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Xinran Guo

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on Chinese contemporary artists' conceptualization of spectatorship in the 2000s, the decade when the state started to regulate art production within the parameters of cultural industry. I argue that these artists—Cai Guoqiang (b. 1957), Xu Bing (b. 1955), and Yang Shaobin (b. 1962)—adopted the visual language and ideals of socialist realism to make their artworks legible to national viewers, who were mostly unfamiliar with contemporary art in the 2000s. Their conceptualizations of spectatorship took the form of Cai's negotiation between the local and international art worlds, which held opposing opinions of socialist realism at a state museum; Yang's figurative tactics that called into question the efficacy of representing coalminers in a conventional gallery space; and Xu's effort to make contemporary art approachable for the public at a private museum. I consider these artworks to be afterimages, a term that refers to the image that persists on a viewer's retina after he or she is no longer exposed to the original object of perception. I suggest that these afterimages of socialism, though detached from direct engagement with historical conditions, provided opportunities for people to reconsider the contemporary relevance of the socialist past and the limitation of retracing this past in the present.

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Introduction

In 2000, the *Third Shanghai Biennale* opened at the Shanghai Art Museum, a major state institution. This iteration of the exhibition was organized by the Shanghai municipal government and the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China (PRC).[1] While the first two biennales had featured oil and ink-and-wash paintings by Chinese artists, this was the first to include photography, video, and installations, half of which were created by international artists.[2] The curatorial team, moreover, was headed by international curators Hou Hanru and Toshio Shimizu.[3] Before 2000, contemporary art was rarely endorsed by the state and state institutions.[4] Thus, for many critics, the *Third Shanghai Biennale* represented a turning point in Chinese contemporary art.[5]

Even before 2000, relevant signs of transformations had appeared on the state level. In 1998, the Ministry of Culture transferred the tasks of policy-making and the guidance of art production from the China Artist Association to the newly established Cultural Industries Division within the Ministry.[6] Then, in 2000, the Central Committee of the Communist Party emphasized the importance of developing cultural industries in the "Outline of the '10th Five-

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[1] *2000 上海双年展* [2000 Shanghai Biennale](Shanghai: Shanghai Meishuguan, 2000).

[2] Shi Linlin, Zhuo Qi, Xu Pan et al.,"1996–2012 上海双年展时间简史" [1996–2012 A brief history of Shanghai Biennale], *艺术世界* [Art World] 292 (December, 2014): 129; Wu Hung, "The 2000 Biennale—The Making of a Historical Event," *ART Asia-Pacific* 31 (2001): 42-49.

[3] The curatorial team included Hou Hanru, Toshio Shimuzu, Li Xu, and Zhang Qing. See Wu Hung, "'Experimental Art' of the 1990s," in *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 13.

[4] According to art historian Wu Hung, this lack of official endorsement, manifested in the cancellations and early closings of contemporary art exhibitions, is due to various reasons. One major reason is the authority's insistence on maintaining its control over cultural production through administrative means. See Wu, *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 19.

[5] Hank Bull, "The Third Shanghai Biennale November 2000—Reviewed," *Chinese Type Contemporary Art Magazine* 3 (2000), quoted in Thomas J. Berghuis, "Considering *Huanjing*: Positioning Experimental Art in China," *positions* 12, no. 3 (2004): 716; Wu, "The 2000 Biennale—The Making of a Historical Event," 42-49.

[6] Xiang Yong, "2011-2015: Principles of National Cultural Strategy and Cultural Industries Development in Mainland of China," *International Journal of Cultural and Creative Industries* 1, no, 1 (September, 2013): 74–5.

year Plan' for National Economic and Social Development"; in 2002, the State Council reiterated this emphasis in the 16th National Congress Report.[7] Meanwhile, the government strengthened and refined laws regarding art production and circulation. The Ministry of Culture re-issued *Measures for the Administration of Business Operations of Fine Arts* in 2004; then, the Ministry of Commerce established *Measures for the Administration of Auction* in 2005.[8] All of these signals from the topmost institutions of the central government had regulative and guiding effects on the policy-making of various levels of local governments.[9] The governance of contemporary art became intertwined with the government's policies, laws, and regulations of the creative industry.

Contemporary art emerged in mainland China after the government initiated market reforms in the late 1970s. During the last three decades of the twentieth century, contemporary art mostly developed outside art academies and state museums in the form of private or semi-private exhibitions. Critics commonly characterize the turning point around 2000 as official acceptance of international contemporary art in mainland China.[10] Some see it as the Chinese government's attempt to challenge the Western domination of global contemporary art, while others take it as an opportunity to expand the view of Chinese contemporary art outside the canon formed by art professionals from Europe and America.[11] In either case, commentators believe that support from the Chinese government opened up new terrain for Chinese

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[7] Xiang, 75.

[8] "商务部令 2004 年第 24 号 拍卖管理办法" [Measures for the administration of auction issued by Ministry of Commerce in 2004, no. 24], accessed March 3, 2018, http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/b/d/200412/20041200316117.html.

[9] Michael Keane, *Creative Industries in China* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 22.

[10] Joan Lebold Cohen, "Shanghai Biennale 2000, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai," *Art Newspaper* 100, no.1 (2001):164; Xiao Lin, "Shanghai Biennale," *China Today* (January 2001): 18–22; Grace Fan, "Report from Shanghai," *Oriental Art* 47, no. 1 (2001): 70–4; Satoru Nagoya, "Shanghai Biennale 2000," *Flash Art International* 216, no. 34 (January/ February, 2001): 113.

[11] Fan, 71; Lin, 18–22; Satoru, 113.

contemporary art. One curator, Zhang Qing, encapsulates this promising view: "Only in this way can Chinese artistic developments stand on their own feet, rather than submissively following the West."[12] Zhang's rhetoric recalls Chinese nationalistic discourses that center on the advocacy of national independence and critiques of imperialism, underlying the tendency for some Chinese viewers and commentators to associate contemporary art with the domination of Euro-America culture in the world.[13] In this light, the official endorsement not only legalized contemporary art in terms of administrative procedures, but also made it appear more legitimate to national viewers by foregrounding the association between Chinese institutions and contemporary artworks.

However, the development of contemporary art in mainland China during the 2000s, I would argue, did not essentially challenge the power discrepancy between the socially enfranchised and disenfranchised in global contemporary art. Rather, it replicated this hierarchy by generating class distinctions that separated the middle class from the others. To study how art was implicated in social stratification, I select three artists whose works evinced their responses to ideological boundaries that were taking shape at contemporary art institutions. In the first chapter, I focus on Cai Guoqiang's *Collection of Maksimov's Works* (2002), a display of ninety-six works by the Soviet painter Konstantin Maksimov (1913–1993) (fig. 1). The installation was shown at two state institutions—the Shanghai Art Museum and the Central Academy of Fine Arts Gallery. In the second chapter, I consider Yang Shaobin's two series of multimedia works on coalminers, *800 Meters Under* (2004–2006) and *X-Blind Spot* (2006–2008), both of which

[12] Lin, 21.
[13] The rhetoric that emphasizes national independence and anti-imperialism became significant to political discourses in mainland China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This was catalyzed by the onslaught of foreign invasions and the rise of revolutionary sentiments. See Charles A. Laughlin, "Writing the Actual," in *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of Chinese Literature* (London: Brill, 2011), 137–38.

were made in collaboration with a commercial art gallery, Long March Space (fig. 2, fig. 3). Lastly, I analyze Xu Bing's *Phoenix Project* (2008–10), which consists of two colossal structures assembled from construction debris and workers' tools as well as a documentary exhibition at Today Art Museum, a private contemporary art museum in Beijing (fig. 4). In chronological order, these three chapters show how Cai, Yang, and Xu responded to structural changes that contributed to the formation of ideological boundaries at contemporary art institutions, including the impact of nationalism and the division between socialist realist and contemporary art in the early 2000s, the emergence of art districts and commercial art galleries in the mid and late 2000s, as well as the growing presence of corporate sponsorship in the late 2000s.

The artists' engagements with these institutional conditions took place at three kinds of exhibition spaces, where most viewers in mainland China could access contemporary artworks in the 2000s. Originally founded in 1956, the Shanghai Art Museum is a major state institution dedicated to painting exhibitions.[14] In 2000, it more than doubled its size by relocating to a new building, which soon became a site for global contemporary art by hosting the *Third Shanghai Biennale*.[15] Cai staged *Collection of Maksimov's Works* in his solo show at the Shanghai Art Museum in 2002, the first retrospective of an international contemporary artist in mainland China.[16] When Yang showed his first coalminer series *800 Meters Under* at Long March Space in 2006, the gallery had just begun a new stage of development. It more than tripled its size by

[14] "概况" [Overview], Shanghai Art Museum, http://shanghaimeiguan.meishujia.cn/?act=usite&said=413&usid=822, accessed March 22, 2018.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Other major contemporary art exhibitions in the early 2000s include Shanghai biennales and abstract art exhibitions that mainly focus on modern and contemporary artists of Shanghai origins. These shows include: *Shanghai Biennale* (2000), *Ontology: Shanghai Abstract Art Exhibition* (2001), *Shanghai Biennale* (2002), *Shanghai Biennale* (2004), *Ontology: Shanghai Abstract Art Exhibition* (2003).

relocating to a new site in the 798 Art District, the earliest contemporary art district in China.[17] Between the exhibitions of Yang's two series in 2006 and 2008, the art district underwent drastic growth in its number of galleries and visitors.[18] In line with this broader shift, Long March Space transformed from an alternative art space to one of the most commercially successful galleries in mainland China.[19] The Today Art Museum, where Xu exhibited *Phoenix Project*, is representative of private art museums funded by corporations. Founded in 2002 by the Chinese conglomerate Antaeus Group, the museum moved from a residential area to 22 International Art Plaza in 2006.[20] By the late 2000s, it had become one of the most established museums of contemporary art in Beijing.[21] Given these institutional changes, Cai, Yang, and Xu had to re-conceptualize the spectatorship of their works in order to make their artworks speak to viewers unfamiliar with these new exhibition spaces.

I define conceptualization of spectatorship as the way in which contemporary artists position their artworks by recalibrating the relationship between artworks, art institutions, and viewers. My three case studies trace how Cai, Yang, and Xu based their conceptualization of spectatorship on the visual language and political ideals of socialist realism. Despite the end of

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[17] "画廊正能量：长征空间从 1.0-8.0 的升级路" [Positive energy of a gallery: Upgrading Long March Space from 1.0 to 8.0], Sina, accessed March 12, 2018, http://collection.sina.com.cn/ddys/zh/2016-04-29/doc-ifxrtzte9826307.shtml.

[18] Zhang Yue, "Governing Art Districts: State Control and Cultural Production in Contemporary China," *The China Quarterly* 219 (September, 2014): 836.

[19] In 2008 and 2009, Long March Space was listed as one of the art world's most powerful institutions by *Art Review* magazine. See Chang Tan, "Art for/of the Masses Revisiting the Communist Legacy in Chinese Art," *Third Text* 26, no. 2 (March, 2012): 192.

[20] "今典集团：中国度假地产先锋" [Antaeous Group: Forerunner in tourism real estate], Antaeous Group, accessed June 2, 2016, http://www.jdjt.net/WebPage/About.aspx?Cid=1. "22 International Art Plaza," China Daily, accessed June 2, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/beijing/2012-12/12/content_16008732.htm; Zhang Tianyu, "今日美术馆：民营美术馆，困难是因为盲目" [Today Art Museum: Private Art Museum, the Difficulty comes from Blindness], *艺术市场* [Art Market], no. 2 (2009): 27–30.

[21] The Today Art Museum was one of the two Chinese contemporary art museums to be included in the survey on new global contemporary art spaces in the exhibition *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds after 1989*. See Andrea Buddensieg, "Art Spaces. A Museumscape in Transition," in *Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (Karlsruhe: ZKM/Center for Art and Media, 2013), 60–73.

the revolutionary era in the late 1970s, socialist realism continued to serve a prominent role in official discourses, state media, general education of politics and art, and popular culture in mainland China in the 2000s.[22] The visual language and ideals of socialist realism remained a part of the visual vocabulary of people across generations. The three artists mobilized aspects of socialist realism to position contemporary art in relation to the public's visual vocabulary.

The chapter titles—"Between Socialist Realism and Contemporary Art," "Between a Revolutionary Theme and a Social Problem," and "Between 'Art for the People' and Art for the Public"—refer to how the three artists negotiated between aspects socialist realism and those of contemporary art. The first chapter focuses on how Cai positioned contemporary art in relation to the historical associations between state museums and socialist realist art objects, which stemmed from his awareness of socioeconomic conditions of art institutions and of the deeply entrenched gap between socialist realist and contemporary art in the early 2000s. The second and the third chapter focus on Yang and Xu's responses to capitalistic exploitations of workers in mainland China in the 2000s. Yang's two series addressed the social problem of coalmine accidents by rearticulating the classic revolutionary theme of miners. Though Yang grew up in a coalmining town Tangshan, his onsite research process departed from the life sketching of socialist realism for the lack of interpersonal communication with miners and a visual command of the social issue. These works related to and diverged from his early portraits of bruised figures

[22] For the continuing existence of visual elements of socialist culture in the 1990s and 2000s, see Francesca Dal Lago, "Personal Mao: Reshaping an Icon in Contemporary Chinese Art," *Art Journal* 58, no. 2 (Summer, 1999): 46-59; Lily Chumley, *Creativity Class: Art School and Culture Work in Postsocialist China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Zhang Xudong, "Introduction: The Cultural Politics of Postsocialism," in *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press), 1–22. This study builds on the disjunctions and associations between socialist revolutionary culture and contemporary culture that these scholars point out. It departs from Chumley's study on art education and Zhang's research on broad cultural trends by focusing on aesthetics of contemporary art. It also differs from Dal Lago's work on appropriations of Mao icons in contemporary China and Chinese contemporary art by focusing on artworks exhibited at emerging art institutions in mainland China in the 2000s.

by alluding to the gravity of social violence without victimizing miners, which revealed ideological limitations to representing workers at commercial art institutions. Xu constantly drew parallels between the formal details of *Phoenix Project* and the visual language of socialist realism. In the assemblage and the exhibition, he also included construction workers' hats as well as photos of migrant workers, a gesture that underscored the socialist ideal of making art for the people. Xu's interest in socialist realism and his concern for workers stemmed from his early experience in designing revolutionary prints, his continuous interrogations of the public dimension of contemporary art, and his position as an administrator of an art academy that required him to reposition contemporary art in relation to socialist realism. If the first chapter reveals the persisting distance between contemporary art and the broader field of art in mainland China, the last two chapters expose the difficulty for contemporary artists to offer a coherent socio-political standpoint regarding social inequality and labor issues.

The public's lack of familiarity with contemporary art contributed to the formation of these limits. Contemporary art had few opportunities to reach the national public before the 2000s, due to historical reasons delineated in the next section. In the 2000s, the majority of the national public had gained some familiarity with the concepts and visual languages of international contemporary art. In an article that freelance journalist Xiao Lin wrote to celebrate the exhibition as well as the future of contemporary art that it heralded, the writer included the observation that, despite the significance of the occasion, relatively few Chinese visitors understood the artworks.[23] Most only glanced at the art then asked each other, "What does it mean?" or concluded, "I don't understand."[24]

[23] Xiao, 22.
[24] Ibid.

The artworks under study demonstrate the various ways in which artists gauged viewers' relationship to contemporary art and art institutions. The works were all created around the time when Cai, Yang, and Xu shifted their focus to collaborating with Chinese art institutions and had to reposition their works in relation to national viewers. The three artists all grew up in mainland China during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Cai and Xu moved to the United States in the early1990s and, by the end of the decade, had become internationally known. In 1999, Cai won the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Biennale and Xu received the MacArthur Genius Award.[25] The prestige they accumulated in the 1990s created more opportunities for them to collaborate with government institutions and global corporations in the 2000s. While Cai and Xu could sell artworks directly from their studios, the majority of contemporary artists in mainland China worked with galleries.[26] This included Yang, who mainly worked with galleries and dealers in the 1990s and 2000s.[27] These three artists re-conceptualized the spectatorship of their artworks by mobilizing cultural frameworks associated with socialist realism. This includes the relationships formed between socialist realist artworks and viewers, people's familiarity with the themes and visual languages of socialist realism, as well as the ideal that art should be part of the communist revolution and created for the public. Cai, Yang, and Xu's appropriations of these cultural frameworks in the conceptualization of spectatorship art reveal the ideological limit that was solidifying at Chinese contemporary art institutions.

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[25] "Timeline," in *Xu Bing: A Retrospective*, eds. Chia Chi Jason Wang (Taipei: Taipei Fine Art Museum, 2012): 392–409.
[26] Richard Vine, Christopher Phillips and Barbara Pollock, "Money Talks Mandarin," *Art in America* 95, no.3 (2007): 49.
[27] Yang Shaobin, interview by author, April 12, 2017.

My definition of ideology is inspired by art historian T. J. Clark's notion that it manifests in art production as a set of limits to action, representation, and discourse.[28] Its appearance, as Clark insightfully notes, is often hidden under various guises.[29] Ideology often speaks to class distinctions while masking them under naturalized appearances that suggest no specific meanings.[30] Clark's point about ideology is part of his study of modernist painting in late-nineteenth-century France. Despite significant cultural and historical differences, the inter-relationship between representation, capitalism, and class that Clark delineates strikes a chord with the ideological status of contemporary China, which had become inherently opaque after the socialist country initiated market reforms in the late 1970s.[31] Here, I approach this ideology by examining artists' conceptualization of the spectatorship of contemporary art. Rather than imposing a preconceived notion of the ideology of contemporary Chinese art, I contend that it is only by tracing visual representations and artists' responses to institutional boundaries that one can delineate the contours of ideology that were forming at contemporary art institutions.

The covert and undefined state of ideology is best characterized by Michel Foucault's idea of governance that he delineated in a lecture in 1978.[32] He suggests that methods of governance concern not only administration and law but also the kind of relationships formed between the state and the governed, between institutions and communities, and among people.[33] In other words, the state governs not only by regulation but also by guiding the formation of

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[28] T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1985), 8.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Clark, 8.
[31] Theorist Wang Hui suggests that ideological divisions between capitalism and workers, between the socialist government and global capital became unobvious in contemporary China, due to the party's interest to hold onto power while developing the capitalist market. See Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* (London: Verso Books, 2011), 12–3.
[32] Colin Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Govermentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2–3.
[33] Ibid.

relationships between social agents. Foucault's point underscores the necessity of examining methods of governance outside the realm of state administration and its immediate socioeconomic consequences. Building on Foucault's insight, this study mediates between two contrary views on the role of the state: one that recognizes the increased freedom in cultural production, and one that emphasizes the persisting administrative control. For example, political scientist Richard Kraus claims that market reforms initiated in the late 1970s granted more space for creative endeavors and that the regulation of cultural production was no longer the focus of the state.[34] Political scientist Zhang Yue and urban studies scholars Ren Xuefei and Sun Meng hold a very different view of government control of cultural space; they point out that the government controls the production and circulation of contemporary art through numerous spatial strategies and administrative means, whereby it mitigates contemporary artworks' potential to generate political antagonism.[35] By focusing on specific artworks, my study shows the importance of considering both perspectives when understanding the ideological underpinnings of contemporary art production. It calls scholarly attention to policy changes and institutional shifts without underestimating the relative freedom of aesthetic creation.

In particular, ideological changes were intertwined with the rise of the middle class in mainland China. The Chinese middle class first appeared during the modernization and industrialization initiated by the Republican Chinese government at the start of the twentieth century then grew during the socialist revolution from the 1940s to the 1970s.[36] A major turning point was the founding of the PRC in 1949.[37] This weakened the aristocratic class as well as

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[34] Kraus, 1–36.
[35] Zhang Yue, 829; Xuefei Ren and Meng Sun, "Artistic Urbanization: Creative Industries and Creative Control in Beijing," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 36, no. 3 (May 2012): 504–21.
[36] Goodman, 25-27.
[37] Ibid.

capitalists that emerged during the earlier part of the twentieth century and facilitated the growth of a social group of officials, professionals, and intellectuals associated with the newly established bureaucracy.[38] During the socialist revolutionary era, there were few terms for members of the middle class. It was not until the late 1990s that terms like "middle stratum" (中间层), "middle-income stratum"(中等收入阶层), and 'middle-income group' (中等收入群体) became common in Chinese academic studies, official documents, and popular discourse. [39] These terms describe the social group that benefited from the development of the capitalist economy in the post-revolutionary era.[40] In her pioneering study of home ownership among the middle class, sociologist Zhang Li identifies the 2000s as the moment when the Chinese middle class emerged as a distinctive social group.[41]

Visitors to galleries and museums in mainland China in the 2000s mostly fall into the category of the middle class.[42] In order to stimulate consumption and enlarge the market, the state had been promoting discourses and practices of leisure since the mid 1990s.[43] According to

[38] Goodman, 25-6.
[39] Li Cheng, "Introduction: the rise of the middle class in the Middle Kingdom," in *China's Emerging Middle Class: Beyond Economic Transformation,* ed. Li Cheng (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 8; Erik K. Goodman, *The New Rich in China: Future Rulers, Present Lives* (London: Routledge, 2008), 24; Ren Hai, *The Middle Class in Neoliberal China: Governing Risk, Life-building, and Themed Spaces* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 8.
[40] This social group did not replace the officials, scholars, and intellectuals associated with the socialist bureaucracy. Most of the offspring of these bureaucrats, intellectuals, and technocrats remained members of the middle class in the post-revolutionary era, due to the close connection between political capital and economic capital in mainland China.
[41] Zhang Li, *In Search of Paradise: Middle-Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 7.
[42] This is a personal observation during my stay in Beijing from 2005 to 2009. The socio-economic status of the audience of contemporary art in the 2010s has not changed essentially. During my part-time job at a contemporary art museum in Beijing in 2016, I encountered few visitors that could be categorized as people of other social groups. Due to the lack of public education of contemporary art in mainland China, urban dwellers have better opportunities to gather cultural resources to understand contemporary art through other means. This may explain why most visitors to contemporary art institutions belong to the urban middle class.
[43] Wang Jing, "Culture as Leisure and Culture as Capital," *positions* 9, no.1 (Spring 2001): 78.

state campaigns, leisure entails spending time outdoors and various forms of consumption.[44] In that same decade, the overall market structure shifted from one based on people's everyday needs to one centered on fashion, luxury, and leisure.[45] While the practice of leisure was not limited to city dwellers, most museums and art districts featuring contemporary art were located in cities.[46] Art viewing was a form of leisure mainly for city dwellers. Unlike exhibitions of socialist realist art and traditional art, contemporary art exhibitions had yet to establish modes of viewing in the 2000s, which rendered it a unique lens for understanding the possibility of generating shared cultural frameworks for the middle class.

Cultural pursuits are of crucial importance, I believe, to understanding the Chinese middle class. I hereby adopt historian E.P. Thompson's view that the formation of a class is predicated as much on the socioeconomic base as on class consciousness.[47] The creation of class consciousness is a discrete historical process that involves a changing of relationships between classes.[48] It cannot be detached from the means of social production, though it is not determined by socioeconomic conditions.[49] While scholars tend to define the Chinese middle class by home ownership and consumption habits in the private realm, I contend that representations and discourses circulating in the public space are equally important to comprehend the ideological boundaries manifested in the making of this social group.[50] My study takes the expanding global

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 76.
[46] Most of the contemporary art institutions are located in cosmopolitan cities on the east coast, especially Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. In a survey in 2016, private contemporary art museums in these three cities accounted for 73% of the total 26 institutions in the country. See Shen Tong, "全球首份《私人美术馆调研报告》发布" [The first global issue of *Survey of Private Art Museums* has been published], Xinhua Net, accessed August 8, 2017, https://news.artron.net/20160121/n811593.html.
[47] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: V. Gollancz, 1963), 9–16.
[48] Ibid.
[49] E. P. Thompson, 9–16.
[50] For example, Zhang Li centralizes stratified home ownership in the definition of the middle class. See Zhang Li, 1-25.

contemporary art spaces in mainland China as sites that shape this ideological boundary. This process is unlikely to lead to the creation of a distinctive class consciousness, as middle-class culture is characterized by its insistent denial of class features.[51] Nonetheless, the shared cultural frameworks that members of the middle class used to approach representations of workers is central to understanding the ideological state of contemporary China, which was transforming into a class-based society from a country in which the overwhelming majority of the urban population belonged to the working class.[52]

This aspect of visual culture is key to understanding the political orientation of the middle class, as the emergence of this group was intertwined with the growth of stark socioeconomic inequality between people who profited from the market reforms and those who were marginalized by them.[53] In fact, the initial use of the term 'middle class' in official documents was integral to the state's attempt to pacify the tension generated by mounting social inequality. One major component of the government-initiated economic reform of the 1990s was the downsizing of state-owned enterprises, which had played a pivotal role in the national economy from the 1950s to the 1980s. In 1994, the National People's Congress passed the new labor law, granting state-owned enterprises the right to terminate contracts with workers. As a result, millions of urban workers had to leave their jobs.[54] Due to the lack of an efficient social welfare

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[51] This differentiation between class consciousness and class culture is based on sociologist Anthony Giddens's distinguishing between class consciousness and class awareness. See Giddens, *Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 111, quoted in Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760–1900* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[52] This point is based on Giddens's view that the primary feature of a class society "is not one in which there simply exist classes, but one in which class relationships are of primary significance to the explanatory interpretation of large areas of social conduct." See Giddens, 132, 105, 107–9, 111, 177–97, cited in Blumin, 8–9.

[53] Ren, 1; Li Cheng, 17.

[54] The total employment dropped from 110.4 in 1997 million to 76.4 million in 2001. See Dali L. Yang, "China in 2002: Leadership Transition and the Political Economy of Governance," *Asian Survey* 43, no.1 (2003): 34; Cai Yongshun. "The Resistance of Chinese Laid-off Workers in the Reform Period," *The China Quarterly*, no. 170 (June, 2002): 327. Specific reasons varied across regions, due to different business environments of the state owned

system, laid-off workers protested across the country.[55] Such unrest ranged from mild petitions to violent actions such as blocking transportation and attacking government offices.[56] Reports of workers' protests appeared on domestic and international media, drawing widespread attention. To deal with this urgent social problem, the state disseminated two terms in government reports in 2002: the middle class and the disadvantaged.[57] In March, former Premier Zhu Rongji, in his government work report, expressed his concern with the worsening situation of the workers and categorized them as the disadvantaged group.[58] This is the first time that the term appeared in official documents. That November, at the Sixteenth National Congress meeting, the government, for the first time, encouraged the growth of the middle-income group, a shift from the marginalization of capitalists and petite bourgeoisie during the revolutionary period.[59] Due to the fact that the economic interest of the middle class largely relies on social stability and market prosperity, the state repositioned the middle class as allies to secure social stability.[60]

My three case studies show how the government and market forces created aesthetic opportunities for the middle class to reflect on representations of the working class and yet deprived these reiterations of sociopolitical resonance by embroiling their production and reception within inconsistent institutional settings. The artists' conceptualization of spectatorship speaks to the legibility of representations of the working class to middle-class viewers in the

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enterprises. It is also related to if the central government gives subsidies or austerity plans. See William Hurst, *The Chinese Worker after Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 37–59.

[55] Hurst, 37–59; Eli D. Friedman, "Labor Politics and Capitalist Industrialization," in *Insurgency Trap: Labor Politics in Postsocialist China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1–28.

[56] Dorothy J. Solinger, "State and Society in Urban China in the Wake of the 16th Party Congress," *The China Quarterly*, no. 176 (December, 2003): 947.

[57] Ren Hai, 1.

[58] He Lei, "朱镕基报告中出现新名词：弱势群体包括哪些人" [New words appeared in Zhu Rongji's report to the government: What does the underprivileged group consist of], China News, accessed July 3, 2016, http://www.chinanews.com/2002-03-07/26/167412.html.

[59] Cheng Li, 11.

[60] Ibid.

2000s, as well as the difficulty for this legibility to cohere into sociopolitical standpoints. Cai exhibited *Collection of Maksimov's Works* at a time when art professionals had yet to reach a consensus about the relationship between socialist realist and contemporary art. While international art critics see Cai's project as an ironic appropriation of socialist realism, viewers less familiar with contemporary art take it as a commemoration of a Soviet artist whose work and teaching in Beijing in the 1950s had a profound influence on subsequent generations of Chinese practitioners.[61] When Yang created his two series on coalminers, Long March Space underwent a transformation from an alternative art space into a fully-fledged white cube gallery. In relation to this institutional change, Yang's figural tactics of the two series highlight the unbridgeable distance between viewers and the issues of the coalminers. When making *Phoenix Project*, Xu constantly faced changes in funding source, availability of materials, and exhibition space. His initial plan to create an interior sculpture for the building of a global finance company, Henderson Group, eventually evolved into a two-part installation in a museum.

The artworks I study are afterimages, images that persist on a viewer's retina after he or she is no longer exposed to the original object of perception. More specifically, I see these representations as "afterimages of socialism," as they encapsulate how aspects of socialist visual culture linger in contemporary China in ways that resonate with viewers without generating sociopolitical consequences. Scholars' theorizations of the afterimage often associate the concept with a blinding light and its lasting effect. Walter Benjamin uses 'afterimage' to describe people's reactions to the blinding experiences generated by industrialization in the early

[61] Fan Di'An, "蔡国强：否证的艺术" [Cai Guo-Qiang: The Art of Falsification], in *Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe*, eds. Thomas Kres, Alexandra Monroe, trans. Wang Chunchen (Beijing: Renmin Press, 2008), 18-25; Eleanor Heartney, "Cai Guo-Qiang: Illuminating the New China," *Art in America* (May 2002): 96; Julia Andrews, "Art Under Mao, 'Cai Guoqiang's Maksimov Collection,' and China's Twentieth Century," in *Writing Modern Chinese Art: Historiographic Explorations*, ed. Josh Yiu (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2009), 67.

twentieth century.[62] In particular, he used the concept of the afterimage to critique how Henri Bergson's isolated examination of afterimages denies the historical dimension of memory.[63] Similarly, I use 'afterimage' to describe people's reaction to the growth of capitalism and social inequality in Chinese cities and how this experience created new contemporary relevance of socialist visual culture. Unlike Bergson, my reading of these afterimages is grounded in my analysis of the historical conditions that generated the blinding experience. I build on art historian Krista Thompson's study of popular photographic practices in Jamaican dancehalls, in which she proposes that the use of blinding light in the documentation of dance produced afterimages that persisted in viewers' eyes and shaped people's memory of dancing.[64] While afterimages do not lead to direct engagement with historical conditions, they provide opportunities for people to reconsider the contemporary relevance of the past.

My study of these afterimages is based on an analysis of the cultural frameworks that the three artists used to make their contemporary artworks accessible to national viewers. The cultural frameworks they utilize have more to do with the reference points that Cai, Yang, and Xu expected viewers to use than with the diverse reception enacted by people's viewing of an artwork. I base my definition of cultural framework on what sociologist Erving Goffman calls the framework of interpretation.[65] Goffman suggests that people constantly employ frameworks to make meaning out of "events and our subjective involvements in them."[66] These frameworks do not necessarily suggest one specific way of interpretation; instead, they imply a range of

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[62] Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 172.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Krista Thompson, "Introduction: Of Shine, Bling, and Bixels," in *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 1–46.
[65] Erving Goffman, "Introduction" "Primary Frameworks," in *Frame Analysis* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 1–39.
[66] Ibid., 10–11, 21.

circumstances associated with the chosen frameworks.[67] My case studies show how the three artists mobilized the different cultural frameworks rooted in the development of socialist realism from the 1950s to the 1970s. In Cai's case, he appropriated the relationship formed between official art institutions and socialist realist artworks. In Yang's and Xu's cases, the artists' works evoke the socialist realist ideal that art should be created for the people and thus can expect viewers to be familiar with the revolutionary visual language and themes. Cai's, Yang's, and Xu's appropriations of socialist realism are based on Chinese viewers' visual vocabulary. Unlike other Chinese contemporary artworks, they did not use the visual language and themes of socialist realism as general reference points to China, an interpretive framework that I examine in the next section.

Socialist Symbols as a Reference Point to China

National and international audiences differ significantly in their reading of socialist symbols in contemporary artworks created by Chinese artists.[68] Local viewers tend to approach socialist symbols through their memory of the revolutionary era, the knowledge of socialist realist artworks, the visual vocabulary of socialist slogans, posters, and symbols, and their experience of living in a socialist state; however, international viewers are more likely to use their knowledge of the Cold War, the Chinese Communist Revolution, and critical opinions of the Chinese government. To differentiate the three oeuvres being examined from those that gravitate more towards the cultural frameworks employed by international viewers, I will now compare Cai's, Yang's, and Xu's approaches with those of other Chinese contemporary artists.

[67] Goffman, 21.
[68] Ibid.

The three artworks I study diverge from the appropriation of socialist symbols in paintings categorized as cynical realism and political pop, the two concepts of Chinese contemporary art best known in Western Europe and North America. Paintings of cynical realism and political pop often juxtapose symbols of socialism with those of consumerism against brightly colored backgrounds.[69] Wang Guangyi's *Great Criticism*, a series of works begun in 1990, epitomizes this style.[70] In his *Great Criticism–Coca Cola* (1990–93), for instance, the artist juxtaposed the representation of soldiers, farmers, and workers in revolutionary prints with the logo of a commercial product (fig. 5). The bright color scheme, the figures' dynamic postures, and the figures' angular black outlines call to mind those of revolutionary posters. One of Xu Bing's early works that I study in Chapter Three serves as a good example of these revolutionary posters (fig. 6). It depicts two men and a woman holding farming tools and looking toward the upper right, a posture often used to indicate people's vision of the revolutionary future. Textual elements rendered in bright red color feature popular slogans circulating during the Cultural Revolution, including "Learn from Dazhai" that calls for people to follow the model of revolutionary farmers at Dazhai Village in Shanxi province, as well as slogans that mobilize people to fight capitalism. The figures all hold farm tools in their hands and stand with their legs wide open, implying that they are ready for action. The angular black outlines further strengthen the forceful appearance of the figures.

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[69] Jane Debevoise, "The Chinese Avant-Garde Moves Offshore," in *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 260.

[70] For the canonization of Wang's paintings as cynical realism and political pop, see Li Xianting, "Major Trends in the Development of Chinese Contemporary Art," in *China's New Art, Post-1989: With a Retrospective from 1979-1989*, ed. Chang Tsong-zung (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), X–XXII; Li Xianting, "Wang Guangyi," in *China's New Art, Post-1989,* 31.

Unlike a revolutionary poster, *Great Criticism–Coca Cola* contrasts visual elements drawn from socialist visual culture and the capitalist market.[71] A commercial brand captures viewers' attention in the lower right corner, a focal point indicated by the tip of the pen. To strengthen the visual contrast, the artist stamped the whole painting with numerals that recall serial numbers printed on commercial products. Taken as a whole, the composition creates contrast between visual elements of socialist and capitalist cultures. Unlike Wang's works, the three artworks studied here do not juxtapose socialist symbols with visual elements derived from other ideological contexts. Cai's staging of a Soviet painter's works, Yang's reiteration of a classical revolutionary theme, and Xu's association of *Phoenix Project* with native art forms retraced the visuality rooted in socialist visual culture.

