, Cai Guoqiang, Ai Weiwei, Huang Rui and Gu Wenda, would attract enormous response and attention. The year 2013 marked a particularly crucial year as “The Zero State” – 2013 The First China Installation Art Biennale, co-presented by the Museum of Contemporary Art Beijing, Beijing Hengyuanxiang Xiangshan Art Museum and the Tianjin Art Museum was inaugurated on November 16, 2013. It was the first and largest ever installation art exhibition China had held to present an overall showcase of the current development of Chinese installation art.

The event was an integration of exhibition and academic forum. Forum for Art Installations 2013, co-organised by the National Research Center for Contemporary Art and China Academy of Sculpture, Chinese National Academy of Arts, was held for the first time at the Shengzi Art Center, 798 Art District. Wu Weishan, Director of National Museum of Contemporary Art Research Center, remarked:

Contemporary art has become a phenomenon in the construction of contemporary Chinese culture. The Ministry of Culture established the National Research Center for Contemporary Art with the aim of providing contemporary artists and theorists with a platform, enabling contemporary art to grow in a healthy and orderly manner. And the first Forum for Art Installations serves as a probe and research into symbolic door theme installation artworks in the contemporary art.

It is evident from the above that Chinese installation art has already earned a place both within and outside the country, and evolved from a non-mainstream art form into a mainstream one.

While there is an increasing volume of studies by the Chinese art circle and the academia on installation art, most of them are centered on the differences between the innovative approach of this art form and the conventional approach of “art on stand” (i.e. painting, ceramics, calligraphy), with rarely any touching upon the integration of Western art approach and traditional Chinese culture in Chinese installation art. Drawing on her own background of being born in Hong Kong where the Chinese and

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Western cultures intermingled, educated in a culturally mixed mode, and having produced a number of artworks integrating elements from both sides of the world, the researcher applies the insights she has gained into cultural integration to this study. The study thus focuses on how installation art has entered the Chinese art scene; evolved from emulating the Western approach into taking root in its own culture after trial and error as well as retrospection and introspection; sought multidirectional progression, and earned its place in the international art scene proactively. Finally, the study explores the future orientation of Chinese installation art and a new way to create a new series of installation art works.
(B) Methodology

The first stage in this study involved data collection. The Internet was used as the starting point of this process. When a considerable volume of information was collected and put into categories so as to provide a clear sequence of ideas as the backbone of the study. Some information was found inaccurate over the course of this stage while some graphics and persons were mismatched. Even though this was a drawback to collecting information from the Internet, the researcher was developing her ability to evaluate the credibility of information during the process of data verification; at the same time, inaccurate information that was not citing officially was providing a reference for further research and verification of information in printed publications.

Despite the presence of false data online, official websites of major art organisations and artists were providing trustworthy information (these websites are the ones listed in the appendix on page 67). In order to ensure those websites which listed on the appendix were reliable, the methods included checking the given websites which printed on different artist /organisation’s official publications such as books, posters and pamphlets…etc., or try to search the target artists/ organisations/ museum's website from different government’s official site/ authorized government portal site. For example, the website of National Art Museum Beijing (http://www.namoc.org) can found from the authorized government portal site of the People's Republic of China. (http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/museums/116909.htm3).

Various art research groups and video clips of personal interviews with artists were also serving as reliable supplementary online sources. During the 1980s when film photography prevailed, photographs of art exhibitions at the time were mainly kept by the participating organisations and artists, some by the viewers and newspaper journalists. Reportage, coverage and circulation by the press were limited even if these events were reported. However, thanks to the generous sharing by the relevant persons and organisations, precious photographs of the past exhibitions and artworks were available for appreciation online.

In terms of data collection, printed publications were proved to be a more reliable source of information. The Hong Kong Central Library provides a large reservoir of art resources at the Arts Resource Centre, in which an area was dedicated to Chinese

3 China.org.cn, The authorized government portal site to China, it is published under the auspices of the State Council Information Office and the China International Publishing Group (CIPG) in Beijing.
art. Apart from publications on Chinese art history, reviews, individual artists, art periodicals, numerous exhibition pamphlets and academic essays were also available. The centralised collection was expedited the verification of information of this study. As a Daoist and Taichi practitioner herself who appreciates the Daoist way of natural equilibrium, the researcher paid frequent visits to Fung Ying Seen Koon Daoist Cultural Centre throughout the study to cross check her findings from books and literature with the research essays in the library of the Centre. Consultation with scholars at the Centre also enabled the researcher to pool the collective wisdom and understand the findings on Daoist philosophy from more perspectives.

Installation art is a conversation between an artwork, the exhibition venue and the viewers. A change in any of the three parties may give birth to a completely different interpretation. As such, it is important to be physically in an exhibition, to see the artworks in person, to move in the carefully designed space, to feel the intensity of the lighting, the changes in sound, the movement of air, and the flow of smell. None of these sensory experiences can be obtaining from two-dimensional reference materials.

In this connection, the researcher was conducted field study on one of the subject cases, the Chinese Pavilion of the 54th Venice Biennial to gather first-hand material for this study. Not only did the set-up and arrangement of the artworks give the researcher a most pleasurable experience, but also inspiration for the orientation of her graduation art project. The researcher was also studied in various exhibitions some of the installation artworks by Huang Rui and Cai Guoqiang, who were also subject cases in this study.

The researcher was attempted in the beginning to employ research methodologies and theories foreign academics applied to installation art to study and analyse the form and content of the Chinese artworks. However, both the temporal and environmental context of these Chinese installation artworks were rendered the attempt in vain. The approach had thus adjusted since the Western methodologies and theories could only be applied to analyze the nature of installation art. Relevant theories by foreign and Chinese academics were employed to supplement each other while the findings from the textual material and data were re-organised and re-categorised, with an aim to produce a logical and well-supported argument.

After those findings from various forms of collected data (from internet, video, text, photos, site visit...etc.) were retrieved and validated as correct and useful, all data were being organized and analyzed through various process to cope with the needs of
different chapters. Including sorting and arranging the information in some sequence or in different sets (e.g: by year, artists or theories...etc.) summarize the detail data and retains the most important points of the original document and then classifying the data, separates it into various categories. Multiple pieces of data could be combined through aggregation. Therefore all analyzed data were reorganized and re-categorized to produce a logical and well-supported argument

When critiquing an installation artwork, the artist’s decisions on its form, media, arrangement and location should be taken into consideration. As aesthetics standards are ultimately a matter of personal preferences, the researcher recognises the inevitability of subjectivity but strives to include arguments from various sources to make the analysis objective and genuine.
Chapter 2: Concept and Presentation of “Installation Art”

“Installation”, originally a technical term in industry and architecture, means “setting up” and “fixing into position”. It was not until 1970s when installation art rose to prominence that “installation art” began to be used to denote large-scale, three-dimensional artworks composed of ready-made objects, which are often of mixed media. The term was first documented by the Oxford English Dictionary as an art term in 1969 and was defined as: “Art. A large art work (esp. a sculpture) specially created or constructed for display within a gallery, museum, or other site; an exhibition of such works.” According to art historian Julie H. Reiss, “installation” made its first appearance in Art Index in 1978, and has become a technical art term since then. As to whether installation art is a genre, a medium or a conceptual practice, Reiss remarked:

“(Installation Art) refers to a wide range of artistic practices, and at times overlaps with other interrelated areas including Fluxus, Earth art, Minimalism, video art, Performance art, Conceptual art and Process art. Site specificity, institutional critique, temporality and ephemerality are issues shared by many practitioners of these genres.”

On the same topic, Nicholas De Oliviera and Nicola Oxley’s views were: “Installation art can superficially appear to be an assembly of materials, objects or artefacts. This art form presumes an acquaintance with a cluster of related terms such as location, site, site-specificity, gallery, public, environment, space, time and duration.” The two citations above have pointed out the nature of installation art as a highly malleable and accommodating art form, which can be combined with different art genres, media and space to explore all kinds of themes, to break out of limitations from existing approaches and conventional art materials. Its compatibility with different media, including multimedia, endows the art form with an aesthetic that is manifold and sophisticated.

"Installation art" also refers to an artwork whose unique artistic qualities are created by the dynamics between the viewer and itself in a particular exhibition space. Such dynamics are, hence, not only about the creation of artistic implications by a piece or a set of installation art out of the “space” and “time” it is in, but also about the re-interpretive effect it has on the venue and time. As such, space, time and the viewer

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4 Julie H. Reiss. From Margin to Center The Spaces of Installation Art (Cambridge: The MIT Press 1999), p.xiii
together constitute the content of the work, and are an indispensable part of installation art. Mark Rosenthal remarked, "The viewer is asked to investigate the work of art as much as he or she might explore some phenomenon in life, making one's way through actual space and time in order to gain knowledge." Rosenthal’s focus was on the dialogue between the viewer's immediate feelings and the artwork. Reiss even believes that installation art demanded participation of the spectators, and their varied degrees of participation would result in different impressions of the artworks. She opines that "the viewer is required to complete the piece; the meaning evolves from the interaction between the two.” In conclusion, the viewer becomes a part of the work. As the viewer and the work converse, the viewer’s experiences of life and living become elements that enrich the work.

The concept of installation art can be traced back to the aesthetic principle proposed by German composer and opera director Richard Wagner (1813-1883)—_Gesamtkunstwerk_ (total work of Art), which first appeared in the two essays he penned in 1894, namely “The Artwork of the Future” and “Art and Revolution”. Wagner took inspiration from Greek drama, which was a synthesis of poetry, music and dance, and proposed to integrate different art media, such as music, drama and dance into opera, so as to produce the finest of art. To him, all elements in the theatre, including the audience and the theatre building itself, were equally important; and only the unification of music, song, dance, poetry, writing, plot, and performance could produce an artistic experience providing comprehensively for all the human senses; meanwhile, only by breaking all the boundaries between fields of art that the most complete artwork could be born. Wagner put his ideals into practice in his own opera, which was later called Music Drama. _Gesamtkunstwerk_ was also adopted as an art term to refer to art that may make use of any available art forms, such as painting, ceramics and sculpture. This concept can be regarded as the origin of installation art.⁶

The earliest artists to try their hands at the concept of installation art include Pablo Picasso (1811-1937), Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) and Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948). Picasso’s work “Still Life with Chair Caning” (1912) (Fig. 1) is a cubist collage containing authentic chair cane to bring a three-dimensional effect to the graphic composition. William Seitz described it as an “art of assemblage”⁷ (a synonym of “installation art” used before the latter gained popularity), a process to endow an artwork with novel qualities through the harmony or discord between different

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⁷ Assemblage is an artistic process. In the visual arts, it consists of making three-dimensional or two-dimensional artistic compositions by putting together found objects.
materials. He even held that “Picasso violated the limits of representation.”