Apart from aesthetic strategy, these works differ from cynical realism and political pop in their means of circulation. *Great Criticism—Coca Cola* made its international debut in *China's New Art, Post-1989*, a show that toured the United States, England, Canada, Taiwan, and Hong Kong from 1994 to 1997.[72] This exhibition, organized by the Hong Kong-based Hanart Gallery, successfully promoted cynical realism and political pop as key terms of Chinese contemporary art.[73] One co-organizer, Li Xianting, associates the two terms with a sense of malaise and disillusionment in the post-revolutionary period.[74] In this interpretive framework, the use of socialist symbols in Wang's *Great Criticism* series stems from people's disenchantment with the bygone revolutionary era and enthusiasm for imported commercial products. Narratives based on these reference points are usually familiar to international viewers. The widely reported

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[71] Debevoise, 245; Tang Xiaobing, *Visual Culture in Contemporary China: Paradigms and Shifts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 152.
[72] Debevoise, 258–67
[73] For Li Xianting and Chang's propagation of the two concepts through international exhibitions, see *China's New Art, Post-1989*.
[74] Li Xianting, XX–XXII.

Tian'anmen Student Protests further enhanced people's interest in such narratives.[75] According to art historian Jane Debevoise, international audiences in the early 1990s were "waiting for" artworks that could shed light on Chinese people's reactions to market reforms and political changes.[76] English writings published in Europe, Australia, and the United States often frame Wang and his fellow artists as political dissidents.[77] This transparency to interpretation expanded the market share of paintings associated with cynical realism and political pop.[78] According to an article in *Asia Week* (亚洲周刊), the price of Wang's paintings rose tenfold after the tour of *China's New Art, Post-1989*.[79] For this reason, English writings published in Hong Kong and Chinese art criticism published in mainland China frame Wang's work primarily as a market success, instead of discussing the visual and ideological aspects of his work.[80]

The hyper-visibility of cynical realism and political pop facilitated the crystallization of a historical narrative centered on the perpetual opposition between contemporary art and socialist realism, between dissident artists and a suppressive regime. It generated a problem that Chinese studies scholar Tang Xiaobing terms the "dissidence hypothesis," which conflates all kinds of criticism expressed by Chinese as open resistance against the authoritarian regime.[81] Contemporary artists associated with cynical realism and political pop often faced political harassment and intervention into their exhibition activities in the 1990s, as my introduction of the Yuanmingyuan Artist Village in Chapter Two on Yang Shaobin will thoroughly explore. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that they created their artworks to express political dissidence.

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[75] Debevoise, 264.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Debevoise, 264–65.
[78] Ibid.
[79]"在反思的画布上追寻前卫" [Searching for the avant-garde by considering paintings], *亚洲周刊* [Asiaweek] (February 21, 1993), quoted in Debevoise, 264.
[80] Debevoise, 258–67
[81] Tang, 178.

Asian Studies scholar Geremie Barmé points out that the cultural products which people outside of mainland China viewed as dissident and anti-official in the 1990s can be better characterized as "nonmainstream" and "underculture."[82] Though these artworks were not funded or openly endorsed by the state, their aesthetic stance alone does not make them oppositional.

If Wang's *Great Criticism* seems a satire on socialism to some, it can be seen as a contemplation of the contemporary relevance of socialist visual culture by others. For example, Chinese studies scholar Tang Xiaobing suggests that the *Great Criticism* series enacts the visuality of socialism and capitalism by highlighting the distance between the two while nonetheless intertwining them in the same compositions.[83] The juxtaposition of two kinds of visual language from opposing ideological backgrounds resonates with the growth of consumerism in mainland China in the 1990s. In the broader realm of visual culture, people's approach to socialist symbols in this decade encompassed a wide range of collective and individual sentiments. In art historian Francesca Dal Lago's study of the appropriation of Mao portraits in Chinese contemporary art, she notes that icons of Mao became prominent in low-cost products in the 1990s, which many called the Maocraze (毛热).[84] These products ranged from keychain accessories to the interior design of restaurants, from car talismans to literary stories of Mao's life.[85] These cultural products, as suggested by Dal Lago, manifest how deeply the visual culture of the revolutionary era was ingrained in the post-revolutionary period.[86] The continuing relevance of Mao's portraits did not suggest a sociopolitical standpoint; rather, it became an aesthetic space in which the state, market forces, and individuals with different interests

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[82] Geremie Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), xiv.
[83] Tang, 152.
[84] Dal Lago, "Personal Mao: Reshaping an Icon in Contemporary Chinese Art," 49-50.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Dal Lago, "Personal Mao," 49–50.

negotiated, endowing each reiteration with a range of meanings that may have varied across audiences.[87] Apart from Mao's portraits, the 1990s witnessed the reappearance of socialist visual languages of various kinds in commercial production. Wang's appropriations of socialist symbols in *Great Criticism* mobilize people's familiarity with socialist symbols in popular culture and highlight the ideological disjunction inherent in these contemporary reiterations.

Wang's *Great Criticism* series differs from the works I study also in terms of its circulation. Due to government interference and the lack of market opportunities, Chinese audiences had little access to works of this series. In 1990, one popular news outlet, Beijing Youth (北京青年报), included Wang's paintings from this series in the newspaper.[88] Art historian Yi Ying, working as an editor of the newspaper at that time, recalls that officials from the Beijing municipal government warned the editorial team that Wang's juxtaposition of symbols should not appear in public media.[89] In 1992, *Great Criticism-Coca Cola,* along with a number of works from that series, won the first prize at the First Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair in 1992.[90] This art fair, organized by dealer, critic, and curator Lü Peng and funded by a Chinese entrepreneur, marked the earliest attempt to create a domestic market for contemporary paintings.[91] Its successful opening was catalyzed by the government's renewed emphasis on building the socialist market economy in 1992.[92] In addition to economic incentives, Lü and the artists who joined the show were aiming to legitimize contemporary artworks to officials and the

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[87] Ibid., 47.
[88] Yi Ying, "关于公共性"[About being public], Artlinkart, accessed March 3, 2018, http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/artist/txt_ge/4f4hwzo/a75itAu.
[89] Yi.
[90] Debevoise, 221, 235.
[91] Ibid., 220–29.
[92] For details regarding changes in the national economy and economic policy in 1992, see Peter Harrold and Rajiv Lall, "Recent Economic Developments," in *China: Reform and Development in 1992–93*, *World Bank Discussion Papers* (August 1993): 1–2.

public by increasing their economic value.[93] However, the show largely failed to generate economic gains, due to some confusion regarding administrative details and financing, as well as the fact that a domestic market for contemporary art was still nascent in the early 1990s.[94] If Wang initially created *Great Criticism* in consideration of viewership both in and outside mainland China, conceptualizations of spectatorship in his later works inevitably gravitated towards the cultural frameworks that were familiar to international audiences.

Among aesthetic appropriations of socialist symbols during the 2000s, the artworks under study differ from the others in Cai, Yang, and Xu's responses to social tension of the present. Cai's *Collection of Maksimov's Works* stems from the artist's awareness of the significant gap between the international and local art worlds; both Yang's coalminer series and Xu's *Phoenix Project* involve the artist's concern with capitalistic exploitation of workers. In this regard, these artworks diverge from artists' appropriation of socialist symbols without specific reference to social issues familiar to Chinese viewers. Ai Weiwei's *Fountain of Light* (2007) was a contemporary reiteration of a socialist symbol that appealed to an international spectatorship (fig. 7). This cone-shaped structure was shown at the Albert Dock at Tate Liverpool as part of the exhibition *The Real Thing: Contemporary Art from China*. The basic design was inspired by Russian Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument for the Third International* (1920). Tatlin conceived the dynamic structure of the spiral model to herald the future of the newly established Soviet Union.[95] Though his work was never realized, the design, through photographs of an early model, discursive descriptions, and models shown in Moscow in 1920 and after, became

[93] Debevoise, 220–29.
[94] Ibid., 248–50.
[95] Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 55–60.

symbolic of socialism in Western Europe and North America.[96] Unlike the works I study, Ai employed a Constructivist symbol that the majority of the Chinese public was unfamiliar with in the 2000s and exhibited it outside of China.

A Chinese artist's appropriation of a prominent Soviet socialist symbol easily leads viewers to a series of reference points, such as the socialist revolution of the past, the current state of socialism, and the possibility of future revolution. Karen Smith, curator of *The Real Thing*, proposes that Ai's glass-bead-covered piece refers to the ideological confinements of contemporary China and potential emancipation from these confines in the future.[97] Art historian Jonathan Harris notes that *Fountain of Light* was set at a distance from the quay and looks more like a flat sign signaling the unrealized ambition of socialism.[98] While *Fountain of Light* is approachable for international viewers, its reference to China is somewhat nebulous. In fact, Ai's presentation of the socialist symbol omits an issue directly relevant to contemporary China—namely, that of labor. *Fountain of Light* is seven meters high, similar to the model that Tatlin initially exhibited in the Hall of the Eighth Congress of the Soviets in 1920.[99] While Tatlin's wooden model makes use of the bending nature of the material, Ai's steel structure required intensive labor and a large amount of financial input.[100] To create the piece, Ai collaborated with architects and technicians to modify Tatlin's model, had numerous strings of glass beads made at a Chinese manufacturing plant, and employed a team of laborers to assemble the piece.[101] The

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[96] *The Real Thing: Contemporary Art from China*, eds. Simon Groom, Karen Smith, and Xu Zhen (London: Tate, 2008).
[97] Ibid., *"Working Progress (Fountain of Light),"* 40.
[98] Jonathan Harris, *The Global Contemporary Art World: A Rough Guide* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).
[99] At that time, the Congress was discussing the electrification of the country. See Lodder, 60.
[100] The structure is four meters in length, seven meters in height, and weighs three tons. See Karen Smith, "*Working Progress (Fountain of Light)* 2007," in *The Real Thing,* 39. The total cost of the production amounts to 400,000 British Pounds. See Cristina Ruiz, "Ai Weiwei's Spider Web for Liverpool," *The Art Newspaper* 186 (December, 2007), 3.
[101] Smith, "*Working Progress (Fountain of Light)* 2007," 39.

production was made possible by the development of creative industries in and outside China that provided artists with funding and access to various kinds of labor. Yet, compared to the artists on whom I focus, Ai did not take account of these institutional conditions in *Fountain of Light*. Works like this often overlook the capitalistic exploitation of workers' labor in the contemporary art industry.

The artworks in this study also differ from appropriations of socialist symbols in digital media that do not rely on physical setting to convey their meaning, as exemplified by Cao Fei's (b. 1978) *RMB City* (2007 and after) (fig. 8). For this piece, Cao used an online game to create a virtual island that displayed various visual elements of contemporary China. The online software she used, entitled "Second Life," was internationally popular in the 2000s.[102] Viewers could register on the company's website and explore Second Life in the guise of a customized digital avatar.[103] Every digital avatar could explore the city from ground level or obtain an aerial view of the cityscape.[104] RMB, short for *renminbi*, is the official currency of mainland China. Most symbolic elements in *RMB City* allude to the transformation of Chinese cities brought about by economic developments, such as landmark skyscrapers in Beijing, the Oriental Pearl television tower in Shanghai, the Yangtze River Three Gorges Dam, construction workers' hats, and a giant sculpture that closely resembles socialist realist sculptures of Mao raising his hand. The image most often used to represent the work online and in publications portrays the space from above (see fig. 8). In the background, a skeleton of the Beijing National Stadium, skyscrapers put in a crate, and a construction crane float alongside the island as a panda flies through the air. This

[102] Shira Boss, "Even in a Virtual World, 'Stuff' Matters," *New York Times* (September 9, 2007), accessed April 2, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/09/business/yourmoney/09second.html.
[103] RMB City, accessed March 30, 2018, http://www.rmbcity.com/home.html.
[104] Alice Ming Wai Jim, "The Different Worlds of Cao Fei," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 11, no.3 (2012): 82-90.

view marks the virtual island as a disorderly amalgamation of visual elements of contemporary China familiar to viewers from around the world. Socialist symbols in this work—including the Mao sculpture and official slogans that appear on walls of virtual buildings—appear as fragments that continue to exist in the urban fabric.

In re-adaptations of *RMB City* at exhibitions, Cao's appropriations of socialist symbols appear as disjointed parts of the imaginary space. *RMB City Opera* (2009), for example, is a performance that Cao created for Artissima 16, an international art fair in Turin, Italy (fig. 9).[105] The 8-part show features visual and thematic connections between the live performance on stage and the virtual space of *RMB City* onscreen. Most of the performance is about the connections and discontinuities between the virtual world and contemporary life. In one part, actors donned the clothes of the Red Army and performed a series of ballet moves. Correspondingly, the screen behind them showed two avatars wearing similar clothes and dancing in a similar way. The uniforms and choreography recall the eight-part opera (样板戏), the eight performances that dominated the stage in mainland China during most of the 1960s and '70s.[106] These performances either adopt the form of Peking Opera or ballet. According to Performance Studies scholar Yan Haiping, the highly stylized language of ballet and Peking Opera create a theatricality that constantly reminds actors and viewers of the ideological messages underlying the show.[107] Unlike performances of the past, actors in *RMB City Opera* omitted the facial expressions that typically accompanied the moves in model operas; the narrative is unclear;

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[105] "RMB City Opera," Cao Fei, accessed June 19, 2018, http://www.caofei.com/works.aspx?wtid=3&year=2009.
[106] These eight performances include: *The Legend of the Red Lantern* (红灯记), *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (智取威虎山), *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment* (奇袭白虎团), *On the Dock* (海港), *Red Detachment of Women* (红色娘子军), *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女), *Shajiabang* (沙家浜) (opera) and *Shajiabang* (沙家浜) (symphony).
[107] Haiping Yan, "Theatricality in Classical Chinese Drama," in *Theatricality*, eds.
Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66–67, cited in Jason McGrath, "Cultural Revolution Model Opera Films and the Realist Tradition in Chinese Cinema," *The Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 2-3 (2010): 365–68.

figures shift from one set of moves to another without transition. Compared with the ballet moves in model operas, the dancing of the actors and virtual figures in Cao's *RMB City Opera* is more schematized, even robotic. Their seemingly involuntary moves seem like a contemporary imagination of the past made possible by the virtual world.

Cao's video installations based on *RMB City* mostly evade the fraught line between virtual space and institutional settings. One example is *The Birth of RMB City* (2009), which Cao showed at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing in 2009 (fig. 10). It was shown as part of the exhibition *Breaking Forecast: 8 Key Figures of China's New Generation Artists* that surveyed recent developments in Chinese contemporary art. For this piece, Cao designed a structure made of steel and wood that resembled a digitally rendered mountain in *RMB City*. At the Ullens Center, viewers could walk into the unlit interior of the structure and watch video clips based on the game.[108] Similar to the works under study, *The Birth of RMB City* was installed right after a major institutional shift at the Ullens Center. The Center was founded in 2007 with the financial support of the Ullens Foundation, which was established by Baron Guy Ullens, a Belgian businessman and collector.[109] Though it set out to be a nonprofit organization claiming to build a comprehensive collection of Chinese contemporary art, the Center started selling artworks in 2009.[110] This news broke in late 2008, leading to the resignation of several of its senior staff members.[111] In an article that surveys criteria for evaluating Chinese contemporary art, renowned curator Gao Minglu describes the sale as

[108] Lee Ambrozy, "Breaking Forecast: 8 Key Figures of China's New Generation Artists," Leap, accessed March 3, 2018, http://www.leapleapleap.com/2010/02/breaking-forecast/.
[109] "UCCA, Beijing," "UCCA," accessed March 4, 2018, http://ucca.org.cn/en/about/index/.
[110] Griselda Murray Brown, "Important Collection of Contemporary Chinese Art up for Auction," Financial Times (April 1, 2011), accessed April 1, 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/92d6777e-5c62-11e0-8f48-00144feab49a.
[111] Ibid.

"dumping."[112] He viewed it as a derogatory gesture that reveals Western collectors' under-evaluation of the aesthetic value of Chinese contemporary art.[113] In 2009, the staging of *The Birth of RMB City* took place amid this institutional shift and its backlash. If Cao had a response to this difficult moment, it materialized in a gesture suggestive of shelter and escape, for the mountain structure delimits a space separate from the brightly lit exhibition hall, and the videos recreate the virtual space of an online game.

Apart from the lack of engagement with institutional conditions, Cao also leaves out the contentious issue of online space in *RMB City* and its reiterations. While she mobilized international and national viewers' familiarity with the Internet in the 2000s, she did not problematize the issue of the online space in this work. In the 2000s, the online space witnessed a major shift in the Chinese public sphere, as the number of Internet users grew from a small faction to half of the population.[114] This new mode of communication created widespread speculation regarding its political implications in and outside mainland China.[115] By the end of the decade, however, the state had blocked Chinese users' access to a number of major websites, including Google, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. It also developed a set of administrative and technological measures to control content published online.[116] If *RMB City* and its reiterations manifest the possibilities created by the virtual space, they hardly address the power relations that were taking shape online. In fact, the making of *RMB City* directly participates in the

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[112] Gao Minglu, "Changing Motivations of Chinese Contemporary art since the Mid-1990s," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 11, no. 2&3 (2012): 214.
[113] Ibid.
[114] The number of Internet users in China was one million in 1998. It rose to 632 million in 2016. See Min Jiang, "The Coevolution of the Internet, (Un) Civil Society, and Authoritarianism in China," in *The Internet, Social Media, and a Changing China,* eds. Jacques deLisle, Avery Goldstein, and Yang Guobin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ronald Deibert, *Access Contested: Security, Identity, and Resistance in Asian Cyberspace Information Revolution and Global Politics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012, cited in Min Jiang, 29.

consolidation of these power relations. In 2009, Cao received financial support for the monthly rent of virtual space in Second Life from institutions and individuals, including UCCA, where she exhibited *The Birth of RMB City* that same year.[117] In relation to this, Cao invited Director of UCCA Jerome Sans to play the role of the third mayor of RMB City and be in charge of organizing activities for three months. This manifestation of the power hierarchy in the virtual space, to some degree, corresponds to and reveals structural conditions of the art world. Yet, in practice, viewers' interaction in *RMB City* and its new mayor only reinforced this hierarchy. Unlike the works on which this study will focus, *RMB City* mobilized emergent possibilities created by the online space yet evaded ideological issues that were part of the work, exhibition sites, and viewership.

Global Contemporary Art and the Chinese Cultural Industry

This dissertation suggests the importance of integrating the nation state into the analysis of global contemporary art. This importance stems not only from cultural specificity but also from the ideological boundaries that undergirded the production, circulation, and reception of contemporary art. My emphasis on the nation state is not to isolate contemporary art of one country from that of the world; rather, it aims to stress how contemporary art often functions as a site in which national interests intersect with those of transnational capitalism in the creation of ideological boundaries at art institutions. My focus on ideological boundaries at art institutions stems from the specific social conditions in East Asian and South East Asian contemporary art, in which the market plays a much stronger role in the art world than nonprofit art institutions,

[117] Second Life has its own virtual economy, and Cao had to pay monthly rent for the virtual space of RMB City Cao Fei and Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Cao Fei in Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist," in *Cao Fei: I Watch That Worlds Pass by*, eds. Cao Fei, Renate Wiehager, and Christian Ganzenberg et al. (Berlin: DAC, Daimler Art Collection, 2015), 227–41.

universities, and the state.[118] On this note, my study diverges from art critic Lane Relyea's emphasis on the network, which he characterizes as a fluid, de-centered, and horizontal organization that emerged in the art world in North America and Western Europe in the 1990s and that fostered individuals who are interested in connecting with like-minded people and making things outside of the existing canon.[119] My focus on the ideological boundaries taking shape at art institutions stems from the fact that socioeconomic conditions for fostering such networks—educational institutions and nonprofit foundations—could hardly compete with commercial and state institutions in defining the parameters of contemporary art in mainland China. As early as the 2000s, discursive constraints and market concerns functioned as indispensable factors for most Chinese contemporary artists.

My study is based on the premise, widely accepted by art professionals of Asian contemporary art, that aesthetic and institutional parameters of contemporary art differ significantly from those of Western Europe and North America. In particular, it engages with scholarship that interrogates the prominent role of the globalized market in the development of contemporary art in Asia.[120] It is only by understanding how global market forces shape specific institutional conditions, I argue, that one can gain a comprehensive view of whether the rise of contemporary art in Asia challenges the cultural hegemony of Europe and America. This study contributes to this discussion by examining the relationship between socioeconomic and

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[118] For discussions of this phenomenon, see Iola Lenzi and Joan Kee's contribution to "An Expanded Questionnaire of the Contemporary," in *Field Notes* 1, no. 1 (2012): 11–90.
[119] Lane Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), x, 5, 33, 79, 54.
[120] Irina Vogelsang, "The Art Market Bubble of Contemporary Indonesian Art: Part of a Global Development?," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, eds. Hans Belting, Jacob Birken, Peter Weibel et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 88–105; C. J. W.-L. Wee, "'We Asians?' Modernity, Visual Art Exhibitions, and East Asia," *boundary* 2 (Spring 2010): 91–126; Debevoise, *Between State and Market*. My study builds on these works by showing the integral roles of the market and the government in shaping the field of contemporary art in Asia. It departs from these studies by focusing on how Cai, Yang, and Xu responded to such conditions in their aesthetic approaches.

aesthetic aspects of the Chinese cultural industry, which includes but is not limited to contemporary art.[121] More importantly, the Chinese cultural industry developed in a context very different from the bourgeois public sphere and neoliberalist economy of Western Europe and North America.[122] Theorist David Harvey, in his seminal work, singles out China as a unique case, suggesting that the Chinese central government continues to play a prominent role in the neoliberalist economy.[123] Cultural theorist Wang Jing points out that the presence of state-owned enterprises distinguishes the cultural industry of China from that of Europe and America.[124] This manifests in the partial commercialization of state-owned enterprises, the lingering dominance of state monopoly in certain sectors, and the transactions hidden behind businesses of mixed ownership.[125] In the 2000s, although the central and local governments reduced financial support for art institutions, state museums, to various degrees, continued to rely on government funding.[126] Even for galleries and private museums, the line between public and private is less clear than in Europe and America, as land invariably belongs to the state or state-owned enterprises.[127] This subjects private institutions to abrupt changes of rent and administrative measures.

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[121] According to the China National Statistics Bureau in 2004, cultural industry (文化产业) include six main categories: the production and sales of cultural products, service of cultural communication, service of cultural entertainment, the production and sales of stationary, the production and sales of cultural equipment, the production and sales of related cultural productions. See National Statistics Bureau, "文化产业及相关分类" [Cultural industry and relevant classifications], May 18, 2004.

[122] For discussions of the difference between the Chinese society and the bourgeois society, see Philip C. C. Huang, "'Public Sphere'/'Civil Society' in China?: The Third Realm between State and Society," *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (April, 1993): 216-240.

[123] David Harvey, A *Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 120–51; Keane, *Creative Industries in China,* 16.

[124] Wang Jing, "Guest Editor's Introduction," *positions* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 16.

[125] Ibid. Mixed ownership refers to the ownership and administration of enterprises that involve both state stockholders and private stockholders.

[126] Kirk Denton, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 9.

[127] Pauline Yao, "另类艺术空间在中国" [Alternative art spaces in China], Artintern, accessed March 23, 2018, http://review.artintern.net/html.php?id=75165.

This study builds on the scholarship that delineates the institutional context of Chinese contemporary art of the 1990s, including Jane Debevoise's effort to situate contemporary art amid domestic political changes and growth of the art market from the 1976 to 1993 as well as Wu Hung's account of exhibition conditions of experimental art in China from the late 1970s to the 1990s.[128] A major difference between the art world of the 1990s and that of the 2000s, I suggest, is the growth of contemporary art institutions, mainly due to the fact that the state shifted its regulation of contemporary art from suppression to normative regulation within the parameters of the development of the cultural industry in the 2000s. My three case studies show how ideological boundaries took shape in these institutions through interactions between the state, funding agencies, artists, and viewers in the production, exhibition, and reception of contemporary artworks. My focus on contemporary art institutions departs from Winnie Wong's ethnographic study of the mass production of oil paintings in Dafen village in Canton Province during the 2000s, in which she emphasizes similar tendencies of the state and contemporary artists to elevate artistic creativity over the copying labor of village workers. My study complicates this socioeconomic and cultural hierarchy by revealing ideological conditions that constrain the creativity of contemporary artists, without which one cannot gain a full understanding of how the social and cultural differentiation of labor occurred in the contemporary art world.

The development of contemporary art took place as part of the state's plan to globalize the national economy after China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, which allowed and facilitated foreign direct investments in economic sectors such as banking and finance.[129]

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[128] Debevoise; Wu, *Exhibiting Experimental Art in* China.
[129] Lee Bransetter, "China's embrace of globalization," in *China's Great Transformation*, eds. Loren Brandt and G. Thomas Rawski (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 655.

This shift can be situated within a longer trajectory of how the authority shifted the emphasis of cultural policy from propaganda to market concerns. Kraus points out that, after the central government initiated market reforms in the late 1970s, the Ministry of Culture and other professional institutions took the place of the Department of Propaganda and the army in guiding and administering cultural production.[130] The State Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance also started to attend conferences on art and culture, indicating officials' interest in positioning cultural production in the economic realm.[131] Compared with these earlier reforms, policy changes in the 2000s took place when the cultural industry became a profitable sector in several East Asian countries with which China had strong economic and geopolitical ties.[132] The government's support for contemporary art was but one of the ways it sought to capitalize on the country's market share in the global culture industry and further integrate the nation into the international market.

The state's agenda to develop the cultural industry was also catalyzed by the incentive to conjure up a cosmopolitan image of Beijing during the 2008 Summer Olympics. Hosting the Olympics often functions as a political opportunity for a country to reposition itself in relation to its historical past and the rest of the world.[133] Having won the bid to host the 2008 Summer Olympics in 2001, Beijing underwent a major urban transformation.[134] The central and municipal governments, in collaboration with the private sector, built a number of spectacular architectural projects that created a bold and lasting visual impression of a modern city for international

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[130] Richard Kraus, *The Party and the Arty in China: The New Politics of Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 56.
[131] Ibid., 62.
[132] Keane, "Brave New World: Understanding China's Creative Vision," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 10, no.3 (2004): 265-79.
[133] Alan Tomlinson, "Olympic Spectacle: Opening Ceremonies and Some Paradoxes of Globalization," *Media, Culture, and Society* (1996): 583–601.
[134] Anne-Marie Broudehoux, "Image of Power: Architectures of the Integrated Spectacle at the Beijing Olympics," *Journal of Architectural Education* 63, no. 2 (March 2010): 52–62.

visitors.[135] The development of contemporary art was deeply embedded in this government-initiated image-making process, which I articulate in my three case studies.[136] Cai exhibited *Collection of Maksimov's Works* while he was serving as visual director for the planning committee of several important official ceremonies, including the opening ceremony of Shanghai Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Meeting in 2001 and the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Yang's two exhibitions were held at the Long March Space in the 798 Art District. Around that time, the 798 Art District became a major site of tourism in Beijing, as the number of annual visitors grew from 450,000 in 2005 to 1.5 million in 2007.[137] During the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics Games, 10,000 visitors visited the district daily.[138] It was also during the 2008 Olympics that the Beijing municipal government suspended a number of construction projects to guarantee air quality, which limited the supply of construction materials for Xu's *Phoenix Project*.[139] While Xu had originally planned to collect materials only from the construction site of World Financial Center; he ultimately had to collect debris from construction sites outside of Beijing.[140] By focusing on Cai's, Yang's, and Xu's aesthetic responses to these conditions, my dissertation explores the unique relationships formed between the state and art production in the cultural industry.

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[135] Broudehoux, 52–62; Aihwa Ong, "Hyperbuilding: Spectacle, Speculation, and the Hyperspace of Sovereignty," in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of being Global,* eds. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Chichester: Blackwell, 2011), 205–226.
[136] Ren Xuefei and Sun Meng, "Artistic Urbanization: Creative Industries and Creative Control in Beijing," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 36, no. 3 (May 2012): 510; Zhang Yue, 834–35.
[137] Sun Meng, "The Production of Art Districts and Urban Transformation in Beijing," (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2010), quoted in Zhang Yue, 836.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Beijing Municipal Government, "关于发布 2008 年北京奥运会残奥会期间北京市空气保障措施的通告" [Notice about measures to guarantee the air quality in Beijing during 2008 Beijing Olympics and Para-Olympics], The Central Government of the People's Republic of China, accessed December 15, 2015, http://www.gov.cn/zwgk/2008-04/14/content_944313.htm; Xu Bing Studio, 43–44.
[140] Xu Bing Studio, 43–44.

To understand this aesthetic space is of paramount importance to theorizing basic concepts of Chinese contemporary art, such as form, space, critique, and spectatorship. As early as the 2000s, art professionals in China generally lacked consensus about the definition of these aesthetic categories, largely due to the lack of contemporary art curriculum and publications in the 1980s and 1990s.[141] For example, art historian Peggy Wang analyzed how Chinese art professionals endowed the two Chinese terms for conceptual art—*guannian yishu* (观念艺术) nd *gainian yishu* (概念艺术)—with different meanings throughout the 1990s.[142] While some used it as an umbrella term referring broadly to the visual languages of international contemporary art, others see it as linked to critical engagement with the art historical canon.[143] Wang notes that the occasion on which art professionals used these terms was often more relevant to the terms' meaning than the lineage of conceptual art in Europe and America.[144] For this reason, it is rarely sufficient to comprehend contemporary artworks and the criticism they evoke by referencing modern and contemporary art solely in the Euro-American context. This study approaches form, space, and aesthetic critique in relation to contemporary artists' conception of local spectatorship within fluctuating institutional conditions.

Contemporary Art and the Public

My dissertation brings to light an issue that has always been central to the development of Chinese contemporary art—artists' conceptualization of spectatorship. Compared with the 2000s, Chinese contemporary artists of the 1980s and 1990s rarely had to envision new modes of viewing or relationships between their artworks and national viewers outside academic art

[141] Tang Di, "A Frowning Smile," in *Another Long March,* 115; Fei, "When we look…" 35.
[142] Peggy Wang, "Making and Remaking History: Categorizing 'Conceptual Art' in Contemporary Chinese art," *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 10 (June 2014): 1–17.
[143] Peggy Wang, 1.
[144] Ibid., 1–17.

circles. Reasons for this include the relative lack of contemporary art museums and galleries, Chinese artists' limited access to major state museums, the elitist orientation of their aesthetic language, and the transient nature of the events they staged in the urban space. Taking a retrospective view of the development of Chinese contemporary art in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, I will elaborate upon the way in which artists' vision of the reception of their works factored into, and was affected by, exhibition conditions. This highlights the importance of studying Chinese contemporary artists' conceptualization of spectatorship in the 2000s, as this was the first decade in which it became possible and necessary for artists to envision the reception of their artworks among national viewers at specific sites.[145]

Since the beginning of Chinese contemporary art in the late 1970s, artists' conceptualization of how national viewers approach their works has been integral to the way in which they exhibit their works. Members of the Star Group and Wuming Painting Society, two painting societies founded in the late 1970s, were mainly non-professional artists who had taught themselves to paint, since many art schools had closed during the revolution and those which remained open based their training mostly on socialist realism.[146] The artworks they created differed markedly from socialist realism in their mundane themes and visual languages that drew inspiration from impressionism.[147] For example, Wuming member Ma Kelu's (b. 1954) *Morning Snow* (1975) depicts a scene with no figures in sight, except for several trees in the foreground and a rooftop of traditional architectural style in the background (fig. 11). Unlike most socialist realist paintings, the subject matter of the painting does not seem directly relevant to

[145] For the necessity for artists to conceptualize spectatorship of national viewers, see my discussion of Cai's *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard* (1999) in Chapter One.
[146] Julia Andrews and Shen Kuiyi, "Light Before Dawn," in *Light Before Dawn: Unofficial Chinese Art 1975–1985* (Hong Kong: Asia Society Hong Kong Center, 2013), 15–30.
[147] Ibid., 27.

revolutionary narratives; the palette is cold and subdued, rather than red and bright. Though these artworks looked unfamiliar to national viewers, their difference from the socialist realism that dominated Chinese art from the 1950s to the late '70s rendered them symbols of cultural freedom at the dawn of the post-revolutionary era.

Though many members of the Star Group and the Wuming Painting Society started to create such works in the 1970s, it was not until the public exhibition that these works began to develop with political implications. These exhibitions were met with great public enthusiasm as well as heightened political tension. The Wuming Group held their first public exhibition in 1979 at four pavilions of the Beihai Huafangzhai.[148] More than 2,700 people visited the exhibition each day. The Star Group made their first appearance by hanging their works outside the National Gallery of Art that same year.[149] The police soon shut down this exhibition, provoking group members to organize a march to Tiananmen Square in a call for political and artistic freedom.[150] This may have attracted the attention of officials supporting cultural reforms, who then pressured the bureaucracy to consent to a second exhibition of the Stars several months later.[151] Unlike the first show, the second took place at the National Gallery of Art.[152] Contemporary artists' conceptualization of the public's eagerness to embrace new art forms in the late 1970s is essential to understanding how they exhibited their artworks.

Contemporary artists of the nationwide avant-garde '85 New Wave Art Movement took a different approach by mainly conceptualizing the reception of their works in relation to a limited

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[148] Andrews and Shen, "Light Before Dawn," 38.
[149] Ibid., 28.
[150] Andrews, and Shen, "*Xingxing* (Stars)", in *Light Before Dawn*, 45.
[151] Several officials talked about the first show of the Stars Group at the National Congress of Literary and Art Circles in 1979. See Andrews and Shen, "*Xingxing* (Stars)", 46.
[152] Andrews and Shen, "*Xingxing* (Stars)", 48; "星星画会 大事记" [Stars Group, Timeline], The Stars Art, accessed April 8, 2018, http://www.thestarsart.com/3181.html.

circle of art professionals in mainland China. Despite its name, the '85 New Wave Art Movement was not organized around a theme or shared agenda.[153] Rather, it involved disparate artistic approaches and self-organized artist groups around the country.[154] Active in the mid to late 1980s, these artists were mostly students and young faculty members at art academies, who, given the low college admission rates in the 1980s, were mostly seen as cultural elites. Similar to many cultural elites of the 1980s, they saw art as an integral part of the nation's modernization and themselves as leaders of peasants and workers.[155] Their vision of cultural modernization was inherently utopian, as Wang Jing points out.[156] Instead of addressing issues of public concern, cultural elites of the '80s aimed to initiate changes from above by engaging in discussions of theoretical issues without sociopolitical specificities.[157] In the realm of contemporary art, this elitist orientation manifested in universal or ontological themes inspired by Euro-American philosophy and modern and contemporary art, which the majority of national viewers were unfamiliar with. Unlike the late 1970s and the early '80s, artworks that diverged from socialist realism no longer carried the radical meaning of artistic freedom, as the growth of the Chinese market economy had brought about substantial heterogeneity in popular culture. In addition, the government associated contemporary art with bourgeois values and launched several campaigns to curb liberal tendencies in society in the 1980s.[158] These made '85 New Wave artists, or cultural elites more broadly, less inclined to address issues of public concern.

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[153] For an overview of the artists, artist groups, art magazines, and institutions involved in the '85 New Wave Art Movement, see Gao Minglu, "Map of the '85 Avant-Garde Movement," in *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 101–06.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Wang Jing, *High Cultural Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 55.
[156] Wang Jing, *High Cultural Fever*, 48–56.
[157] Ibid.
[158] These campaigns included the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in 1983, the Campaign against Bourgeois Liberalization in 1987, and the tightening control of cultural production after the Tiananmen Student Protest. See

In relation to their conceptualization of a limited circle of viewers, ’85 New Wave artists organized most of their exhibitions at smaller art institutions, such as university museums and local cultural institutions.[159] This was due to the fact that major state museums rarely opened their doors to Chinese contemporary art exhibitions in the 1980s. For instance, the National Gallery of Art, the most prominent art museum in mainland China, had held a number of exhibitions of European and American modern and contemporary artists by the end of the decade.[160] Yet, the first exhibition of artworks associated with Chinese contemporary art was not held until 1989. Due to the elitist orientation and lack of opportunities to reach the broad public, ’85 New Wave artists had not found effective ways to engage with the visual vocabulary of the public and institutional parameters at official or semi-official art institutions. The most notable example was the landmark exhibition *China/Avant-Garde* at the National Art Gallery in 1989, a major retrospective of the ’85 New Wave. Planning for this show involved almost all the leading contemporary art critics and curators at that time.[161] Yet preparation for the show reveals conflicting notions of engaging with the official space and situating contemporary artwork in a state museum. Some organizers invited influential officials and art professors to join the advisory board, aligning *China/Avant-Garde* with official exhibitions at the National Gallery; others invited performance artists to create seven works not included on the exhibition program,

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Andrew J. Nathan, “Chinese Democracy in 1989: Continuity and Change,” *Problems of Communism* (September–October 1989): 1–7.

[159] “大事记艺术部分图文”[Text and image of events’ list, art section], Fei Dawei Archive, Beijing, China.

[160] This include the retrospective of French artist Jean Hélion (1904–1987) in 1980, the retrospective of Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) in 1983, the retrospective of Norwegian artist Edward Munch (1863–1944) in 1983, a retrospective of Chinese-French artist Zou Wou-ki (1921–2013) in 1983, an exhibition of French impressionist paintings of the early twentieth century in 1985, the retrospective of American artist Robert Rauschenberg (1985–2008) in 1985, the retrospective of French artist Henri Cueco (1929–2017) and Ernest Pignon-Ernest (1942–) in 1986, the retrospective of Belgian artist Franc Masereel (1889–1972) in 1986. See “大事记艺术部分图文” [Text and image of events’ list, art section].

[161] The leading curator is Gao Minglu. His co-organizers include Li Xianting, Fei Dawei, Fan Di’an etc.. For complete list of organizers, see Curatorial board, “中国现代艺术展 筹展通告 第一号” [China/Avant-garde exhibition, curatorial statement, no.1], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no.171 (October 31, 1988).

challenging normalized institutional procedures.[162] This incongruity in curatorial practices reveals the curatorial team's lack of preparation in creating a coherent aesthetic plan to work within the existing ideological and socioeconomic conditions of the National Gallery of Art.

Compared with the 1980s, the government became more tolerant of contemporary art activities in the 1990s.[163] At certain times, the police tightened their control by cancelling shows and harassing artists; at other times, contemporary art exhibitions were allowed to proceed without disruption.[164] Some artists started to stage transitory shows of contemporary art in urban public spaces.[165] These artists' conceptualization of their works' reception was predicated on the temporary nature of these interventions as well as uncertainty about the authorities' attitude. The artists often employed visual languages immediately recognizable to viewers, including the forms of newspaper and graffiti, and rarely made clear the status of their work as contemporary art. An apt example is Zhang Dali's series of graffiti works entitled *Dialogue* (1995–2005), in which the artist spray-painted the profile of a bald head on Beijing streets (fig. 12).[166] In order to avoid police enforcement of vandalism laws, Zhang sprayed these images quickly without interacting with viewers or revealing his identity.[167] By 1998, Zhang had created more than 2,000 such images.[168] In mainland China, the notion of graffiti (涂鸦) as a genre straddling

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[162] Fei Dawei, interview by author, Beijing, August 12, 2013.
[163] Wu, "Major Traditions in Chinese Contemporary Art," in *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 14.
[164] Wu, "Major Traditions in Chinese Contemporary Art," 13.
[165] Leng Lin, "是我：九十年代艺术发展的一个侧面" [It's me! A profile of Chinese contemporary art of the 90s] (1998), 69; Francesca Dal Lago, Song Dong, Zhang Dali et al., "Space and Public: Site –Specificity in Beijing," *Art Journal* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 74–87.
[166] Wu, "Zhang Dali's Dialogue: Conversation with a City," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 749.
[167] Wu, "Zhang Dali's Dialogue," 757–59. For discussion of the law enforcement and punishment of Zhang, see Joan Kee, "Land Lords: Art, Property and Law in Post-Nineties China," Sydney Asian Art Series, University of Sydney, May 20, 2017, accessed February 20, 2018, https://soundcloud.com/the-power-institute/sydney-asian-art-series-joan-kee.
[168] Ibid.

between contemporary art and street art did not exist until the late 1990s and 2000s.[169] Most viewers of Zhang's works saw them as random drawings on walls.[170] When discussing this series of works with Dal Lago in 2000, Zhang attributed his graffiti to his perception of ideological limits at state museums, including the impact of the state and his perception that most viewers were art professionals.[171] Though Zhang's works eventually circulated as photographs in news reports or art exhibitions, his initial effort to create artworks outside of existing art institutions stems from his conceptualization of his works' reception as transient yet uncircumscribed by institutional constraints of state museums in the 1990s.[172]

Also in this decade, other artists reacted to the long-term suppression of contemporary art in mainland China by withdrawing from public exhibition settings. Wu Hung suggests that, in the 1990s, cancellation of contemporary art exhibitions by police created a certain mystique in the Chinese contemporary art world by "confirm[ing] the experimental nature of the exhibition and enhanc[ing] its impact on public consciousness."[173] Some artists and curators organized exhibitions as transitory events that were only open to people in the art world. In relation to this, their visual language became increasingly radical and obscure. The exhibition, entitled *Post-Sense Sensibility—Alien Bodies and Delusion* and curated by Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie at an underground art space in Beijing in 1999, is one such example. Shown in the basement of the Shaoyaoju Building and lasting for just one day, the show ranged from installations and

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[169] For an overview of the development of graffiti art in mainland China, see Pan Lu, "Who is Occupying Wall and Street: Graffiti and Urban Spatial Politics in Contemporary China," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2014): 136-38.

[170] Zhang kept photographic records of most of his graffiti, which won him broad acclaim through news reports, art writings, and exhibitions in mainland China and abroad. For discussions of the photographs of Zhang's graffiti, see Pan, 140–42; Wu, "Zhang Dali's Dialogue,"

[171] Francesca Dal Lago, Song Dong, Zhang Dali et al., "Space and Public: Site –Specificity in Beijing," *Art Journal* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 74–87.
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[172] Dal Lago, Song, Zhang et al., 75, 79.

[173] Wu, "Introduction: Exhibiting Experimental Art in China," 42

performances to photography, involving distortions of the human body as well as human and animal corpses.[174] Some artists and curators call it "shock art (震撼艺术)," which describes people's visceral reactions to its visual language.[175] *Post-Sense Sensibility* captures the moment when contemporary artists created artworks solely for viewers within art circles, who shared similar cultural backgrounds and a basic vocabulary of modern and contemporary art. Such viewers, rather than doubting the legitimacy of these artworks, tended to associate the shock that they generated with a notion of radicality.

Unlike the previous two decades, the 2000s offered artists more opportunities to conceptualize spectatorship in relation to art institutions and viewers outside of art circles. To cover changes in art institutions and viewers' interpretation frameworks, I select contemporary artworks shown at three kinds of spaces in different parts of the decade. My study of these artworks combines visual analysis of artworks with an investigation of institutional conditions to study the three artists' conceptualizations of spectatorship. For visual analysis, I read the theme, formal language, and spatial arrangement of artworks as evidence of how artists gauged and responded to ideological boundaries through aesthetic means, as the creation of each artwork involved the artists' engagement with various aspects of art institutions. For institutional analysis, I position the artists' conceptualizations of spectatorship in relation to my examination of the shifts that each art institution was undergoing around the time when the artwork was shown, as well as the social tension generated by nationalism, the discursive gap between the local and international art worlds, the sharp increase in miners' injuries and deaths, and the broader issue of social inequality. Though my analysis does not primarily rely on the interviews

[174] Berghuis, *Performance Art in China,* 114.
[175] Ibid.

with the three artists, encounters with them at their studios from 2015 to 2017 helped me understand their relationship with workers on their team, their awareness of social issues, and how they discursively framed the artworks under study.

My analysis of Cai's, Yang's, and Xu's conceptualization of spectatorship does not mainly rely on art criticism in written form.[176] For most art professionals active in mainland China, art criticism in Chinese fails to convey the reception of contemporary artworks, due the lack of comprehensive understanding of theoretical concepts derived from Euro-American contexts, issues of bribery, and problems with existing institutional platforms.[177] These three artists' appropriations of the visual language and ideals of socialist realism are based on their knowledge of what cultural frameworks were likely to speak to Chinese viewers. This knowledge is largely derived from the three artists' long-term experience of living in mainland China during and after the socialist revolutionary period, as well as their perception of how other Chinese approached visual art, especially socialist realism, in the 2000s.

My experience of having lived in China influenced my interpretation of these artists' conceptualization of spectatorship. From 2005 to 2009, I was an undergraduate at a university in Beijing, a frequent visitor to various kinds of galleries and museums, and an outsider to the contemporary art world. This experience framed my understanding of how the general public in Chinese cities approached contemporary artworks in the 2000s. I gathered information on the contemporary art world of the 2000s through interviews, archival research, and ethnographic observations in Beijing and Shanghai from 2016 to 2017. Except for the interviews and archival

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[176] My first case study employs writings and symposium transcripts to elaborate on the disparate reception of *Collection of Maksimov's Works* among artists working at Chinese art academies and international contemporary art professionals. This manifests the contradicting opinions that Cai anticipated.

[177] For discussions of the problems of Chinese art critics, see Jiang Qigu, "The general state of theory and criticism for Chinese contemporary art," The Research House for Asian Art, last modified November 15, 2012, accessed April 23, 2018, http://www.xzine.org/rhaa/?p=352; Tang Di, 115; Fei, 35.

research, I participated in most art world activities as a part-time researcher at a private contemporary art museum in Beijing and a graduate student interested in contemporary art. In my ethnographic research, I gave particular attention to information on social relationships between art professionals, parameters of art institutions, and how art professionals recalled the 2000s. This did not grant me direct access to the contemporary art world of the 2000s, yet it helped me understand sociological aspects of art production and curatorial activities, which, due to the vast social and political differences between Chinese and Euro-American contemporary art institutions, was necessary for me to refine my research framework. It did not give me *a priori* knowledge of the artworks under study. Rather, it helped me develop a perspective on artworks as aesthetic manifestations of ideological limits, which may not be articulated in discourses or administrative records.

In Chapter One, I examine how Cai mobilized contradictory interpretive frameworks of socialist realism through his *Collection of Maksimov's Works*, a display of the Soviet painter's socialist realism that wavers between a monographic exhibition and a contemporary installation. The ambiguous status of his *Collection*, as well as its bifurcated reception, reveals the deeply entrenched gap between local and international viewers in the early 2000s. Compared with the artist's works of the 1990s, *Collection* demonstrates the artist's conceptualization of spectatorship rooted in specific art worlds and ideological conditions. By analyzing the arrangement of *Collection,* its reception, and Cai's previous works, I demonstrate how Cai explored a third path through the polarizing situation by achieving a temporary, if somewhat elusive, agreement between the two sides. This third path not only reveals the social and discursive gap that separated contemporary art from socialist realism, but also the possibility to cross this boundary by making artworks speak to different groups of audiences in various ways.

In Chapter Two, I study how Yang created visual encounters between artworks and viewers by employing new figural tactics. *800 Meters Under* and *X-Blind Spot* both eschew direct representation and turn miners into fugitive subjects whose conditions of representation render them invisible. This calls into question the efficacy of representing coalminers in the conventional gallery space. Seen against the evolution of Yang's visual portrayals of violence from the 1990s to the 2000s, the two series evince his conceptualization of spectatorship in relation to a specific socio-political reference point and the transformation of Long March Space from an alternative art space into a commercial gallery.

I examine how Xu conceptualized public spectatorship by staging *Phoenix Project* at a private contemporary art museum in Chapter Three. This concern with viewers evolves out of the artists' engagement with the socialist realist ideal of making art for the people in the 1970s as well as his pursuit of making art approachable for the viewing public in the 1980s and '90s. Xu made *Phoenix Project* more approachable by showcasing details of the sculpture's production. His exposure of the inter-relationship between contemporary art and corporate sponsorship orients viewers toward the corporate funding of the exhibition site.

By studying Cai, Yang, and Xu's aesthetic responses, this study delineates ideological limitations that were taking shape at contemporary art institutions in mainland China in the 2000s, which embedded the production and viewing of art within the broader socioeconomic changes of urbanization, globalization, and social stratification. Though the three artists did not articulate socio-political critiques, their artworks show the possibility to make the ideals and visual languages of socialist realism relevant to social and aesthetic concerns of the present.

Between Socialist Realism and Contemporary Art

In the spring of 2002, the Shanghai Art Museum exhibited a collection of works by the Soviet painter of socialist realism Konstantin Maksimov (1913–1993) (see fig. 1). In many ways, the show looked like an officially sanctioned artistic presentation of the sort that pervaded state museums in China from the 1950s to the 1970s. A wall text in the first gallery introduced Maksimov's painting class at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) from 1955 to 1957, the first of its kind in mainland China. Ninety-one paintings stood on easels in six galleries. Numerous documentary photos of Maksimov were mounted to the wall. Yet the exhibition, entitled *Collection of Maksimov's Works*, was in fact part of contemporary artist Cai Guoqiang's retrospective; all of these paintings had been drawn from Cai's own collection. After this show, the collection travelled to CAFA, the most prominent art academy in mainland China.[1] These two iterations of *Collection* wavered between exhibition and installation. As subsequent publications revealed, while international art critics saw the show as an ironic appropriation of socialist realism, most viewers in China took it as a commemoration of a Soviet artist whose teaching during the 1950s had profoundly influenced generations of Chinese artists.[2]

In the early 2000s, Cai was at the center of multiple institutional changes that were eroding the boundaries between official and contemporary art. A few months before Cai's retrospective, the Shanghai municipal government appointed Cai as visual director of the 2001

[1] For details of the second iteration and Maksimov's students' responses to the show at CAFA, see Feng Fasi et al., "尊重人民，尊重艺术规律：中央美院马克西莫夫油训班座谈会纪要" [Respect the people and respect the principles of art: Notes from the conference on Maksimov at the Central Academy of Fine Arts], *Meishu* (July 2002): 12–37.

[2] Andrews, "Art Under Mao, 'Cai Guoqiang's Maksimov Collection,' and China's Twentieth Century," in *Writing Modern Chinese Art: Historiographic Explorations*, ed. Josh Yiu (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2009); Eleanor Heartney, "Cai Guo-Qiang: Illuminating the New China," *Art in America* (May 2002): 92–97; Feng Fasi et al., 12–37.

Shanghai APEC firework show.[3] The scale of the show, lasting twenty minutes and making use of eighteen ships and twenty-three high-rise buildings along the banks of the Huangpu River, was unprecedented among state ceremonies.[4] Cai's work was broadcast on four Chinese TV channels as part of the ceremony and reported in most major newspapers.[5] Cai's retrospective at the Shanghai Art Museum was the first solo show by a contemporary artist at a major state museum. Around the time of the show, Cai was teaching a graduate course on contemporary art making at Shanghai Drama Academy, a major state university.[6] By exhibiting *Collection,* Cai used the occasion of this retrospective to resituate his works in relation to official institutions.

While establishing connections between socialist realist art and contemporary art, two realms with distinct aesthetic and ideological discourses in the early 2000s, *Collection* exemplified Cai's engagement with a third way. As analyzed in the introduction, the gap between socialist realist and contemporary art manifested in art discourses that placed socialist realism and contemporary art on opposite ends of the political spectrum. While the former represented government control over cultural production, the latter epitomized grassroots resistance. The ambiguous status of *Collection* evaded such discursive opposition. In his "Collector's Statement," Cai explained his ambiguous position as a penchant for the middle course. He wrote, "[Collecting and exhibiting Maksimov's works] again demonstrates my embeddedness in the middle course…in which I always alternate between tradition and modernity, Oriental and Occidental, national and international, localism and globalism, within

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[3] Fang Zhenning, "关于蔡国强的艺术和上海 APEC 焰火晚会的访谈" [Cai Guoqiang's art and an interview on the ceremony of Shanghai APEC fireworks], Artlinkart, accessed March 10, 2015, http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/article/ overview/1c5dwzp/about_by2/F/140auAr.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Fang, "关于蔡国强的艺术和上海 APEC 焰火晚会的访谈" [Cai Guoqiang's art and an interview on the ceremony of Shanghai APEC fireworks].
[6] *延安艺术教育座谈会* [Talks at Yan'an Forum on art education] 99; Jiang, "蔡国强访谈录" [An interview with Cai Guoqiang].

the system and outside the system, or escape from them to seek another possibility."[7] The Chinese word that he uses for "the middle course" is *zhongyong* (中庸), the Confucian virtue of keeping true to one's heart without choosing sides or committing to extremisms.[8] In this chapter, I demonstrate how Cai explored a third path through the polarized situation by enacting art discourses on both sides without reconciling their differences.

Collection of Maksimov's Works and Shanghai Art Museum

Collection of Maksimov's Work is now categorized as an installation on Cai's website, yet for many visitors to Shanghai Art Museum in 2002, it was an exhibition independent from Cai's other artworks.[9] The first gallery introduced viewers to Maksimov's career (fig. 13), with a Chinese text written by art historian Cao Qinghui presenting Maksimov's contribution to Chinese art history. Alongside this text were four portraits of Maksimov, including a sketch of his profile by Galina Lvova, his wife. Beneath it, a vase with a white rose created a sense of commemoration. The museum plaque read, "Konstantin Maksimov: A Master in Chinese Art History; Curator: Cai Guoqiang" (fig. 14). Understandably, for most viewers, *Collection* seemed to be a monographic exhibition curated by Cai.

Other visual and textual materials framed *Collection* as an exhibition independent from Cai's retrospective. Upon entering the gates of the Shanghai Art Museum, viewers would have noticed banners hung from the lampposts in front, reading "Exhibition of Cai Guoqiang's Collection of Maksimov's Works" side by side with others declaring "Cai Guoqiang Art Exhibition" (fig. 15). These banners gave the initial impression that the retrospective and

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[7] Cai, "收藏马克西莫夫作品的坦白" [Confessions for collecting Maksimov's works], 40.
[8] Li Chenyang, "The Confucian ideal of harmony," *Philosophy East and West* 56, no. 4 (2006): 583–603.
[9] "Cai Guo-Qiang's Maksimov Collection," Cai Guoqiang, accessed March 19 2015, http://caiguoqiang.com/projects/cai-guo-qiangs-maksimov-*Collection*.

Maksimov's exhibition were two separate shows. Zhang Qing, curator of Cai's retrospective, and Fang Zengxian, Director of Shanghai Art Museum, referred to *Collection* as an "exhibition" in the museum catalogue.[10] And in most Chinese news reports of the retrospective, *Collection* was titled "Exhibition of Cai Guoqiang's Collection of Maksimov's Works."[11] Cai shows a similar ambiguity about the work's status on his website. A hyperlink titled "Cai Guo-Qiang (2002)– Shanghai China" links to entries of all artworks in Cai's retrospective, except for that of *Collection of Maksimov's Works*.

This third way helped Cai reposition his artworks in relation to the state museum. Until the 1980s, exhibitions at the state museum had mostly been associated with state-sponsored socialist realism. Since the 1930s, socialist realism had been an integral part of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) political agenda. Literary theorist Zhou Yang, an active leftist intellectual who would assume key official roles in the Communist Party, first laid out the principles of socialist realism in a 1933 article entitled "Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism."[12] Inspired by contemporaneous discussions of realism in the Soviet Union, Zhou emphasizes that socialist realists should offer a vivid, albeit non-dogmatic, portrayal of reality and make art part of the socialist revolution.[13] In a talk given at the Yan'an Art Forum in 1942, Mao Zedong elaborated on the character of socialist realism and its integral role in the

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[10] Zhang Qing, "历史，挑战，现实" [History, Challenge, and Reality], in *蔡国强艺术展* [Cai Guoqiang's Art Exhibition], 8–15. At the opening ceremony, Director of Shanghai Art Museum Fang Zengxian indicated that Cai's *Collection of Maksimov's Works* was an exhibition, while describing the other works in the exhibition as "Cai's own work and exploration," see "Shanghai Retrospective Opening," Cai Studio, New York, USA.

[11] Jiang Hongbing, "当蔡国强回来办展" [When Cai Guoqiang came back for an exhibition], "People's Net," accessed May 1 2015, http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper40/5374/558647.html; Fan Di'an, "蔡国强：否证的艺术" [Cai Guo-Qiang: The Art of Falsification], in *Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe*, ed. Thomas Krens, Alexandra Monroe, trans. Wang Chunchen (Beijing: Renmin Press, 2008), 18–25.

[12] Zhou Yang, *周扬文集*[Collected essays by Zhou Yang] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000), 3.

[13] Zhou Yang, 3.

revolution.[14] Mao gave this talk during the Yan'an Rectification Movement, the first attempt by the CCP to unify their understanding of Mao's thought on the basis of Marxist-Leninism.[15] Over the next few years, Mao would continue to reiterate and modify the principles presented at the Yan'an Art Forum, eventually granting socialist realism an integral role in the socialist revolution.[16]

Soviet art had a deep impact on Chinese socialist realism. After the end of the Korean War and the launching of the First Five-year Plan in 1953, the leadership shifted the focus of art making to academic training modeled after Soviet socialist realism.[17] In 1954, the Chinese Minister of Culture, Jiang Feng, visited the Soviet Union; not long after, Aleksandr Gerasimov, then Chairman of the Union of Soviet Artists and President of the USSR Academy of Arts, visited China.[18] That same year, the Chinese government held a major exhibition in Beijing titled *Accomplishment of Soviet Economic and Cultural Development*, featuring two hundred and eighty Soviet artworks.[19] Also in 1954, the Chinese Artists Association (CAA) published its first official art magazine, *Meishu* (美术), giving considerable coverage to Soviet paintings. In consultation with the Soviet Ministry of Culture, the Chinese government invited Konstantin Maksimov to teach a class at the newly established Oil Painting Division within the Painting Department at the CAFA, the only art school directly administered by the Ministry of

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[14] Kirk Denton, "Rectification: Party Discipline, Intellectual Remolding, and the Formation of a Political Community," in *Words and Their Stories,* 378, 391; Michael Sullivan, "Art in China since 1949," *The China Quarterly*, no. 159 (September, 1999): 712.
[15] Ibid., 378.
[16] Ban Wang, "Socialist Realism," in *Words and Their Stories,* 101–18.
[17] Among most socialist countries in the 1950s, people assumed that the Soviet Union was the symbolic center that provided a vision for the communist future. See Benjamin Schwartz, "Sino-Soviet Relations—the Question of Authority," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 349 (September 1963), 43–8; Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 110.
[18] Cao Qinghui, "请进来的油画" [The oil painting that was brought in], *读书* [Reading] (August 2005), 19–20.
[19] For a complete list of works in the exhibition, see *苏联造型艺术展览品目录* [Catalogue of Soviet plastic art exhibition] (Beijing, 1954), 9–46.

Education.[20] At that time, Maksimov was an ideal candidate. He had twice won the Stalin State Prize, the highest award for cultural workers in the Soviet Union. In 1954, Vice-President of the Academy of Arts of the USSR, Boris Ioganson, praised one of Maksimov's paintings, *Sashka the Tracktor Driver*, as an example of psychological depth.[21] In addition, Maksimov had already accumulated more than ten years of teaching experience at the Moscow State Art Institute, one of the main art institutes of the Soviet Union.[22] With his highly recognized status in the Soviet art world and his substantial teaching experience, Maksimov was selected by Chinese and Soviet officials to teach oil painting in China.

Life sketching was an important part of Maksimov's curriculum. The teaching of oil painting at the Moscow State Art Institute, where Maksimov had studied and taught, generally followed the Chistyakov system.[23] Originated in Imperial Russia, the system included a set of comprehensive techniques for sketching and painting.[24] In Maksimov's class, he emphasized that paintings should be based on sketches.[25] According to Maksimov's driver Ding Zhengao and his

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[20] "中国美术大事记" [Important events in the art of the People's Republic of China], National Museum of Art, accessed March 28 2013, http://www.namoc.org/msg/xxzy/dsj_2/index_5.html.

[21] Boris Ioganson, "为造型艺术进一步繁荣而斗争" [Fight for the continuing prosperity of plastic arts], *Meishu* (6, 1955): 49.

[22] Xi, 8.

[23] Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 138. The name of the school was changed to Moscow State Institute of Art in 1948. "Moscow State Academic Art Institute," accessed February 1, 2013, http://www.artinst.narod.ru/index_en.htm.

[24] Bown, 138.

[25] Maksimov once said in a lecture, "You should start with using your pencil instead of paint. If not, you will overlook the more important things by (only) looking at the colors." See Maksimov, "Tang mai makeximofu jiaoshou jiangke bilu (xu)" [Lecture notes of Professor Konstantin M. Maksimov (continued)], ed. Zhu Xi, *Meishu* (7, 1955): 19.

student Qin Zheng, Maksimov brought a sketchbook wherever he went.[26] A number of his sketches were included in *Collection*.[27]

Maksimov's paintings in *Collection* indexed the history of Soviet-inspired socialist realism that had played a prominent role in Chinese art during the revolutionary period. By evoking this period of history, it also highlighted major differences between the institutional setting of Shanghai Art Museum and that of the revolutionary period. Starting in the 1980s, state museums grew more autonomous in their financial and administrative operations.[28] On the one hand, they continued showing exhibitions of socialist realism, often held in partnership with other official agencies such as the CAA.[29] On the other hand, they had to compete with other cultural institutions to finance their operations, which compelled them to rent out spaces to self-sponsored shows and hold exhibitions that would attract more visitors.[30] Under these circumstances, socialist realist artworks continued to appear at state museums, though they no longer occupied the center of museum programs. The relationship between state museums and contemporary art was equally precarious in the early 2000s. State institutions rarely housed collections of international contemporary art and had few museum programs dedicated to research and education in contemporary art.[31] Wall texts at museums relied on multiple threads

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[26] Ding Zhengao, "Women the youyi xiang 'changcheng' yiyang yongshichangcun" [Long live our friendship that is like the Great Wall], *Meishu* (11, 1957): 12. Qin Zheng, "Peiyang huajia zijue de zerengan" [Train the self-conscious responsibility of painters], *Meishu* (2, 1956): 25.

[27] There are 36 sketches in *Collection of Maksimov's Works*. See "蔡国强收藏马克西莫夫作品展" [Cai Guoqiang's Collection of Maksimov's works], accessed February 15, 2013.

[28] Ibid., 12.

[29] The All-China Art Workers Association, the predecessor to China Artists Association, was founded in 1949 at the occasion of the All-China Congress of Literary and Arts Workers. The China Artists Association played an active role in the revolutionary period by funding and organizing exhibitions and art publications. For an overview of the founding of this organization, see Andrews, *Painters and Politics,* 35–6; for more on the suspension of the organization's operations during the Cultural Revolution and its reconstitution in the post-revolutionary period, see Andrews, *Painters and Politics,* 319–32, 388–89.

[30] Debevoise, 127.

[31] During the 2000s, only a few museums, including Guangdong Art Museum, He Xiangning Art Museum, and Shenzhen Art Museum, possessed substantial collections of contemporary art. See Chen Yan, "文化部对美术馆的

of ideological discourse, such as Maoism, as well as narratives advocating market reforms and the development of neoliberalism.[32] The ambiguity of *Collection*'s status underscores this fragmented aesthetic and political orientation of state museums.

To understand Cai's engagement with institutional parameters at Shanghai Art Museum, it helps to consider one of his works shown earlier at the same site. Shanghai Art Museum was one of the first state museums to host an international contemporary art biennale, the Third Shanghai Biennale, in 2000.[33] In this exhibition, Cai showed *Self-promotion for the People* (fig. 16), a row of bulletin boards installed outside the museum displaying photographs and handwritten texts that introduced his career. Such bulletin boards had been a familiar sight in Chinese cities since the 1950s. Municipal governments, local institutions, and neighborhood committees routinely used them to post newspapers and official notifications. The row of bulletin boards started at the main entrance of the museum, facing the street, and ended at the other entrance around the corner, occupying a threshold between the museum's interior and exterior. Right next to the museum was a busy intersection in the city center. No fences separated the piece from the street, which made it possible for pedestrians to walk through the gate and view *Self-Promotion* without paying admission.[34] The form and location of the piece made it seem as if the bulletin boards belonged to the museum. In this way, Cai made *Self-promotion* approachable to viewers unfamiliar with the medium of installation and the notion of contemporary art.

Self-promotion for the People exemplifies a third way that neither resisted nor fully conformed to institutional parameters. The piece relied on the museum to maintain its status as

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政策" [Cultural Ministry's Policy on Art Museum] , accessed May 29, 2015, http://art.china.cn/voice/2013-11/26/ content_6487446_2.htm.

[32] Denton, *Exhibiting the Past*, 3.

[33] For a detailed introduction of this biennale, please refer to the introduction of this dissertation.

[34] David Barrett, "Shanghai Biennale 2000," David Barrett, accessed July 18 2015, http://www.royaljellyfactory. com/davidbarrett/articles/eyestorm/eye-shanghai-intro.htm

an artwork yet straddled the border between institutional and public space. The institution functioned as a necessary yet insufficient condition for this artwork. This approach also appears in other works that Cai created during this period. In the 2000s, Cai initiated a series of works that centered on the building of museums, including *Dragon Museum of Contemporary Art: Everything Is a Museum No. 1 (DMoCA)* (2000) and *Under Museum of Contemporary Art* (*UMoCA*) (2001) (fig. 17, fig. 18). For the former, Cai transported a Dehua kiln from his hometown, Quanzhou, in Fujian Province to the remote mountain village of Tsunan in Nigata Prefecture, Japan; for the latter, Cai established an open-air museum under ten arches of a bridge in Colle di Val'Elsa, Italy.[35] Compared to the earlier *DMoCA*, *UMoCA* was structurally more complex. It included three exhibition halls, a director's office, a permanent collection, an information center, a gift shop, a coat check, toilets, and a café.[36] The status of *DMoCA* and *UMoCA* wavered between artworks and functional institutions. Cai was both the curator who worked for the institutions and the artist who used the museum institution as a heuristic tool.[37] Similar to *Self-promotion*, these artworks involved the institutional conditions of museums as an integral part, yet did not defy or conform to their existing conditions.

Cai's third way differs from the aesthetic challenging of institutional parameters, as exemplified by the work of Ai Weiwei (b. 1957). During the *Third Shanghai Biennale*, Ai co-organized a satellite show titled *Fuck Off* with curator Feng Boyi. The Chinese title is *Buhezuo*

[35] *Cai Guoqiang*, accessed May 14, 2015, http://caiguoqiang.com/projects/2001.
[36] Sans, "Light Your Fire," 57.
[37] In addition to the inaugural exhibition, Cai curated an exhibition of Chinese American artist Jennifer Wen Ma in 2005 at UMoCA. At DMoCa, he curated American artist Kiki Smith's first solo museum exhibition in Japan in 2003 and Japanese artist Miyanaga Kotaro's show in 2006. "Cai Guoqiang," accessed May 14, 2015, http://caiguoqiang.com/projects/2001.

fangshi (不合作方式), which literally translates as "a way of non-cooperation."[38] Unlike the Shanghai Biennale, *Fuck Off* included a number of artworks that involved the use of politically sensitive or sexually explicit images, the kind that curators of the Biennale excluded.[39] In the exhibition catalogue, Ai and Feng announced their insistence on an alternative position that "entails challenging and criticizing the power discourse and popular conventions" and "resists the threat of assimilation and vulgarization."[40] Here, "assimilation and vulgarization" refer to the envisioned consequences of working with established art institutions. In this vein, Ai and Feng expressed a stronger interest in aligning with like-minded contemporary artists, while doubting "if there is even the need for the presence of an audience."[41] Cai's third way differs from Ai and Feng's anti-establishment stance in his emphasis on working within existing institutional parameters and viewers' visual vocabulary.

Collection exemplifies Cai's third way. Unlike *Self-promotion*, *UMoCA*, and *BMoCA*, *Collection of Maksimov's Works* was situated within a state museum. It was placed across the hallway from fourteen of Cai's gunpowder drawings, which the artist had created by igniting fuses and gunpowder on canvas (fig. 19). The fourteen drawings were all based on the themes of the firework show that Cai had designed for the closing ceremony of the 2001 APEC meeting.[42]

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[38] *Fuck Off* was held at Shanghai Eastlink Gallery. Other notable satellite exhibitions held in Shanghai were *Normal and Abnormal*, curated by Gu Zhenqing; *Useful Life,* curated by Yang Fudong, Yang Zhenzhong and Xu Zhen; and *About Me,* curated by Lin Xiaodong.

[39] Wu mentioned that the selection of artworks for *Fuck Off* actually involved self-censorship to ensure the exhibition's opening. See Wu, "'Experimental Exhibitions' of the 1990s," in *A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art (1999-2000)*, ed. Wu Hung (Guangzhou: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2002), 83–97.

[40] Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi, "About 'Fuck Off,'" in *Buhezuo fangshi* (Shanghai, 2000), 9.

[41] Ibid.

[42] The fourteen themes were "Dragon Boat," "Salute from Heaven," "Fountain," "Great Dragon," "Heavenly Ladder," "Golden Willow," "Missiles Rising," "Ode to Joy," "Oriental Pearl," "Red, Yellow, and Blue Peonies," "Red Carpet," "Red Lanterns," "UFO," and "Imagining the Universe." Among these themes, "Heavenly Ladder" did not materialize for safety reasons. See "Cai Guo-Qiang" accessed January 19, 2015, http://www.caiguoqiang.com/ projects/drawings-asia-pacific-economic-cooperation; Fang, "关于蔡国强

A video at the end of the hallway replayed the grand state ceremony.[43] This spatial juxtaposition between Cai's and Maksimov's works linked Cai's gunpowder performances and paintings with the socialist realism that had dominated official institutions from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Connections between Cai's works and Maksimov's paintings permeate other parts of the show as well. In Cai's exhibition of Makismov's paintings, he included a "Collector's Statement," which attributes the collection to his nostalgia for and indebtedness to the Soviet painter's legacy.[44] Before viewers reached the display of *Collection* and Cai's gunpowder paintings on the second floor, they would have encountered thirteen of Cai's oil paintings on the mezzanine. All of these paintings were based on videos of explosions played on repeat directly alongside the paintings, an association that Cai described—in a two-page spread in the catalogue for his retrospective—as "sketching" (fig. 20). In this spread, Cai turns slightly away from the canvas with a paintbrush in hand. In the photograph, to Cai's right is a still of his outdoor project *Fetus Movement—Project for Extraterrestrials No. 9* (1992), in which the artist explodes packets of gunpowder arranged in three concentric circles while sitting at the center.[45] The spread shows Cai painting the explosion based on a video still, underscoring the oil painting's naturalistic representation. A line of text in the corner reads: "Cai Guoqiang sketching with oil paint in front of a video of his explosion project," which tallies with the socialist realist emphasis on life sketching. Thus the spatial, visual and rhetorical alignment with Maksimov's art practice

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的艺术和上海 APEC 焰火晚会的访谈" [Cai Guoqiang's art and an interview about the ceremony of Shanghai APEC fireworks].