Marcel Duchamp was a prime figure in Dadaism. “Bicycle Wheel” (1913) (Fig. 2) is the first installation artwork that he created with ready-made objects. He raised assumptions and questions about what objects could constitute a work of art. He attempted to assemble mass-produced spare parts of different natures, namely a bicycle wheel, bicycle fork and kitchen stool, into a simple structure and then called it art. His approach subverted the idea of artistry and the aesthetic experience of the audience, kindling reflection on the notion of art. In addition, his “Fountain” (1917) (Fig.3) became a significant piece in art history. The work was an inverted urinal with “R. Mutt” signed on it. Duchamp submitted his work to the exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists to provoke the committee although he was one of the board members at the time. The committee, not knowing who the artist was who produced the work, hid it and even lost it not long later. Had not the New York art journal The Blind Man published a photo of the artwork in its second issue revealing the Society’s hiding of it, the world would be left only with the replica without ever seeing the original. Duchamp’s works were already often linked to conceptual art, and the

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Fig. 1 Pablo Picasso, Still Life with Chair Caning, 1921, 29(H)x37cm(W), Collection of Musée National Picasso, Paris. [https://artsy.net/artwork/pablo-picasso-still-life-with-chair-caning](https://artsy.net/artwork/pablo-picasso-still-life-with-chair-caning)

Fig.2 Marcel Duchamp, Bicycle Wheel, 1951 (third version, after lost original of 1913) . Metal wheel mounted on painted wood stool , 63.5(W) x 41.9 cm (D) 129.5(H) . Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York. [http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81631](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81631)
attention of the art circle at the time began to shift from the physical art piece to intellectual interpretation. By creating and submitting this artwork, Duchamp has proved that the existence of all objects relies on thoughts and intentions rather than on themselves as stand-alone; they lose their original functions and meanings, and become entirely different and new objects when new titles and perspectives are accorded. Because it had unlocked the potentialities of ready-mades, “Fountain” became a monument to 20th-century contemporary art.

“Merzbau/Merz Building” (1919-1936) (Fig. 4) was an artwork that Dadaist/Constructivist artist Kurt Schwitters transformed from a number of rooms in his apartment in Waldhausenstrasse, Germany. “Merzbau, a construction in his house formed around personal objects charged with erotic and psychological meaning, is an important precedent for installation.”\(^9\) Schwitters altered the interior construction and created visual illusions by adding conical shapes, columns, sculptures, etc. “Merzbau” extended from one room to eight, continued to grow and evolve, and was full of dynamicity and vitality. The interior structure, colours and layout, which changed from time to time, together with the artist’s own valuables, collages, reliefs and large sculptures, formed a perplexing and uncanny space; at the same time, the spectator

became a constituent of the artwork by entering into the space. More installation works emerged in late 1960s. Under the influence of Post-modernism, contemporary art evolved from an elite language of Modernism into social media of Post-modernism.10 To bring art to the ordinary people, artists endeavoured to break the exclusive and conservative image of art exhibitions built behind the high walls of art galleries or museum. They began to seek new artistic presentations and alternative space to execute the new display mode. The act was at the same time an affront to the role and materialism embodied by the official art regime and commercial gallery system. According to Claire Bishop, many artists exhibited their works in alternative spaces; some even defied the involvement of the art market so that the spectators could enjoy direct and immediate contact with their artworks.11 Owing to the limitations of the exhibition sites, many of the exhibitions were temporary and were thus called Project Art. Claes Oldenburg’s “The Store” (1961) (Fig.5) was a papier-mâché installation on display in a rented store in Manhattan, emulating consumer goods. The store was the exhibition site, which was at the same time Oldenburg’s studio where spectators could look at and even purchase the exhibits as if they were customers. The multiple identities the people and the objects had blurred the relationship. Riess remarked, "These activities contribute to erasing the boundaries between art and life."12

Before 1970s, “environment art”, a near-synonym for installation art, aimed for art to exist in communion with nature and for the unique qualities and historical background of the exhibition site to reinforce and enrich the exhibition theme. Jennifer González believes that “Art must take the form of discrete and durable object that bear the mark of fine artisanship.”13 Both installation art and environment art have overcome the constraints posed by the conventional spectator, exhibit and the exhibition venue. To further enhance the approach to presenting exhibits, land art/earth art (later known as

10 Postmodernism is a late-20th-century movement in the arts, architecture, and criticism that was a departure from modernism. Postmodern style is often characterised by eclecticism, digression, collage, pastiche, and irony. Some artistic movements commonly called postmodern are pop art.


12 Riess, *From Margin to Centre*, p.19.

site-specific art) - large-scale installations that are integrated with the nature - emerged. Robert Smithson's “Spiral Jetty” (1969-70) (Fig. 6) at the Great Salt Lake in Utah is the archetype of a Land Art work. It is an anti-clockwise coil 1,500 feet long and 15 feet wide created with the local black basalt rocks. Standing at the centre, a spectator was surrounded by the rocks and experienced being an integral part of the exhibit on site). Smithson documented the seasonal changes as well as the interaction between the spectators and the exhibit on camera. The photographs were then displayed in a gallery, allowing spectators to observe the art in a more detached position (off-site). This method of displaying an exhibit on-site and off-site, devised by Smithson, was the very concept of his art.

As installation art can be easily manipulated to cater for the different artistic styles and ever-changing technologies, artists are enjoying much more freedom to make creative works, still or moving. Anything, such as social issues, political aspirations, personal life experience and philosophy of life, could serve as a source of inspiration for art. The 1980s saw German Joseph Beuys's “Soziale Plastik” (a social sculpture) which concerned his personal history and anthroposophy, and French Bertrand Laviar's synthetic objects which emphasised the change in the concept of objects; in 1990s, American artist Jeff Koons endowed objects with new notions based on the hedonistic doctrine, while English artist Damian Hirst stirred up an extensive debate on the morality of art with his art created with preserved dead animals. Installation

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art has remained a method of art rather than a style since its emergence. It is a method or a means to create art based on a space, whether it be existential or conceptual space. Different schools have more or less employed the method of installation in creating their art. Whether they be old or new, these artworks have not only dissolved the original function of art and aesthetic standards, the mutation of meaning that the artists formulated have also reflected the influences that economic, social, political and cultural values have on contemporary art. These influences will be discussed in later chapters using the arrival of installation art in China in 1980s as case studies.
Chapter 3: Installation Art in China

(A) The Arrival of Installation Art in the East — Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange

In the early 1980s, installation art had already developed into a popular art form in the West. Works of its kind were included in large-scale international art exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale, dOCUMENTA of Kassel and Sao Paulo Biennale. Nonetheless, it remained unheard of to the majority of Chinese until November 18, 1985 when American Pop Artist Robert Rauschenberg held the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) at the China Art Gallery In Beijing. The event’s influence on China’s modern art history was close to enlightenment as it allowed the Chinese audience to come close for the first time to representative works of avant-garde art from the West.

Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008), born in Texas, United States, was one of the major figures of Pop Art in his country and had considerable influence on the development of modern art. During the height of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s, Rauschenberg merged unconventional materials and media with “Action Painting” of Abstract Expressionism to formulate his very own and famous “Combine Painting” (also known as “Combines”)16, breaking out of the boundaries of conventional painting, sculpture and craft. His unique way of art expression became a pioneer of Pop Art, which later swept the world off its feet.

In December 1984, Rauschenberg announced at the United Nations press conference his plan to organise the self-financed ROCI with an aim to promote “world peace and understanding”17. The interchange was planned to set foot in 11 regions, starting from Mexico to Chile, Venezuela, China, Tibet, Japan, Cuba, the Soviet Union, Berlin, Malaysia and ending in the U.S. These regions were considered by Rauschenberg as places which were “underdeveloped or had politically repressive governments”18.

He further explained that these regions were “more sensitive areas”19. Therefore, he wished to promote peace through art; “I feel strong in my beliefs that a one-to-one

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15 Action Painting, also called ‘gestural abstraction’, This style of painting was widespread from the 1940s-early 1960s, and is closely associated with abstract expressionism. It emphasizes the process of making art, often through a variety of techniques that include dabbing, dripping, smearing, and flinging paint on to the surface of the canvas.
16 Combine painting, it is a very radical form of collage, a painted surface which is ‘combined’ with various real objects including newspaper clippings, photographic images, ephemera attached to it.
contact through art contains potent peaceful powers. It was not until I realized that it is the celebration of the differences between things that I became an artist who could see.”

Rauschenberg spent two to four weeks in each region of his choice. He was in touch with the local artists, academics, students and residents, documenting their daily life and objects with a camera, and collecting ordinary necessities. He set up temporary studios to make cultural exchanges with the local artists and to create art with the daily objects he collected. Exhibitions of the artworks he created in each place were then held in the major local galleries along with those created in the previous regions. He donated one artwork to each participating gallery as a gift. He then selected a collection of 170 ROCI pieces to be displayed and conserved at the final stop, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. of the U.S., to showcase the result of the cultural exchange.

Apart from his prints and famous Combine Paintings, a number of Rauschenberg’s works were also on display in ROCI China, including his combine art (Chinese regarded it as installation art at that time), which drew most attention from the local art scene. The works on display included past works “Monogram” (1955-1959), “7 Characters” (1982), new work “Sino-trolley” (1985) and a few exhibits from ROCI Mexico, Chile and Venezuela. “Monogram” (Fig. 7) was an amalgam of seemingly unrelated objects that included a preserved Angora goat, a tire, an abstract painting, a tennis ball, paint, paper, knits, newspaper, metal, wood and police cordon. This pioneering work changed the concept of the content of art. The combination of mixed media and images had become the essence of Rauschenberg’s art, of which the

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materials were generally actual objects collected off the street. Unprecedented in China, his art shook the artists in the country who had long been creating painting and sculptures in the orthodox manner, and attracted extensive discussion on the methods of art.

Another exhibit named "7 Characters" (Fig 8) was created by Rauschenberg during his first visit to China in 1982. In an old Xuan paper mill of Jing County, Anhui Province, he studied the production of Xuan paper and made art. He incorporated posters, images, photographs and all sorts of folk patterns he collected into the two types of Xuan paper he was producing, of which one was as thick as a plank, the other as thin as a cicada wing. Rauschenberg created 50 pieces of work by superimposing the two types of Xuan paper and adding in floral print fabric, lenses, ribbons, etc, interweaving two-dimensional embossed surfaces with three-dimensional objects. Each piece of work was accompanied by a Chinese character or term which meant, for example, “individual”, “change”, “howl”, “light”, “trunk”, red heart” or “truth”. The denotation and aesthetic connotation of each term endowed the respective artwork with a new interpretation. Meanwhile, Rauschenberg’s breakthrough in China’s papermaking technique awakened the Chinese artists to the realisation that they had been blase about the many good materials that were at their fingertips.

"Sino-trolley" (Fig. 9) was one of the works that Rauschenberg created for ROCI China. He went into a very ordinary local community and saw trolleys loaded with goods; leaflets on walls; Buddhist statues in a temple and wire fences, to name just a
few. These items that constituted an ordinary local community all served to form his impression of China. Subsequently, Rauschenberg applied screen-printing techniques to acrylic paint, fabric and aluminum alloy stent to create “Sino-trolley, an installation artwork born of a cultural exchange between the East and the West, embodying both the traditional burden and the outlook towards a new era.

In addition, Rauschenberg also presented “Pelican”, a multimedia installation art performance, at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing. Wearing a pair of roller skates and carrying an umbrella-like object, Rauschenberg ran back and forth on
the stage, with moving images being projected onto a screen hanging over the stage. Rauschenberg could be regarded as the first foreign artist to introduce multimedia installation art performance to China.