[43] Cai's Shanghai Retrospective was on view from February 2002 to March 2002. His APEC Cityscape Fireworks took place in October 2001. For media coverage of the APEC fireworks, see Jiang, "蔡国强艺术展" [An interview with Cai Guoqiang].

[44] Cai, "收藏马克西莫夫作品的坦白" [Confessions for collecting Maksimov's works], in *蔡国强艺术展* [Cai Guoqiang's Art Exhibition], eds. Zhang Qing and Cai Guoqiang (Shanghai: Shanghai Shuhua Chubanshe, 2002), 40.

[45] Cai, "Ninety-nine tales: Curious Stories from My Journey through the Real and Unseen Worlds," in *Cai Guo-Qiang: Ladder to the Sky*, eds. Rebecca Morse and Jeffrey Deitch (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012), 122.

established linkages between the contemporary artwork and the state museum.

Yet this alignment does not necessarily reiterate ideological ties between socialist realism and the state museum. Most of Cai's gunpowder paintings are over two meters high and one meter wide. This spatial juxtaposition brings to light the contrast in medium, visual language, and scale between the two artists' paintings, underscoring the difference between state-supported artworks of the past and present. His practice of sketching from video stills diverges significantly from socialist realist sketches of everyday life. In this light, Cai's statement reads more like an expression of personal attachment than a claim of art historical lineage or political alliance.

The relationship between *Collection* and Shanghai Art Museum strikes a chord with art historian Hal Foster's study of contemporary art projects that take the form of archival work. The aesthetic interest in connecting with visual materials from the past, Foster observes, was not uncommon among contemporary artists in the late 1990s and early 2000s.[46] In these projects, the objects under investigation are presented as "unstable, even active—open to eruptive returns and entropic collapses, stylistic repackaging and critical revisions."[47] They generate narratives that expose the fragmented status of art institutions. Similarly, *Collection* re-enacts the multi-layered relationship between socialist realist paintings and Shanghai Art Museum, whereby Cai positions his own contemporary art in relation to the state institution.

Foster's study mainly addresses aesthetic developments in Europe and the United States, where the development of institutional critique rendered inconsistencies between ideological underpinnings and discursive framings of museums as a common point of departure for art professionals in the late 1990s and early 2000s.[48] The fragmented condition of Chinese state

[46] Hal Foster, "The Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Autumn, 2004): 3–22.
[47] Foster, 17.
[48] Ibid., 5.

museums, however, did not come about through critical inquiries. Cai's conceptualization of spectatorship did not stem from his knowledge of viewers' critical awareness of existing institutional conditions; rather, it was based on his anticipation of how different groups of viewers approached socialist realism at state museums. As I elaborate in the next section, this socially specific idea of viewership was provoked by the reception of one of Cai's works in the late 1990s, which caused the artist to shift away from a universalized conception of viewing.

From a Universalized Conceptualization of Spectatorship to a Socially Specific One

Cai's early works of the 1980s show his combined interest in painting and stage design. As a young artist in his hometown of Quanzhou, Cai studied ink painting with his father, Cai Ruiqin, as well as local painter Yang Zhenrong and stage designer Chen Yiting.[49] His training in academic painting and stage design started when he enrolled in the Theatre Design Department at Shanghai Drama Academy, training that furthered Cai's interest in working with three-dimensional space. To pursue career opportunities, Cai moved in 1985 to Japan, where he attended the Integrated Art Program at the University of Tsukuba, a program that encouraged students to incorporate stage design and painting in the making of artworks.[50]

As early as the 1980s, Cai conceptualized the spectatorship of his painting as an interaction in three-dimensional space. He started to experiment with spontaneous, abstract compositions by igniting gunpowder on canvas in 1984 and continued to work with that method

[49] "Chronology," in *Cai Guo Qiang: Saraab*, eds. Cai Guoqiang, Yuko Hasegawa, and Wassan Al-Khudhairi (Qatar: Arab Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 317–19.

[50] In the 1980s, Japan was much more connected to the international art world than China. This created better job opportunities for contemporary artists like Cai. In mainland China in the 1980s, the government assigned students jobs upon graduation. Most artists worked at local official cultural institutions or art schools. For more on the international resonance of the Japan-originated Gutai Movement in the 1950s and '60s, see Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 99–146. For accounts of Cai's study in Japan, see "Chronology," in *Cai Guo Qiang: Saraab*, 322–23; Cai, *延安艺术教育座谈会* [Talks at Yan'an forum on art education], 98.

after moving to Japan.[51] The use of gunpowder transforms the surface of Cai's paintings with a scorched visual effect that accentuates the thickness of its materiality. When making these paintings, Cai would first lay down a ground of oil paint, then position the canvas horizontally, create a composition in gunpowder, and ignite the gunpowder.[52] To create a textured effect, Cai would sometimes emboss a pattern before painting by rubbing the canvas against hard surfaces.[53] One of the paintings Cai created in this period, *Gunpowder Painting—Ancestor with Feathers* (1985), demonstrates the texture achieved through this process (fig. 21). For this work, Cai spread the gunpowder along a figural shape outlined with red paint against a white background. The ignition of the gunpowder created not only a dense black outline of the figure on top of the red paint but also an unevenly textured surface. This figure is not based on images of ancestral figures from specific cultures; rather, the deeply textured outline and background recall the surface of cave paintings, alluding to a generalized notion of ancestral images. When envisioning the reception of his gunpowder paintings in 1988, Cai emphasized viewers' intuitive reactions, rather than the symbolic meaning of images.[54] He said, "The smell of the powder will remain on the canvas forever, alluring and impressing onlookers. This marriage of sight and scent impregnates the exhibition hall with an atmosphere of stimulants."[55] In Cai's description, his painting is a component of an unfolding event that activates multiple senses.

Cai materialized such multisensory spaces in his first installations, *Space No.1* (1988) and *Space No. 2* (fig. 22, fig. 23), both of which were shown at Kigoma Gallery on the outskirts of

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[51] "Chronology," in *Cai Guo Qiang: Saraab*, 322. On Cai's website, he categorized gunpowder paintings as "gunpowder drawings." Yet Cai indicated that his "gunpowder drawings" were more than drawings and were a kind of painting for him. See Lesley Ma and Cai Guoqiang, "Interview with Cai Guoqiang," *Asia Art Archive in America*, accessed June 10 2015, http://www.aaa-a.org/programs/interview-with-cai-guo-qiang-by-lesley-ma/.
[52] Sometimes the oil paint was mixed with soil, carbon, and coal cinder to add texture to the surface. Cai Guoqiang and You Jindong, "Painting with Gunpowder," *Leonardo* 21 (1988): 251–254.
[53] Ibid., 252.
[54] Cai and You, 252.
[55] Ibid.

Tokyo in a solo show entitled "Explosions and Space Holes: Cai Guo-Qiang."[56] For these artworks, Cai mainly used curtains of Japanese paper, which is highly sensitive to physical and chemical reactions.[57] The exploding gunpowder left the paper full of holes and scorch marks. To enhance the visual effect, Cai used mirrors in both installations. For *Space No. 1*, a mirror lies beneath each of the four paper curtains that hang vertically; for *Space No. 2*, a mirror is mounted to the wall, next to four curtains of different sizes that hang at different angles. Cai positioned these mirrors to reflect viewers as they navigate the space. Within this confined space of 2.5 by 4 square meters, the interaction between paper, light, and shadow created complex visual and spatial effects.[58] In a statement on the piece written in 2012, Cai explained that the mirrors were included "to expand the space, making it an installation, a relatively young genre that was starting to gain more recognition in Japan."[59] While the paper curtains recall the format of hanging scrolls common in Japan and China, the use of mirrors evinces the artist's interest in generating a spectatorship different from the viewing of paintings.

The titles of the installations and the exhibition—*Space No. 1, Space No. 2* and *Explosions and Space Holes: Cai Guo-Qiang*—refer to notions of spaces detached from specific social and political issues. Cai rearticulated this cosmic idea of space in the title of a new series, *Project for Extraterrestrials*, which seems to suggest that he creates works for viewers unconfined to the earthly realm. These titles correspond to the fact that most of Cai's works of the 1980s and early '90s do not directly address specific cultural or political issues, though they are by no means detached from earthly concerns. At various occasions, Cai endowed the

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[56] Cai, "Ninety-nine Tales," 108; "Chronology," in *Cai Guo Qiang: Saraab*, 323.
[57] For details of the piece, see Cai, "Ninety-nine Tales," 108. To enhance the visual effect of burning, Cai used more explosive agents for this piece, see Fei Dawei, "Amateur Recklessness: On the Work of Cai Guoqiang," in *Cai Guoqiang* (Paris: Fondation Cartier, 2000), 11.
[58] For the size of the space, see Cai, "Ninety-nine Tales," 108.
[59] Cai, "Ninety-nine Tales," 108.

extraterrestrial perspective with various meanings, including the view of earth from above and freedom from the dichotomy of East and West. [60] In the 1980s in Japan, Cai's interest in a universalized viewership can be seen as a response to a major trend in the Japanese art world that defined contemporary Asian art by regional identities.[61] This series won acclaim from Japanese art critics, who read Cai's works as an attempt to overstep divides in human culture.[62]

This spectatorship was tied to the exhibition of *Project for Extraterrestrials* at various contemporary art institutions. Most works in this series involved explosion events and gunpowder paintings based on explosion designs. These paintings offer views from above in the form of an explosion plan. For example, in one project, *Human Abode: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 1* (1989), Cai staged an explosion inside a yurt that he had constructed on the bank of Tama River in Fussa City, Japan (fig. 24, fig. 25). On the gunpowder painting that he created for the occasion, the burn marks in black and yellow indicates the yurt, while the line that meanders from the yurt represents the twenty-meter fuse, and the ink inscriptions record the artist's notes and instructions. The painting serves as a material trace of an explosion that lasted for just a few seconds. The rice paper and inscriptions frame the painting in the format of an ink

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[60] Cai Guoqiang and P3, "Cai Guoqiang," in *Primeval Fireball*: *The Project for Projects—Cai Guoqiang*, ed. Rumiko Kanesaka (Tokyo: P3 and environment, 1991), 2–3; Gerald Matt, "Gerald Matt in Conversation with Cai Guo-Qiang," in *Cai Guo-Qiang: I am the Y2K Bug* (Vienna: Walther Konig, 1999), 50; Pan Ge, "我没变, 我仍是个正确的'民族主义者'" [I did not change, I am still a true nationalist], New York Times, last modified August 12, 2013, accessed March 12, 2014, http://cn.nytimes.com/culture/20130812/cc12caiguoqiang/.

[61] Joan Kee, "Points, Lines, Encounters: Tansaekhwa and the Formation of Contemporary Korean Art" (Doctoral dissertation, New York University, 2008), 203.

[62] Kuroda Raiji, "The Future of Presenting 'Asian Art:' Thoughts on Asian Contemporary Art," *The Shin Bijutsu Shinbun* (Japan) 608 (July 1, 1991), originally published in Japanese, trans. Reiko Tomii, quoted in "Writings on Cai Guoqiang," 264; Chiba Shigeo, "Fireworks at Mount St. Victoire: Chinese and Japanese Art," *Mainichi Newspaper* (Japan) (Sept 10, 1990) evening edition, 6, originally published in Japanese, translated by Reiko Tomii, quoted in "Writings on Cai Guoqiang," in David Joselit, Miwon Kwon, Alexandra Munroe, and Wang Hui, *Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2010), 263; Kurabayashi Yasushi, "What is 'Open System'—To Identify it with Artists' Works," in *Mito Annual '94: Open System*, ed. Watanabe Seiichi and trans. Media & Communications, Inc. (MAC), Miyatake Miki, and Miyatake Fumiyo (Mito: Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Center, 1994), 58–69, quoted in "Writings on Cai Guoqiang," 265.

painting, situating it as an artwork to be shown inside a museum. The implication of the series' title is tied to a universalized conception of spectatorship unconfined by cultural divides.

This mode of viewing also applies to Cai's outdoor explosions in *Project for Extraterrestrials*. Most of Cai's explosions are spatially detached from the interiors of museums yet are closely tied to museums economically, as their installation often requires a considerable amount of funding and labor. Art historian Miwon Kwon points out that these explosion projects are notable for their extravagant display of economic expenditure, whereby they expose to the public the over-expenditure of the museum system.[63] Based on French philosopher Georges Bataille's theory that consumption is no less important than production in a capitalist economy, Kwon proposes that Cai's outdoor explosions exemplify a way to recuperate the museum system by overspending.[64] By consuming millions of dollars in mere seconds, these projects issue subtle critiques of the art industry. While the spatial and visual arrangements of Cai's explosions differ, they expose socioeconomic conditions of art institutions that are usually hidden from visitors.

When exhibiting artworks in mainland China during the 1990s, Cai envisioned a spectatorship outside the museum context. Right after the Tian'anmen Square Student Protests in 1989, the government tightened its control over culture, and contemporary art was rarely shown in museums, most of which were state-owned in the 1990s.[65] This situation began to change in 1992, as the Central Government unveiled the Eighth Five-year Plan at the Fourteenth Plenary Meeting of the Congress and set marketization of the economy as its primary task.[66] This

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[63] Kwon, "The Art of Expenditure," in *Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2010), 67.
[64] Kwon, 67.
[65] Wu, "Introduction: Exhibiting Experimental Art in China," 17.
[66] "十四大，社会主义市场经济体制目标确立" [The fourteenth plenary meeting: setting the goal for the socialist market economy], *人民网* [People's Website], accessed Jan 21 2016, http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/134580/137248/.

relieved some tension in the realms of culture and politics. In 1993, contemporary art exhibitions increasingly appeared in temporary spaces near artists' communities, universities, commercial galleries, and galleries affiliated with educational institutions, though they were constantly being cancelled or closed early by the government.[67] To make use of emerging exhibition opportunities, Cai staged an outdoor explosion project, *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10*, at one end of the Great Wall in Jiayuguan, China (fig. 26).[68] The work featured a 10,000-meter-long fuse zigzagging across vast expanses at the west end of the Great Wall, along which packs of gunpowder had been placed every thousand meters.[69] When ignited, fire zigzagged through the countryside at about fourteen meters per second.[70] The entire process took about ten minutes and attracted 40,000 viewers from nearby.[71] Despite the large audience, Cai organized the installation and viewing of the piece mainly as an event for Japanese tourists.[72] In doing so, he blurred the line between tourism—a market activity that the government encouraged—and art. The ambiguous status of the work guaranteed that Cai could stage his project in a public space without government intervention.

Exhibition of Cai's *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard* (1999) at the 1999 Venice Biennale sparked a confrontation between contemporary artists and Chinese viewers (fig. 27). Exhibited in the 3000-square-meter Palazzo dell'Esposizione, the group sculpture was based on

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[67] Xiong Yan, "圆明园画家村研究" [A research on Yuanmingyuan painters' village] (Doctoral dissertation, Peking University, 2011), 103–104. For the changes that took place in 1993, see Wu, "Introduction: Exhibiting Experimental Art in China," 24.
[68] Cai, "Ninety-nine Tales,"124.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Serizawa Takashi, "Going Beyond the Wall: Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10," in *Cai Guo-Qiang,* eds. Dana Friis- Hansen, Octavio Zaya, and Serizawa Takashi, (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2002), 107–10, originally published in Cai Guo-Qiang, *Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10: Project to Add 10,000 Meters to the Great Wall of China* (Tokyo: Atelier Peyotl Co., Ltd. with P3 art and environment, 1994) as "At the End of a Certain Wall," quoted in "Writings on Cai Guoqiang," 271.
[71] Cai, "Ninety-nine Tales," 124; Li Pin, "蔡国强经典作品年谱，玩的就是'乱搞'" [Chronology of Cai Guoqiang's important piece, the key is to "make a mess"], accessed January 21, 2016, http://news.99ys.com/news/2014/ 0815/9_179953_1.shtml.
[72] Cai "Ninety-nine Tales," 124.

the socialist realist sculpture *Rent Collection Courtyard* (1965), one of the most famous artworks during the revolutionary era in China (fig. 28).[73] Comprising ninety-nine figures, the work depicts landlord Liu Wencai's cruel oppression of peasants.[74] While Cai borrowed the narrative and form of *Rent Collection Courtyard*, he re-staged the piece as part of a performance.[75] Along with Cai, the work was sculpted by Long Xuli, who was one of the original sculptors of *Rent Collection Courtyard*, seven other Chinese artists, and two of Cai's assistants. The sculpting lasted for ten days.[76] Because the artists used unfired water-based clay, viewers could see the sculptures cracking and eventually collapsing, a process reminiscent of the impermanence of Cai's explosions.[77] This emphasis on impermanence did not rely on exact replication of the socialist realist sculpture. Most sculptures seemed half-done by the time the artist finished sculpting: numerous details were left unsculpted; supporting metal armatures were left visible on the ground; the wooden props used to represent guns and walking sticks were left unpainted (fig. 29). The performative aspect of sculpting and the unfinished character of the sculptures revealed Cai's interest in staging the gradual creation and disintegration of the socialist realist piece.

Waves of criticism came from artists associated with the creation of the original. Most of the artists who had worked on *Rent Collection Courtyard* were affiliated with the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. In May of 2000, a group of them organized a news conference stating that they would sue curator Harold Szeemann, the exhibition committee, and Cai for copyright

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[73] Berghuis, 714.

[74] The story was divided into seven sections, including "Handing in Rent," "Checking Rent," "Dispute," "Conflict," "Checking the Record," "Collecting the Rent by Force," and "Fury". These seven sections went through a number of revisions during the Revolution. See Dao Zi, "'收租院'的复制与后现代主义" [Replications of *Rent Collection Courtyard* and Postmodernism], *景观* [View] 60 (August 2000): 107–112.

[75] According to the instructions of Cai, "these clay sculptures should be left in an unfinished state and without maintenance throughout the duration of the exhibition, until they collapse under the natural effect of drying and cracking." See Fei, "Amateur Recklessness," 11.

[76] Cai Guoqiang, "关于'威尼斯收租院'" [About *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard*].

[77] Laikwan Pang, *Creativity and its Discontents: China's Creative Industries and Intellectual Property Offenses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 219; Fei, "Amateur Recklessness," 11.

infringement.[78] One of the artists from the Sichuan Academy, Wang Guanyi, argued that the appropriation of the symbolic piece catered to "Western political ideology" and the "Western fascination with the East."[79] As a result, these artists held a conference criticizing Chinese artists who branded themselves overseas for individual gain.[80]

The strong backlash had much to do with the symbolic status of *Rent Collection Courtyard* in Chinese socialist realist sculpture. The original had been commissioned by the Dayi County Landlord Manorial Exhibition Center, an institution established by the county government for exhibitions and political gatherings, to provoke class-consciousness and instigate socialist revolutionary fervor.[81] The production of the piece was motivated by Mao's emphasis on class struggles at a central plenary meeting in February of 1963, which spurred the making of sculptures at exhibition centers throughout the country.[82] The group of artists from Sichuan Academy visited the peasants who had worked for Liu Wencai and developed a dramatic storyline that opens with the landlord's cruel oppression of peasants and ends with peasants' victory over the landlord.[83] To expedite the production and lower costs, these artists

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[78] They finally filed the paperwork to the National Copyright Office in September of 2000, yet the court did not accept the case because the institution and the people sued were not in China. See Sheng Wen, "强占'收租院" [Occupying "Rent *Collection* Courtyard"] *新闻周刊* [News Weekly] 314 (January 1, 2010); Yang Ruichun, Wu Yao, "蔡国强? 危险! 一个男人的玩火史" [Cai Guoqiang? Danger! A history of a man playing with fire], *南方周末* [Nanfang Weekly], last modified September 10, 2008, accessed November 5, 2015, http://www.infzm.com/content/17023.

[79] Wang Guanyi, "收租院少为人知的内幕" [The Less-known facts of *Rent Collection Courtyard*], *China and World Periodical Digest* no. 11 (2011): 57.

[80] Zhu Qi, 2.

[81] The Center was established in 1958. By that time, Liu's family had become the target of political campaigns and was no longer in charge of the property. See Wang Guanyi, 41; Liu Yuping, "Avant-garde Art? Socialist Realist Art? Comments on the Methodology of 'Mao's Art' through Chinese Production Mechanism of *Rent Collection Courtyard,*" *东方艺术* [Oriental Art], no. 21 (2010): 62.

[82] In 1965, under the instruction of Mao, exhibition centers in China, including the one at Sichuan Dayi, started holding shows that depicted or provoked class struggles, see Liu Yuping, 62.

[83] Ibid.

experimented with the traditional clay-sculpting method used for temple sculptures.[84] Through this technique, they made sculptures that not only looked familiar to local villagers but also possessed a sense of vividness not found in traditional figures.[85] Upon its exhibition, art critics deemed it a model artwork for its theatrical narrative and compelling visual language.[86] In February of 1966, China's Vice-President, Lin Biao, through the head of the Film Section of the Communist Party's Propaganda Department Jiang Qing, issued a talk that called for "a socialist revolution on the cultural frontier."[87] The talk listed certain model artworks that could circulate during the Cultural Revolution.[88] *Rent Collection Courtyard* was the only sculpture on Lin's list.[89] During the Cultural Revolution, the sculpture was modified multiple times, replicated, and exhibited in and outside of China.[90] Cai based his Venice piece on the third version of *Rent Collection Courtyard*, which was exhibited in Albania in 1967.[91] As this version was to be sent to Albania upon official invitation, it underwent strict political inspections.[92] Upon official instructions, the artists inserted a revolution scene at the end of the narrative; among the ninety-nine sculptures, thirty-seven were newly created for this version.[93] In 1967, a book on this version of *Rent Collection Courtyard* was also published in multiple languages through China

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[84] According to Wang Guanyi, the artists reduced the final cost to several RMB, about one to two dollars. See Wang Guanyi, 41–2.
[85] Wang Guanyi, 41–2.
[86] The story was divided into seven sections: "Handing in Rent," "Checking Rent," "Dispute," "Conflict," "Checking the Record," "Collecting the Rent by Force," and "Fury." These seven sections underwent a number of revisions due to emerging political concerns during the Cultural Revolution. See Dao Zi, 107–112.
[87] Liu, 63.
[88] Ibid. Apart from *Rent Collection Courtyard*, eight model operas were listed in the talk, including five modern operas, two opera ballets, and one symphony.
[89] Wang Guanyi, 44.
[90] Zhu Qi, 56.
[91] Cai, *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard* (1999), 9; Cai Guoqiang, "关于'威尼斯收租院'" [About *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard*], accessed June 10, 2015, http://www.bbtpress.com/homepagebook/1170/a02.htm.
[92] Liu, 64.
[93] Ibid.

Foreign Language Press, which introduced the piece to audiences outside the communist bloc.[94] By recreating the work at the Biennale, Cai mobilized the reproducibility and internationalism of communist artworks, while raising important questions about the converging tendencies between communist art of the 1960s and global contemporary art of the 1990s.

The emblematic status of *Rent Collection Courtyard* made Cai's appropriation an easy target for rising nationalist sentiments in the late '90s, which in turn made the position of international contemporary artists highly sensitive. One of the creators of the original piece, Wang Guanyi, when criticizing Cai's work, associated it with Cai's effort to cater to curator Szeemann's interest and "a trend in collecting in the Western art market."[95] Art critic and curator Zhu Qi suggests, however, that underneath the success of Cai's installation at the Venice Biennale and the ensuing disputes lay Chinese artists' long-held antagonism toward Euro-American cultures, especially regarding their one-sided portrayals of China.[96] Members of the emerging middle class played an important role in escalating this nationalism, as many were seeking ways to voice public concerns.[97] This sentiment was particularly strong in 1999. In May of that year, NATO bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade during NATO's intervention in Kosovo, instigating a major outcry of popular nationalism in China.[98] University students chanted "Long live Chairman Mao" when they protested outside the US Embassy in Beijing, turning to Maoism as a way to express their dissatisfaction with the world order.[99] The

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[94] Liu, 58.
[95] Liu Wenxin, "威尼斯克隆收租院 原创者欲跨海打官司" [Venice's copy of Rent Collection Courtyard, artists of the original piece are preparing for overseas lawsuit], in 中国消费者报 [China Consumer Newspaper] (June 14, 2000).
[96] Ibid.
[97] Zhang, Xudong, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 102–135.
[98] Elizabeth J. Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2014), 228.
[99] Lin Xiaoping, "Globalism or Nationalism?," *Third Text* 18, no. 4 (May 2006): 282–84.

government, seeking new grounds for political legitimacy, largely endorsed this popular nationalism and gave rare permission to student protests and media coverage of relevant events.[100] This nationalistic sentiment exacerbated the backlash against *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard* in mainland China.

The ambiguity of the legal and economic ownership of socialist realist works in the late '90s further catalyzed the dispute. After auction houses in mainland China held several successful sales of socialist realist paintings in the mid '90s, these works gained growing visibility in the art market.[101] The problematic status of socialist realist paintings became widely known in 1999 through a case concerning Liu Chunhua's *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* (1967) (fig. 30). The painting, depicting Mao walking at the top of a mountain, had been among the most widely reproduced works during the Cultural Revolution.[102] The composition that put the leader at the center, the lavish use of bright colors, and the ethereal even light that illuminates the scene exemplify socialist realist paintings from the revolutionary years. The Central Propaganda Bureau announced the piece as a model work and an example of Red Guard painting in 1968.[103] This symbolic status translated into economic value in the 1990s. Liu sold the piece to the Guangzhou Branch of China Construction Bank for 550,000 Yuan at a public auction in 1995, a rather high price when the national average yearly income was 3,893 Yuan.[104] Though Liu legally owned the piece, the Revolution and History Museum sued Liu on the grounds that the Museum had kept the work until 1980 and the piece was national property.[105] A popular news

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[100] Ibid.
[101] Yue Ruifang, "中国秋拍将现'红色'专场" ["Red" sales will appear in fall auctions in China], Xinhua Net, accessed August 12 2016, http://www.bj.xinhuanet.com/bjpd_sdzx/2009-09/22/content_17775822.htm.
[102] Andrews, *Painters and Politics,* 338–42.
[103] Ibid., 338.
[104] Perry, 228.
[105] The painting went into the collection of the Revolution and History Museum in 1968. In 1980, Liu Chunhua claimed private ownership of the piece by presenting a document from Beijing Painting Academy to museum

program of China Central Television Station reported the case, placing it in the national spotlight.[106] By the late 1990s, artists and relevant institutions had yet to agree upon a way to differentiate between forms of ownership of socialist realist works. Exhibited in the same year that disputes arose over *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan*, *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard* provoked similar concerns about the work's ownership.

The dispute over the Venice piece in the legal and political realms exposes the gaping disjunction between art criticism inside and outside of China. When responding to the dispute in a statement published in Chinese, Cai justified the piece by using terms "modern" and "contemporary art." He emphasized that *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard* was based on the gesture of "appropriation" commonly used by contemporary artists.[107] He also reminded readers that the "conceptual" and "performative" features of the piece were more important than any formal resemblance to the socialist realist sculpture.[108] To support this point, Cai cited art criticism written in English, which took up almost one-third of the three-thousand-word essay.[109] While a number of contemporary artists, curators, and critics held a symposium to back Cai's claim, few of these aesthetic discussions mitigated the tension.[110] Contemporary art critic Zhu Qi points out that the enormous gap between art criticism in and outside of China rendered basic

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officials. The document states that Liu Chunhua can claim single authorship of the painting. See Perry, 228; Liu Chunhua, "《毛主席去安源》的幕后风波与历史真实" [The backstage disturbance and historical truth of Mao Zedong Goes to Anyuan], People, last edited on July 29, 2006, accessed July 17, 2018, http://culture.people.com.cn/ GB/40479/40482/4646393.html.

[106] Perry, 228.

[107] Cai, "关于'威尼斯收租院'" [About *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard*].

[108] It was published in the contemporary art journal *Avant-garde Today* and literary and cultural studies journal 读书 [Reading].

[109] Ibid.

[110] Yang Ruichun, "北京艺术家认为：威尼斯收租院不是侵权" [Beijing artists think that *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard* did not involve copyright infringement], China News, accessed March 15 2015, http:// www.chinanews.com/2000-07-04/26/36174.html.

concepts of modern and contemporary art illegible in mainland China.[111] In some cases, international writers lost sight of the complexity of Chinese culture; in others, Chinese readers struggled to understand "the trained, sophisticated language of Western critics."[112]

Cai's *Collection of Maksimov's Works* is a response to the nationalist sentiments, ambiguity in ownership of socialist realist artworks, and disjunction in aesthetic discourses revealed by disputes around *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard*. Unlike the Venice piece, however, Cai did not claim authorship of *Collection*. The museum plaque in the first gallery room referred to Cai as curator, and the "Collector Statement" announced his ownership of Maksimov's paintings; however, by highlighting his curatorial role and making explicit his economic ownership of the paintings, *Collection* avoided the problematic issue of aesthetic appropriation and legitimized Cai's exhibition in administrative and economic terms.

A Third Path

Collection of Maksimov's Works highlights the Soviet painter's contribution to the development of academic oil painting in China. As mentioned earlier, a wall text introduced his work in China (see fig. 13).[113] Written by a professor at CAFA Cao Qinghui for Cai's *Collection*, this text describes Maksimov's training of students, the teaching program he helped to develop, and his participation in national conferences and meetings.[114] For viewers who read this text, the

[111] Zhu Qi, 5–6.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Cao, "马克西莫夫略历及其在中国的教学创作简述" [A brief account of Maksimov's career and his teaching practice in China], 31; Cao, interview by the author, Beijing, January 6, 2016.
[114] The other contributions that Cao listed are: "(1) Primarily focusing on the basic oil painting exercises (1955–1956) and practice (1956–1957), providing training for people to strengthen the practice and teaching of oil painting. Under the direction of Maksimov, students were systematically and comprehensively trained in the oil painting methods of the former Soviet Union. They also learned more about the medium of painting and its pedagogical methods. (2) Based on the training methods of the former Soviet Union, Maksimov helped the Oil Painting Division at the CAFA to develop a teaching program. From then on, CAFA started to improve its teaching program. (3)

use of easels may have evoked the setting of a painting class, a connection that the photos further strengthen (fig. 31).[115] Above *Pianist* (c.1955), for example, two photos show Maksimov creating that painting in front of his students (fig. 32, fig. 33, fig. 34). This use of photography recalls Cai's inclusion of a photo of himself painting in front of a video, as mentioned earlier (see fig. 20). In both cases, Cai highlights the act and setting of sketching.

Viewers' knowledge of Maksimov's role in Chinese art history was central to Cai's conceptualization of *Collection.* He explained,

> Some of the viewers this time did not know anything about Maksimov. They would get to know Maksimov, who had such a fundamental influence on fine art education in China. Those who knew about Maksimov would experience a quickened heartbeat, recognizing their relationships with the past. Both of these, for me, are meaningful.[116]

In line with this, most of the paintings in *Collection* were created when the Soviet artist was teaching an oil painting class in China.[117] At the time of its exhibition in 2002, *Collection* included twenty-six watercolors and ink wash paintings among the ninety-one artworks.[118] This indexes Maksimov's interest in ink and wash painting and presents a comprehensive overview of

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Regarding common problems in the practice and teaching of oil painting in our country, Maksimov proposed constructive opinions at symposiums, including the Second Plenary Meeting of the Chinese Artists Association in 1955, National Sketch Education Symposium in 1955, and National Oil Painting Conference in 1956," see Cao, 41.

[115] Cai's selection of these photographs focused mainly on Maksimov's stay in China from 1955 to 1957, including photographs of Maksimov painting and teaching, portraits of Maksimov, and news reports or journal articles on Maksimov in Chinese. Digital photographs, Cai Studio, New York.

[116] Jiang Mei, "蔡国强访谈录" [An interview with Cai Guoqiang], accessed March 9, 2015, http://3y.uu456.com/bp-a82d1q3083c4bb4cf7ecd182-1.html.

[117] Fan Wennan, "依附与探索，苏联美术对中国油画教育的影响（之二）：中苏油画教育交流的繁荣阶段" [Reliance and exploration: the impact of Soviet art on the training of oil painting in China II: the flourishing period of cultural exchanges in oil-painting education between China and the Soviet Union], *艺术理论* [Art Theory] (May 2010):10.

[118] In January of 2002, Cai's Collection included 29 oil paintings, 36 sketches, and 26 watercolors and ink wash paintings, as well as a number of photographs, catalogues, and posters. Cai acquired most of these paintings from a dealer from the Netherlands and Maksimov's wife. For details of the collection, see "蔡国强收藏马克西莫夫作品展" [Cai Guoqiang's Collection of Maksimov's works], http://www.cnarts.net/cweb/exhibit/show/caigq/images/big/tb.asp. For more on how Cai acquired the paintings, please see video of "Symposium of the Oil Painting Class at Central Academy of Fine Arts," Cai Studio, New York.

his work in China.[119] Cai, in collaboration with the official art magazine *Meishu*, invited academic painters' takes on *Collection* by exhibiting it also at CAFA from April 29 to May 9, 2002.[120] The layout of the Beijing exhibition was similar to that in Shanghai—most of the paintings stood on easels, and wall texts elaborated Maksimov's art historical significance. In conjunction with the exhibition, Cai and *Meishu* organized a two-day symposium on Maksimov. Most participants had been Maksimov's students at CAFA and subsequently found employment at fine arts academies around the country.[121] Unlike the reception of *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard*, academic artists endorsed *Collection* as an exhibition of their renowned teacher.[122]

Collection retraces an important episode in the development of Chinese socialist realism that would have been familiar to most academic artists. Before Maksimov came to China, oil painting in China was at a rather early stage of its development. Though the theory of socialist realism came into shape in the 1940s, the teaching and practice of oil painting lacked the necessary social stability and financial support during the war. Most artists, whether in Communist-controlled or Nationalist-controlled areas, lacked access to systematic academic training, let alone oil painting.[123] The lack of effective training made it exceedingly difficult for them to grasp oil painting techniques.[124] After the founding of the PRC in 1949, academic training in oil painting had not yet developed into a comprehensive set of methods. At that time, the principles laid out by Xu Beihong (1895-1953) formed the core of academic pedagogy. Xu

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[119] Video of "Symposium of the Oil Painting Class at Central Academy of Fine Arts," Cai Studio, New York.
[120] Feng et al.
[121] All the participants, except Cai, an editor from the magazine *Meishu*, Maksimov's translator, and a staff member at the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, had been Maksimov's students. See Feng et al.
[122] Feng et al.
[123] Andrews, *Painters and Politics,* 23.
[124] Cao, "学派与体系:'徐悲鸿美术教育学派'刍议" [The school and the system: Discussions of "The School of Xu Beihong Art Pedagogy"], Artron, last modified July 13, 2012, accessed January 10, 2015, http://auction.artron.net/20120713/n247714.html.

had trained in France and Germany from 1919 to 1927.[125] From the 1930s on, he promoted the use of pencil sketches and realist modes of oil painting in China, emphasizing that painting should make the subject as lifelike as possible.[126] Xu elaborated this point into a set of seven principles in 1939, which included instructions on composition, proportion, shading, posture, and psychological depth.[127] Most of these principles, however, took the form of theoretical descriptions instead of procedures that could be easily learned and followed. For example, Xu reminded the students to "make the dark shades distinctive from the bright ones" and to "keep a balance between airiness and weight."[128] These generalized directions would have been difficult to follow without demonstrations, as students' sense of color, contrast, and balance would necessarily have varied from person to person.

Inspiration from Chinese folk art hardly facilitated the learning of oil painting techniques. During the Sino-Japanese War, the Party promoted the style of rustic woodcut prints to propagate political messages to the masses.[129] These prints were characterized by their bright colors, flat pictorial space, and strong black outlines. People commonly used them as household decorations during festivals. Yan Han's (1916–2011) *Soldiers and People Collaborating to Protect the Country* (1944) exemplified the woodblock prints produced in Communist-controlled areas during this period (fig. 35). The two-panel set of prints showed a soldier and peasant riding horses and holding a spear and sword, respectively. The symmetrical composition, colorful palette, and posture of the two figures were inspired by traditional New Year prints of door deities, as exemplified by one set produced in Zhuxian County, Henan Province (fig. 36). Similar

[125] Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 228.
[126] Cao, "学派与体系" [The school and the system].
[127] Wen Jinyang, "学习徐悲鸿老师"新七法"的一点体验" [A few thoughts about my teacher Xu Beihong's "New Seven Principles"], *Meishu*, no. 5 (1979): 36–38.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 60–64.

to these traditional works, Yan used bold black outlines and flat blocks of color to portray the soldier and peasant while foregoing shading and depictions of volume. By adapting a contemporary theme to the style and format of a popular medium, Yan made the political message of military mobilization more accessible to the masses.

After the founding of the PRC, President of CAFA Jiang Feng, who had been a printmaker himself, emphasized the nativist approach to art making in academic training and called for artists to incorporate the forms and techniques of rustic prints into their work.[130] One of these academic paintings that received the greatest acclaim was Dong Xiwen's *The Founding of the Nation* (1953), a large-scale oil depicting Mao announcing the founding of the PRC to crowds on Tian'anmen Square (fig. 37).[131] The dramatic contrasts between the bright blue sky, the red lanterns, and the black outlines of figures are derived from Chinese New Year prints.[132] Dong's combination of Chinese folk art and European history painting exemplifies the nativist approach in oil painting; yet, it is questionable if his method provided students with an effective model to grasp basic skills such as the construction of three-dimensional space or the depiction of subtle color changes.

Maksimov's class took place as part of the official endeavor to professionalize the training of oil painting in 1953. Within the communist bloc in the 1950s, there was the assumption that these countries were on a universal path towards communism and that the Soviet Union was the symbolic center, incarnating a vision for the future.[133] In the welcoming meeting for Maksimov's class, Jiang Feng expressed high expectations: "Maksimov's coming to China

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Dong created the major part of the painting in 1952 and 1953, and the figures standing on the left underwent several major changes due to political upheavals in the 1950s and '60s. See Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 76–86.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Schwartz, "Sino-Soviet Relations: The Question of Authority," 42–8.

makes it possible for us to learn from an advanced Soviet Art directly and systematically."[134] Indeed, Maksimov's class was expected to effectively transmit the painting techniques from the presumably more advanced socialist country to the younger one. His class at CAFA lasted two and a half years, including one year of basic training and one and a half years of painting practice.[135] The Academy carefully selected twenty-one students from art and military institutions across the country.[136] Most underwent a significant shift in their art practice after taking the class, as evidenced by the structuring of their color scheme as well as their depiction of individual characters and emotional states.[137] *Meishu* promoted Maksimov's painting method by publishing his lecture notes, transcriptions of his talks, and color reproductions of his works.[138] After his classes at CAFA, Maksimov would go to an art studio at People's Fine Arts Press, where he taught painting to a group of more advanced painters.[139] Through these means, Maksimov came to be known by most painters trained in socialist realist techniques. In the guise of a commemorative exhibition, *Collection* addresses this art historical episode in a way that

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[134] Fan Wennan,"依附与探索" [Reliance and exploration], 10.
[135] Ma Gang, "马克西莫夫油画训练班的教学" [The training of the oil painting class taught by Maksimov] (Doctoral dissertation, Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2008), 68.
[136] Ibid.
[137] For Maksimov's emphasis on structure, see Maksimov, "马克西莫夫教授讲课笔录" [Lecture notes of Professor Konstantin Maksimov], *Meishu*. (June 1955): 33. For Maksimov's emphasis that socialist realist paintings should depict the inner emotions of common people by constructing a narrative or by showing individual features, see Maksimov, "马克西莫夫教授讲课笔录" [Lecture notes of professor Konstantin M. Maksimov]; Maksimov, "苏联画家马克西莫夫在美协全国理事会第二次全体会议上的讲话" [Soviet Painter Maksimov's speech at the Second Plenary Session of the National Council of Artists' Association], 22.
[138] For published class and lecture notes of Makismov, see Maksimov, "马克西莫夫教授讲课笔录" [Lecture notes of professor Konstantin M. Maksimov], 33, 49; Maksimov, "马克西莫夫教授讲课笔录(续)" [Lecture notes of Professor Konstantin M. Maksimov (continued)], ed. Zhu Xi, *Meishu* (July 1955): 19; Maksimov, "马克西莫夫教授讲课笔录(续)" [Lecture notes of Professor Konstantin M. Maksimov (continued)], ed. Xi Zhu, *Meishu* (August 1955): 47; Maksimov, "苏联画家马克西莫夫在美协全国理事会第二次全体会议上的讲话 " [Soviet Painter Maksimov's speech at the Second Plenary Session of the National Council of Artists' Association] *Meishu* (June 1955): 22.
[139] Cao, interview by the author, Beijing, January 6, 2016.

resonated with academic painters.[140]

This resonance, however, did not fundamentally change the reception of contemporary art in the academy. Few of Maksimov's former students mentioned Cai or the installation of Maksimov's paintings in Cai's retrospective at the Shanghai Art Museum.[141] In one instance, they discussed the confusion and disorder created by the emphasis on spontaneity and the lack of systematic methodology in art practice.[142] In another instance, colloquium participants briefly mentioned "contemporary art" as the polar opposite of their training in socialist realism.[143] Though they were not antagonistic towards contemporary art, they were unconcerned about the connections between socialist realist and contemporary art.

International audiences' reception of *Collection* similarly revolved around the dichotomy between socialist realism and contemporary art. They mostly saw *Collection* as a contemporary artwork that expressed a sense of irony towards socialist realism. In an article written for *Art in America* in 2002, critic Eleanor Heartney noted "hints of irony" in the work.[144] She wrote, "Cai installed the works in a distinctively outmoded mode, crowded together on wooden easels that evoke sidewalk art-fair displays."[145] Art historian Julia Andrews also saw ironies of socialist realism in the installation, suggesting that it "looked like a cluttered ethnology display instead of like art."[146] While Andrews suggests that Maksimov's class helped Chinese artists produce the

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[140] Most Maksimov's students saw the show as an exhibition of their teacher's works, see video of "Symposium of the Oil Painting Class at Central Academy of Fine Arts," Cai Studio, New York.
[141] The only time this topic was raised was when Cai explained his reason for collecting Maksimov's works at the symposium, see "Symposium of the Oil Painting Class at the Central Academy of Fine Arts."
[142] Video of "Symposium of the Oil Painting Class at Central Academy of Fine Arts," Cai Studio, New York.
[143] Feng et al.
[144] Heartney, "Cai Guo-Qiang: Illuminating the New China," 96.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Andrews, "Art Under Mao, 'Cai Guoqiang's Maksimov Collection,' and China's Twentieth Century," 67.

"most technically advanced" oil paintings, she deems the academic art world irrelevant to contemporary art.[147]

In truth, *Collection* displays few details that suggest "sidewalk art-fairs" or "ethnology displays." Heartney's and Andrew's readings rely on their preconceived notions of exhibition displays, as well as interpretive frameworks derived from international writers' long-term critique of the over-politicization of socialist realism during the revolutionary period. Starting in the late 1950s, the Maoist government exerted much stricter control over culture through waves of political persecutions, which became extreme in the Anti-Rightist Movement (1957-1959) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).[148] In the 1970s, the Central Cultural Revolutionary Leadership Group devised and promoted the "red, smooth, and shiny" style that became the doctrine of socialist realism.[149] Due to this historical episode, international scholars commonly associated socialist realism with a lack of artistic freedom.[150] Development of Chinese contemporary art overseas in the 1990s further enhanced these interpretations. Toward the end of the Cold War, there was growing interest in socialist visual culture in Europe and the United States at international art exhibitions and in the art market.[151] This catalyzed wide interest in paintings that curator Li Xianting and gallery owner Jonathan Chang labeled as "cynical realism" and "political pop."[152] As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, the popularity of

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[147] Ibid., 54.
[148] For shifts in the government's attitude towards oil painting, see Andrews, *Painters and Politics,* 306–13.
[149] Ibid., 360.
[150] This dichotomy pervades writings on Chinese contemporary art. For studies that put pressure on this dichotomy, see Jerome Silbergeld, "Chinese Art, Made-in-America," in *Outside in: Chinese x American x Contemporary x Art*, ed. Jerome Silbergeld (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 112–39; Hou Hanru, *On the Mid Ground* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2003).
[151] Gao Minglu, "Changing Motivations of Chinese Contemporary Art Since the Mid 1990s," *Journal of Visual Art* 22, nos. 2&3 (December 2012): 211.
[152] Debevoise, 255–69.

cynical realism and political pop facilitated the crystallization of an historical narrative that centered on the perpetual opposition between contemporary art and socialist realism.

What *Collection* presents is the peaceful yet precarious co-existence of the academic and international art worlds, each relying on its own interpretive framework. This co-existence generated competing modes of viewing. While the white rose in front of Maksimov's portrait in the first gallery may have seemed to Maksimov's former students like a gesture of respect, it exposed the meaningless "contemporary ritual of quasi-Confucian commemoration" for international critics; the easels in *Collection* may embed the paintings in settings of oil painting instruction for some, but they may also look outmoded and ironic for others.[153] *Collection* crosses the boundary between the two art worlds, reconciling the differences in between.

Cai may have anticipated the polarizing reception from local and international viewers. As mentioned above, in his "Collector's Statement" on the wall of the last gallery, Cai framed the ambiguous status of *Collection* with the Confucianist virtue, *zhongyong*, or the middle course. Cai's middle course is the artist's response to the inherently divided spectatorship he envisioned. At the risk of erasing its own coherency, *Collection* reveals the deeply entrenched ideological and discursive gap between international and local art worlds.

[153] Andrews, "Art under Mao," 54.

Between a Revolutionary Theme and a Social Problem

In the 2000s, Yang Shaobin created two multimedia series on coalminers—*800 Meters Under* (2004–2006) and *X-Blind Spot* (2006–2008) (see fig. 2, fig. 3). While the former was comprised of twenty-one paintings and a room-sized installation, the latter included thirteen paintings, three figural sculptures, and two installations. For these two series, Yang, the gallery owner of Long March Space, Lu Jie, and the gallery staff visited coalmines in Kailuan, Tangshan, Hebei, Shanxi, and Inner Mongolia to gather materials.[1] Both series were shown as solo exhibitions at Long March Space in complete form: *800 Meters Under* in 2006 and *X-Blind Spot* in 2008. At that time, the series addressed one of the most urgent social problems in the early 2000s—the significant surge in fatalities of Chinese miners.[2] This was mainly due to the lack of protections in private coalmines, which, in order to enlarge their profit margins, commonly lowered their investment in mining technology and safety measures.[3]

Existing writings on the two series often collapse both projects within the discursive framework of the gallery. Established in 2003, Long March Space initiated a number of projects that aimed to bring contemporary art closer to the local context in mainland China, including these series by Yang.[4] Many of the gallery's projects aimed to mobilize local cultural resources

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[1] Lu Jie, "Curatorial Notes," in *800 Meters Under* (Beijing: Long March Space, 2006), 1–17; Lu, "Curatorial Notes: From *800 Meters Under* to *X-Blind Spot,*" in *X-Blind Spot* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2009), 7–21.
[2] The number of coalmine accidents dropped from 1613 in 2005 to 374 in 2006, eventually dropping to below 154 in 2008, see Wang Mingxiao et al., "Analysis Of National Coal-Mining Accident Data In China, 2001–2008," *Public Health Reports* 126, no. 2 (2011): 270–275.
[3] Due the significantly high casualty rates, the government closed 12,209 coalmines of smaller scales, most of which were privately owned in the late 2000s. The number of coalmine accidents dropped from 1613 in 2005 to 374 in 2006, eventually dropping to below 154 in 2008. See Wang et al., 270–275.
[4] Lu and Qiu Zhijie, "Preface," in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (Beijing: Long March Project, 2003), 10–11.

and collaborate with non-professional artists.[5] Employing this interpretive framework, critic Nikos Papastergiadis characterizes Yang's two series as collaborations between the artist and the coalminers.[6] Based on the fact that Yang grew up in a coalmining town, Papastergiadis suggests that Yang's familiarity with the coalmines facilitated his communication with miners and his creative imaginings about their lives.[7] Contrary to this claim, I argue that Yang's two series bring to light the limitations of naturalistic representations of coalminers, which makes these two projects diverge from Long March Space's emphasis on collectivism and collaboration.

The two projects evince Yang's approach of representing the violence inherent in miners' living and working conditions through indirect means that point to the fatal consequences of social problems in the coalmines without victimizing coalminers. They challenge the romanticized depiction of miners as revolutionaries and the contemporary portrayal of miners as victims of coalmine accidents. The two series draw inspiration from Yang's earlier paintings in portraying violence by depicting the pain and anomalies of the human body, such as a swollen face and a bleeding nose. Yet compared with his earlier works, *800 Meters Under* and *X-Blind Spot* show Yang's conceptualization of spectatorship in relation to specific social points of reference. Rather than depicting violence directly, the two series inspire viewers to reconsider the gravity of the social problem and the limitations of representing such problems.

From Anyuan Miners' Strike to Long March Project

Accounts and representations of miners' strikes in Anyuan, Jiangxi Province during the 1920s constitute one of the most important chapters in Chinese revolutionary history. The town

[5] Chang Tan, "Art for/of the Masses Revisiting the Communist Legacy in Chinese Art," *Third Text* 26, no. 2 (March, 2012): 191–2.
[6] Nikos Papastergiadis, "The Paradox of Light: Negative Vision, Being Involved and Imaginative Collaboration," in *X-Blind Spot*, 22–30.
[7] Ibid.

of Anyuan derived its strategic importance from several factors. When the modern coalmining industry took root there in 1898 with the founding of Pingxiang Mining Company, the aim was to provide coal to a new iron factory in nearby Hubei province, as most of China's coalmines at that time were located in the far North.[8] Several key Party leaders, including Mao, were born or raised in nearby provinces.[9] Their familiarity with vernacular culture and local dialects greatly facilitated their communication with Anyuan miners.[10] To transport coal out of the mountainous area, a railway was built.[11] Thus, the town had a concentrated population of coalmine and railway workers, mostly peasants recruited from Jiangxi and neighboring provinces.[12] In September of 1922, one year after the founding of the CCP, Mao, together with two party cadres, led a landmark nonviolent strike in Anyuan that forced the Republican government to recognize the Party's control of the labor union and won financial subsidies for the Anyuan workers' club and other Communist activities.[13] Mao then chose Anyuan for the earliest revolutionary bases, where he organized labor movements, founded peasant associations, and recruited Red Army soldiers—all of which were critical for the Communist organization and political mobilization in subsequent decades.[14]

Paintings on the theme of Anyuan Miners' Strike occupy a symbolic place in socialist revolutionary art. Yang grew up in the coalmining town Tangshan in the 1960s and '70s and was familiar with representations of this strike in revolutionary discourse and art. Liu Chunhua's *Mao Zedong Goes to Anyuan* and Hou Yimin's work *Liu Shaoqi with Anyuan Workers* (1961) were

[8] Perry, 17.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Perry, 9.
[11] Ibid., 19
[12] Perry, 20
[13] Ibid., 9.
[14] Perry, 7.

some of the most widely circulated paintings on the subject (see fig. 30, fig. 56).[15] Liu's painting, as mentioned in Chapter Two, depicts Mao on his way to lead the Anyuan Miners' Strike. The work emphasizes the communist leader while omitting direct representations of miners. Hou's painting also depicts another political cadre, Liu Shaoqi, leading the Anyuan miners forward.[16] Standing in the center, Liu serves as the composition's central focus. At that moment, the painting was embroiled in a critical historical disjuncture with the Party's leadership, since Liu, having succeeded Mao as President of the country in 1959, was competing with the Chairman in fame and prestige.[17] In 1961, Hou's *Liu Shaoqi with Anyuan Workers* was displayed at the Museum of Revolutionary History, the centermost official art institution.[18] During the socialist revolutionary period, Liu's and Hou's paintings were among the most widely reproduced artworks.[19]

Paintings like *Mao Zedong Goes to Anyuan* and *Liu Shaoqi with Anyuan Workers* were based on idealized and romanticized narratives of the strike. In his seminal essay, "Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism (社会主义现实主义与革命浪漫主义)," communist literary scholar Zhou Yang (1908–1989) suggests that romanticism is inseparable from socialist realism.[20] In the 1940s, Mao proposed that art should be a tool to mobilize and unite the masses for class struggle.[21] This calls for creative representation of reality.[22] Mao writes, "life reflected

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[15] Andrews, *Painters and Politics,* 328.
[16] This took place despite the fact that Li Lisan, another Party leader, played the predominant role in the revolution at Anyuan. See Perry, 169–70.
[17] Perry, 169–70.
[18] Ibid., 187.
[19] Notably, between 1962 and 1965, People's Fine Art Press reproduced 172,077 copies of Hou's painting. During the Cultural Revolution in 1968, the Central Propaganda Bureau announced Liu's piece as a model work and an example of Red Guard painting. For the popularity of Liu's painting, see Andrews, *Painters and Politics,* 338–42, for the popularity of Hou's painting see Perry, 189.
[20] Zhou Yang, 周扬集 [Collected essays of Zhou Yang] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000), 3
[21] Bonnie S. McDougall, "Mao Zedong's" Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" (1983).
[22] Ibid.

in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, near the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual daily life."[23] Instead of individual fantasies and emotions, romanticism in socialist realism is expected to draw from artists' understanding of revolutionary goals and serve as inspirational means to instigate revolutionary sentiments.[24] In the realm of painting, the emphasis on depicting typical figures constituted a major part of students' training. Hou received training from the Soviet painter Konstantin Maksimov (1913–1993). According to Maksimov, the depiction of figures should be based on ideal types representative of class status.[25] To arrive at idealized types, Hou deliberately altered the skin tone of some miners. In his two paintings on miners, most of the workers standing or sitting near the Party cadres barely show a trace of coal dust on their face. In *Liu Shaoqi with Anyuan Workers*, only the figures in the second row and the miners on the far right have darker skin. In *Mao Zedong with Anyuan Workers,* only the miners in the farthest corners show signs of dust. This hardly correlates with the fact that miners, after a day's shift, would be almost entirely covered in black dust. Mining technology was much less advanced at that time, so the situation could not have been otherwise.

When Yang created these series in the 2000s, conditions in the coalmining industry and representations of coalmines were vastly different from those of the revolutionary period. After the founding of PRC, almost all mining companies came under state ownership. In the 1950s, the communist government upgraded the equipment and safety measures used at coalmines to reduce

[23] *Mao Tse-tung on Literature and Art* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 14.
[24] Ban Wang, "Socialist Realism," in *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of Chinese Literature*, ed. Ban Wang (Brill: London, 2011), 101
[25] Konstantin Maksimov, "马克西莫夫教授讲课笔录" [Lecture notes of Professor Konstantin Maksimov], *Meishu*. (June 1955): 33.

coalminers' rates of injury and death.[26] It also implemented a nationwide social welfare system that granted workers at state-owned enterprises a plethora of benefits, including health care, free housing, access to collective dining halls, and subsidies for childcare.[27] These procedures greatly improved coalminers' working and living conditions. Depictions of Anyuan Miners' Strike, as exemplified in *Mao Zedong Goes to Anyuan* and *Liu Shaoqi with Anyuan Workers*, served as reminders of the revolutionary past and were not immediately relevant to coalmines. In the 2000s, fatality rates of coalminers in China ranked the highest in the world, thirty-eight times that in the United States.[28] This was largely due to the increase in private coalmines after the government initiated market reforms in the late 1970s. In 2005, among the 28,000 coalmines in China, only 2,000 were state-owned.[29] Since these private coalmines, in order to maximize profits, commonly invested little in mining technology or safety measures the number of accidents peaked around 2003, reaching more than 2,000 per year.[30] Through Chinese news media and film, these accidents attracted national attention.[31]

Unlike socialist revolutionary paintings, Yang's two series do not rely on an established

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[26] Xia Ying, "评析建国初期的劳动保护工作" [On workers' welfare in the period after the founding of PRC], *Science and Technology Information* (2011) 35: 404–05.

[27] For the social welfare system implemented at state owned enterprises after the founding of PRC, see Xiaobo Lu, "Minor Public Economy: The Revolutionary Origins of *Danwei*," in Danwei*: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective,* eds. Xiaobo Lu, Elizabeth J. Perry (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.), 21–41.

[28] State Administration of Coalmine Safety, "National coalmining safety accident report in China," Ministry of Emergency Management of the People's Republic of China, accessed April 11, 2017, http://www.chinasafety.gov.cn.

[29] State Administration of Coalmine Safety, "National coalmining safety accident report in China."

[30] Due the significantly high casualty rates, the government closed 12,209 coalmines of smaller scales, most of which were privately owned in the late 2000s. The number of coalmine accidents dropped from 1613 in 2005 to 374 in 2006, eventually dropping to below 154 in 2008. See Wang et al, 270–275.

[31] For example, a coalmine accident in Qitaihe, Heilongjiang Province that took away the lives of seventeen miners in 2005 was reported on two popular TV programs: *Topics in Focus* (焦点访谈) and *Economy Half an Hour* (经济半小时), see "七台河矿难再现监管漏洞" [Qitaihe coalmine accident expose problems with supervision], CNTV, last updated December 14, 2008, accessed August 1, 2018, http://tv.cntv.cn/video/C10326/a8015aabf6ec41f3195063a026d518cc; "黑龙江七台河矿难幕后：安监局副局长开黑矿"[Behind Heilongjiang Qitaihe coalmine accidents: Deputy Director of the Administration of Work Safety opened an unlicensed coalmine], Sina, accessed August 7, 2018, http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2005-06-10/00216896305.shtml.

narrative. In different ways, works in the two series are devoid of references to specific sites or figures. For example, in *No. 7* (2006) of *800 Meters Under*, the painting's three components depict, respectively, a person standing in front of the living quarters, a miner holding his tools, and two workers carrying an injured colleague (fig. 39). All of these scenes are set against a black background, with a brick-lined window that opens onto an expanse of blue sky. This indication of the sky makes the dark space in the front more stifling by contrast. While Yang's use of dark colors and a composition comprised of three vignettes is loosely suggestive of a narrative about miners and coalmines, few visual details point to connections between the painting's parts. Works of *X-Blind Spot* are equally ambiguous about the figures and sites depicted. In *No. 2* (2007–08) of *X-Blind Spot*, the artist depicted several people standing beneath the mouth of a coalmine tunnel (fig. 40). A light source casts the foreground in bright white tones, leaving the background in shadow. Two crisscrossed forms protrude from a machine. Painted in pale white and grey, the two parts waver between three-dimensional objects and flat shadows. This machine blocks the view of the figures in the background whose faces are mostly hidden in shadow. To understand how these two series relate to socialism of the past and the social problem of the present, thus, requires that we look more closely at the socioeconomic conditions of art production in the 2000s as well as Yang's aesthetic approach in particular.

The owner of Long March Space, Lu Jie, framed the earlier series, *800 Meters Under*, with the socialist revolutionary culture of the past and contemporary coalmine accidents. His press release for *800 Meters Under* opened with a list of coalmining accidents in China in 2005.[32] Lu then characterized the art project as an initiative to reconsider the representation of

[32] Lu, "Long March Project: Yang Shaobin: *800 Meters Under*," Long March Project, accessed March 12, 2018, http://www.longmarchspace.com/wp-content/uploads/2006/09/06.09.02-Yang-Shaobin-800-Meters-LMSre.pdf.

coalmines during the socialist revolutionary period.[33] "'800 Meters Under' enters directly into the collective memory of industrialism and socialism," he writes.[34] He then proposes that Yang's portrayal of the contemporary situation is a way to reposition the socialist past in relation to the present. In the press release for *X-Blind Spot*, however, Lu no longer emphasizes Yang's direct engagement with the contemporary social problem or socialist visual culture. The project is primarily about the "highly subjective psychological realm" of miners, Lu writes; it serves as "a deliberate metaphorical reference" to Chinese rural areas.[35]

Lu's two press releases epitomized the different discursive frameworks that he established for the Long March Space. "The Long March" originally referred to the historical retreat of the Red Army (1934–36), a momentous turning point for the Communists in the Chinese Civil War (1927–1937). Lu explained his use of the term in the catalogue for the inaugural program "Long March Project–A Walking Visual Display" (2002–2003). He established Long March Foundation in 2000, based on which he and his collaborator Qiu Zhijie initiated "Long March Project" by inviting more than a hundred artists to walk the route of the Long March.[36] They organized activities at twelve sites along the way and encouraged participating artists to work together with peasants and folk artists, an effort that lasted four months and covered six thousand miles.[37] In the catalogue, Lu and Qiu defined "Long March" in several ways: as an historical episode in the Communist Revolution, as the art project they organized, and as "a process of movement through space, time, or thought without a fixed beginning or end."[38] Their description of their "Long March Methodology" in the same catalogue is more specific about this

[33] Ibid.
[34] Lu, "Long March Project."
[35] Lu, "Yang Shaobin: *X-Blind Spot*," Long March Space, accessed March 12, 2018, http://www.longmarchspace.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/08.09.04-Yang-Shaobin-X-Blind-Spot-LMS.pdf.
[36] Tan, 10.
[37] Lu and Qiu, "Curator's words," in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, 8–12.
[38] Lu and Qiu, "A Long March Glossary," 1.

"movement."[39] The methodology, as they explained, involved four aspects: "adaptation to local and temporal circumstances," the will to stick to their original aims, the collapsing of boundaries between "theory and reality," and an engagement with history and people's memories of history.[40] This interest in crossing the line between aesthetics and life while engaging with local history and culture resonated with the goal of socialist realist art. As Mao elaborated in the Yan'an Art Forum, art is part of the socialist revolution and should serve the interest of the masses.[41] In the preface to the catalogue, Lu and Qiu quoted the dictum of "art for the people"—a principle of socialist art that Mao proposed at the Yan'an Art Forum—to characterize participating artists' engagement with local sites and people.[42] They saw such aesthetic efforts, by shifting the dynamics between the center and periphery, as creating new dynamics for Chinese contemporary art.[43]

Lu's framing of *X-Blind Spot* as a metaphor for rural society in 2006 can be seen as a response to the increasing presence of the state in the development of contemporary art. Lu launched Long March Space in the 798 Art District in 2003.[44] The 798 Art District was originally the factory area of a state-owned enterprise.[45] The municipal government granted the private-owned company Seven Stars Group the right to sell and manage the real estate of the area in the 1990s, and the company started renting out unused factory space for profit in 2001.[46] The high ceilings attracted numerous artists and galleries in the early 2000s. Then Seven Stars

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Lu and Qiu, "A Long March Glossary," 1.
[41] For a more elaborate discussion of the Yan'an Art Forum, please refer to Chapter Three.
[42] Lu and Qiu, "Preface," 4.
[43] Lu and Qiu, "Preface," 10–11.
[44] Yao, "另类艺术空间在中国" [Alternative art spaces in China].
[45] Zhang Yue, 832.
[46] Craig Simons, "Amid Ghosts of the Red Guard, The Avant-Garde Now Blooms," New York Times (September 1, 2004), accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/01/arts/amid-ghosts-of-the-red-guard-the-avantgarde-now-blooms.html?_r=0; Zhang Yue, 832.

stopped issuing leases to artists and gallery owners in 2003, in order to build a high-tech park in pursuit of greater profit.[47] Seventy-four galleries and studios in the area jointly staged an art festival to protest the company's decision in 2004, when the tension mounted between the two sides.[48] The local government, in indirect ways, took the side of the artists.[49] Long Xinmin, the assistant party secretary of the Development and Planning Ministry of Beijing, and Liu Heping, vice president of People's Political Consultative Conference, visited 798 in 2004.[50] In 2005, the mayor of Beijing, Wang Qishan, and secretary of the Municipal Party Committee, Liu Qi, also expressed concerns about the 798 Art District.[51] Given the government's long-term suppression of contemporary art, such public statements signified a shift in officials' attitude. Then in 2006, the municipal government designated the district as a Cultural Creative Industry Cluster (文化创意产业积聚区) and established a management office under the guidance of the Beijing Municipal Department of Propaganda.[52] These gestures signaled the government's support for the development of contemporary art in the area, as well as its increasing control over its cultural production. Though the government never specified its reasons for this decision, people generally associated it with the municipal government's preparation for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics Games, in which contemporary art would contribute toward conjuring the image of a cosmopolitan city.[53]

As the decade progressed, Long March Space became an established commercial gallery in

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[47] Zhang Yue, 834.
[48] Simons," Amid Ghosts of the Red Guard."
[49] Ibid.
[50] Zhou Lan, "798 保卫战：从电子城到艺术区的华丽转身" [The defense of 798: From a technology zone to an art zone], Xinhua Net, accessed January 12, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/shuhua/2010-08/16/c_12448794_3.htm. "Xinhua Net" is an official website directly associated with the official Xinhua Press. The publication of the news on this website also speaks to official recognition of contemporary artists' concerns.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Zhang Yue, 835.
[53] Simons, "Amid Ghosts of the Red Guard"; Zhang Yue, 834.

the 798 Art District. Art critic and curator Pauline Yao, in an article on alternative art space in mainland China, points to Long March Space as exemplifying the transformation of numerous nonprofit art spaces into contemporary art galleries.[54] Though it is unclear whether Lu had ever meant for the space to be nonprofit, its commercial orientation became obvious in the late 2000s.[55] Between 2003 and 2005, Long March more than tripled its floor size by shifting locations within the 798 Art District, where rents were skyrocketing in the middle of the decade.[56] In October of 2005, the gallery moved into a space of about 2,500 square meters, which had once served as a dining hall for a state-owned enterprise.[57] Traces of the original use of the space were still visible in the exhibition of *800 Meters Under* in 2006. Staff had covered the windows on one wall with curtains, but some pipes still ran across the gallery (see fig. 2, fig. 41). At the exhibition of *X-Blind Spot* two years later, the curtains and pipes were no longer visible due to a major renovation. The expansion and remodeling both paved the way for Long March Space to become one of the most commercially successful galleries in mainland China in the late 2000s.[58] Government support ensured the long-term development of the art district, though it also signaled the ideological limits that were taking shape. Lu's shift of rhetoric from direct engagement to metaphor can be seen as a response to this broader institutional shift

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[54] According to Yao, these examples include Borges Bookstore, founded in Guangzhou in 1993; Biyi Art Center, founded in Shanghai in 1998; China Art Archive and Warehouse, founded in Beijing in 1999; Vitamin Space, founded in Guangzhou in 2002; Chuangku Art Space, founded in Shenzhen in 2001; Long March Space, founded in Beijing in 2002; Platform China, founded in Beijing in 2005; U Space, founded in Beijing in 2005; and Beijing Commune, founded in Beijing in 2005. See Yao, "另类艺术空间在中国" [Alternative art spaces in China].

[55] In 2008, it became one of the few Chinese galleries to have joined the Frieze Art Fair, London. See "Frieze Art Fair London," Long March Space, accessed April 12, 2018, http://www.longmarchspace.com/en/2008-frieze-art-fair-london/.

[56] "画廊正能量：长征空间从 1.0-8.0 的升级路" [Positive energy of a gallery: The upgrading of Long March Space from 1.0 to 8.0]; Zhang Yue, 835.

[57] "画廊正能量：长征空间从 1.0-8.0 的升级路," [Positive energy of a gallery: The upgrading of Long March Space from 1.0 to 8.0].

[58] The success of the gallery can be proved by the fact that Long March Space was the only art institution in Asia that *Art Review* magazine elected as "Power 100" in 2009. See "2009 Power 100," Art Review, accessed December 1, 2017, https://artreview.com/power_100/.

regarding the role of the government.

Contrary to Lu's discursive framing in the press releases, Yang's methods of creating *800 Meters Under* and *X-Blind Spot* differ essentially from the life sketching of socialist realism.[59] In Yang's discursive framing of the two series, he emphasized the unbridgeable distance between himself and his subject matter, rather than his comprehension of the severity of the social problem. According to Yang, direct communication with miners and on-site sketching were rare in his research process.[60] The working conditions of the coalminers, Yang said, appalled him.[61] He recalled miners' living quarters as always being clean and tidy when he was growing up.[62] Yet when he returned to his hometown Tangshan in 2005, the coalmine was "hell-like."[63] In a statement on *800 Meters Under* published on his website, Yang reveals few connections between his childhood experience and his coalminer series. Rather, he admits that the contemporary situation is too alienating for him to fully grasp.[64] His published research notes consist mostly of fleeting impressions and visual descriptions of scenes rather than his interactions with coalminers.[65] In one instance, after describing with dismay the dire conditions at coalmines in Tangshan, he writes a series of questions, "Why? What kind of lives do these people have to live for? What of the so-called basic necessities view of life in which life is just about survival?"[66] He then compares the miners' living conditions to "an absolute bare life little different from that of

[59] Lu, "Long March Project: Yang Shaobin: *800 Meters Under*."
[60] Yang, interview by the author, Beijing, April 12, 2017.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Yang, "我的职业艺术生涯" [My professional career], Yang Shaobin, last modified October 27, 2006, accessed March 12, 2018, http://www.yang-shaobin.com/htm/pinglun/2006-p/2006-7_main.htm.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Yang, "我的职业艺术生涯" [My professional career].
[65] The Long March Writing Group, "Excerpts from Yang Shaobin's Notebook," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 8, no.1 (January/February, 2009): 67–77.
[66] Ibid.

animal."[67] Yang admitted that he and his team had hardly communicated with miners when collecting materials for the two series.[68] Yang created most of his works in Beijing based on photographs and videos that he and his teammates had taken at the coalmines.[69] For *800 Meters Under*, he collaged fragments of video stills and photos to create new compositions; for images in *X-Blind Spot*, Yang manipulated the color scheme on computers.[70] In creating both series, Yang's relationship with coalminers was intermediated by these digitally rendered materials as well as his appropriation of these materials.