ROCI China attracted an enormous response. Critic Zheng Shengtian commented, “Chinese artist so you can get out from old ideas and the shackles of traditional art forms in order to face the new world.”21 Present at the inauguration ceremony were over 7,000 people, while the 25-day-long exhibition recorded an attendance of 300,00022. It was a remarkable achievement in the Chinese art scene. Arts students from more distant regions travelled to Beijing for the exhibition. One student from Xiamen, Huang Yongping, later co-presented Xiamen Dada—Modern Art Exhibition with more than 10 young artists in September 1986 and dedicated one of her works to Rauschenberg, ”A memo in 1986 to Robert Rauschenberg”. In mid-December of the same year, Lam Ka Wah, Jiao Yaoming and Huang built a setting in Fujian Art Museum with items such as trolleys, large grilles and old picture frames along with a video playback. The exhibition made an impact on the public and their concept of "art" and “museum”. Meanwhile in places such as Hangzhou, Taiyuan, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Luoyang and Quanzhou, artists put together installations of ready-mades and performance art to create various controversial exhibitions. Some of the prominent works in these exhibitions included “Yang Style Taichi” by the Pond Association of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts and "Red Humour Series” by Wu Shanzhuan. Although Rauschenberg had proclaimed in the letter of intent for the ROCI China his wish to create art and conduct art exchanges in different parts of the world through his seven-year-long touring exhibition in 11 regions, the impact his journey to China had made to Chinese contemporary art was far beyond his expectation.

(B) Development of Installation Art in China

I) The Art Scene in China before the Rise of Installation Art

The ROCI acted as a catalyst for the germination of China's installation art. However, the good turn did not take place by chance and should be attributed to the Open Door Policy\(^{23}\) that was implemented by the Chinese government before the arrival of the ROCI in the country. The reform brought great changes in the country’s economy, society and cultural consciousness, which subsequently generated favourable conditions for the germination of installation art.

Founded in 1949, the People’s Republic of China conformed to the socialist\(^ {24}\) doctrine advocated by the Soviet Union (1922-1991), adhering to the national policies of being self-sufficient and resisting connection with foreign countries. In such a self-isolating environment, artists had minimal freedom to create art. Mao Zedong, the party’s chairman from 1949 to 1976, held that the function of the art was to serve politics. In other words, art is a tool for and an appendage to politics, which always came first. This principle was imported from the Soviet Union and had become the most important precept since Chairman Mao’s speech at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942. Any art that was not meant to serve politics would not be approved of nor circulated.

This situation lasted till 1978 when Deng Xiaoping began to lead China. To purge the political instability brought by the Cultural Revolution,\(^ {25}\) Deng implemented the Open Door Policy to encourage foreign trade and investment in the country and open up to information exchange with foreign countries. In 1979, a new journal titled World Art (Meishu Shijie) took the initiative to introduce western art in a systematic manner; the second issue introduced various schools of art including Dadaism and Surrealism. Artists, whose creative freedom had suffered for years before and who were now encouraged by the government’s new and much-touted ideology of “emancipation” and "pragmatism", set up different art organisations in their communities and held exhibitions for their artworks. One exhibition that drew especially wide attention was the one organised by the art group ‘The Stars Painting

\(^{23}\) Open Door policy, describes the economic policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 to open up China to foreign businesses that wanted to invest in the country. This policy set into motion the economic transformation of modern China.

\(^{24}\) Socialism is an economic system characterized by social ownership of the means of production and co-operative management of the economy.

\(^{25}\) Cultural Revolution was a social-political movement that took place in the People's Republic of China from 1966. Set into motion by Mao Zedong, then Chairman of the Communist Party of China, its stated goal was to enforce communism in the country by removing capitalist, traditional and cultural elements from Chinese society, and to impose Maoist orthodoxy within the Party.
Association’ (or The Stars)\textsuperscript{26} on September 27, 1979, Entitled “The Stars Art Exhibition” The artists of the exhibition made a decision to hang their paintings and sculptures all over the railings in a park outside the China Art Gallery.(Fig.10) Drawing on various modern schools of art, such as Symbolism, Abstract Expressionism and Cubism, these artworks were an artistic experiment. The avant-garde exhibition and the \textit{Fifth National Art Exhibition} being opened on the same day inside the China Art Gallery to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the founding of People's Republic of China formed a stark contrast between the new and the old art factions. With official sanctions from the authority, The Stars’ exhibition was quickly met with intervention by the police, which triggered off a protest march for democracy. Later, in November of the same year and in August of the next, The Stars organised two more exhibitions, of which the second received permission to be held at the China Art Gallery. The exhibition was 16 days long and attracted nearly one hundred thousand visits. The art of China thus embarked on a journey, departing from the art of political propaganda before the reform of the country and proceeding to the avant-garde. After The Stars’ exhibition, Ai Weiwei (moved to USA in 1981), Chen Danqing (moved to USA in 1982) and Yan Peiming (moved to France in 1982) became the first artists to travel Overseas after the reform.

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\textbf{Fig. 10} A scene from The Stars Art Exhibition 1979. The Chinese artists displaying their paintings and sculptures all over the railings in a park outside the China Art Gallery. The work was influenced by Impressionism and Postimpressionism and considered radical in the post-Cultural Revolution context. \\
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\textsuperscript{26} The Stars Group, also known as the "Stars Painting Association" or simply the "Stars," was founded by Ma Desheng and Huang Rui in 1979. Chief members of Stars include Yan Li, Wang Keping, Li Shuang, Yang Yiping, Qu Leilei, Mao Lizi, Bo Yun, Zhong Aocheng, Shao Fei, and Ai Weiwei.
The Stars’ exhibition caught the attention of the Westerners, among which was Rauschenberg who had initiated an application to go to China to learn the ancient techniques of producing Xuan paper as early as 1980 during the beginning phase of China’s reform and opening up. However, as China wished to keep the special techniques to itself, it took Rauschenberg two years before his application was approved. It could be true that Chinese people were unwilling to share the treasurable techniques with foreigners or that an anti-spy strategy might also be taken into account. Even when he was in China in 1982, his activity was restricted to his temporary studio and his hotel; workers from the paper mill were only allowed to bring required materials to the studio for production and Rauschenberg was kept under security surveillance throughout his stay in the country. Thus, apart from making art, including the piece “7 Characters” (see Chapter 3A for relevant discussion), Rauschenberg had gained a rudimentary understanding of China’s national conditions, which sparked his desire to achieve communication in “more sensitive areas” through art and thus conceived the ROCI. Thanks to his perseverance, and coupled with China’s wish to show its brand-new, liberal image to the world after the reform, ROCI China came true in 1985 finally and smoothly.
II) Mid-1980s: Chinese Installation Art in its Initial Stage

Rauschenberg’s direct inclusion of ready-made objects in his artworks made an enormous impact on the young artists in China and caused a furore over installation art in the art circle. Artists who had been painting or making sculpture and who had never received professional training in installation art emulated Rauschenberg in assembling ready-mades. Many became installation artists out of a pure interest in the utilisation of ready-mades. Creativity that was severely stifled during the Cultural Revolution found full expression and artists were enjoying a completely new domain for artistic creativity beyond conventional realist drawing and sculpture. During the germinating stage of installation art in 1985-1986 when China’s reform policy was ongoing, more than 70 art communities were founded in the country across 23 provinces and 97 art events were held. The atmosphere created by the establishment of art communities was called “The 85 New Wave Movement”. As most of the artists of the time had little understanding of the real concept, content and origin of installation art and had yet to truly include “installation” into their professional vocabulary, they were simply enjoying the assurance and encouragement they had received from the Western art scene since the opening up of their own country, and aimed to challenge the rigid art system that had been in place since the Cultural Revolution. As critic Fan Di’an states: ”This was to demonstrate the modern consciousness of the artists through the new image and mode; or even to question the existing standards and principles of art through the emergence of so-called ambiguous ‘anti-art' content.” After all, at the beginning of the reform, the country was just starting to accept and digest Western art; it was natural that emulation of the foreign artistic language seemed mechanical while the context of the local works seemed crude, forced and lacking in soul. Professor Sun Meilan of the Central Academy of Fine Arts disapprovingly pointed out three characteristics of the early installation art in China: ‘fast', it attempted to trace the footsteps of its Western counterpart in a fast pace; 'wide', the wide array of things that the early installation art tried to include, from the visual to the content, from the form to the language, gave the art form a complicated and jumbled kind of multifariousness; 'shallow', it is immature, defective, indelicate.” A number of examples were given in He Wanli’s

27 He Wanli, History of Chinese Contemporary Installation Art (1975-2005), Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House (Shanghai Shuhua Chubanshe), 2008, p.27.
28 The '85 New Wave Movement was a Chinese avant-garde movement that flourished between 1985 and 1989. The movement continued to develop in 1987 towards a more provocative and conceptual direction, peaking in 1989 with the China Avant-Garde exhibition.
29 Fan Di’an, born in Fujiang Province in 1955, past Vice Dean and professor of the Central Academy of Fine Arts and current Director of the National Art Museum of China, is a researcher of Chinese Art in the 20th Century and art museum, critic of contemporary art and art curator.
30 He Wanli, History of Chinese Contemporary Installation Art (1975-2005), Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House (Shanghai Shuhua Chubanshe), 2008, p.27.
31 He Wanli, History of Chinese Contemporary Installation Art (1975-2005), Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House (Shanghai Shuhua Chubanshe), 2008, p.27.
publication *Chinese Contemporary Installation Art 1975-2005* :”In one piece of installation, a big pile of cabbage was directly stacked in the corner of a large warehouse. in the approach of so-called “direct presentation” or “symbolism”, and the piece was so ordinary that it had almost no creativity and wisdom to speak of. These were attempts to bring daily life into installation art, and in the end, the piece became merely “ordinary life”, some physical objects, something called “art” but without any artistic factors.32

After two years of proactive effort, China saw a rising number of foreign modern art movements for example, Pop Art, Performance Art, Abstract painting etc., being introduced into it in 1987, and the Chinese artists had gradually absorbed the impact brought by Western art. Some of the Chinese artists became conscious of the crude and juvenile-like qualities of Chinese installation art in terms of its context, as well as its amateurish and alienating expression. In order to find a more suitable and professional environment for their creativity, a group of artists decided to go abroad to experience Western art for real. Cai Guoqiang (moved to Japan in 1986), Gu Wenda (moved to USA in 1987) and Zhu Jinshi (moved to Germany in 1988) were among these artists. Some of those staying in the country began to explore how to build personal style in artistic language. They recognised that they could start with the Chinese culture inherent in their society and instill Chinese elements into their work. Among these artists were Central Academy of Fine Art teachers Xu Bing and Lu Shengzhong. Both of their solo exhibitions held at the China Art Gallery in 1988 met with wide and positive reception.

In Xu Bing’s exhibition *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 11), Chinese characters were deconstructed and then re-constructed. They were carved onto wood and printed in giant long scrolls and books. Walk, the solo exhibition of Lu Shengzhong (1952 -) transformed folk paper-cutting into a solemn ritual sacrifice to the human life journey. The most important aspect of these exhibitions was that these artists recognised the resources in traditional Chinese philosophy and rituals they could translate into modern artistic images. This has become a basic artistic approach of the Chinese artists to captivate attention internationally since the 1990s.

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China/Avant-Garde Art Exhibition, held on February 5, 1989 at China Art Gallery, provided an overview of the modernist art movement during 1985-1987. A total of 186 artists participated and 297 pieces of artwork were displayed in the exhibition. The Chinese contemporary artists’ hearts were filled with excitement, as it was the very first time that they were able to show avant-garde art, including installation art, in the sacred temple of conventional art. The subtitle of the exhibition "No U Turn" attested to the artists’ dedication to make creative art and not to turn back to the 1980s when artists were stripped of creative freedom. Works of installation art and behavioural art were displayed in the hall on the first floor. Works of installation art included: Huang Yongping’s "A History of Chinese Painting and A Brief History of Modern Painting Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes" (1987/1993) (Fig. 11).

Fig. 11 Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, 1987-1991, installation, dimensions variable. Three different versions of the installation are in the collections of Hong Kong Museum, Queensland Art Gallery and Ludwig Museum.  

*China/Avant-Garde Art Exhibition* was a show put on at the National Art Gallery in Beijing in 1989, organized by ten young art theorists, including Gao Minglu, Hou Hanru, Zhou Yan and Kong Chang'an, and highlighted work by artists Huang Yongping Xu Bing, and Wu Shanzhuan. It is widely regarded as a seminal moment in the history of contemporary Chinese art.
12) which opposed adhering to tradition; Zhang Rongjian’s “Black Box” which satirises strange phenomena after urbanization; and Shen Yuan’s “Waterbed”, which was concerned with farmer’s working life. Although different in theme and presentation, these artworks served as a reflection of the social and political condition at the time. The exhibition was suspended at one point because a part of behavioural art involving real gun shooting was added into Lu Xiao and Tang Song's installation and performance art piece "Dialogue" (Fig. 13). After a few months in the same year, owing to the escalation as well as the premature end of the June-Fourth Incident34, the society was cloaked in a shroud of anxiety and instability. The entire art scene stopped in its tracks and quietened down.

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34 June Fourth Incident, took place in the spring of 1989 It is student-led popular demonstrations in Beijing which received broad support from city residents. The student demonstrators had occupied for seven weeks Tiananmen Square, the heart of Beijing. This incident exposing deep splits within China's political leadership, the resulting bloodshed were unprecedented in the history of Beijing.
III) 1990s: Downturn and Revival of Chinese Installation Art

a) Early 1990s: Installation Art in the Years of Neglect

Installation art fell into a downturn in the early 1990s after the gun shooting incident that happened in the *China/Avant-Garde Art Exhibition* and the June-Fourth Incident in 1989. A number of pioneering newspapers which promoted modern art, such as *Fine Art Current (Yishu Sichao)*, *Fine Art in China (Zhongguo Meishu Bao)*, *Art Renditions (Meishu Yicong)* ceased publication. Many young artists, such as Huang Yongping (moved to France in late 1989), Xu Bing (moved to USA in 1990) and Wu Shanzhuan (moved to Germany in 1991) went abroad via different channels to seek development and gain a more realistic and concrete understanding of Western modern art. Meanwhile, China was experiencing an economic leap. The country saw an upsurge in parvenus due to the rapid development in the country’s economy and modernization. The gap between the rich and the poor widened, and the people had their focus entirely placed on material life. This development translated into extraordinary living pressure for the people. Many artists abandoned art-making for business and the emerging art market, engaging in making commercial painting. Engagement in Installation art, which required greater financial resources and had no market value, was greatly reduced.

Nonetheless, some art groups, such as the New Analysts Group (*Xinkedu Xiaozu*) of Beijing and the Big Tail Elephant Group (*Daweixiang Gongzuozu*) of Guangzhou, did not give up on holding discussions and exhibitions. As the China Art Gallery had set up a new but unwritten internal rule to not display any installation and behavioural art after the gun shooting incident in the *China/Avant-Garde Art Exhibition*, many of the installation art exhibitions in the early 90s went underground or turned to non-exhibition spaces, including apartments, basements, factories, bars, parks and even foreign embassies located in Beijing. Such exhibitions became coterie activities among exhibition curators, artists and their friends and family, individual patrons, critics, reporters and foreigners interested in Chinese contemporary art. Consequently, experimental art exhibitions in the early 1990s were often playfully referred to as "Apartment Art", or "Embassy Art".

Compared with their quiet and “underground” counterparts in China, the Chinese artists sojourning overseas and part of the avant-garde artists still in the country had embarked on a journey to connect and make dialogues with the international art world through their installation art. In April 1990, artists including Ye Yongqing, Zhang Peili

and He Jianguo were selected to participate in the French Contemporary Art Fair held by the Musée d'Orsay of France. In January 1993, the House of the Cultures of the World (Haus der Kulturen der Welt) of Berlin launched a retrospective touring exhibition titled *China Avant-Garde* and displayed the works created on location by five Chinese artists, including Huang Yongping, Wang Guangyi and Wu Shanzhuan. In the same year, 14 Chinese artists participated in the 45th Venice Biennale in their own personal capacity. At the Biennale, Xu Bing's installation work received a huge response. To attract international exposure, artists sojourning abroad would often add oriental elements into their art to cater for the taste of the Western audience; at the same time, Western curators would often use "Chinese contemporary artists" as the focus of exhibition publicity to attract an audience who would like to experience new, contemporary art by Chinese artists and not the familiar forms such as Chinese ink painting or calligraphy.

**b) Mid-1990s: Revival of Chinese Installation Art**

Installation art remained underground until 1994 when the Beijing Normal University Museum obtained approval from the Ministry of Culture to organise the *International Com-Art Show in Beijing*, an exhibition co-presented by China, Korea and Japan. In 1995 at the same venue, *Open Your Eyes, Close Your Mouth*, a Beijing-Berlin art communication exhibition, and *Displacement*, an installation art exhibition by four artists, were held. The Beijing Normal University Museum had thus become an important avant-garde art exhibition space in Beijing in this period. In addition, installation art exhibitions on a smaller scale would also often be held at the Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum.

In March 1996, China Art Museum Shanghai (known as Shanghai Art Museum at the time) held the"1st Shanghai Biennale" with "open space" as the theme, aiming to highlight the multiplicity of art in China since its reform and although the event constituted largely of oil painting, it engaged installation art by travelling artists Chen Zhen, Zhang Jianjun and Gu Wenda. This international exhibition added to China's distinct image of opening up to the world. In December 1996, artists including Wang Jin completed the work *Ice 96 Central China (Bing—96 Zhongyuan)* (Fig. 14) during the inauguration ceremony of Tianran Building in Zhengzhou, Henan. The work was a 30-meter wide and 2.5-meter tall ice wall with a multitude of consumer's goods frozen in ice bricks. Since visitors were free to dig through the ice to retrieve the content inside at the opening ceremony, there was much hubbub as the people grabbed their portion. These visitors were thus involved in the creation of the artwork incidentally and the process was a display of the changing moral values of the people.
in the commercial era.

Photo removed due to copyright reasons.

Fig. 14  Wang Jin, *Ice 96 Central China*, 1996, 7 black and white photographs, 109.2(W) x 165.1cm (H), by Wang Jin, Courtesy of the Artist

c) Late-1990s: Chinese Installation Art’s Return to the Global Stage

Increasingly active in the late 1990s, Chinese contemporary art had the world's attention captured again and Chinese artists began to appear on the international stage. From March to September 1997, a touring exhibition titled *Immutability and Fashion: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Midst of Changing Surroundings* was staged in Tokyo, Osaka and Fukuoka in Japan respectively. The exhibition was administered by Japanese curator Fumio Nanjo. Chinese critics Yin Shuangxi and Huang Du wrote an overview of Chinese contemporary art for the event. Participating artists included Chen Zhen, Geng Jianyi and Hong Hao. The exhibition was a reflection of the Chinese contemporary artists’ contemplation of “fashion”. It intended to explain how art attempted to identify the unchanging universal human spirit through the constantly evolving approaches of art itself. From May to August of the same year, *Another Long March: Chinese Contemporary Art Show* was held in Breda, the Netherlands, with more than 10 participating artists such as Chen Shaoxiong, Chen Yanyin, Feng Mengbo and Lin Yilin. Marianne Brouwer and Chris Driessen were the curators while Tang Di acted as the coordinator for the Chinese group. The exhibition virtually covered all the more active Chinese contemporary installation artist, and provided the Western art field with a more comprehensive view of the progress of Chinese installation art.

III) 21st Century: Thriving of Chinese Installation Art

The Shanghai Biennale held at the China Art Museum Shanghai in October 2000 was a pivotal point in Chinese contemporary installation art history. Adopting the mode of international biennales, two-thirds of the Shanghai Biennale constituted experimental art forms including installation art, video art and new media art. The event could be deemed a symbol of Chinese contemporary art, including installation art, going “public” and “legitimate”. The unwritten internal rule set by the China Art Gallery “to not display any installation and behavioural art” turned obsolete.

By the time the new era arrived, Chinese contemporary art had already embarked on the international track. Chinese installation art had begun to show itself as a “rising” force since the Shanghai Biennale in 2000. Most of the artworks sent by the Chinese artists to participate in major international exhibitions, such as the Venice Biennale and dOCUMENTA of Kassel, were installation art. Take the Chinese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale as an example. In the 50th Venice Biennale (2003), Fan Dian and Wang Yong acted as curators for the Chinese Pavilion titled *Synthi-Scapes*. Two out of five participating Chinese artists submitted installation artworks as their exhibits,
namely “Urban Landscape” (Fig.15) by Zhan Wang and “Landscape Study” (Fig.16) by Lu Shengzhong. The Chinese Pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennale, with Cai Guoqiang as the curator and titled Virgin Garden: Emersion, was summed up as a line-up of 50 plus 70—a joint performance by curators born in the 50s and artists born in the 70s. All of the Chinese artists, i.e. Zhang Yonghe, Wang Qiheng, Xu Zhen, Liu Wei, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, sent in multimedia installation artworks with technological elements. Installation art has since then become the theme of the Chinese Pavilion in the 52nd to 55th Venice Biennale (2007-2013).

Photo removed due to copyright reasons.

Fig. 15  Zhan Wang, Urban Landscape, 2003-2014, stainless-steel mountains, stainless-steel table-wares, dimensions variable. Two different versions of the installation are in the collections of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art and the recently newly built San Francisco de Young Museum


Photo removed due to copyright reasons.

Fig 16  Shengzhong, Landscape Study, 2003, Bookshelf, books, table lamp, table, dimensions variable.

http://cul.sohu.com/20090522/n264115323.shtml
In September 2006, dOCUMENTA of Kassel held a retrospective exhibition to celebrate its 50th anniversary and launched an international touring exhibition. Named ‘Archive in Motion’, the exhibition was a review of dOCUMENTA’s experience over the past 5 decades since 1955. The exhibition arrived at Sichuan Fine Arts Institute of China on December 13, 2006. Harald Szeemann, internationally renowned curator who was involved in the planning of dOCUMENTA, wished as early as in 1970s to invite Sichuan Fine Arts Institute to display the sculpture “The Rent Collection Courtyard”, which was created by a team of teacher- and student-sculptors of the Institute around the Cultural Revolution, in dOCUMENTA. With elements such as a storyline and object layout incorporated into the scene, the realist group sculpture installation unexpectedly placed the art of the then enclosed China and the post-modernist art trend of the West of the time in the same league. Although the sculpture installation had already attracted attention overseas, the invitation to exchange with dOCUMENTA could not be accepted due to a lack of an official channel in China to conduct cultural exchanges. Finally in 2006, a replica of "The Rent Collection Courtyard" was exhibited in the touring exhibition. The work is kept in the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute collection as a permanent display in the special exhibition hall.