The situation of coalminers in the 2000s can be examined through Giorgio Agamben's notion of bare life that describes the state of humans as animals outside the confines of geopolitical regulations.[71] Agamben's concept was derived from the Aristotelian distinction between *bios* (the specific way in which life is lived) and *zoē* (the natural state of being that humans share with animals).[72] In his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben—via his reading of Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence"—cites bare life as a crucial link between juridical violence and law by pondering the state of life when law and jurisdiction cease to exist.[73] Through a critical reading of Michel Foucault's idea of biopolitics and Hannah Arendt's examination of totalitarian states, Agamben claims that modern governance has become intertwined with bare life, as twentieth-century nation states function not

[67] Yang Shaobin, "纵深八百米" [800 Meters Under], Yang Shaobin, accessed April 12, 2018, http://yang-shaobin.com/eng/englishindex.htm.
[68] Yang, interview by author, Beijing, April 12, 2017.
[69] You and Yang, "访谈时间 2008 年 8 月 9 日"[Interviewed on August 9, 2008].
[70] Yang, interview by the author, Beijing, April 12, 2018.
[71] Claire Colebrook and Jason Maxwell, *Agamben (Key Contemporary Thinkers)* (Chicago: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 82.
[72] Patricia Owens, "Reclaiming 'Bare Life'?: Against Agamben on Refugees," *International Relations* 23, no. 4 (January, 2009): 570.
[73] Girogio Agamben, Homo Sacer*: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 65.

just on the level of jurisdiction but also in medicine, science, and other parts of people's lives.[74] This notion serves an important part of the philosopher's critique of the refugee issue, which he singles out as revealing the fundamental structure, limitations, and possibilities of the modern political system.[75] He suggests that refugees' lives exemplify the subjection of bare life to sovereignty and law, as well as a threshold state from which future political order can emerge.[76] Through Agamben's perspective, one can argue that the lack of welfare and lawful protection for coalminers share great similarities with the conditions of bare life. It is in this liminal ethical-political state that the violence inherent in modern governance becomes most visible.

The lack of an open public sphere in mainland China made it more difficult for people like Yang to approach and represent the issue of bare life. Art critic and philosopher Wang Min'an, in a catalogue article on Yang's *800 Meters Under*, notes the lack of in-depth discussion of coalmine accidents.[77] "News of coalminers' deaths permeate the media, to the extent that they no longer carry any weight," Wang writes, yet "news of coalminer deaths seems to have become a natural reality that is unable to cause public concerns or political ripples."[78] In addition to censorship, the authority shifted the emphasis of state legitimacy away from class struggle and class consciousness in the 2000s.[79] While most news reports criticized the failure of management at private coalmines, they evaded class issues and social critiques. The lack of access to information regarding coalmine operations presented another obstacle, which Yang encountered in the process of his research. In his published notes, he recounts how some coalminers would stop working when they noticed him, in order to avoid exposing the details of their work, as well

[74] Ibid., 111–12.
[75] Owens, 567–68.
[76] Agamben, 94.
[77] Wang Min'an, "The Darkness of Hope," Yang Shaobin, accessed April 4, 2017, http://www.yang-shaobin.com/eng/englishindex.htm.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Nathan, 1–7.

as the difficulty of gaining access to materials kept at the local TV station.[80] These problems of the discursive state distanced the artist from the subject matter of coalminers.

Unlike Lu's discursive framing, direct references to coalmine accidents are rare in both series. *Aboveground Underground* (2006), for instance, is based on a reconstruction of miners' living quarters and an underground coalmine (fig. 42, fig. 43, fig. 44). The first part of the installation stages the interior of a miner's dorm (see fig. 42). On a small TV set in the corner, Yang showed a black-and-white video on the life of miners, including shots of miners playing poker, children running around, and women cooking. A line of carts used for coalmine transportation led viewers' eyes from the room to a dark space opposite to the entrance (see fig. 43). Yang covered the ground with coal dust and the wall with black linoleum that looked like the chain mesh used in mines to keep loose rocks from falling, making the space closely resemble an underground coalmining tunnel. Except for flickering glimpses of miners in the videos, *Aboveground Underground* is conspicuously devoid of miners. Instead, the artist uses the miners' tools, shoes, coats, and hats to imply their bodily presence (see fig. 44). As such, viewers are invited to walk into a space that is unoccupied yet somewhat haunted by its dwellers. This metonymic connection activates viewers' imagination of miners' lives while acknowledging the inadequacy of figural representations in conveying the convoluted social problem. Yang's aesthetic approach was distinctively different from that of artists like Zhang Jianhua (b. 1973). In Zhang's *Coalmine Accidents! Coalmine Accidents!* (2006) (fig. 45, fig. 46), he created about ten life-size clay sculptures that, taken together, represent the scene of a coalmine accident. In addition to the figures standing or squatting, Zhang included six human-shaped sculptures shrouded in green cloth—a direct reference to the bodies of miners after an accident (see fig. 46).

[80] The Long March Writing Group, 72.

The overall setting is highly theatrical, offering a poignant remark on coalmine accidents. In an article on this work, critic Peng Feng suggests that the bluntness of Zhang's installation interrupted the dubious atmosphere of happiness stemming from market growth, and forced people to face the harsh reality of the coalmines.[81] Yet it is questionable if direct presentation of Areality presents a more comprehensive picture of the social problem. Zhang's sculptures, by isolating miners from their everyday life, present miners as pitiful victims. By contrast, *Aboveground Underground* propels viewers to imagine aspects of the miners' lives that cannot be represented directly. Indeed, spatial juxtaposition and metonymic reference to the miners are the two main tropes in Yang's two series. Apart from the use of miners' clothes, *Aboveground Underground* also juxtaposes the miners' dorm with the underground coalmine, destabilizing the sense of interiority. In the first part of the installation, the wall and ceiling are unpainted; faded posters of TV stars are pasted to the wall; a bare bulb illuminates the interior; daily items—clothes, simple kitchenware, a pink headband, a mirror, plastic toys, and alphabet lists for children—are scattered around the room (see fig. 42). Yet Yang made few efforts to create physical boundaries between the two spaces. The underground coalmine is fully visible to viewers standing in the interior. Moreover, Yang scattered the ground with a layer of coal shards (see fig. 43). These details interrupt the interiority of the dorm, prompting viewers to reconsider the relationship between the life and work of miners.

Paintings of *800 Meters Under* employ a similar visual tactic of urging viewers to imagine violence, rather than portraying it directly. In *No. 7*, for example, the injured miner on the upper right, the numb facial expression of the miner on the upper left, and the seemingly angry miner below are suggestive of a narrative (see fig. 39). The size of the canvas—4.5 meters

[81] Peng Feng, "事物本身的力量" [The power of things], Artron, accessed April 3, 2017, http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/article/overview/18agyyn/about_by2/P/f67aABnk.

in width and more than 2.5 meters in height—means that the figures are almost life-size. By collaging naturalistic representations at such scale, Yang creates a theatricality that speaks to the social tension surrounding coalmines. In *No. 8* (2006), as another example, the artist portrays three coalminers in front of a worksite (fig. 47). A light source from the right casts the scene in bright white tones. While the smiling figure in the center establishes direct eye contact with the viewer, the figure on the left presses the side of his coal-covered face to the surface of the painting and the one in the middle looks at the viewer rather angrily. In the background, light shines on a seemingly deserted machine at a coalmine. These two parts of the composition are separated by a construction elevator packed with miners. Compared with *No. 7*, the spatial juxtaposition is more implicit; yet, the emotional states of depicted figures and the suggested narrative are just as unsettling. Seen against the dramatic lighting, the deserted landscape, and the group of miners squeezed into the elevator, the smile of the central figure only alienates viewers from the scene in the background. Though this is the only figure addressing the viewer, the incongruity between the smile and the rest of the landscape only makes the whole composition and narrative harder to approach.

Yang's collage of image and space in *800 Meters Under* mobilizes the exhibition space to generate a sense of disorientation. Art historian Benjamin Buchloh, when analyzing Soviet artist El Lissitzky's exhibition *Pressa* at the International Press Exhibition in Cologne in 1928, suggested that the artist pieced together typography, graphic signs, and photographs to create an agitational space, which facilitates the imagining of a new socialist subjectivity (fig. 48).[82] The viewing of these spatially incongruous images, he proposes, is cinematic.[83] Similar to *Pressa*,

[82] Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," in *October: The First Decade, 1976-1986*, eds. Annette Michelson et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 95.
[83] Ibid., 95.

800 Meters Under highlights visual juxtaposition and disjunction through the arrangement of the exhibition. In one case, two paintings—*No. 12* and *No. 13*—hang next to each other with little space in between (see fig. 41, fig. 49, fig. 50). The image above, *No. 12,* shows the profile of two miners in a landscape that has been turned upside-down, while the image below, *No. 13,* depicts the head of a miner positioned underground in an inverted position. This curatorial choice positions the two paintings as mirror images of each other and enhances the disorientation generated by spatial collage in the two paintings. Like the agitational space of Lissitzky's *Pressa*, the exhibition of *800 Meters Under* prompts viewers to imagine the lives and subjectivity of miners beyond representation. Yet unlike Lissitzky's show, most of the other works of *800 Meters Under* occupy an isolated space in the gallery. While Yang's show disorients viewers in order to address the violence inherent in the social problem, it does not necessarily agitate viewers to generate new subjectivities or sociopolitical critiques.

While Lu framed *X-Blind Spot* as a metaphor of Chinese rural society, the series is no less poignant in revealing the violence inherent in the social problem of coalmine injuries. The three largest paintings of the series depict blackened lungs on canvases more than 3 meters in height and 2.5 meters in width. These are lungs that hospitals keep as clinical specimens after conducting lung lavage for coalminers diagnosed with pneumoconiosis.[84] For example, one of these works, *No. 2*, presents a detailed depiction of the biomorphic outline of the lung, its dotted surface texture, and subtle variations of light reflections in and outside the glass container (fig. 51). Yang also portrayed the glass container, the yellow formalin solution, as well as the medical tape sealing the lid, indicating the status of the lung as a medical specimen. Yang paid meticulous attention to the reflection of light in this painting. The soft white light reflected on the

[84] Yang, interview by the author, Beijing, April 12, 2017.

table and the container indicates that the lung specimen is located indoors, most likely in a hospital. The large canvas of 354 by 240 centimeters makes it possible for viewers to closely examine the texture and color variation of the lung, which Yang portrayed with thick layers of paint. These blackened lungs and their status as medical specimens serve as metonymic surrogates for miners' bodies, the pain these miners endured from disease, and the miners' death.

Viewers' encounter with *No. 15* (2008) reiterates this metonymic association. The installation is comprised of light boxes showing photos of bottles that contain liquid extracted from the lungs of workers who had pneumoconiosis (fig. 52). Each bottle has a tag specifying the name and age of the corresponding miner. In *No. 15* and the paintings of blackened lungs, the medical equipment, the gridded arrangement of the light boxes, the rectangular shape of the glass containers, and the cold white light all echo the white walls, the white light, and the insulated space of Long March Space. They present medical evidence of the miners' physical pain, disease, and death, though they involve no figural representation of miners or the cause of these problems.

Yang's portraits of miners are also reminiscent of a kind of medical object, x-ray photographs. The series includes two large-scale portraits of miners in inverted color schemes. In both works, Yang renders a miner's face in white and grey against a monochromatic black background on a canvas of 280 by 210 centimeters. For instance, one of these works, *No. 8* (2008), omits the details of the miners' face, only detailing the eyes and a coalmining hat (fig. 53). These portraits resemble the view of x-ray photographs against a white light box. Unlike a camera photograph, people take x-ray photos by turning their face to a machine, instead of looking into a camera. The purpose of these photos is primarily medical or scientific. Figures portrayed in x-ray photos are rarely expected to address the cameraman or potential viewers. X-ray photos are as much about close examination as about indirect engagement with the subject

depicted. The inverted color scheme of Yang's portraits creates certain distance between the viewer and miners.

Indirect representation characterizes Yang's approach to representing miners and the coalmining industry. In fact, the English title *X-Blind Spot* recalls the idea of an x-ray photograph. The invitation card for the exhibition, fittingly, is reminiscent of an x-ray photograph in scale and color (fig. 54). If the English title points to both blindness and x-rays, the Chinese title *houshi mangqu* (后视盲区), literally translated as "rearview blind spot," associates the series primarily with the risk of blindness. According to Long March Space, Yang derived the term from an engineering defect of a coal truck used at Taibao open-air coalmine of Shanxi Province.[85] This huge truck, named the Komatsu 170, has wheels over two meters in diameter.[86] Due to the truck's size, drivers have a blind spot in their rearview mirrors, which places people within thirty meters on both sides at higher risk for accidents.[87] This Chinese title highlights the risks involved in not seeing, which may bring about deaths and casualty. As the title of Yang's series, it reminds viewers of the limitations of seeing miners' lives through representation as well as the necessity of understanding the social issue beyond visual materials.

In *800 Meters Under* and *X-Blind Spot*, Yang points to the violence of the coalmining industry by using indirect figural tactics that inspire viewers to imagine the living and working conditions of miners rather than portraying them directly. As art historian Huey Copeland suggests, contemporary artists' non-figural representations of the issue of slavery enact viewers' awareness of their own relationship with the issue, as well as viewers' own connections with the

[85] The Long March Writing Group, 71.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Jin Yujie, "Interview with Yang Shaobin," Yang Shaobin, accessed July 1, 2017, http://www.yang-shaobin.com/htm/pinglun/2008-p/2008-1_main.htm.

world.[88] Yang's two series, though depicting a different subject, show a similar tendency of encouraging viewers to see beyond representation and reconsider their relationship to the lives of coalminers.

Violence as a Theme

Yang based his two coalminer series primarily on his exploration of representations of violence, rather than on aesthetics of socialist realism. By taking a retrospective view of the artist's career in the 1990s, I show how his portrayal of miners draws inspiration from his earlier works, which were intertwined with the formation of an artistic community in mainland China. Growing up in the coalmining town of Tangshan, Yang had studied art for three years at Hebei Technical College, where the training was less systematic than at art academies.[89] Partly due to this lack of basic training, Yang failed the entrance exam to CAFA several times.[90] To seek better education and career opportunities as an artist, Yang moved to Beijing in 1990.[91] Yuanmingyuan village, situated in the Western suburbs of Beijing, served as the host to a community of artists working outside the academic system in the city.[92] In the meantime, Yuanmingyuan village brought together independent artists from outside the academic system and international art professionals. In a feature-length article that initially introduced American audiences to Chinese contemporary art, *New York Times* journalist Andrew Solomon writes, "The village is a mecca for Western tourists and journalists."[93] While he found most Chinese

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[88] Huey Copeland, *Bound To Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 17.
[89] Karen Smith, "Yang Shaobin," in *The Real Thing: Contemporary Art from China*, eds. Simon Groom, Karen Smith, and Xu Zhen (London: Tate, 2008), 160.
[90] Smith, "Yang Shaobin," 159–163.
[91] Li Xianting, "Interview with Yang Shaobin."
[92] Ibid.
[93] Andrew Solomon, "Their irony, humor (and art) can save China," *The New York Times Magazine* (1993): 42-51.

artists reserved, he found that Yuanmingyuan artists were an "easygoing lot and have a kind of casual professionalism" that made their works approachable to foreign visitors.[94]

Painters in Yuanmingyuan were invested mostly in creating artworks of "cynical realism" and "political pop," which featured flat compositions, brightly colored symbols of consumerism and political leaders, and facial expressions that were idiosyncratic and obscure.[95] At that time, the international attention garnered by the show *China's New Art, Post-1989* encouraged a number of painters in the Village to create works in similar styles.[96] For example, in *Policeman* (1993), Yang depicted six policemen standing against a brightly colored sky and butterflies (fig. 55). The preposterous and eccentric facial expression, the disproportionate figures, the flat composition, and the formulaic rendering of figures are typical of cynical realist works.

The creator of the two terms, curator and critic Li Xianting, associated the two genres with a sense of meaninglessness.[97] According to his narrative, cynical realism and political pop evinced the general disillusionment that people felt after the Tian'anmen Student Protests ended with the government's brutal suppression.[98] Li associated this mentality specifically with Yang's generation—the generation born in the 1960s. He claimed that these artists experienced both revolutionary idealism and profound disillusionment while growing up.[99] While Li's theorization captures the collective disenchantment of the early 1990s, it is questionable to what extent such sentiment motivated artistic production. Outside such narratives, Chinese contemporary artworks

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Debevoise, 260.
[96] Ibid., 258–67. For Li and Chang's propagation of the two concepts through international exhibitions, see *China's New Art, Post- 1989*.
[97] Li Xianting, "Major Trends in the Development of Chinese Contemporary Art," XX–XXII.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Li Xianting, "Major Trends in the Development of Chinese Contemporary Art," XX.

often lacked basic interpretive frameworks and appeared confusing to international art professionals.[100]

The popularity of political pop and cynical realism not only confined people's understanding of Wang's works but also that of Chinese contemporary art in the 1990s. As early as 1993, art professionals in China criticized the curator of the 45th Venice Biennale, Achille Bonito Oliva, for showing exclusive interest in cynical realism and political pop when selecting artworks for the show.[101] Discussions in this vein continued throughout the 1990s, as I elaborate in my analysis of Cai's *Venice Rent Collection Courtyard* (1999). In fact, soon after the success of *China's New Art, Post-1989,* contemporary artists started churning out works that would be categorized as cynical realism and political pop in large numbers. In 1993, journalist Solomon observed that Yuanmingyuan artists were mainly interested in producing these two genres of painting and that the predominant mode of production was imitation and repetition.[102] He compared these artists to "jade carvers or other practitioners of local handicraft for foreign consumption."[103] Li's emphasis on meaninglessness and the journalist's observation of repetitive production reveal two coexisting relationships between Yang's generation and paintings of cynical realism and political pop. While their practice of these two genres cannot be separated from a sense of disillusionment, it was also a way for them to participate in the emerging field of Chinese contemporary art in the international realm. Yang was one of the artists who benefited from this international interest in Chinese contemporary art. During his stay at the

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[100] Marianne Brouwer and Chris Driessen, "Another Long March," in *Another Long March,* 11.
[101] Wang Lin, "Oliver is not the Savior of Chinese Art," in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents,* 366–68.
[102] Solomon, "Their irony, humor (and art) can save China," 42-51.
[103] Ibid.

Yuanmingyuan Village, his paintings drew the attention of the Hong Kong-based Schoeni Gallery, which started representing Yang in 1993 and hosted his first solo exhibition in 1994.[104]

Meanwhile, the aesthetic of Yang's painting cannot be reduced to cynical realism or political pop, for it enacts a sense of violence not encapsulated in Li's theorization. Yang's depiction of individual figures in *Policeman* attends to the facial muscles, subtle changes of color and shading on the skin, as well as details like the teeth and mustache. His meticulous attention to these physical features makes the policemen look more threatening. In 1993, Yang painted this work at a time when police and Yuanmingyuan artists stood on opposite ends of the power spectrum, for the artist community occupied a grey area. In 1992, the Ministry of Labor broadly endorsed the use of labor contracts.[105] This granted more mobility to artists who were geographically and financially tied to the institutions they had been assigned to upon graduation.[106] Artists from around the country were now able to move to urban areas or outskirts of cities such as Yuanmingyuan Village. Yet most of these artists lacked legal status in the city due to the household registration system, which bound people to their place of birth.[107] In multiple interviews, Yang associated his depictions of policemen in the 1990s with the anxiety he felt during police raids.[108] In the 1990s, policeman was the beholder and symbol of political authority in everyday life, while contemporary artists remained underground for most of the decade. Yang's *Policeman* hardly rendered this subject matter meaningless. Rather, his depiction

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[104] Li Xianting, "Interview with Yang Shaobin."
[105] Lu Xueke, *北京社会建设六十年* [Sixty years of society building in Beijing] (Beijing: Beijing shehui chubanshe, 2008).
[106] Ibid.
[107] Zhang Yue, 827–48.
[108] You and Yang, "访谈时间 2008 年 8 月 9 日" [Interviewed on August 9, 2008], accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.yang-shaobin.com/htm/pinglun/2008-p/2008-7_main.htm; Yang Shaobin, "800 Meters," Yang Shaobin, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.yang-shaobin.com/eng/englishindex.htm; Li Xianting, "Interview with Yang Shaobin."

of the idiosyncratic smiles made the figures appear intimidating, suggestive of imminent violence.

Yang's *Red Violence* makes more explicit his interest in depicting violence inflicted on the human body. Almost all of the works comprising *Red Violence* portray victims of violence against a monochromatic red background. In *Untitled 4* (1997–1998), for example, a face with blood and bruises occupies composition's center (fig. 56). Yang enhanced the corporeality of these figures by using loose paint reminiscent of dripping blood. The size—230 by 180 centimeters—enhances the intense visual effect.

Yang's *Red Violence* aligns with the radical trend of portraying extreme violence in the late 1990s. The exhibition *Post-Sense Sensibility—Alien Bodies and Delusion*, curated in 1999 by Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie at an underground art space in Beijing, defined the tone of this trend.[109] Most works in the show, ranging from installations and performances to photography, involve distortion or anomalies of human or animal bodies.[110] Even to art professionals, the works appeared extreme. Some artists and curators called the aesthetics represented by the show "shock art (震撼艺术)," which aptly describes their reaction to the works.[111] Both Yang and curators of *Post-Sense Sensibility* associated the extreme portrayals of the human body with waves of social change in the 1990s that profoundly transformed China from a socialist revolutionary society to a consumerist one.[112] The depiction of death, anomalies, and violence to the human body were aesthetic reactions to the disruption and erosion of a stable social order.[113]

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[109] Berghuis, *Performance Art in China* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2006), 114.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Berghuis, *Performance Art in China,* 114.
[112] Berghuis, "Considering *Huanjing*," 117.
[113] Berghuis, *Performance Art in China,* 711–31.

Despite their aesthetic similarities, Yang's *Red Violence* and works of *Post-Sense Sensibility* demonstrate two different approaches to making contemporary art in mainland China in the late 1990s. While Yang created his paintings for international shows and the overseas market, contemporary artists associated with *Post-Sense Sensibility* were staging transitory shows for a closed circle of viewers in mainland China. By the end of the decade, Yang's *Red Violence* series had gained considerable recognition overseas. He showed works of this series at the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999, a major debut of Chinese contemporary art.[114] In comparison, *Post-Sense Sensibility* was shown in the basement of a residential building in Beijing and lasted only for one day on January 9, 1999.[115] The private and transitory arrangement protected the show from police interference, yet it also meant that most viewers were people in the art circle. The artists in the show created their transgressive appropriation of animal and human bodies in anticipation of this audience, who were supposedly more open to different forms of visual language. Unlike Yang's *Red Violence* series, most artworks that involved the use of human or animal bodies, due to ethical issues, were less known overseas in the 1990s.[116]

Yang's *Red Violence* foreshadowed his coalminer series in his portrayal of bodies that had endured violence. Unlike the coalminer series, *Red Violence* required no comprehension of specific sociopolitical issues. In the abovementioned *Untitled 4*, the dominance of red in the color scheme broadly alluded to China and communism; and the depiction of brutal violence corresponded to critical views towards authoritarian abuse of power. Viewers' approach to the

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[114] Alexandra Munroe, "A Test Site," in *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World*, eds. Alexandra Munroe, Hou Hanru, and Philip Tinari (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2017), 26–7.
[115] Berghuis, *Performance Art in China,* 114.
[116] The recent dispute between Guggenheim Museum and animal rights activists over the exhibition of several artworks of Chinese contemporary artists that involve the use of animals shows international audiences' relative unfamiliarity with these works and their original context of exhibition. For details of the dispute, see Matthew Haag, "Guggenheim, Bowing to Animal-Rights Activists, Pulls Works From Show," New York Times, last modified September 25, 2017, accessed April 23, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/25/arts/design/guggenheim-dog-fighting-exhibit.html.

victims depicted in *Red Violence* was based on a visual encounter, while the violence of *800 Meters Under* unfolded in linear time as viewers moved through the images in series.

The differences between *Red Violence* and *800 Meters Under* point to a key transition in Yang's career. In the 1990s, he had relatively few opportunities to exhibit his works in mainland China or create artworks with specific institutions in mind. Collaborating with Long March Space in the early 2000s gave him a chance to create a series of works with specific spatial and social settings in mind. Around the time when Yang started to collaborate with Long March Space, he showed a stronger interest in anchoring violence within concrete spatial and social settings. For instance, in *Black Shadow* (2002), Yang depicted a figure supine on the ground, with the shadow of another figure looming over him, suggesting an imminent sense of violence unfolding in time (fig. 57). The spatial setting is also more concrete and three-dimensional than in his previous works. Around the same time, Yang expanded his subject matter from an abstract notion of violence to depictions of danger and tension in the media. He based most of these depictions on the photos he took of TV, DVDs, and newspapers.[117] In *The Fish Bites It?* (2003), for example, the artist painted and juxtaposed three vignettes reminiscent of film scenes (fig. 58). In the upper right, a meeting is taking place between two men. The image beneath shows a dog sniffing a suitcase. The image on the left features a helicopter and two men on a platform, with an expanse of sea filling the background. Though the artist offers few clues about thematic connections between these scenes, the sequence suggests a hidden narrative that unfolds over time. This paved the way for Yang's conceptualization of spectatorship for *800 Meters Under*.

Modes of Representing Coalminers

[117] Li Xianting, "Interview with Yang Shaobin."

Yang's coalminer series differ from *Red Violence* in terms of their figural tactics. While Yang portrayed the impacts of physical violence directly in his earlier works, he turned to metonymic fragments suggestive of violence in his coalminer series. Through a survey of the depiction of coalminers during and after the revolutionary era, it becomes clear that Yang's approaches challenge the long-term absence of a visual language for representing aspects of ordinary lives that do not fit neatly into revolutionary narratives.

In socialist realist representations of coalminers, political leaders always take center stage, of which the opera *The East is Red* (1964) serves as an apt example. *The East is Red* dramatizes the history of the CCP from the late 1910s to the founding of the PRC.[118] The opera premiered at the People's Hall in 1964 to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the nation's founding and was later distributed as a film.[119] It soon gained the status of a model opera and became one of the few works that enjoyed wide circulation during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).[120] "The Song of Anyuan Railway and Coalmine Workers' Club" featured in one part of the show, yet miners remain largely invisible (fig. 59). When the song plays, workers dressed in tattered clothes appear as a group, celebrating the unification of the working class and the leadership of the Party. The rest of the opera gave more weight to Mao's leadership, as this opera was first shown at the Great Hall of the People, a building used for legislative and state ceremonial activities.[121]

Representations of miners during the revolutionary period show little of their hardship, even though it was the distressing work conditions that drove many miners to join the Communist Revolution. When Mao and Liu led the miners' strike in 1922, the working and

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[118] Chen Xiaomei, *Staging Chinese Revolution: Theater, Film, and the Afterlives of Propaganda* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 24–5.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Rethinking Cultural Revolution Culture, accessed December 12, 2017, http://www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/conf/propaganda/musik.html.
[121] Chen Xiaomei, 24–5.

living conditions at the coalmine were dehumanizing. The temperature underground could reach as high as 100° Fahrenheit.[122] Gas explosions were frequent and many miners died.[123] The camps were cramped and dirty—forty-eight workers had to sleep in a hut of three and a half by seven meters.[124] To control and discipline the miners, a mining company employed about nine hundred policemen.[125] One slogan for the strike was "Once cattle and horses of burden, now we will be men (从前是牛马，现在做主人)!"[126] "Cattle and horses" is a metaphorical idiom that refers to the enslaved state of laborers. By using this term in the slogan, the Party mobilized workers' long-held hatred for their working environment and employers.[127] However, even in paintings of the Anyuan Strike, there are few depictions of coalminers' working conditions in the 1920s. As mentioned above, Hou Yimin's *Liu Shaoqi with Anyuan Workers* (1961) was one of the most widely circulated paintings on the subject.[128] Between 1962 and 1965, People's Fine Art Press reproduced 172,077 copies of the painting.[129] During the Cultural Revolution, the media and the public deemed Mao as the figurehead of the Anyuan Strike. In line with this dictum, Hou created a second painting on Anyuan miners (fig. 60). *Mao Zedong with Anyuan Workers* (1976) depicts a scene in an underground tunnel or coalmine. A warm lamp in the upper right highlights the figure sitting closest to the orange light—a young Mao in his thirties, surrounded by coalminers who listen attentively. While Mao is bathed in light, most of the miners, except those adjacent to the Chairman, are left in the dark. This intertwined relationship between socialist realism and

[122] Perry, 28.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Perry, 29.
[125] Ibid., 27.
[126] Perry, 9.
[127] Ibid., 65.
[128] Andrews, *Painters and Politics,* 328.
[129] Perry, 189.

politics made painters like Hou give exclusive attention to communist leaders, while ignoring the circumstances and struggles of miners.

Hou's paintings reveal a visual hierarchy that elevates figures of lighter skin over those of darker appearance, which began through initial contacts between the Chinese and Africans in pre-modern times and was reinforced by encounters with Europeans in the modern period.[130] During the socialist revolutionary period, this visual hierarchy was often filtered through the authority's preference for brighter color schemes and fair-skinned figures. Most notably, the Central Cultural Revolutionary Leadership Group articulated and promoted the style of "red, smooth, and shiny," which became the doctrine of socialist realism in China in the early 1970s.[131] Painterly use of darker colors risked being classified as anti-revolutionary. This clouded people's understanding of the lives of the socially disenfranchised and limited the possibility for the society to build relevant ethical grounds. It exacerbated the lack of an all-encompassing moral principle in the Confucian tradition that could be applied to both kin and strangers, as sociologist Fei Xiaotong points out.[132] It also corresponds to what literary scholar Lee Haiyan calls "a temporary alibi" in her study on socialist realist models of altruism constructed in the revolutionary period.[133] According to her, romanticized representations of miners circulating during the revolutionary era merely claimed to align art with the masses without building the ethical base and moral imagination that serve as foundations for such alignment.[134]

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[130] Barry Sautman, "Anti-black racism in post-Mao China," *The China Quarterly* 138 (1994): 413–37; Don J. Wyatt, *The Blacks of Premodern China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1–11.
[131] Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 360.
[132] Fei Xiaotong, "差序格局" [Structure of Grade], in *乡土中国* [From the Chinese Soil] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1998), 24–30.
[133] Lee Haiyan, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 2.
[134] Ibid., 7.

Academic artists started to critically examine and refine socialist realism's mode of figural representation by applying academic techniques to subjects that were not conventional during the revolutionary era.[135] Scar art was one of the key movements that grew out of experiments in this vein in the late 1970s. Artists associated with the trend were mainly students and teachers at art academies.[136] Compared with paintings of the revolutionary period, artists of scar art were not primarily concerned with depicting typical people.[137] Instead, they were more interested in exposing what had been hidden beneath the idealized or formulaic depictions of socialist realism. This new mode of realism paved the way for rural art in the 1980s, of which Luo Zhongli's (b. 1948) *Father* serves as an example (fig. 61). In this monumental painting of 227 by 154 centimeters, the artist depicted a farmer's sun-beaten face with meticulous attention. The detailed depiction of dark skin and wrinkles make this face significantly different from the smooth fair skin of the political leaders, who were often portrayed on a similar scale. According to Debevoise, Luo's detailed depiction and use of crusty impasto made the skin texture of the farmer protrude into the viewers' space.[138] By substituting the face of a leader with that of an old farmer, *Father* challenges the personality cult of the revolutionary era and asserts the humanitarian value of ordinary individuals.

The domination of fair-skinned figures in socialist realist painting from the 1950s to the 1970s made *Father* a highly contentious artwork. At the center of the debate were the sociopolitical implications of portraying people with darker skin. Critic Shao Yangde, in an article on *Father* published in the official art magazine *Meishu*, suggested that the dark skin,

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[135] Andrews, 389–400.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Shao Dazhen, *中国现代美术理论批评文丛：邵大箴卷* [Anthology of Critiques of Chinese Modern Art: Shao Dazhen] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2011), 288.
[138] Debevoise, 50.

wrinkles, and missing front teeth indicated a sense of "ugliness" and were seen as "perverted" and "unhealthy."[139] Yet Shao Dazhen, another critic writing for the same magazine, associated the darker skin with the working class.[140] Critic Li Weiming, echoing Shao Dazhen's view, suggested that the painting presented an honest portrayal of a farmer.[141] Li Weiming called figural representations in socialist realism "a cheap powder compact, [that] served to make cosmetic embellishments and hide the hideous."[142] He suggested that *Father* marked an art historical turning point in which Luo veered from this mode of realism.

Discussions of *Father* highlight a persisting problem of Chinese socialist realism in the mid-twentieth century—namely, the lack of representations of the socially disenfranchised who fail to fit into revolutionary narratives. Yet the painting itself did not fundamentally generate new modes of representation. Art historian Shui Tianzhong points out that *Father*'s composition closely follows those of political leaders' portraits.[143] Shui also criticizes that rural art, as epitomized in *Father*, prioritizes visual and physical features of the subject over consideration of the sociopolitical aspects of the subject's circumstances.[144] This problem identified by Shui persisted throughout figural representations in the 1980s, when most members of disadvantaged groups were rendered as motionless and isolated from their surroundings. Following the trend of scar art, a number of artists teaching at art academies developed new approaches to painting by combining techniques of socialist realism with various strands of European tradition, in what was

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[139] Shao Yangde, "创作，欣赏，评论: 读《父亲》并与有关评论者商榷" [Creation, appreciation, comment: A reading of father and a discussion with critics] *Meishu*, no. 9 (1981): 59–69, quoted in Debevoise, 56.
[140] Shao Dazhen, "也谈《父亲》这幅画的评价"[More on the critique of father], *Meishu*, no.3 (1981): 23–4, quoted in Debevoise, 57.
[141] Li Weining, "也谈油画《父亲》兼与邵养德同志商榷" [More thoughts on the oil painting father and a discussion with comrade Shang Yangde], *Meishu*, no.1 (1982), quoted in Debevoise, 58
[142] Ibid.
[143] Shui Tianzhong, "关于乡土写实绘画的思考" [Thoughts about realistic rural art painting], Trueart, accessed December 11, 2017, http://info.trueart.com/info_17484.html.
[144] Ibid.

called neo-classicism (新古典主义).[145] Unlike European neo-classicist painting of the nineteenth century, Chinese neo-classicism was not motivated by a new vision of exhibition display, the viewing public, or the political role of artists that the revolution brought about.[146] Rather, it was motivated by the artists' reconsideration of the technical aspects of oil painting after they gained better access to European artworks and could view them in person.[147] Jin Shangyi's (b. 1934) *Tajik Woman* (1983) is one of the earliest and best-known neo-classicist paintings (fig. 62). In this work, a bride of Tajik ethnicity stands against a monochromatic background. The red of her wedding robe and scarf creates a dramatic contrast between the figure and the dark background. Though the woman faces front, her lowered eyelids and attentive expression indicate that she is immersed in thought. Jin's depiction of serene figures in an isolated environment exemplifies the figural tactics employed by most neo-classical painters in the late 1980s.