Installation art has become a mainstream practice in Chinese contemporary art since 2000. Most of the Chinese installation artists in the 90s had no professional training in installation art. Relying on the limited information on installation art from the West, the self-taught artists met with much difficulty and failure on the path to becoming installation artists. Thanks to the effort of the preceding artists, younger artists now have access to formal and systematic learning. In 2001, the China Academy of Art added introductory courses on installation art and interactive installation as a part of the syllabi of the schools of integrated painting and new media. In 2004, Lu Shengzhong led the Central Academy of Fine Arts to provide an installation art programme under the name of “experimental art” and recruit the first batch of students. In the following year, the programme was structured as the Faculty of Experimental Art, which enjoyed the same standing as oil painting, print-making and sculpture-making. Other art institutes in the country followed suit to launch their installation art programmes or introduce installation art into their other programmes. Installation artworks of different new forms can now be found in different graduation exhibitions of the art institutes in the country. Works combining installation and painting also often emerge from faculties of traditional art. In 2011, after the conference on teaching experimental art and the exhibition “Harmonious Differences” held by the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the China Artists Association founded the
Experimental Art Association. There are clear signs that education of experimental art weighted towards installation and video art is currently undergoing a strong development; in addition, conceptual and avant-garde art, including installation art, has already been admitted into the system by the authority.

Artistic expression through installation art has evolved into a natural approach and is one of the many kinds of art which artists and art students would adopt. The territory of installation art has also continued to enlarge as the art form grew from the straightforward application of ready-mades in an environment, into a synthesis of moving images, sculpture and interactive media art of advanced technology. The concept and meaning of installation art have continued to expand because of these developments.
Chapter 4: Incorporation of Daoism into Chinese Installation Art

(A) Introduction

For assimilation of an imported culture to take place, time plays a crucial role. Direct application of a foreign culture newly arriving will only produce form without soul. As discussed in Chapter 3, the early installation artworks in China were lacking in fineness and content because Chinese installation artists of the time imitated blindly the emerging installation art of the West. After the test of time, much introspection and contemplation, many of the artists gradually began to place their works in a Chinese context and combine the Western art form and traditional Chinese thoughts to create modern art with Chinese features. Many of these works instilled traditional Chinese philosophies, namely Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. On one hand, as Daoism adopts a way that seeks to be at ease and to follow one’s heart, it is more flexible than Confucianism which demands conformity. On the other hand, although Daoism stresses a broad and open mentality, it embraces worldly conducts. It is thus closer to the people than Buddhism, which is concerned with transcending worldliness. In order to demonstrate how modern Chinese artists present traditional Daoist thinking through installation art and connect with the international art world, a number of artworks by two Chinese modern artists, Huang Rui and Cai Guoqiang, as well as a series of works exhibited at the Chinese Pavilion of the 54th Venice Biennale are scrutinized as case studies in this research. Their works present a strong personal style and characteristics and reference the socio-historical, cultural, economic and political context. However, their works had a different interpretation of “non-interference with the course of natural events and harmonious co-existence with nature”.

Huang Rui studied the I-Ching formany years. Most of his works deal with the idea of a balance of yin and yang, Cai Guoqiang used different unstable materials (eg: gunpowder, smoke) to create his work. Only nature can assist him in completing the work as it was much influenced by natural factors (humidity, wind direction and weather…etc.) .As for a series of works exhibited at the Chinese Pavilion of the 54th Venice Biennale different scents fill up the exhibition space which links the outdoor and indoor exhibition area seamlessly. Each work invites us to think about our relationship with the natural world—now and then.

It is necessary to define the term “Daoism” used in this exegesis prior to beginning
the discussion. “Daoism” in this exegesis covers ideas from both the Daoist school of philosophy and the Daoist religion. The Daoist school of philosophy, founded by Lao Tzu (604-531 BCE), is a system of philosophy based on the thoughts of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu (or Chuang Tzu) (369-286 BCE) emerging in the Spring and Autumn Period from the sixth century to the third century BCE. The main canon includes The Way and Its Power (Dao De Jing), Chuang Tzu and Huainanzi. The core concept of Daoism is “the way”. The interpretations of “the way” are many, but it can be explained as the intangible flow of the universe that gave rise to and sustains the cosmic order. It is also the law by which heaven and earth operate. The first chapter of Classic of the Way and Its Power states: "The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way; the names that can be named are not unvarying names. It explains that a “way” that can be put into words directly is not the real “Way”; and if a specific name is to be chosen for “The Way”, the name must not be one that can truly signify “The Way”. Something "unvarying" is something real. Something defined by the human beings must not be the real meaning of “The Way”. This is because “The Way” exists in the natural world and in the heaven and earth, while seasonal changes and the cycle of life and death are not something reversible by human force. Daoism advocates non-interference with the course of natural events and harmonious co-existence with nature. As long as you go along with “The Way” and practice “non-interference” or non-doing (or non-action/ Wu Wei), energy is regenerated through rest. Maximum results can be achieved so far as you do not go against “The Way”. This ideal state of being unfettered and at ease was the ideal that Chuang Tzu pursued and advocated. The Daoist religion is native to China and was founded during the reign of Emperor Shun (115-144) of the Eastern Han Dynasty. The religion was established based upon the Daoist philosophical theories. The religion was so named owing to its pursuit of “The Way”. Lao Tzu is regarded as the father of the religion and respectfully called the Supreme Old Lord, while Jade Emperor is worshipped as the supreme god. Followers of the Daoist religion study canon including The Way and Its Power, The Book of Changes (Yijing or I-Ching), Zheng Yi Jing (the canon of orthodox unity) and Dao Zang (literally “Daoist Canon”). The Daoist religious culture has a long history and is extremely extensive and profound. Its doctrines can be classified into the following 12 areas: cosmology, philosophy of the human life, philosophy, Theology, magic, sacrificial ceremony, medicine and health, yinyang fengshui, fortune prediction, temples and ceremonies, martial arts and

37 Non-doing, Daoism is not only a philosophy of freedom and nature; it also led for instance to another philosophical trend from ancient China, called ‘Legism’ 法家, was based on the notion of ‘non-doing’ 無為 inherited from Daoism; in their view, which was that of the first emperor, ‘non-doing’ is the way the emperor should rule; he did so by establishing laws so hard, so violent, that people were forced into submission.
music. This is the reason why Lu Xun\textsuperscript{38} was of the opinion that Daoism was the foundation of the whole Chinese culture\textsuperscript{39}.

Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu had unique opinions on aesthetics despite the fact they had never directly discussed art. Lao Tzu opined in the second chapter of The Way and Its Power: "It is because everyone under Heaven recognizes beauty as beauty that the idea of ugliness exists.\textsuperscript{40} When people know what “beauty” is, they pursue it unduly; and “beauty” in this instant is not the “beauty” that manifests itself naturally. Chuang Tzu said in “Knowledge Wandered North”: "Heaven and earth have their great beauties but do not speak of them.\textsuperscript{41}" If people wish to achieve the state of great beauty and recognise the great beauty of the non-existence of non-beauty, they must first be able to completely disregard the concept of beauty/ugliness and completeness/incompleteness of the outer form. This great beauty is beyond expression. It is the beauty of the inherent personality, spirit and ideal rather than the physical look. These aesthetic standards of Daoism have liberated Chinese art from orthodoxy in terms of its methods of creation and presentation. The focus on artistic conception naturally agrees with the flexibility in its form that installation art offers.

\textsuperscript{38} Lu Xun, was the pen name of Zhou Shuren (1881 – 1936), a leading figure of modern Chinese literature. Writing in Vernacular Chinese as well as Classical Chinese, Lu Xun was a novelist, editor, translator, literary critic, essayist, and poet. In the 1930s he became the titular head of the League of Left-Wing Writers in Shanghai.

\textsuperscript{39} Lu Xun, Collection of Lu Xun’s Letters to Xu Shouchang (Lu Xun Shuxin Ji—Zhi Xu Shouchang), People's Literature Publishing House, 1976.


(B) Case Studies

(i) Huang Rui (1952-)

Huang Rui, born in Beijing in 1952, was one of the founders of The Stars in 1979 and a leader of Chinese avant-garde art. He focused largely on painting in the 80s. He had begun to sojourn in Japan since 1984. During the height of experimental art in the 90s, he engaged in a multitude of areas, including installation art, behavioural art, photography and printmaking. In 1995, he returned to China and now lives and works in Beijing. He was one of the most crucial figures behind the conception and actualisation of the Dashanzi 798 Art District in Beijing. He often gives his works an overtone of politics and philosophy of life, and from time to time adds Daoist concepts and images directly.

In 1994 and 1995, Huang created a number of experimental installations, which happened to relate to the Daoist theory of the five elements. The piece “Water And Bamboo” (1994) (Fig. 17) was a pot of bamboo hanging upside down outdoor with water from the pot atop seeping very slowly into the roots of the bamboo. The bamboo had a difficult survival. The artist placed the bamboo in such an unnatural condition for growth as an allegory of the difficult life people were living. Besides the way of nature that Daoism embraces, there is also the way of the survival of the fittest. Despite the harsh environment, the bamboo survived on the water. The survival of the bamboo was a proof of the theory of the five elements, which says water gives rise to wood (bamboo in this case). “Water and Five Wall” (Fig 18), the piece created in

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42 Five elements, a series of abstract generalizations and then many traditional Chinese fields applies them to the classification of all phenomena. The “Five elements” are Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth.
1995 was a performance and installation art piece. Huang first lined up 13 bottles of erguotou (a kind of Chinese strong spirit made of sorghum) on top of a two-feet-tall wall of red bricks. Next, he broke the bottles of wine with a fire stick. The red brick wall turned into a wall of fire instantly as fire met alcohol. It demonstrated the theory of water being incompatible with fire. The artwork was a metaphor of the consequence of malicious violation of the people: malicious violation of the people would result in a series of vigorous reactions that would go out of control.

In 2008 when China hosted the Beijing Olympics, Huang created a corresponding piece titled “Beijing 2008 : Animal Time in Chinese History” (Fig. 19). The artwork was comprised of a myriad of bricks from the alleys demolished for the construction of the Olympics stadium. Squares matrices of 60 bricks in each were assembled, and above each matrix stood a pillar and on top of the pillar one of the 12 animals that designate years. In addition, each brick was given a number sequentially representing the years from 1924 to 2643. In other words, a look at the artwork gave the audience an overview of 720 years of time. According to the traditional Chinese calendric system, the ten Heavenly stems and the 12 Earthly branches\(^{43}\) operate in cycle to form 60 combinations, which is called a jiazi. The cycle goes on endlessly; in addition, the years, months, dates and time repeat themselves every 60 years. It signifies the changes of time and the unfailing phenomenon of alternation between new and old things. Things that are new today will be superseded in due course.

\(^{43}\) The Earthly Branches, it is a traditional Chinese system for counting time which built from observations of the orbit of Jupiter. There are 12 Earthly Branches, which makes up the Chinese Zodiac Calendar cycle.
Huang’s “I-Ching Project” (2011) (Fig. 20) consisted of two parts: the first being behavioural art and the second installation art. It was first presented on the inauguration day of the Hong Kong International Art Fair 2011. The first part took place at the Star Ferry Pier in Central, Hong Kong with 64 participants. Each person carried an umbrella in black and white and printed with the 64 Hexagrams from the *I-Ching*. The participants took turn in handing their umbrellas to Huang for him to open. Meanwhile, the participant rendering his/her umbrella and the artist would stand on a Taichi symbol on the ground, staring into each other’s eyes for 64 seconds. Afterwards, the second part of the art took place within the venue of the Art Fair where the artist and the audience assembled the umbrellas into round structures to complete the installation art. *I-Ching* is a system of symbols designed for fortune-telling in the Zhou Dynasty of China. In this system, yin and yang designates the two fundamental energy forms in the universe respectively; the Eight Trigrams symbolises the eight basic phenomena in the nature, including Wind, Fire, Earth, Marsh, Heaven, Water, Mountain and Thunder; while the 64 Hexagrams signifies

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44 Eight trigrams, it represent the fundamental principles of reality under Daoist cosmology, it have correspondences in astronomy, geography, astrology, anatomy, the family, and other areas.

45 64 Hexagrams are forming from the eight trigrams intermingle with one another. Each hexagram has a particular subject
the connections between the human life and the environment. The 64th Hexagram in *I-Ching*, which stands for “fire and water not crossing each other”, carries the meaning of danger and incompleteness. As it was presented at a time close to the 22nd anniversary of the June-Fourth Incident and when artist Ai Weiwei was arrested and retained for suspected economic crimes, the artwork engendered a wide array of associations.

Another art piece by Huang that was associated with the number 64 was “6.4.” (2012) (Fig.21). It was one of his works made with an intention to commemorate the June-Fourth Incident. The work consisted of the two Chinese numbers, 六 (six) and 四 (four), cast out of raw iron and bisecting each other on a circular base of the same material. Beneath the top structure was a wooden square which matched in the number four 四 in shape. As such, the concept of the art piece matches with the theory of the five elements which says “metal overpowering wood” as well as the concept of the sky being round and the earth being square described by Huainanzi in *Benjing Xun*: “Standing between the round sky and the square earth, carrying equipment for making measurements and marking lines In the researcher’s opinion, the art piece by Huang implied that there will eventually be a justified explanation to the June-Fourth Incident as heaven and earth (the world) are watching closely.

Huang never slows down nor stops looking around for ideas for art creation and for new ways of expression. History, current affairs, memories, time, life and space, to name just a few, are all material for his art. It is evident that he has an enthusiastic attitude for innovation and making changes.
(ii) Cai Guoqiang (1957-

Cai Guoqiang, born in Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, China in 1957, graduated from the Department of Stage Design of the Shanghai Theatre. His art spans from painting, installation, video and performing arts to several other kinds of media. He lived in Japan from 1986 to 1995, and currently resides and works in New York, U.S. He became known to the Western mainstream art circle in the mid-80s for his work employing gunpowder, which later earned him a number of awards, including the 1999 Venice Biennale Golden Lion Award in 1999 and the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize in 2009. In 2008, he acted as the Chief Designer of Visual Effects for the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. Often instilled with Eastern philosophy and reflective of conditions of the contemporary society, his artworks always encourage contemplation.

“Cultural Melting Bath: Project for the 20th Century” (1997) (Fig.22) was one of the pieces in Cai’s first solo exhibition in the U.S. at the Queens Museum of Art, Queens, New York. He took bathing, which is a therapeutic and purifying ritual most common of all times, and combined the phenomenon with Chinese herbal medicine, fengshui and Chinese courtyards to create an interactive installation artwork through audience participation. Eighteen Taihu rocks were arranged according to the principles of

Fig. 22 Cai Guoqiang, Cultural Melting Bath: Project for the 20th Century, 1997, Taihu rocks, wood, bathbut, water,dimension variable.
Collection of Musée d’art contemporain de Lyon.
fengshui so as to concentrate the field of qi (energy) of the courtyard. The artwork was arranged so that the audience members soaking in the tub filled with Chinese herbal medicine were positioned in the best acupuncture points. According to Cai, “New York of the U.S. is itself a big melting pot of cultures.”

Subsequently, his work, which was inspired by his early experience in New York, was a big bath of cultures and a collage of matters from both the East and the West. The piece was designed to embody the effects brought by the exchanges between different races and cultures in the contemporary and globalised context.

Photo removed due to copyright reasons.

Fig. 23 Cai Guoqiang, *Transient Rainbow*, 2002, 1,000 3-inch multi-color peony fireworks fitted with computer chips, Explosion radius approximately 200 m. Realized over the East River, from Manhattan to Queens, Commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art, New York for the opening of MoMA Queens.

http://www.caiguoqiang.com/projects/transient-rainbow

Cai is most noted for his gunpowder explosion drawings. After he had settled himself in the U.S. and gained a reputation, he adopted explosions to create a series of three-dimensional gunpowder drawings. The work “Transient Rainbow” (2002) (Fig. 23) was a colourful rainbow that lasted in the air for 15 seconds over the East River between Manhattan and Queens created with peony firework shells fitted with computer chips. The work was a metaphor for the restoration of the U.S. after the 911 terrorist attack as well as a praise of life. Later in 2005, he transformed the colourful

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rainbow into another work titled “Black Rainbow” (Fig.24), which was displayed in the blue sky above the Museum of Modern Art, Valencia, Spain, in an attempt to express his fear for the spreading of international terrorism. Gunpowder was discovered incidentally by the Daoists in China when they were making medicines. The unpredictability caused by the unstable and ephemeral nature of gunpowder heightens people’s desire to see the final look of his work.

If an authentic explosion compares with the “fullness” in Taichi, then an explosion effect created through lighting and scene arrangement compares with the “emptiness”. “Inopportune: Stage One” (2004) (Fig 25) was an ensemble of nine cars, lighting and light tubes arranged to imitate the explosion of a car. The aesthetics of the constructed violence was even more effective in sending a chill down the audience’s spine than blood and physical breakage. Placed still in the hall of the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, Massachusetts, the installation created a striking, conflicting asymmetry between the dynamic and the static, bringing the audience through the experience of a quiet explosion.
Photo removed due to copyright reasons.


Photo removed due to copyright reasons.
The installation work “Head On” (Fig. 26) made its debut at the Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin, Germany in 2006. The work consisted of 99 authentic-looking replicas of wolves jumping and turning over in the air, thrusting themselves onto a glass wall, landing on the floor in twisted forms and returning to the starting point to make a loop. The process is like an endless cycle that Guan Zhong described in Purifying the Mind: "The brightest sun sinks, the fullest moon wanes." The art piece was thus a metaphor of the servility of the human beings that leads to recurrence of past tragedies. In addition, according to Chinese divination, the number 99 implies incompleteness and hidden concerns. Although the Berlin wall had been demolished physically, there is an invisible immaterial wall that is more resistant to removal and that is the unsurpassable divide in the hearts of the people of East and West Germany. The ill feelings can be solved by a genuine belief in fairness. In the work “Heritage” (2013) (Fig. 27),

![Photo removed due to copyright reasons.](http://www.caiguuoqiang.com/projects/heritage)
99 handmade and life-sized replicas of animals were amassed by a lakeside surrounded by white sand with their heads lowered to drink from the lake. Predators and preys gathered in peace, creating a poetic ambience with religious solemnity and the utopian ideal. The state of sharing the world and not differentiating between each other corresponds with the ideal described by Chuang Tzu in On Levelling All Things: "The universe and I came into being together; I and everything therein are One." This large-scale installation piece exhibited at the Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art Foundation, Australia was inspired by Cai’s visit in 2011 to Stradbroke Island in Australia, which is a pure land far away from the worries and conflicts in the world outside and whose tranquility draws people from all over the world.

Cai once said: “I believe in making arts with my own creative ability and according to my own artistic ideals. And there must be elements in the work that strike a chord with the ordinary people and the world.” This is the ideal of art-making that he has upheld for many years. He believes that an artwork that relies solely on Chinese elements in the global world will only earn the artist a short period of attention; an artwork must be able to move the mass in order to have enduring effects.

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(iii) Pervasion—The Chinese Pavilion, the 54th Venice Biennale

Peng Fung, curator of the Chinese Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale, officially named the exhibition as Pervasion. The five participating artists, including Pan Gongkai\(^{49}\), Yang Maoyuan\(^{50}\), Cai Zhisong\(^{51}\), Yuan Gong\(^{52}\) and Liang Yuanwei\(^{53}\) created five separate installation pieces with the scents of tea, lotus, sandalwood, liquor and herbs as clues to bring the audience into the core of Chinese traditional culture. The works were the most contemporary artistic expression of the profound traditional Chinese culture. In Autumn Floods, Chuang Tzu said, "The life of things passes by like a rushing, galloping horse, changing at every turn, at every hour.\(^{54}\) Everything is changing and shifting, sometimes fast, sometimes slowly. Whether it be the scents or the method of presentation, the five works in Pervasion presented a continuously varying state that was sometimes subtle and sometimes beyond perception. The dynamic state of something waning and another waxing was present throughout the exhibition, manifesting itself as a continuously growing, changing and extending process.

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Fig. 28  Pan Gongkai, Snow Melting in Lotus, 2011. Materials: Ink-water painting, projector, pebble, paper characters, mixed media, 400 (W) x 2000 (D) x 350cm (H)
The Chinese Pavilion, the 54th Venice Biennale.
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"Snow Melting in Lotus" (Fig. 28) by Pan Gongkai was a cold tunnel whose temperature was set below 5°C with the scent of lotus flowing through it. Images were projected onto the walls along both sides of the tunnel. In the upper part of the projection was the English essay, “On the border of Western Modern Art”, composed by Pan Gongkai, in the bottom part an ink painting of his of the lotus pond. While part

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\(^{49}\) Pan Gongkai 潘公凯 (1947-) is a Chinese painter, he was the former president of the China Academy of Art and now the president of the China Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Beijing, China.

\(^{50}\) Yang Maoyuan 杨茂源 (1966-) is a Chinese visual artist, graduated from the Central Institute of Fine Arts, Beijing in 1989.

\(^{51}\) Cai Zhisong 蔡志松 (1972-) is a Chinese sculptor, a professor of the Central Institute of Fine Arts from 1997 to 2001 and 2008. He is currently living and working in Beijing.

\(^{52}\) Yuan Gong 原贡 (1961-) works with drawing, sculpture and installation. He is now lives and works in Beijing and Shanghai.

\(^{53}\) Liang Yuanwei 梁远伟 (1977-) A Chinese photographer and installation artist, She is He is currently living and working in Beijing.

\(^{54}\) Chuang Tzu, The Chuang Tzu, trans Lin Yutang. (Source from [http://terebess.hu/english/chuang.html](http://terebess.hu/english/chuang.html)).
of the English text moved like snowflakes falling upon and melting in the lotus pond, part of the English letters fell onto the pebble stone ground like paper cutouts. Flowing and turning in the tunnel were something real, something imagined, something obvious and something subtle. Juxtaposing traditional Chinese ink painting and unique Western collage, the artist had built up a space filled with Chinese imageries. The artwork also carried another deeper meaning, which was: the harmonious co-existence of different cultural identities is possible.

“I Plead: Rain” (Fig. 29) by Liang Yuanwei borrowed its name from a poem of the same title by Haizi\(^55\) which expresses the sadness caused by the passing of love. Corresponding with the oil tanks stored at the venue, which was a warehouse, the installation consisted of a pan atop oil containers collecting Chinese white liquor with black rubber tubes hanging around it to form a circulation device. The liquor entered the rubber tubes from the bottom of the oil containers and slowly flowed through the small openings of the tubes, pitter-pattering on the pan. The signature fragrance of the Chinese liquor filled the surroundings with a unique Chinese scent.

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\(^{55}\) Haizi (1964-1989) is the pen name of the Chinese poet Zha Haisheng. He was one of the notable poets in China after the Cultural Revolution. He committed suicide at the age of 25.
Yang Maoyuan’s work “All Thing are Visible” (Fig. 30) was displayed in the basement of the pavilion. It comprised over a thousand clay vessels of different sizes, each inscribed with Chinese medical prescriptions inside. Prepared herbal medicine was then poured into the vessels by the artist. The smell of the herbs flowed from the plain-looking clay pots, permeating the air. Since each vessel had a very small opening, the interior was not exposed. Free to take, the vessels wandered off to different parts of the world with its unique Chinese aroma.