Neo-classicism marks the start of a broader trend of passive and stationary depictions of figures at Chinese art academies in the post-revolutionary period. Generally speaking, professors and students at art academies showed greater interest in perfecting technical aspects of their visual language than in exploring their artworks' sociopolitical implications.[148] For example, sketches became highly detailed and technical, often involving elaborate chiaroscuro.[149] In the post-revolutionary period, a typical life sketching session at an art academy took at least three hours to finish; longer sessions took three days to two weeks.[150] This led models to adopt static

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[145] Yin Shuangxi, "Classical Imagery in Chinese Oil Painting in the 1980s," *美术学报* [Art Journal] no. 03 (2003): 55.
[146] Wolfgang Kemp, "The Theater of Revolution: A New Interpretation of Jacques-Louis David's *Tennis Court Oath",* in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, eds. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and, Keith Moxey (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 203-227.
[147] Yin Shuangxi, 55.
[148] Chumley, 95.
[149] Ibid., 93–121.
[150] Chumley, 95.

postures such as hunching shoulders, slouching, lying down, or leaning on props.[151] In these sketches, representations of workers are often detached from viewers' visual recognition of the working class. Anthropologist Lily Chumley notes that the emphasis on technical perfection generated a sort of "art test realism" that prepared art students for applications to art academies through "contentless formal exercises."[152] Increasing competition to pass the admission exam brought higher expectations regarding the technical prowess of student works.[153] While students mainly used socialist realist techniques, the works they created merely evoked viewers' recognition of individual laborers, rather than the collective identity of the working class.[154]

The preference for technical skill within art academies largely limited the development of a new visual language to representations of ordinary people. In the late 2000s, Xu Weixin (b. 1958), a graduate of Xi'an Art Academy and Zhejiang Art Academy and professor of art at Renmin University, created a series titled *Coalminers,* featuring monumental portraits of coalminers. For example, in one of the works, *Notes of Chinese Coalmines 2005—Sichuan Coalminer Liu Zhixiang 01* (2005), Xu portrayed a miner wearing a worker's helmet and uniform (fig. 63). The miner's face, occupying the center of the composition, is enlarged on a canvas of 250 by 200 centimeters. The work's scale and composition recall portraits of Chinese political leaders as well as Luo's *Father*. Yet, unlike the impasto texture of *Father*, Xu rendered the facial features with broad flat brushstrokes. The miner's facial expression also lacks the deep and focused look of the farmer in *Father*. In addition, the ideological tension of representing an atypical subject for socialist realism had long faded in the 2000s. As a result, this representation

[151] Ibid.
[152] Chumely, 93, 101, 104.
[153] Ibid., 95.
[154] Chumley, 93.

of an individual miner in *Notes of Chinese Coalmines 2005—Sichuan Coalminer Liu Zhixiang 01*—hardly challenges existing modes of representation.

Yang's coalminer series also differs from a trend called "neo-realism" in Chinese oil painting in the 1990s, a collective turn towards representation of everyday life led by artists who had been trained at prestigious art academies. Yin Jinan, who offered the earliest and most widely circulated theorization of neo-realism, titled this group the "New Generation," referring to the fact that most of these artists were born in the 1960s.[155] On other occasions, he also called them "Close Ups," due to the artist's interest in examining the mundane.[156] Yang had never studied at art academies and was not active in the neo-realists' circle.[157] A more fundamental difference between the neo-realists and Yang was their approach to naturalistic representations. Unlike Yang's paintings of the early 2000s, neo-realism emphasized a disinterested and unobtrusive aesthetic approach, of which Liu Xiaodong's (b. 1963) *Disobeying the Rules* (1996) is an example (fig. 64). Liu was one of the best known painters that Yin advocated as major proponents of neo-realism. Similar to Yang's coalminer series, *Disobeying the Rules* focuses on a group of socially disenfranchised workers. The painting depicts a number of migrant workers sitting in the back of a truck. Their half-nudity indicates the weather and the nature of their work. The composition captures a moment as the truck passes in front of the viewer, a scene from

[155] According to Yin Jinan in 1991, to define the trend as "ridicule and self-mockery" was but one way to understand it at the time. See Yin Jinan, *独自叩门* [Knocking Alone] (Beijing: Shenhuo dushu xinzhi sanlian chubanshe: 2012), 157.
[156] Critics often called Liu and his fellow artists neo-realists, for their focus on the everyday reality, though this term, coming from critiques of neo-realist literature and film, was not widely used in art criticism in the early 1990s. See Yin, 155.
[157] Yang, interview by the author, Beijing, April 29, 2017.

everyday life.[158] This differs from Yang's representations of miners, in which the men always appear separate from the mundane, whether in collaged compositions or inverted color schemes.

Yang's indirect representation of violence addresses a persistent problem in socialist realism—namely, the lack of a visual language to represent figures and scenes unrelated to revolutionary narratives. Though Yang's paintings gesture towards problems in miners' lives, they rarely provide a visual command of the social issue. Compared with his earlier paintings, the two coalminer series are less direct in representing the consequences of violence. Their metonymic connections to miners' physical pain and death bring to light the limitations of representation itself, which may be the first step towards constructing the voices and lives of the socially disenfranchised.

[158] For an analysis of Liu's approach to representing ordinary people, see Eugene Wang, "Aftershock: Eugene Wang on the Art of Liu Xiaodong," *Artforum* (February, 2012): 209.

Between "Art for the People" and Art for the Public

In March of 2010, six heavy-lift truck cranes in front of Beijing's Today Art Museum raised two gigantic phoenixes fifteen meters off the ground (see fig. 4). Each about twenty-eight meters in length, the two structures were part of contemporary artist Xu Bing's *Phoenix Project* (2008–2010).[1] Their feathers, tails, claws, and ribbons all contributed to the smooth, flowing forms of their largely horizontal composition. Up close, the outline dissolved into a pastiche of construction materials, including helmets, tarps, shovels, and plumbing (fig. 65). Despite the careful arrangement, the artist retained the original shapes and rust of the original materials; he also left visible the wires and nails that bound them together. The two structures appear as both aestheticized sculptures and products of manual labor.

In conjunction with this display, Xu curated an exhibition inside the museum.[2] Titled "The Story of the Phoenix," the exhibition assumed the format of an illustrated narrative, featuring images with captions (fig. 66). Meandering across three walls of the spacious hall, the images and text form a chronological narrative about the production of *Phoenix Project* from 2008 to 2010. The Chinese text, written by poet Zhai Yongming, a friend of the artist, recounted how Xu had received the commission, created the design, assembled the structures with the help of workers, and selected the site. It also described obstacles encountered in the process, including the change of exhibition venue, suspension of funding, and lack of materials—all interrelated with the globalization of the Chinese economy, the 2008 financial crisis, and preparation for the

[1] "Phoenix Project," Xu Bing, accessed March 7, 2015, http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/projects/year/2010/phoenix_project.

[2] Xu published the images and text of "The Story of the Phoenix" in a brochure *The Story of the Phoenix—Xu Bing's Phoenix Project.* I hereby cite the brochure in my analysis of the exhibition.

2008 Beijing Summer Olympics Games. In other words, the narrative linked the production of the gigantic structures to broader socioeconomic changes.

The production of the two colossal structures was a laborious and complex process, and the commission purportedly amounted to three million dollars.[3] The phoenixes weighed about twelve tons each; thus, the creation of the structures required the team to collect a considerable amount of materials from construction sites and junkyards.[4] According to the pictorial narrative, which highlights for viewers the amount of labor involved, once Xu and his assistants had finished the design on paper, they then had to transform the two-dimensional plan into a three-dimensional piece.[5] Xu and his team made many changes, constructed several small plaster models, and built two full-scale models.[6] Despite these efforts, the final assemblage still took a significant amount of labor.[7] To achieve a satisfactory visual effect, workers often had to rearrange the materials repeatedly. When arranging shovels to form a wing, one worker recalled, they had to redo the process about ten times.[8] In the center of the hall, Xu showed a small-scale plaster model and components of a full-scale facsimile (fig. 66, fig. 67). These stages of the process reminded viewers that the monumental installation required a vast amount of labor to assemble. Lastly, the view of the installation from the entrance of hall is not much different from that of a construction project. From inside the museum, the six cranes could be seen framing the phoenixes with their arms and suspension wires (fig. 68). The similarity between the exhibition

[3] "Xu Bing's Phoenix Make Their Way to Shanghai," Jing Daily, accessed July 10, 2015, http://money.163.com/10/0408/02/63ND9L9600253B0H.html.
[4] Xu Bing Studio, 68.
[5] Ibid., 12, 14.
[6] Xu Bing Studio, 22–32.
[7] Ibid., 36, 38-39.
[8] Hu Jiujiu, "冰 '凤凰': 当农民思维遇上城市扩张" [Ice Phoenix: When peasant's mode of thinking meets urban expansion], Artron, accessed May 15, 2015, http://news.artron.net/20100415/n102690.html.

site and a construction site only seemed stronger given that the museum bordered the skeleton of a high-rise when Phoenix Project was on view.[9] The structures simultaneously looked like an engineering project that had required large amounts of labor and a direct reference to the issue of urban construction.

On the relationship between *Phoenix Project* and socioeconomic issues, commentators were divided.[10] Some, criticizing it for the labor and energy it consumed, suggested that the piece only vaguely touched on issues of labor.[11] Some thought that the work delivered an urgent critique of capitalism by enacting an ironic simulation of capitalistic exploitation of labor.[12] Others associated Xu Bing's concern for migrant workers with the Maoist principle of "art for the people" and socialist realist art.[13] Xu's own statement on the piece, however, did little to clarify its ideological, political, and aesthetic orientation. In a symposium on *Phoenix Project* at

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[9] For details of the site of exhibition, see the panoramic view of the site at the website of the Today Art Museum. Today Art Museum, accessed March 23, 2016, www.vrdam.com/gallery/tam/xubingfenghuang.html

[10] Liu Jiakun, "徐冰的凤凰: 让普通人感到震撼" [Xu Bing's Phoenix: Making ordinary viewers feel moved], Artron, accessed June 21, 2015, http://news.artron.net/20100415/n102695.html; Xu Diye, "北岛，格非，徐冰等座谈" [A discussion between Bei Dao, Ge Fei, and Xu Bing], ifeng, accessed December 3, 2015, http://culture.ifeng.com/a/20140711/41115898_0.shtml; Hu Jiujiu, "凤凰实际是一种中国态度" [Phoenix is actually about a Chinese approach], Artron, accessed June 3, 2015, http://news.artron.net/20100401/n101505.html; Danni Shen, "A Dialogue with Chinese Artist Xu Bing," The Cornell Daily Sun, last modified October 20, 2014, accessed June 1, 2015, http://cornellsun.com/blog/2014/10/20/a-dialogue-with-chinese-artist-xu-bing/; Wang Hui, "凤凰如何涅槃" [How do phoenixes achieve Nirvana], Aisixiang, accessed August 26, 2016, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/49960.html.

[11] Lu Yinghua, "'2010 中国当代艺术金棕榈奖 + 金酸梅奖'评选现场实录" [Memoir of the selection of the 2010 Chinese contemporary art Golden Palm Award and Golden Raspberry Award], Artintern, accessed March 11, 2016, http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/article/overview/8d9cuymn; Cheng Meixin, "评徐冰的《凤凰》及其他——理念与行为的冲突" [On Xu Bing's Phoenix Project and others—Conflicts between concepts and actions], Artintern, accessed September 26, 2015, http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/article/overview/906cuymp/genres/critique/JH.

[12] Liu, 52; Ge, 85; Shao Yiyang, "'2010 中国当代艺术金棕榈奖 + 金酸梅奖'评选现场实录"[Memoir of the Selection of the 2010 Chinese contemporary art Golden Palm Award and Golden Raspberry Award]; Wang Hui, "凤凰如何涅槃" [How do phoenixes achieve nirvana]; He Guiyan, "凤凰金棕榈讨论"［Discussions of Phoenix Project at the Golden Palm Award], internal document, accessed at Xu Bing studio, Beijing, February 29, 2016.

[13] John Rajchman, "Xu Bing: Art as a Mode of Thinking," in *Xu Bing: A Retrospective,* 36.

the Today Art Museum, Xu said that the work engaged with multiple layers of Chinese society.[14] He suggested that the relations mobilized by *Phoenix Project* existed "between different ideologies" and "could not be contained by one single knowledge system or ideological framework."[15]

Because Xu's career spans official art institutions and the international contemporary art world, he had experience working with socialist realism as well as making contemporary art approachable for the viewing public. Xu began his career by designing page layouts and fonts for a local journal that propagated political messages in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Xu was an important participant of the '85 New Wave art movement while teaching at CAFA. His works appeared at both contemporary art exhibitions and in official art publications. As Xu became visible in international contemporary art in the 1990s and 2000s, he frequently voiced concern for the public dimension of contemporary art through artworks and writings. When he created *Phoenix Project* in 2008, he had just begun serving as Vice-President of CAFA upon an invitation from the Ministry of Culture. Given the division between socialist realist art and contemporary art in the early 2000s, this role required him to re-adjust his position. By focusing on *Phoenix Project*, this chapter delineates how Xu mobilized principles, production methods, and visual forms from different ideological systems. I argue that *Phoenix Project* evinced the artist's concern for creating a public spectatorship at a private contemporary art museum. It echoes the socialist ideal of making art for the public who were not necessarily familiar with contemporary art, though it did not reiterate sociopolitical issues central to socialist pursuits.

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[14] Xu, "本土资源的视觉再造" [Visual recreation of local resources], in *彷徨于飞——徐冰《凤凰》的诞生* [Hesitation in flight: The birth of Xu Bing's Phoenix Project], ed. Zhou Zan, (Beijing: Yishu yu wenhua chubanshe, 2012), 123.
[15] Ibid.

Phoenix Project and Cultural Industry

According to "The Story of the Phoenix," Xu's use of building materials stemmed from his concern for construction workers. In the pictorial narrative, he placed a photo of the Beijing Central Business District area alongside an image of construction workers' temporary camps (fig. 69). The photos had been taken during Xu's visit to the World Financial Center, where the client Henderson Group originally intended to show *Phoenix Project*.[16] In the foreground of the photo stands the headquarters of the China Central Television Channel, located one kilometer from the World Financial Center. The next image depicts a worker seated on a piece of foam supported by bricks, seemingly as a provisional mattress; around him, the ground is scattered with clothes, construction helmets, cardboard boxes, and water buckets. The dynamic vertical structure on the left contrasts with the cramped living quarters on the right, highlighting the squalid labor conditions that construction workers endured.

The text and other images in the narrative associate these two photos with Xu's critique of urban construction. The text beneath the two photos summarizes Xu's general impression of the construction site, "The contrast between the modern buildings and the rudimentary conditions of the construction work came as a shock to Xu Bing."[17] To illustrate the artist's experience, the image preceding the juxtaposition of the two photos shows the artist at a construction site with a camera in hand (fig. 70). A speech bubble indicates the artist's name. The six subsequent photos detail what Xu saw: coats, blankets, and other belongings of construction workers, deserted transportation carts, a crane in use, and rebar (fig. 71). The captions emphasize Xu's critical stance towards what he saw, referring to the construction tools and materials as "architectural

[16] Xu Bing Studio, *The Story of the Phoenix—Xu Bing's* Phoenix Project (Beijing, 2014), 2, 5.
[17] Xu Bing Studio, 3.

excrement of this skyscraper."[18] The sight of such "excrement" and tools, the caption explains, inspired Xu to use them in *Phoenix Project*.[19] By aligning workers' daily materials with "architectural excrement" visually and rhetorically, Xu poignantly brings to light both the precarious state of the objects and the social condition of construction workers.

Xu originally conveyed this critique by creating an unsettling contrast between the construction of the World Financial Center and the material components of *Phoenix Project*. The installation had originally been intended for the building's atrium, which was under construction at the time. Located in the Central Business District, this building served "world-renowned banks, financial firms and multinational companies."[20] It was among the skyscrapers that sprung up in the city center in the late 2000s. According to the construction design that Xu received from the Henderson Group, both the atrium and the building were to be covered by glass. In "The Story of the Phoenix," Xu compares the atrium to a crystal box.[21] If the original plan were implemented, the construction debris and workers' tools that constitute the phoenixes would have served as unsettling reminders of the capitalistic exploitation of labor in the building's construction.

The textual narrative of "The Story of the Phoenix" refers to the worker in one photo as a "migrant" worker, which typically referred to people who relocated from rural to urban areas for jobs and better wages.[22] These workers started to appear after the government initiated market reforms in the late 1970s. Motivated by the rapid economic growth in cities, their number

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[18] Ibid., 4.
[19] Xu Bing Studio, 4.
[20] "News," Beijing World Financial Center, accessed January 31, 2017, http://www.bjwfc.com.cn/en/news/news01_01.htm.
[21] Xu Bing Studio, 5.
[22] Ibid., 3–4.

drastically increased in the 1990s and 2000s. While the number was 20 million in 1988, it grew to about 200 million around 2008.[23] When Xu initiated *Phoenix Project*, Beijing was undergoing a major reconstruction to present a cosmopolitan image for the 2008 Summer Olympics Games. This involved the efforts of not only the municipal government but also the central government.[24] The bureaucracy implemented a series of projects, including the building of athletic facilities, the improvement of transportation systems, the rebuilding of tourist attractions, and the upgrading of digital technology infrastructure.[25] A Pulitzer Prize-winning article entitled "So Much Work, So Little Time" vividly described the scale of urban construction at the time. The journalist Mei Fong wrote, "At more than 10,000 sites across the city, there is a total of 1.7 billion square feet of floor space under construction—an area that, if laid out, would be three times the size of Manhattan."[26] The construction of Olympics-related buildings alone drew more than two million workers from rural areas.[27] By the time Xu created *Phoenix Project*, the growing population of migrant workers was one of the most profound social changes in Beijing.

Xu ultimately did not criticize the exploitation of migrant workers in Phoenix Project, due to the change of funding source and exhibition site. Initial funding came from the Henderson Group; however, their support was suspended when the 2008 global financial crisis caused lower

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[23] National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, "2008 年末全国农民总量为 22452 万人" [By the end of 2008, the population of peasant workers was two billion two hundred and forty-five million and twenty thousand], National Bureau of Statistics, accessed December 3, 2015, http://www.stats.gov.cn/ztjc/ztfx/fxbg/200903/t20090325_16116.html.
[24] Lee M. Sands, "The 2009 Olympics' Impact on China," China Business Review, accessed January 20, 2017, https://www.chinabusinessreview.com/the-2008-olympics-impact-on-china/.
[25] Wang Qishan, "北京市十一五规划纲要报告" [Report on the eleventh five year plan of Beijing], The State Council of the People's Republic of China, The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, accessed December 12, 2016, http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/07/content_180521.htm.
[26] Mei Fong, "Building the New Beijing: So Much Work, So Little Time," in *China's Great Leap: The Beijing Games and Olympian Human Rights Challenges*, ed. Minky Worden (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011), 172.
[27] Ibid.

stock returns for corporations around the globe.[28] Through an intermediary of the Revenel International Art Group, Xu contacted Lin Baili and the Today Art Museum for further funding and an exhibition site.[29] In the three months leading up to the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, the Beijing municipal government suspended a number of construction projects and curbed truck transportation to guarantee the air quality.[30] Though Xu had initially planned to collect materials only from the construction site of the World Financial Center, the changes in funding source and regulative policy led Xu and his team to collect debris from many other construction sites as well.[31] "The Story of the Phoenix" reveals how project's production was intertwined with socioeconomic changes from 2008 to 2010.

More specifically, the socioeconomic changes that served as the backdrop for the production of the two phoenix structures were embedded in the globalization of the Chinese economy in the 2000s, which facilitated the growth of cultural institutions in the private sector in mainland China. As mentioned earlier, the initial supporter, the Henderson Group, had commissioned the installation for an office building that served global financial and banking companies. The Taiwan-based company Revenel International Art Group worked as the intermediary between the Henderson Group and Xu. Revenel's growth had been greatly boosted by the strengthening economic ties between mainland China and the other parts of Greater

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[28] For account of the suspension of funding, see Xu Bing Studio, 2–3, 46. For analysis of how 2008 Global Financial Crisis affected corporations, see David H. Erkens, Mingyi Hung, Pedro Matos, "Corporate Governance in the 2007–2008 Financial Crisis: Evidence from Financial Institutions Worldwide," *Journal of Corporate Finance* 18, no. 2 (April, 2012): 389-411.

[29] Xu Bing Studio, 57.

[30] Xu Bing Studio, 43–44; Beijing Municipal Government, "关于发布 2008 年北京奥运会残奥会期间北京市空气质量保障措施的通告" [Notice about measures to guarantee the air quality in Beijing during 2008 Beijing Olympics and Paraolympics], The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, accessed December 15, 2015, http://www.gov.cn/zwgk/2008-04/14/content_944313.htm.

[31] Xu Bing Studio, 43–44; Kaufman, 120.

China. Founded in Taiwan in 1999, Revenel opened branch offices in Singapore and Beijing in 2001 and 2003, respectively, contributing to and profiting from the boom of cultural industries in the area.[32] Lin Baili, who financed the completion of the project, was expanding his business in mainland China at the time. Lin's company, Quanta Computer Incorporated, was one of the world's largest computer manufacturers and built three plants in mainland China in the 2000s.[33] The production and exhibition of *Phoenix Project* took place around the same time that Lin was opening the third plant in Chongqing, and served as a means for Lin to display the company's economic power in mainland China.[34] Through Revenel, Xu finally shifted the installation from Beijing World Financial Center to the Today Art Museum at 22 International Art Plaza, an art district at the center of the Beijing CBD area.[35] The Today Art Museum had been built in 2002 by a Chinese conglomerate called the Antaeus Group.[36] While the company mainly invested in real estate and entertainment in the early 2000s, it turned to contemporary art in the late 2000s.[37] This change in investment interest was partly catalyzed by the booming market for Chinese contemporary art around 2005.[38] By recounting the production of the colossal birds, "The Story

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[32] "Revenel International Art Group," Revenel, accessed January 12, 2017, https://ravenel.com/article.php?cid=32&lan=en.

[33] Mark Landler, "Taiwan Maker of Notebook PC's Thrives Quietly," New York Times, last modified March 25, 2002, accessed April 2, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/25/business/taiwan-maker-of-notebook-pc-s-thrives-quietly.html; "Company Introduction," Quanta Computer, accessed April 2, 2016, http://www.quantacn.com/EnWeb/CompanyProfile.aspx.

[34] "Company Introduction."

[35] "22 International Art Plaza," China Daily, accessed June 2, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/beijing/2012-12/12/content_16008732.htm.

[36] "今典集团：中国度假地产先锋" [Antaeous Group: Forerunner in tourism real estate], Antaeous Group, accessed June 2, 2016, http://www.jdjt.net/WebPage/About.aspx?Cid=1.

[37]今典集团：中国度假地产先锋" [Antaeous Group: Forerunner in tourism real estate]; Philip Feifan Xie, "Tourism businesses," in *Authenticating Ethnic Tourism* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2011), 186–219.

[38] One major landmark is Sotheby's and Christie's auctions in 2005, in which works by Chinese contemporary artists achieved record prices. Raj Rangarajan, "$147M Asian Sales Leave Past Records in the Dust," Artnews, accessed January 11, 2017, http://www.artnews.com/2005/06/21/147m-asian-sales-leave-past-records-in-the-dust/.

of the Phoenix" showcased the type of private companies that were supporting contemporary art in the 2000s.

More broadly speaking, the corporations' funding of contemporary art was motivated by the prospects of cultural industry in mainland China. During one tour to the Canton area in 2000, the former General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Jiang Zemin set forth his "Three Represents" theory, which would eventually be included in the Party Charter.[39] According to this theory, the Party should represent the development trend of advanced productive forces, the orientation of advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of Chinese people.[40] "Advanced productive forces" referred to the means of social production in Marxist theory, while "advanced culture" corresponded to superstructure.[41] Compared to previous iterations, which emphasized that the Party should represent the working class, Jiang's theory expanded the social group that the Party represented to include all national citizens, even capitalists and professionals.[42] This signaled a more open attitude towards marketization and a shift away from class struggles.

In the realm of culture, this shift was evident in the government's open endorsement and support of creative industries. In April 2004, "China Culture Market Net," a website closely associated with the Ministry of Culture, issued an article titled "Bring About a Creative Century:

For the increasing visibility of mainland Chinese collectors, see Barbara Pollock, "Mainland China's Mega-Collectors," Art News, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.artnews.com/2012/10/23/mainland-chinas-mega-collectors/.

[39] "The Three Represents Theory," Xinhua Net, published on June 25, 2001, accessed January 29, 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/20010625/422678.htm.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Shi Xia, ""三个代表"的科学含义是什么?" [What is the accurate meaning of Three Represents], News of the Communist Party of China, accessed August 8, 2017, http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64156/64157/4418474.html.

[42] Joseph Fewsmith, "The Sixteenth National Party Congress: The Succession That Didn't Happen," *The China Quarterly*, no. 173 (March, 2003): 13.

Take Action to Develop a Creative China," in which the author, Liu Shifa, claimed that China should model its creative industry after its counterparts in East Asia.[43] In this article, Liu refers to Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong as Asian centers of creative industry, which manifested in many forms: the vibrant exchanges between various media of popular culture; flexible methods of economic collaboration; investments into and profits from the entertainment industry; and enhanced local identity and cultural impacts in the international realm.[44] Published on a media outlet connected to the Ministry of Culture, the article spells out the interrelationship between the development of the Chinese culture industry and China's interest in playing an active role in the regional economy.[45] Two of Xu's collaborating institutions—Revenel and Quanta—directly participated in the growth of this regional economy. Meanwhile, the government's stated interest in developing the cultural industry sped the growth of art investments in the private sector, as exemplified in the building of the Today Art Museum.

Phoenix Project was but one of the many cases that showed the affinity between contemporary art creation and capitalistic production. Art historian Pamela Lee noted that contemporary art was no longer a marginal field insulated from the world; rather, scholars needed to treat works of art as contiguous with the globalization that was being propelled by late capitalism and state control.[46] While Lee mainly focused on contemporary artworks created in the Euro-American context, similar entanglements existed between market forces and

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[43] China Culture Market Net, a website closely associated with the Ministry of Culture, issued an article titled "Bring About a Creative Century: Take Action to Develop a Creative China" in April of 2004, in which the author Liu Shifa claimed that Chinese creative industries should learn from and bring in their counterparts in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Korea to strengthen creativity and originality in the local industry. See "China Cultural Market Network," China Cultural Market, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.ccm.gov.cn/swordcms/publish/default/static/main/index.htm; Keane, "Brave New World," 265-79.
[44] Keane, 274–75.
[45] Keane, "Brave New World," 274.
[46] Pamela Lee, *Forgetting the Art World* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 8.

contemporary art in mainland China during the 2000s. Unlike other places, contemporary art institutions were few in mainland China before the turn of the century, largely due to the government's disapproval and suppression. Globalization not only became contiguous with art production but also directly catalyzed the emergence and growth of contemporary art institutions, as manifested in the opening and expansion of exhibition spaces, the increase of gallery sizes, and the growth of commercialization.[47] This increase in exhibition opportunities required Chinese artists to produce more work within a shorter time. As a result, many turned to outsourcing and workshop production in order to make large-scale installations, aiming for greater productivity.[48] The availability of low-cost labor and skilled craftsmen of various kinds in mainland China facilitated artists' delegation of tasks. Art critic Pauline Yao, who was working in Beijing in the 2000s, suggested that the myriad resources to which artists had access may have contributed to the prevalence of multi-media works on a monumental scale.[49] *Phoenix Project,* judging from its size and complexity, was one such work.

Unlike most other large-scale installations, *Phoenix Project* involved a detailed narrative of the production process. I propose that this shows Xu's deliberate effort to make contemporary art accessible to visitors to the Today Art Museum. This museum was among the dozens of private museums that emerged in Beijing around 2008.[50] Due to the lack of clearly-defined regulations regarding foreign investment in cultural sectors, domestic corporations funded most of these

[47] Pauline Yao, *In Production Mode* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2009), 15.
[48] Ibid., 19.
[49] Ibid., 51, 66.
[50] Dai Zhuoqun, "当代市场背景下我国民营美术馆的现实与困境" [The reality and dilemma faced by Chinese private museums in the contemporary art market], *艺术评论* [Art Criticism], no. 8 (2009): 70–3.

museums.[51] Many of these domestic companies had major investments in real estate and profited from skyrocketing housing prices in major Chinese cities during the mid-2000s.[52] In addition to the profitability of art investment, their interest in contemporary art was interrelated with their aim to raise the cultural and economic profile of their housing assets. The Today Art Museum, for example, was originally located in the Antaeus Garden that the Antaeus Group had developed from 2002 to 2006.[53] In 2006, it moved to Baiziwan Apple Community in the Beijing CBD area.[54] That same year, it started to discursively frame itself as a non-profit institution.[55] Between 2006 and 2009, a new art district, 22 International Art Plaza, sprung up in its vicinity. [56] This district, also developed by the Antaeus Group, surrounded the museum mostly with art-related agencies such as galleries, offices of cultural organizations, and auction houses. In 2007, a sign outside the construction site of 22 International Art Plaza read, "CBD · Art Gallery Street · Hotel Lifestyle · Home · Today Art Museum, Asia's largest Chinese contemporary art gallery, is uniquely linked with the world." The sign's format aptly captures the tension between Today Art Museum and the commercial interest of the Antaeus Group. On the one hand, it reveals the company's persisting interest in connecting the museum with for-profit agencies nearby, such as hotels and apartments. On the other hand, it underscores the importance of the Today Art Museum in the art district's overall profile, as it is the only one of the named institutions to be

[51] Ibid.
[52] Xin Zhui, Lin Bin, and Yu Hua et al., "谁在热衷民营美术馆建设" [Who is enthusiastic about developments of private museums], *艺术品鉴* [Art Appreciation] (February, 2014): 26–29.
[53] "今日美术馆主馆 8 月开馆," [The main gallery of the Today Art Museum opens in August], *东方艺术·财经* [Oriental art—fnance], no. 9 (2006): 31.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Zhang Tianyu, "今日美术馆：民营美术馆，困难是因为盲目," [Today Art Museum: private art museum, the difficulty comes from blindness], *艺术市场* [Art market] no. 2 (2009): 27–30.
[56] "22 International Art Plaza," China Daily, accessed April 3, 2018, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/beijing/2012-12/12/content_16008732.htm.

introduced with a complete sentence. When Xu showed *Phoenix Project* outside the Today Art Museum, 22 International Art Plaza had just been established. Xu's narrative of the production process explicitly links capitalist forces with contemporary art, a connection that also laid the foundation for the creation of the museum and the art district as a whole.

From Socialist Realism to Contemporary Art

Xu constantly drew parallels between *Phoenix Project* and popular culture. In "The Story of the Phoenix," he compared the visual effect of the steel girders to that of folk shadow puppet plays.[57] When discussing the non-technical nature of the assembly process, Xu said, "The method is unsophisticated, like Chinese lanterns."[58] Xu also had the images and text of "The Story of the Phoenix" printed in a brochure (fig. 72). The brochure's design followed the format of *lianhuanhua* (连环画), a kind of illustrated book with sequential drawings that tell stories.[59] *Lianhuanhua* originated in late nineteenth-century Shanghai and became popular in the Republican period.[60] The founding of PRC brought new organizations of labor to the industry, turning private workshops and publishers into state-owned enterprises, though it did not essentially alter the popularity of *lianhuanhua.*[61] Like *lianhuanhua*, each page of the brochure featured an image above and a paragraph below. Xu chose brown kraft paper and lowered the

[57] Xu Bing Studio, 25.
[58] Ibid., 29.
[59] *Lianhuanhua* became popular among the Chinese public during the republican period (1912–1949). They were "printed very cheaply, most were small books, about three by five inches in size, horizontal in format, and with one picture per page. Although some artists used balloons for dialogue, in the Western manner, the majority relied on lengthy captions written above, beneath, or beside the pictures to tell the story." See Andrews, *Painters and Politics,* 67.
[60] Shen, "Comics, Picture Books, and Cartoonists in Republican China," *Inks: Cartoon and Comic Art Studies* 4, no. 3 (November, 1997): 3.
[61] Andrews, "Literature in Line: Picture Stories in the People's Republic of China," *Inks: Cartoon and Comic Art Studies* 4, no. 3 (November, 1997): 17–8.

resolution to make the brochure look more handmade.[62] The captions, written in a colloquial tone, recalls the style of storytelling in *lianhuanhua.* Xu's framing of *Phoenix Project* with vernacular visual elements is intrinsically related to his early engagements with the socialist ideal of making art for the masses when he was working for official institutions.

Growing up during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Xu was familiar with the visual culture of socialism.[63] After graduating from the Affiliated High School of Peking University, Xu, like millions of students in China, worked as a re-educated youth in a village outside Beijing from 1973 to 1977.[64] There, he developed a strong interest in print formats and was in charge of designing *Brilliant Mountain Flowers Magazine*, a journal that propagated political messages, such as those advocating the Party and the Cultural Revolution.[65] Most of Xu's prints published in this journal adopted the visual language typical of revolutionary posters. For instance, one print depicted two men and a woman holding farming tools and looking toward the upper right, a posture often used to indicate people's vision of the revolutionary future (see fig. 6). The figures' focused facial expressions, dynamic postures, and bold outlines recall socialist representations of sturdy and strong-minded revolutionaries. For example, in a poster entitled *Fight the People's Battle of Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius* (1974), two men and women, also holding tools of farming and labor, look towards the lower left, where slogans of Confucianism are being torn to pieces (fig. 73). Though this poster focuses on a different political issue—namely, the criticism of a former military leader and Confucianism—the figures' facial expression and physical

[62] Xu Bing, interview by the author, Beijing, August 25, 2016.
[63] Xu had been interested in woodblock prints from reading his father's collection of *Red Flag* magazine, a CCP journal. See Chia Chi Jason Wang, 34.
[64] "Brilliant Mountain Flowers Magazine," in *Xu Bing: A Retrospective*, 116.
[65] The title "Brilliant Mountain Flowers" comes from one of Mao Zedong's poems 卜算子 咏梅 [Busuanzi, On Plum].

posture are reminiscent of Xu's work. During the Cultural Revolution, artists often employed such figural conventions to represent people who worked for socialist goals or fought against "incorrect" tendencies and public enemies. The font and color of textual elements in the two images are also similar. The title, *Fight the People's Battle of Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius*, is indicated by a line of Chinese in red bold font below the image; in Xu's print, the red characters read, "Criticize Capitalism, Fight for Socialism, Boldly March into the Year of 1976 (大批资本主义，大干社会主义，以战斗的步伐跨入 1976 年)," which urges people to continue working for socialism. Banners showing slogans of "Learning from Dazhai" flow in the background of Xu's prints, calling for people to follow the model of farmers at Dazhai Village in Shanxi province. This detail is also reminiscent of revolutionary posters such as *Fight the Battle of Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius to its End* (1974), in which lines of red banners with slogans calling for the criticism of Lin and Confucius form the backdrop for the worker who holds a loudspeaker in the foreground and a group of people raising their fists in the lower left (fig. 74). The prints that Xu created for *Brilliant Mountain Flowers Magazine* show the artist's familiarity with the visual vocabulary of socialist visual culture.