Cai Zhisong’s work “Floating Clouds” (Fig. 31) was a giant ensemble of white clouds made of stainless steel. Inside these clouds were wind chimes and tea leaves. As the clouds swayed in the wind, the tinkling of the wind chimes and the scent of the tea refreshed the senses of the audience. From time to time, white fog drifted around Cai’s clouds from “Empty Incense” (Fig. 32 and Fig. 33), the artwork by another artist, Yuan Gong. This fog was produced by 20 supersonic humidifiers Yuan Gong hid on top of the oil tanks at the venue and on the outdoor lawn. These hidden humidifiers would emit water vapour every two hours to fill the Chinese Pavilion with white fog, which rendered the surroundings of the audience almost completely invisible.
Accompanied by the thick fog on the lawn, Cai’s clouds seemed as if they were real clouds swimming in mid-air with the audience floating in them. In addition, the fog was scented by sandalwood, which the Chinese have burnt since ancient times in order to calm their mind to attain the state of transcendent peace.

Riding the wave of the new trend, Chinese contemporary art has made rapid progress. The problem now is how to bring the art that is doing well out to the international art arena which is dominated by Western values and to bolster China’s power of
discourse in that arena. The aim of the China Pavilion at the Venice Biennale was to show Europe and the world the history and culture of China and the characteristics of Chinese contemporary art. Certainly, the “pervasive fragrance from China” will continue to linger in the hearts of the audience, thus bringing them closer to Chinese culture. However, only time will tell whether Chinese installation art can open up a whole new world in a non-Chinese context.

(C) Conclusion:

The art works I have produced are largely installation art works supplemented by performance art. In retrospect, this mode is very likely a continuation and variation of my training in Applied Art for Theatre Technical Arts at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. I developed my artistic style naturally, subconsciously following my will and my belief in Daoism. Everything I do comes from the sum of my experiences, desires, thoughts and curiosities. When creating art I strongly believe it’s important to have concept and intent. Without it, the work is flat and lifeless. The concept of my studio projects were based on the theme of the circle of life and Dao, which can be interpreted by Daoist thought.

As I have observed, Huang Rui’s artworks are mostly a reflection of his political views and are added with Daoist symbols or interaction with the audience from time to time. Cai Guoqiang’s works are majestic and highly varied. He is fond of expressing his art with gunpowder and scene setting. His art carries a political and experimental overtone. The artworks of the Chinese artists participating in the 54th Venice Biennale displayed an array of different methods of presentation. Many of them were integrations of art with technology and machines, while the five pieces of art were connected by the five unique Chinese scents contained in each piece respectively. Another common feature was the ample presence of Chinese colours and symbols, such as the twelve animals designating years, the Taichi symbol, Chinese horticulture, ink painting, and Chinese herbal medicine. Whether the artists were motivated by a desire to capture the foreigners’ attention with Chinese features or simply by their deep affection for the culture of their mother country, it is evidenced in their artworks that installation art’s flexibility and compatibility with different media were able to fulfil the artists’ different artistic pursuits in similar themes. This corresponds with Huainanzi’s comment in Benjing Xun: “All roads lead to the same goal.”
Chapter 5: Personal Studio Research

My first personal encounter with Taichi took place at the age of 7-8 in a park where a group of elderly people were moving in extremely slow movements. I was puzzled by their gestures, as some of them vaguely resembled martial arts, while martial arts had always been associated with speedy moves like those of Bruce Lee. The slow moving elderly people seemed as if they were from an ancient time and were unfitting for the fast urban pace. Nonetheless, as an adult, I could hardly recall any memorable moments in the preceding years although many things seemed to have been done and life had seemed fruitful because of the fast urban pace. To be rid of the sudden, strong sense of alienation, I began learning Taichi and realised that the slowness of it gives the practitioner time to have a deeper understanding of oneself. As one concentrates on her/his own state during inhalation and exhalation and the changes brought by each bodily movement, random thoughts disappear and thinking becomes clear. This sensitivity is inherent and has always been there, but it has been neglected and forgotten. Daoists believe that “The Way” models itself after nature. Therefore, when the body and mind is in a natural and balanced state, thinking becomes clear and unobstructed, and life becomes pleasant and unrestrained. Taichi is an activity developed upon Daoist thinking to pacify the mind and enhance health. I would like to share this thought and feeling through the works of mine.

In this studio based research project I aimed to create a new series of installation based artworks that explore connections in Western art form and Eastern traditional thought through various forms of visual expression within space, materials, technique and media. The research aimed to investigate how Daoism informs the creation of a new series of installation based artworks. Emphasis will be placed on understanding new media practices in contemporary art and on learning to connect form to content. During the early stage of the conception of my graduation artworks, I had decided to set the theme upon Daoism. I did not set out to limit the theme of each of my six artworks by specific works in the Daoist canon. Instead, I worked according to my heart and believed that a line of thought would arise naturally out of the different pieces so long as I always had “The Way” in my mind. Upon the completion of all the pieces, I succeeded in identifying a line of thought as I attempted to name each piece of work. The following part is an introduction to the six pieces of my artwork. This series entitled as “The Awakening of Dao 明道”.

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The first piece, titled “Birth 生” 2011 (Fig.34), consists of three giant abandoned spherical street lampshades which are clearly very old as they show signs of erosion and indentation. I painted two of them with black paint, one vertically halfway from one side, and the other only two-fifths from the top. Next, I brought them to an outdoor pathway and arranged them in different combinations. The changes in the different combinations were made dramatic and interesting because of the transparent material the lampshades are made of. The condition is best described by Lao Tzu’s saying in *Dao De Jing*, also *The Way and Its Power*, Chapter 42.

Out of Dao, one is born; out of One, Two; out of Two, Three; out of Three, the created universe. The created universe carries the yin at its back and the yang in front; through the union of the pervading principles it reaches harmony.

There are many interpretations of this saying. The most popular one interprets Dao as pattern, law of nature or order, and “one” as all things and the unceasing phenomenon of changing. As such, “Out of Dao, one is born” means that “pattern” gives rise to changes in particular directions; “out of One, Two [is born]” means changes in particular directions result in dichotomy, such as action/reaction, yin/yang and virtue/vice; “out of Two, Three [is born]” means that when the two opposite sides
become extremities that cannot exist side by side, a mediator between the two appears, such as a human between heaven and earth and the earth element in the five elements; “out of Three, the created universe [is born]” means that the principles that develop from Dao and prescribed before applies to all things, from the birth of the universe to the normal operation of a human body. The last two sentences of the saying explain that everything has two sides, yin and yang; when the yin energy and the yang energy meet head-to-head and blend into a balanced and harmonious state, a new unified system is born.

The quote above can be regarded as a summary of all the 81 chapters of The Way and Its Power. It is also the inspiration for the second piece of my artwork “Classics” 2011 (Fig.35 and Fig.36) which comprises 81 notebooks thread-bound in the traditional Chinese way and laid on the floor according to the environment of the
exhibition space. One of the 81 chapters of The Way and Its Power has been written in each notebook in invisible ink either in Chinese or English. The notebooks look unused, but with the ultraviolet torch provided on the side, members of the audience will be able to read the words written in them. As stated in Taishang Laojun Shuo Changqingjing Jing (literally The Scripture of Constant Purity and Tranquility Spoken by the Supreme Old Lord): “The Great Dao has no form”, The Way existed before all things and has no form, no colour and no characteristics. It is like air which you cannot see and touch, but is present despite so. Likewise, the truths are always there, but if one has to take the initiative to find out this is so to open up the opportunities to understand them.

People in China like practicing calligraphy by writing on the ground of a plaza in water instead of ink. Since water evaporates when the sun shines, the practice is both eco-friendly and convenient. The third piece of my artwork “Visible 見” (Fig. 36) which is a continuation of the concept “The Great Way has no form”, finds inspiration from this practice of the common people in China. At first, I tested on a slate made of concrete, but the words were almost intelligible and it took a long while for the water to dry. Without any idea, I decided to leave the thought aside. However, not long after, I saw my nephew practice calligraphy on a piece of cloth called the Gridded Magic Cloth. Writing in water appears black but fades away in 15-20 minutes.
As a result, I made a painting scroll with this kind of cloth without grid; it is 55 cm (W) by 200 cm (L). The Scroll will be hung on the wall and available for the audience to leave his/her thoughts on it in writing or drawing with the Chinese writing brush and water on the side. Each writing or drawing will be displayed for up to 20 minutes before it dries.

The fourth piece, “Square. Circle 方. 圜” 2012 (Fig.37), is an ensemble of two groups of handcuffs. The first group consists of 99 silver handcuffs arranged as a square, while the second 66 fluorescent handcuffs are arranged in a circle. In Chinese divination, the figure 99 implies incompleteness while 66 implies infinity; the circle and the square that relate to the sky and the earth respectively signify the world together. The concept of non-interference/non-doing upheld by Daoism means not doing anything that will disrupt the mental and physical state, so as to have a comfortable life instead of not doing anything at all. Our life is untrammeled by nature, but we invite trouble ourselves. If we do not grasp, we will find relief to our worries. It all depends on our own will whether we live in joy or grief.

Fig. 37, Lee Chui Ping, Square . Circle, 2012, “Square” made of 99 silver handcuffs, 420 (W) x 120 (D) x 420cm (H) ; “Circle” made of 66 fluorescent handcuffs, diameter of 53 cm x 90 cm (D).
The fifth piece, “Real…(The common zone between the reality and dream) 真…(虛實共同間)” 2011 (Fig 38), is an installation with projection of a video looping every five minutes. The video is a juxtaposition of photographs taken in China, Hong Kong, Prague, Venice and Vienna. Each photograph shares some common features with the one immediately preceding and following it. During the transition from one photograph to another, a mass of vertical or horizontal lines and effect of residual images will appear, creating a dynamic illusion on the screen. This piece of work is a sequel to my graduation work “Real…(The arcane zone between the reality and dream 真…入夢出夢間)” for my Master of Fine Art degree. Both works are inspired by Chuang Tzu’s dream of being a butterfly and exploring the meaning of the self, and seeking to discover the common zone between the imagined and the real.

The last piece “Grow 長” (Fig. 39 and Fig. 40) is an integration of installation and performance. Small rocks, soil and wholegrain seeds are arranged into the Eight Trigrams over a distance of two meters. The performance involves me holding a water bottle and watering the seeds in a Chinese costume. If the exhibition is more than three days long, germination of the seeds can be observed by the audience who will then be invited to practice Taichi on the spot with an aim to pass on the message of maintaining a healthy body and mind to the people who have a bond with Taichi.
For me, art-making is a process of knowing myself and self-awakening as well as a life-long pursuit for spirituality. The struggle of seeking a balance between finiteness and infinity is the largest source of inspiration for my art-making and is my way of making art.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

In 2014, installation art celebrates its 30th anniversary in China. A look at the rear-view mirror reveals an uneven road. The experiences of installation art in China were plunges and surges: upon its new arrival in the country in the mid-80s, it immediately became the new favourite of the Chinese art world. Nonetheless, the fever cooled rapidly in a matter of three years until installation art caught attention again in a major exhibition in 1989. However, it was shunned from official exhibition venues due to a shooting incident during the exhibition and the side-effect of the June-Fourth Incident. This twist caused installation art to turn underground in search of a suitable space for creativity. While some artists emigrated, those who remained in the country went through a decade of hardships underground. Meanwhile, in the West, installation art had already become very mature by the early 90s; there was already ample support and venue space to hold installation art exhibitions. Chinese installation artists organised a number of exhibitions with assistance from Western curators and a few of them made their names soon after. It can be said that these artists had paved the way between Chinese installation art and the international art world, while those staying in the country were protectors who safeguarded the meager space that installation art still had in China. In 2000, a number of foreign artists and Chinese artists sojourning overseas came to hold exhibitions in China, which encouraged the official exhibition venues to open up to installation art once again. Installation art has made a steady progress since then and has now become one of the mainstream contemporary art forms in China.

In the making and exhibition of “The Awakening of Dao”, I have employed materials with both “implicit” and “explicit” attributes to endow the works with different dimensions in one single space and to enrich their contexts and possibilities of interpretation and viewer response. The relationship between the visible and the invisible, between movement and stasis, between fluidity and calmness, between material presence and emptiness, between existence and time is deliberately accentuated in the relationship between the viewer and the art installation in the underlying conception of my work. My intention is to bring the viewer to a harmonious and reflective state of mind in order to promote a feeling of relief and relaxed contemplation. This approach is very much in tune with the philosophical precepts of Daoist thought in respect of existence and nature. Fundamentally, my
approach is to harmonize in my art the human senses of vision and touch with the medium and the material of the creative work. In so doing, I aim to synthesize my own experiences, creative instincts, values and philosophy with the rich aesthetic and philosophical traditions of Chinese thought and art, and in the process to connect this tradition with its modern and contemporary manifestations in the media and hybrid forms of installation.

Installation art is the crystallization of human visual experience in a specific temporal space. Likewise, every kind of art medium or art form is also a product born of a specific time and place. China has its own set of environmental factors and historical background; therefore its artistic traditions must have its own unique ways of expressing thoughts and sentiments. Most of the media and content of the Chinese installation art that successfully drew international attention carried Chinese elements. The cases studied in this research were concerned with Daoism and were just a small part from a bigger portion. As citizens of the world, we and our inner selves are always changing and transforming under globalisation. We are moving through spaces, bearing multiple identities. However, in my view, internationalisation is not about the unification, standardization and normalization of all these complicated relationships and identities nor the fabrication of common standards and values. Rather, it is concerned with revisiting and excavating the alternative values from the rich cultural traditions. It is also about creating new standards, acknowledging the value and contribution local traditions create for the world and sharing them with the world as universal reference material. For this reason, the transferability and the ability to capture gazes of Chinese installation art is reliant on the artist’s sensitivity to the taste of the masses and the change in time. It is also critical for the artist to be able to identify the common experiences as well as the views in visual and life experience that she/he can establish communication upon, and express her/his unique experience through her/his unique traditional ways. To be able to do this, the artist must have a strong ability to connect with a majority of the society and the masses worldwide so as to arouse a wide interest, curiosity and desire in the public. She/he must also possess her/his unique local charisma and taste in order to succeed. As a Chinese artist living and working in Hong Kong, I will also make these concerns my artistic orientation in the way forward.
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Appendix 1: Appropriate Durable Record

Fig. 41 Lee Chui Ping, Birth, 2011, three spherical street lampshades, diameter of 53 cm each.
Fig. 42 Lee Chui Ping, Birth, 2011, three spherical street lampshades, diameter of 53 cm each.
Fig. 43 Lee Chui Ping, *Classic*, 2011, Close-up, 81 Chinese calligraphy practice books, 130 (W) x 195 (L) x
Fig. 44 Lee Chui Ping, Classic, 2011, Close-up Chinese calligraphy practice books, 130 (W) x 195 (L) x 0.2 cm (D) and invisible ink, each, Dimensions variable.
Fig. 45 Lee Chui Ping, Real… (The common zone between the reality and dream, 2011, video projection, here 18 captured images from the video (Group A), Dimensions variable.
Fig. 46 Lee Chui Ping, *Real... (The common zone between the reality and dream*, 2011, video projection, here 18 captured images from the video (Group B), Dimensions variable.
Fig. 47 Lee Chui Ping, *Real... (The common zone between the reality and dream*, 2011, video projection (Group C), here 18 captured images from the video, Dimensions variable.
Fig. 48a Lee Chui Ping, Visible, 2012, 2 photos showing the fading out of Dao De Jing (The Way and Its Power), Chapter 42 on the same painting scroll, 55 cm (W) by 200 cm (L). Better view together with the last 2 images on Fig. 48 b
Fig. 48b Lee Chui Ping, *Visible*, 2012, 2 photos showing the fading out of Dao De Jing (The Way and Its Power), Chapter 42 on the same painting scroll which made by magic cloth for calligraphy practice, 55 cm (W) by 200 cm (L). Better view together with the first 2 images on Fig.48a
Fig. 49 Lee Chui Ping, Visible (The first version), 2012, 6 photos showing the fading out of Chinese Word “道” (meaning: The Way) on the same Chinese style costume which made by magic cloth for calligraphy practice, 112 (W) x 128cm(L).
Fig. 50, Lee Chui Ping, *Square . Circle*, 2012. “Square” made of 99 silver handcuffs, 420 (W) x 120 (D) x 420cm (H); “Circle” made of 66 fluorescent handcuffs, diameter of 53 cm x 90 cm (D).
Fig. 51, Lee Chui Ping, “Square” from Square. Circle, 2012, It made of 99 silver handcuffs, 420 (W) x 120 (D) x 420cm (H).

Fig. 52, Lee Chui Ping, “Circle” from Square. Circle, 2012, “Circle” made of 66 fluorescent handcuffs, diameter of 53 cm x 90 cm (D).

Fig. 53, Lee Chui Ping, “Circle” (under black light) from Square. Circle, 2012, “Circle” made of 66 fluorescent handcuffs, diameter of 53 cm x 90 cm (D).
Fig. 54 (Left) and Fig. 55 (Right) Lee Chui Ping, *Grow*, Installation and performance, 2013, Pebbles, soil and wholegrain seeds and practicing Taichi, Dimensions variable.

Fig. 56 Lee Chui Ping, *Grow*, 2013, close up of the Eight Trigrams, Small rocks, soil and wholegrain seeds, the Eight Trigrams over a distance of two meters.
Fig. 57 Lee Chui Pung, Grow, 2013, close up of the Eight Trigrams. Small rocks, soil and wholegrain seeds, the Eight Trigrams over a distance of two meters. From up to down, left to right—Qian (Heaven), Xun (Wind), Kan (Water), Gen (Mountain), Kun (Earth), Zhen (Wood), Li (Fire), Dui (Lake).
Appendix 2: Exhibition works during candidature

Title of Exhibition: Hope and Glory  
(Conceived by Simon Birch, Lee Chui Ping is one of the creative collaborators)  
Type: Installation and conceptual art exhibition  
Dates: 8-Apr-2010 to 14-May-2010

Photo removed due to copyright reasons.

Fig.58  Lee Chui Ping and Simon Birch, *Twilight Shadows of the Bright Face*, 2010, 12 Life size figures, Mixed media, Dimension Variable. Hope and Glory Exhibition, Hong Kong.  
Fig. 59a Close up of 4 out of 12 figures (Group A) from *Twilight Shadows of the Bright Face*, 2010.

From up to down, left to right.

Saladin, made of steel wool 188(W) x 110(D) x 145cm(H); Urban, made of joss sticks 1100(W) x 97(D) x 188cm(H), Gordian, made from tights filled with bean bag filling 98(W) x 113(D) x 195cm(H); Gorehound, made of toothpicks 72(W) x 70(D) x 192cm(H).
Fig. 59b Close up of 4 out of 12 figures (Group B) from *Twilight Shadows of the Bright Face*, 2010. From up to down, left to right.

*Dave*, made of white cable ties, 90(W) x 113(D) x 143cm(H); *Gergory*, made from liquid filled red ballons 72(W)x 70(D) x 192cm(H); *Bem (White)*, made of white fur 170(W) x 46(D) x 210(H); *Bem (Black)*, made of black fur, 170(W) x 46(D) x 210(H)
Fig. 59c Close up of 4 out of 12 figures (Group C) from *Twilight Shadows of the Bright Face*, 2010. From up to down, left to right.

*Adbenar*, made from liquid filled balloons and tights, 83(W) x 98(D) x 188(H); *Deckard*, made of black form, 95(W) x 72(D) x 192(H); *Pris*, made of white tubes, 85(W) x 102(D) x 138(H); *Godfree*, made from various size blue plastic balls, 88(W) x 82(D) x 185(H).
Fig. 60a  Close up of 4 out of 8 life figures (Group A) from *Twilight Shadows of the Bright Face* (Video Shooting), 2010, From up to down, left to right.

*Adbenar*, liquid filled balloons and tights; *Pris (White)*, made of white tubes, *Pris (Black)*, made of black tubes; *Deckard*, made of black form.

Fig. 60b Close up of 4 out of 8 life figures (Group B) from *Twilight Shadows of the Bright Face* (Video Shooting), 2010. From up to down, left to right. *Saladin*, steel wool; *Gordian*, tights filled with bean bag filling; *Gaff*, white polyform balls in various size; *Gorehound*, toothpicks.

Title of Exhibition: The 65th 第六十五卦
Type: Installation and conceptual art exhibition/ Group exhibition.
Location: Artist Commune, Cattle Depot Artist Village, To Kwa Wan, Kowloon, Hong Kong.
Dates: 7 Nov 2010 -17 Nov 2010

Fig. 61 Poster of the 65th Exhibition.
Fig. 62 Lee Chui Ping, *Preserve*, 2010. Chinese style costume, Western style scholar hat and memory devices, the 65th exhibition, Hong Kong.

Fig. 63 Back view of *Preserve*, 2010.
Fig 64. Close up of *Preserve* FR, 2010.
Title of Exhibition: Hope and Glory Beijing.
(Conceived by Simon Birch, Lee Chui Ping is one of the creative collaborators)
Type: Installation and conceptual art exhibition
Location: G-Dot Art SpaceCentral Gallery Street,
Eastern Art District, Songzhuang Tongzhou, Beijing, China.
Dates: 2-May-2011 to 30-June-2011

Fig. 65  Simon Birth, Wing Shya, Lee Chui Ping, Hutton, 2011, filming life figures from Twilight Shadows of the Bright Face, 3 films HD format shot with Phantom camera, Dimension Variable. Hope and Glory Beijing Exhibition, Beijing.
APPENDIX 3: Curriculum Vitae

Individual Exhibition
2008 Real… (The arcane zone between the reality and dream), The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Hong Kong.

Group Exhibitions
2011 Hope and Glory Beijing, G-Dot Art Space, Songzhuang, Beijing, China.

2010 The 65th Artist Commune, Cattle Depot Artist Village, Hong Kong

2010 Hope and Glory, Artistree, Island East, Hong Kong

2009 MasterMind 2009, Master of Fine Art Graduation Exhibition, Pao’s Gallery, The Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong.

2007 Flash 14, Artistudio-arthome, Hong Kong

2007 Flash 12, Artistudio-arthome, Hong Kong

2006 Almost 18, White Tube, Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong.

As an Art Education Coordinator

2012 Daydreaming with...The Hong Kong Edition, Artistree, Island East, Hong Kong

2010 Hope and Glory, Artistree, Island East, Hong Kong