Due to the domination of socialist realism in cultural production during the revolutionary period, it is unclear whether Xu believed in the socialist message propagated in the print, though his familiarity with socialist realist art likely paved the way for his interest in public aspects of contemporary art. One example is his artwork *Art for the People* (1999) (fig. 75).[66] Commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, this piece features a banner with the

[66] Xu, "我是毛泽东教出来的," [I am taught by Mao Zedong], Sohu, accessed July 3, 2015, http://men.sohu.com/s2010/xubing/.

words "Art for the people" rendered in square word calligraphy, a kind of writing that Xu invented by writing English words in the format of Chinese characters. Mao first articulated this principle of socialist art at the Yan'an Forum of Art and Literature in 1942.[67] Though Mao did not specify how artists could put this claim into practice, this talk would be elaborated and modified over the next few years to become a general principle of socialist realism in art and literature.[68] Xu had the bigger letters printed in bright yellow against a red background, a typical palette for revolutionary slogans in China. In one such poster from 1967, a soldier is reading a *Mao Zedong Anthology* next to a line saying "hold high the great red banner of Mao Zedong thought" in yellow and red, while the left side of the image is framed by a line reading "thoroughly smash the rotting counterrevolutionary revisionist line in literature and art" in black and white (fig. 76). When slogans were printed on a red background, designers typically chose yellow or white for the font to heighten the color contrast.

Unlike most Chinese revolutionary banners, Xu included "Calligraphy by Xu Bing" next to the words "Chairman Mao said" on the right.[69] While the phrase "Chairman Mao said" pervaded textual and oral quotations of Mao from the 1950s to the 1970s, the inclusion of the artist's name indicated a shift of the slogan from a political claim to an artistic endeavor. Xu's appropriation of socialist visual elements differed from that of many Chinese artists, especially artists associated with cynical realism and political pop. In Wang Guangyi's *Great Criticism–Coca Cola*, for example, the figural representation derived from socialist revolutionary posters is immediately

[67] For more about "art for the people," please refer to Chapter One.
[68] Ellen R. Judd, "Prelude to the 'Yan'an Talks': Problems in Transforming a Literary Intelligentsia," *Modern China* 11, no.3 (July, 1985): 378, 391; Sullivan, 712.
[69] "Art for the People," Xu Bing, accessed July 6, 2015, http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/projects/year/1999/art_for_the_people.

recognizable (see fig. 5). For *Art for the People*, the words, rendered in square word calligraphy, had to be deciphered one by one. Shown outside the Museum of Modern Art, the bright-colored banner was visually accessible to passersby, yet the words were only comprehensible to those who had read the introduction inside the museum. While the work is spatially dislocated from the museum, its interpretation relies on the museum institution. In this way, Xu turned the viewing of the artwork into an aesthetic reflection on the institutional boundaries of the museum, which resonated with socialism yet was detached from the socialist ideology.

Xu's early career evinces his tendency to work across realms of art, which anticipates his synthesis of concepts from different ideological contexts. After the Cultural Revolution, Xu studied from 1978 to 1982 in the Printmaking Department at CAFA, where he made a series of woodblock prints titled *Shattered Jade.*[70,71] Most of the prints depict calm scenes of rural life.[72] In one, *Family in Shanbei* (1982), Xu depicted the front yard of a cave-house in northwestern China (fig. 77). Similar to his earlier print in *Brilliant Mountain Flowers Magazine*, Xu's work shows his grasp of the visual vocabulary of socialist realism. The doorframe, the corn, the red peppers, and the smoke that meanders from the door all recall the background of *Chairman Mao Talking with Peasants* (1952) by Xu's teacher at CAFA, Gu Yuan (1919–1996) (fig. 78), who pioneered the reformation of printing for socialist causes in the 1930s and '40s.[73] The poster depicts Mao sitting and talking with peasants in front of a cave-house similar to that in Xu's print. Unlike Gu's poster, which places Mao at the composition's center, Xu's composition is devoid

[70] "Timeline," in *Xu Bing: A Retrospective*, 392–409.
[71] The series *Shattered Jade* includes about one hundred and fifty works and was created over the period from 1978 to 1983. See "Shattered Jade," in *Xu Bing: A Retrospective*, 126–141.
[72] "Shattered Jade," 126–141.
[73] Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 36, 91–92; Chang-tai Hung, "Two Images of Socialism: Woodcuts in Chinese Communist Politics," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no.1 (1997): 46–52; for Xu Bing's early education, see "Shattered Jade," 126.

of human figures, though he paid close attention to signs of human life, which can be glimpsed by comparing the work with his preliminary sketches (fig. 79). In the final version, two magpies, signs of fortune in Chinese folklore, occupy the foreground. In sketches, Xu tried out nine depictions of the doorframe, all slightly different from the final piece. For instance, the composition in the center features hens eating in the courtyard, whereas the one in the upper right shows no feed scattered on the ground. These alternative versions show Xu's effort to present a vivid scene of rural China that does not necessarily have political connotations. While socialist revolutionary artists like Gu collaborated with publishing houses to adapt his lithographic designs into mass-produced machine prints, Xu signed his print with pencil in the lower right, framing it as a unique piece of artwork.[74]

In the meantime, Xu was also known in the '85 New Wave Art Movement for his room-sized piece *Book from the Sky* (1987–91) that included hundreds of books spread on the ground, wall panels of printed text, and hanging scrolls draped across the ceiling (fig. 80). Between 1988 and 1989, he exhibited *Book from the Sky* three times at the National Art Gallery.[75] This artwork shows Xu's early interest in making contemporary art approachable for Chinese-reading viewers. For the first iteration, the artist created 1,250 Chinese characters, carved each in two kinds of woodblocks, inked the blocks, laid pieces of paper over them, and rubbed the ink onto the paper with a large pad.[76] After printing, the artist cut the pieces of paper and bound them into books of

[74] For the reform of private publishers into public ones, see Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 128–34; Andrews, "Literature in Line," 22.
[75] "Book from the Sky," in *Xu Bing: A Retrospective*, 186–203.
[76] Britta Eriksson, *Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words* (Washington: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2001), 37; "Ghosts Pounding the Wall, 1990–1991," in *Xu Bing: A Retrospective*, 204–215.

traditional formats, or mounted them into scrolls that he hung from the ceiling or walls.[77] From a distance the piece looked like a monumental display of traditional artifacts, but on closer inspection it became clear that the texts were constituted of illegible and made-up characters.[78] The disjunction between familiar format and unidentifiable characters points to notions such as disjunctions between form and content, name and substance. More specifically, Xu's use of the traditional formats let viewers associate this disjunction with the relationship between ancient Chinese culture and its modern reiterations, including its stigmatization in mid-century China and more recent partial revival after the market reforms.[79]

Xu's method of working across realms of socialist realist art and contemporary art was made possible by frequent interchanges between the two art worlds in the late 1980s. According to art historian Dal Lago, who studied in mainland China in the 1980s, art production outside official institutions often involved multiple interactions and discussions between official artists and artists working outside state institutions.[80] Xu was an active participant in these complex interchanges. As mentioned earlier, he held roles at official institutions such as the China Artist Association (CAA), an official exhibition committee, and the Academic Committee of CAFA.[81] These roles facilitated the development of Xu's career within the official system. In 1988,

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[77] One year later, he carved one more set of a thousand large and a thousand small characters for the landmark exhibition China/Avant-Garde. For the second reiteration, he worked with a small factory in Daxing to print and bound the books. See Eriksson, 37.
[78] "Book from the Sky;" Chia Chi Jason Wang, 238–39.
[79] For example, several participants of a symposium on Xu's *Book from the Sky* held at CAFA in 1988 associated the work with the artist's understanding of Chinese tradition and culture. See Zhong Han, Fan Di'an, and Du Jian et al., "中国现代主义的出现，时代普遍意识的体现－－中央美术学院座谈徐冰艺术" [The emergence of Chinese modernism, a representation of a common consciousness of our time—a symposium on Xu Bing's art at CAFA], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 46 (1988): 1.
[80] Dal Lago, "The 'Global' Contemporary Art Canon and the Case of China," review of *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents,* ed. Wu hung, with the assistance of Peggy Wang (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), Art Margins 3, no. 3 (2014): 92.
[81] "About," Xu Bing, accessed March 12, 2016, http://www.xubing.com/index.php/chinese/about/C35/.

People's Fine Art Press, the most prominent official art press in mainland China, published a selection of Xu's prints entitled *Spring Light: Xu Bing's Prints*.[82] That same year, Xu held "Exhibition of Xu Bing's Prints" at the National Art Gallery, in which he showed *Book from the Sky*.[83] After this show, CAFA faculty held a symposium entitled "The Emergence of Chinese Modernism, A Representation of a Common Consciousness of Our Time—A Symposium on Xu Bing's Art at CAFA," in which all participants spoke glowingly of *Book from the Sky*.[84]

While contemporary art activities remained largely outside the academy, academic artists and critics were mostly not antagonistic to new forms of art the 1980s. Discussions and debates between artists working within and outside of art academies abound in art publications of the era. *China Fine Arts Newspaper*, a major news outlet of the New Wave art movement, serves as one example. Before the China Ministry of Culture suspended the newspaper in the aftershock of the Tian'anmen Student Protests, contributing writers often questioned its over-emphasis on individualism and self-expression in contemporary art.[85] Senior artists and officials of CAFA and the CAA, such as Shui Tianzhong (b. 1935) and Shao Dazhen (b. 1934), regularly published articles in *China Fine Arts Newspaper*.[86] These discussions indicate the possibility of reconciling

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[82] "About."
[83] Ibid.
[84] For summarization of the symposium, see Zhong Han, Fan Di'an, and Du Jian et al., 1.
[85] For example, see Liu Quan, "并非给自我表现泼冷水" [This is not to criticize self-expression], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no.20 (1986): 1; Xiao Yuan, "再谈青年艺术新潮" [Discuss the new trends in youth's art again], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 12 (1986): 1.
[86] These include their overview and comments on recent developments in the field of art production and writing, their explanation of the organization of art activities, and their writings on specific artists or historical periods. See Shao Dazhen, Zhan Jianjun, Wen Lipeng, et al., "新潮四人谈" [Four takes on the new wave], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 38 (1986): 1; "回顾与瞻望"[Looking back and ahead], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 1 (1987): 1; Shao Dazhen, "我们面临的课题" [The issues we face], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 3 (1986): 1; Shao, "全国美协理论委员会主任邵大箴答本报记者问"[Shao Dazhen, Director of China Artists Association Theory Committee, interviewed by staff reporter], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 16 (1988): 1; Shao, "序扬光华画展"[Preface to Yang Guanghua's Exhibition] *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 32 (1989): 1; Shui Tianzhong, "迎接美术理论的春

different conceptions of spectatorship between contemporary and socialist realist artists. Yet the dialogue came to a close when the government tightened its control over culture after the Tian'anmen Student Protests in 1989, shutting down or reforming a number of art journals and newspapers, such as *China Fine Arts Newspaper*. Discussions of contemporary art lost not only their media outlets but also their significance, as the public had little access to these artworks. Among intellectuals, there was a shared disillusionment with the role of art and culture. In some cases, artists active in contemporary art faced mounting political pressure. According to Xu Bing, critics started to condemn *Book from the Sky* as a "ghost pounding the wall," a Chinese idiom that ridiculed the artwork's eccentric, dark quality.[87] For these reasons, Xu left his position at CAFA and moved to the United States in 1990.[88]

Xu's works of the 1990s showed an increasing awareness of institutional parameters. While *Art for the People* offered a subtle comment on museum borders by creating divisions in the work's reception, *Cultural Animals* (1993–94) exemplifies a quite different approach. For this piece, Xu staged the mating of two pigs in a pigpen constructed at a newly established contemporary art institution, Han Mo Art Center, in Beijing in 1994 (fig. 81).[89] To create the piece, Xu had the whole gallery space transformed into a pigsty.[90] One pig was printed with Chinese characters that Xu had made up; the other was printed with pseudo-English words. Xu

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天" [Welcoming the Spring of Art Theory], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 3 (1986): 1; Shui, "陌生的历史"[Unfamiliar history], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 28 (1986): 1; Shui, "1986 年美术要事印象" [Important art events of 1986], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 1 (1987): 1; Shui, "水天中谈中国艺术研究院科研成果评选" [Shui Tianzhong on the research contest of China Academy for Art Research], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 6 (1989): 1; Shui, "吕斯百和他的画" [Lü Sibai and his paintings], *China Fine Arts Newspaper* no. 11 (1989): 1,

[87] Wu Kejia, "徐冰：艺术的特性是诚实" [Xu Bing: The key feature of art is honesty], Financial Times, accessed January 4, 2017, http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001065612?full=y

[88] Ibid.

[89] "A Case Study of Transference: Cultural Animal," in *Xu Bing: A Retrospective*, 230–37.

[90] Ibid.

also placed printed materials in various languages on the floor.[91] These indices of human culture associated the animals' natural act of copulating with comments on cross-cultural communication. On the second day of the show, Xu drove the eccentricity of the work even further by putting a mannequin smeared with a sow's scent in the pigpen.[92] The boar, aroused by the smell, initiated a series of sexual advances towards the mannequin, also printed with false Chinese characters.[93] The troubling scene was staged for a relatively closed circle of viewers. Before the late 1990s, contemporary art exhibitions had rarely appeared at public institutions. Shows held at commercial or private spaces were mostly attended by artists, critics, and curators associated with the contemporary art world. The perverse display of sexual intercourse reveals the artist's assumption that these viewers were more likely to see the artwork as radical than to doubt its validity as art.

When creating artworks for international contemporary art exhibitions, Xu put stronger emphasis on cross-cultural communication, as exemplified in his *Square Word Calligraphy Project* (1993–2006).[94] Throughout the 1990s, Xu integrated his square word calligraphy into participatory projects, artist's books, and calligraphic works. In 1998, Xu turned a gallery at Taipei Fine Arts Museum into a classroom for teaching square word calligraphy with lined tables for individual students.[95] The pseudo-Chinese characters struck a chord with the language difference between mainland China and Taiwan. While China introduced simplified Chinese in the 1950s with the aim of increasing literacy, Taiwan continued to use traditional Chinese but

[91] "A Case Study of Transference: Cultural Animal," 230–37.
[92] Ibid.
[93] "A Case Study of Transference: Cultural Animal," 230–37.
[94] For introduction to his Square Word Calligraphy Project, see Chia Chi Jason Wang, 30, 32.
[95] "Square Word Calligraphy and the Classroom," in *Xu Bing: A Retrospective,* 265.

with more complex structures. The language difference was but one of many military, cultural, and ideological disagreements across the strait. Xu's invented Chinese characters pointed to cross-cultural misunderstandings and the notion of renewing communication by combining the two systems. However, viewers did not have to be acquainted with the history of mainland China and Taiwan to approach the work. Examples displayed on the blackboard, videotapes, textbooks, and traditional tracing books taught Chinese speakers to re-structure Chinese characters into English words and taught English speakers to transform English words into Chinese characters. While the reference point of the cross-strait relationship seems most pertinent, the work opens to a wide range of interpretations regardless of viewers' backgrounds.

Some of Xu's works of the late 1990s and early 2000s synthesize his previous notions of spectatorship, involving a socialist realist concern for the masses, an interest in approaching viewers in the state museum context, and an exposure of the socioeconomic priorities of art institutions. In *A Consideration of Golden Apples* (2002), which Xu created for *Harvest: Contemporary Art Exhibition* at the No. 1 Hall of the National Agriculture Exhibition Center,[96] Xu had bags of apples distributed to workers outside the museum and ten televisions scattered throughout the exhibition live broadcasting the distribution of apples (fig. 82).[97] Multiple details associate the work with official settings. At the distribution sites, Xu's assistants held banners reading "Golden Apples Send Warm Greetings" and "Best Wishes to Laid-off and Current Workers of the Capital on National Day," the sort of banners typically used when government

[96] "A Consideration of Golden Apples," Xu Bing, accessed January 2, 2016, http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/projects/year/2002/a_consideration_of_golden_apples.
[97] "Ibid.

offices held public activities. Into the broadcast, the team also inserted clips of Chairman Mao giving mangoes to workers, juxtaposing the distribution of apples with historical precedent.[98]

Viewers in and outside the exhibition center approached the artwork differently. In the early 2000s, the Chinese general public rarely had access to contemporary art exhibitions. Few were aware that the distribution of apples was part of a contemporary art event and may have mistaken it for a governmental activity. This official guise addressed institutional parameters at the National Agriculture Exhibition Center, a major official art institution founded for the promotion and sales of agricultural products in 1958.[99] *Harvest: Contemporary Art Exhibition* was funded by the local government of Shandong Qixia County, a place known for its apple production.[100] The exhibition, lasting only five days, was part of the "Shandong Qixia Apple Festival," through which the county government promoted its produce.[101] In addition to receiving support from the local government, the festival was organized by three official institutions—China Art Education Promotion Association, China Fruits Circulation Association, and China Society of Territorial Economists.[102] News of the festival ran not only on the Qixia local government's webpage but also in *People's Daily*, the main official newspaper.[103] In a break from the past, this was the first time that the National Agriculture Exhibition Center had rented

[98] "A Consideration of Golden Apples."
[99] "About," National Agriculture Exhibition Center, accessed April 12, 2018, http://www.ciae.com.cn/lg/zh/summary.html.
[100] Ibid.
[101] In addition to the exhibition, the festival included a concert titled "farm tools and symphony," a forum on World Trade Organization and agriculture, as well as a trade fair. See "第一届中国山东栖霞苹果艺术节" [The first Shandong Qixia apple festival], Shandong Qixia Government, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.sdqixia.gov.cn/cn/zjqx/index_show.jsp?id=2472.
[102] "Brief News," *People's Daily* (September 4, 2002).
[103] Ibid.

spaces to contemporary art shows.[104] By concealing the status of contemporary art outside the museum, Xu reframed the institutional boundary as a divide in the spectatorship of his artwork, making explicit the limited ability of museum exhibitions to convey social concerns.

Xu's appropriation of Mao in *A Consideration* did not involve any statement of his own ideological position. It mobilized the symbolic status of Mao's act of giving mangoes to workers without using it to articulate a political comment. Mao's concern for workers in 1968 was largely related to his plan to control the political turmoil by strengthening the leadership's alliance with workers.[105] Officials' concern for workers in 2002 occurred in a completely different context. Due to reforms of state-owned enterprises and the transformation of the economic structure, millions of workers in urban areas lost their jobs in the 1990s and early 2000s. Several months before Xu carried out *A Consideration*, three major worker protests broke out in Northeastern China.[106] To showcase officials' support for laid-off workers, scenes of cadres making visits to factories or workers' homes were common in newspapers and on TV. Though various links could be drawn between officials' concern for workers in these two periods, *A Consideration* provided few details about the specific link Xu was addressing. In an article that Dal Lago wrote on the appropriation of Mao images in contemporary art in the 1990s, she noted that artists of different generations had approached popular icons of Mao without specific political positions, as these signs were so deeply rooted in the people's memories and everyday life that they rarely

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[104] "About," National Agriculture Exhibition Center.
[105] Alfreda Murck, "Golden Mangoes: The Life Cycle of A Cultural Revolutionary Symbol," *Archives of Asian Art* (2007): 1.
[106] The protests broke out in Liaoyang, Daqing, and Fushun in March of 2002. See William Hurst, "Understanding Contentious Collective Action by Chinese Laid-off Workers: The Importance of Regional Political Economy," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 39, no. 2 (Summer, 2004): 94.

held specific relevance.[107] Xu's work, though created in the early 2000s, showed a similar tendency. Similar to *Art for the People*, it points out Mao's relevance to the present without addressing the political and social differences that separated the present from the past.

Art for the People, *Phoenix Project* and *A Consideration* all consist of two parts: one inside the museum and the other outside. Compared with the two earlier works, *Phoenix Project* evinces a more consistent conceptualization of spectatorship. Viewers in and outside the museum were all aware of the status of *Phoenix Project* as a contemporary artwork. The heavy-lift cranes outside, the construction site next to the museum, and the materiality of the installation associated the artwork with the ongoing urbanization, making the work resonate with viewers in and outside the museum in diverse, yet not contradicting, ways. Such difference demonstrates Xu's changing approach of engaging with institutional boundaries. Unlike previous cases, Xu exhibited *Phoenix Project* at a museum in an emerging art district. The monumental scale of the two structures made the work visible not only to museum visitors but also to passersby in the vicinity of the district. They evince Xu's conceptualization of a spectatorship relevant to both the museum and the surrounding area.

Xu's concern for the spectatorship of contemporary art was intrinsically related to his new position as Vice President of CAFA, which started around the time that he began *Phoenix Project*.[108] This nomination came about amidst a major bureaucratic change at CAFA. In 1997, the central government initiated reforms of educational institutions to steer away from an over-

[107] Dal Lago, "The 'Global' Contemporary Art Canon and the Case of China," 91–2.
[108] Chia Chi Jason Wang, 32.

reliance on manufacturing industries and to foster the growth of cultural industries.[109] This affected art academies in two ways—the establishment of programs in design and contemporary art, and the expansion of student enrollment. Institutional shifts at CAFA, the only art academy directly under the Ministry of Education, is indicative of these new imperatives.[110] CAFA founded the Studio of Experimental Art in 2005, which enabled it to admit undergraduate and graduate students.[111] In 2007, it established the Department of Experimental Art.[112] Art professionals in mainland China commonly use the term "experimental art" to refer to contemporary art practices in the 1990s.[113] The establishment of the department at CAFA meant that contemporary art became an integral part of its curriculum. Along with these curricular shifts, there was increasing emphasis on employing faculty and admitting students from overseas, as education in experimental art and design was relatively new to Chinese academies.[114] These structural changes at CAFA made it possible for Xu, who had ample work experience at CAFA and held a prominent role in the international contemporary art world, to assume this position.

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[109] Lisa Hoffman, *Fostering Talent: Patriotic Professionalism in Urban China* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), quoted in Chumley, 2.

[110] For the status of CAFA, see "学院概况"[Overview of the School], CAFA, accessed January 1, 2017, http://www.cafa.edu.cn/aboutcafa/?c=101.

[111] "About The School of Experimental Art, CAFA," Central Academy of Fine Arts, accessed July 28, 2018, http://www.cafa.edu.cn/dep/?c=625&t=1.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Wu, "Introduction: Exhibiting Experimental art in China," 11.

[114] For the employment of overseas faculty members, see Chumley 2, 8. CAFA held a conference on improving the pay and subsidies for advanced oversea talents in 2011. According to the news report, staff commonly agreed that the school should raise the pay to attract overseas talents, see Lü Xufeng, "我院召开提高海外高层次人才待遇专题会议" [The academy held a conference on improving the pay and subsidies for advanced oversea talents], ed. Xu Xinli, CAFA, last modified October 12, 2011, accessed July 28, 2018, http://www.cafa.edu.cn/info/?c=901&N=4931. For the admission of international students, see "Admission," Central Academy of Fine Arts, accessed July 28, 2019, http://www.cafa.edu.cn/info/?c=806&page=3&page_b=1.

Given the long-term discursive and institutional division between socialist realist art and contemporary art, these institutional changes, including Xu's nomination, marked a watershed moment for the art academy.[115] One of Xu's primary concerns at the time was art's relationship with the public. In an open letter in 2007, Xu criticized socialist realist and contemporary art for their detachment from the public. Teachers and students at art academies, he noted, tended to immerse themselves in "bucolic socialist realism," by which he meant formulaic methods of painting and a lack of social consciousness in art making.[116] Meanwhile, he also criticized the distance between Chinese contemporary art and the national public.[117] Xu's effort to make *Phoenix Project* comprehensible to viewers across ideological and spatial boundaries evinces a similar concern.

The Disappearance of the Working Class

When analyzing the large-scale production of artworks in mainland China during the 2000s, Pauline Yao suggests that many of these artworks created compelling visual effects yet lacked critical engagement with issues of authorship.[118] She claimed that most Chinese contemporary artists' mobilization of labor stemmed from considerations of work efficiency rather than from critical reflection on relevant social issues.[119] *Phoenix Project* diverges from these works, as

[115] For detailed analysis of this divide, please refer to Chapter One.
[116] Xu addressed the letter to Yong Liang, whose real name remained unknown. According to Xu, Yong raised four issues in his unpublished letter: Xu's opinion on Chinese art created during and after the 1980s; Xu's opinion on Western contemporary art, especially art of the United States; Xu's opinion on art pedagogy in the East and the West; and Xu's thoughts about the future of Chinese contemporary art. Xu wrote and published his response in 2007, right before he took up the position at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. See Xu, "徐冰: 关于现代艺术及教育问题的一封信" [Xu Bing: A letter on contemporary art and its education], Artron, accessed March 18, 2015, http://artist.artron.net/20140916/n653875.html.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Yao, *In Production Mode*, 19, 62.
[119] Ibid., 19, 69.

representations of workers abound in “The Story of the Phoenix.” When viewers walked into the exhibition hall, they encountered a photo of workers on a wall-sized LED screen (fig.83). Parts of the phoenix structures under construction were visible in the background, indicating that the workers were in the process of assembly. The pictorial narrative acknowledged the creative input of many workers on Xu’s team by naming them and detailing their contributions. One wall panel, for instance, showed a photo of two workers, Lu Xin and Da Lang, and two sketches they had created, though neither of the sketches had a museum tag indicating its author, title and date (fig. 84). The hierarchy between Xu and his workers was largely overshadowed by an overall sense of collaboration.

These representations of workers, however, are essentially different from the critique of urban construction that Xu initially conceptualized. According to the pictorial narrative, his original plan had been to stage a contrast between the rough materials constituting the installation and the glass-covered atrium of Beijing World Financial Center. This visual contrast largely disappears in representations of Xu’s workers. As mentioned above, the pictorial narrative emphasizes collaboration between team members rather than the hierarchical relationship between Xu and them. Moreover, the display outside the Today Art Museum dilutes the tension between the work and its site, making the site look like a construction project joining the other skyscrapers in the vicinity, rather than confronting them. Xu’s conception of spectatorship in and outside the museum is largely separate from the concern about workers he expressed in the original plan for *Phoenix Project.*

Class formation in the 2000s, I propose, rendered it difficult for contemporary artists such as Xu to represent the working class. In Xu’s original plan, the glass-covered atrium of the

Beijing World Financial Center was essential for Xu to turn construction debris and workers' tools into reference points of their labor due to the sharp visual contrast between the two. The visual contrast between the building and construction debris would have led some viewers to reference points such as the working class, labor, and social inequality. Articulating the same critique at the Today Art Museum required Xu to reference workers and their labor differently.

The construction of this interpretive framework in visual terms was a daunting task in the 2000s. At that time, the working class no longer consisted of a unified group of people tied to state-owned enterprises that provided all-inclusive social services; "workers" was an umbrella term that encompassed groups bound by heterogeneous socio-economic conditions and concerns.[120] Within the working class, migrant workers were most vulnerable to legal and economic disenfranchisement in cities.[121] The government established a household registration system that categorized every citizen as either having urban or rural status in 1955.[122] This was accompanied by significantly different rights and harsh limits on one's ability to change status.[123] Legal changes in 1992 permitted migration between villages and cities, yet the discrepancy between rural and urban residency status persisted.[124] Unlike urban workers, few migrant workers had access to subsidized housing, health insurance, education for their children, or pensions. Most migrant workers lacked a college education, which meant that they could only work in low-paying jobs. Their lack of competitiveness in the job market also made them victims of unfair contract terms. For these reasons, their income fell behind that of urban dwellers

[120] Eli D. Friedman, "Labor Politics and Capitalist Industrialization," in *Insurgency Trap: Labor Politics in Postsocialist China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 12.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Wu Xiaogang and Donald Treiman, "The Household Registration System and Social Stratification in China: 1955–1996," *Demography* 41, no. 2 (2004): 363.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Wu and Treiman, 363.

increasingly in the 2000s.[125] This stratification in the working class called for new representations of migrant workers that were different from socialist realist portrayals.

The vast socioeconomic gap between contemporary artists such as Xu and migrant workers made it harder for such representations to coalesce in contemporary art. Boosted by a stronger client base in East Asia, the market for Chinese contemporary art boomed after 2000.[126] A major landmark was Sotheby's and Christie's auctions in 2005, in which works by Chinese contemporary artists achieved record prices.[127] Xu was among the contemporary Chinese artists who achieved phenomenal market success. The auction price of his work rose above one hundred thousand dollars in May of 2005, which was soon followed by the appearance of his works at two Chinese auction houses, China Guardian and Poly.[128] While only one of his works appeared on international auctions in 2001, twelve appeared in 2005 and seventeen in 2007.[129] This upward social mobility may have catalyzed Xu's awareness of social stratification, though it also distanced him from the lives of migrant workers.

There was a disjunction between people's awareness about social problems concerning migrant workers and awareness of their political implications. A search on the China Academic Journals Full-text Database, the database most widely used by research institutions in China, shows a sharp increase in the number of journal articles on migrant workers between 2000 and

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[125] While the ratio of urbanites' to peasant workers' income was 2.4:1 in 2004, it rose to 5.5: 1 in 2009. Haining Wang, Fei Guo, and Zhiming Cheng, "A Distributional Analysis of Wage Discrimination against Migrant Workers in China's Urban Labor Market," *Urban Studies* 52, no. 13 (October, 2015): 2284.
[126] China's share of the Contemporary market has grown from less that 1% in 2002 to the third largest market worldwide, with 24% in 2007. See The European Fine Art Foundation, "Chinese contemporary Art Session from 'Globalization and the art market' report," Poly Auction, accessed January 12, 2017, http://en.polypm.com.cn/english/news_detail.php?nid=119.
[127] Raj Rangarajan, "$147M Asian Sales Leave Past Records in the Dust," Artnews, accessed January 11, 2017, http://www.artnews.com/2005/06/21/147m-asian-sales-leave-past-records-in-the-dust/.
[128] Artnet Price Database, accessed February 12, 2016.
[129] Ibid.

2005, from 35 to 1,830.[130] That number continued to grow from 2005 to 2009, reaching 5,292.[131] Yet this did not lead to new class representations. Though scholars note a tendency for young migrant workers in Southern China to negotiate with management and protest for better wages and subsidies, they point out that such strikes often aimed at specific interests and lacked formal organization and leadership.[132] These workers often turned to Maoist discourse to articulate their claims and had yet to develop new discourses and representations to address their situation.[133] At art academies, there had been a tendency toward depicting figures in static postures since the 1980s. As analyzed in the last chapter, teachers and students tended to emphasize paintings' technical mastery rather than the socio-political resonance of their representations.

Official organizations that claimed to represent workers' interests also silenced voices of resistance. For example, branches of All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) existed in almost every state-owned enterprise in the 2000s, yet they often wavered between representing the interests of the corporations and those of workers.[134] More importantly, most migrant workers signed temporary contracts with employers and lacked access to trade unions.[135] In terms of law and policy, though the state had passed a number of laws regarding labor and social welfare in the 2000s, it did not adjust the policies to the needs of migrant workers.[136] Without effective organizational and regulative representation, the issue of labor lacked a collective voice and representation in the public realm. The difficulty of representing workers in cultural,

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[130] China Academic Journals Full-text Database, accessed March 12, 2017.
[131] Ibid.
[132] King-Chi Chan, Chris, and Pun Ngai, "The Making of a New Working Class? A Study of Collective Actions of Migrant Workers in South China (Case Study)," *The China Quarterly* no. 198 (2009): 288–89, 300–02.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Chan, 31–61.
[135] Cai Yongshun, "The Resistance of Chinese Laid-off Workers in the Reform Period," *The China Quarterly* no. 170 (June, 2002): 329; Friedman, 16–17.
[136] Cai Yongshun, 329; Friedman, 16–7.

organizational, and political terms exposes a key aspect of the development of neoliberalism in China. According to David Harvey, neoliberalism inevitably gravitates towards class differentiation and social inequality.[137] In particular, Harvey describes neoliberalism in China as a combination of neoliberal elements and the central government's control of the economy.[138] While the government ensures entrepreneurs and corporations freedom in trade and private property rights, its dominance in the cultural and political realm eliminates any voices that speak out against the ongoing socioeconomic stratification.

Xu's position in this economic environment can be compared with the formation of the identity of the art worker in the 1960s and '70s in the United States, when artists developed the critical notion of the art worker to address the issue of labor amidst unprecedented labor strikes and the rise of the postindustrial society.[139] By focusing on the artists associated with the Art Workers Coalition, art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson delineates the various, even conflicting, positions that artists occupied in relation to workers and actual class formations.[140] She points out that while these artists announced their solidarity with workers, they showed little concern for labor relations.[141] Their artistic strategies were primarily responses to the institutionalization of artistic work within a gradually maturing museum system.[142] Xu's relationship with workers in *Phoenix Project* struck the same chord. Similar to Xu's artworks from the 1980s to the early 2000s, *Phoenix Project* shows his appropriation of visual and political elements of socialism, as well as his conceptualization of spectatorship in relation to art institutions. Yet, these gestures

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[137] Harvey, 2, 16.
[138] Ibid., 120.
[139] Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
[140] Ibid.
[141] Bryan-Wilson, 3, 15.
[142] Ibid., 8, 33-36.

did not stem from the artist's understanding of, or identification with, the working class, nor from his sociopolitical pursuits. It was artwork created for a viewing public familiar with the socialist realist dictum of making art for the people, though itself remaining detached from this ideal.

Epilogue

Since 2010, neither Cai, Yang, or Xu studied here exhibited works in mainland China that involve the use of the visual language and political ideals of socialist realism to approach viewers. Indeed, the three artworks under study had limited circulation in mainland China and abroad. Moreover, when shown again, none were exhibited in the same form. Cai never showed *Collection of Maksimov's Works* after 2003. Yang's *800 Meters Under* and *X-Blind Spot* were never exhibited as complete series or solo exhibitions. A two-channel video installation based on the clips that Yang had showed in *Aboveground Underground* was exhibited at the Central Academy of Fine Arts Gallery as part of the exhibition *People History*, a group exhibition that broadly surveyed the development of twentieth-century art in mainland China.[1] Except for this re-adaption, works of the two series rarely appeared in mainland China again. Compared with the former two works, Xu's phoenix structures became a frequent sight at contemporary art exhibitions, though, in mainland China, they were only shown once.[2] After the exhibition at the Today Art Museum, the two phoenix structures travelled to the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai, an international fair showcasing the culture and economic achievements of nations, corporations, and international organizations to foster dialogue and cooperation.[3] Unlike *Phoenix Project*, the two structures were not shown alongside "The Story of the Phoenix." Their resonance with the

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[1] For details of this exhibition, see "人民·历史: 20 世纪中国美术研究展" [People and history: Research exhibition of twentieth-century fine arts of China], Artron, accessed June 12, 2018, http://exhibit.artron.net/exhibition-5956.html. Works of the two series appeared in several exhibitions abroad. Several paintings of *800 Meters Under* were shown at the exhibition *The Real Thing: Contemporary Art from China* at Tate Liverpool in 2007; some paintings and sculptures of *X-Blind Spot* were exhibited at the 6th Asia-Pacific Triennial at Queensland Art Gallery and Queensland Gallery of Modern Art in 2009.

[2] Outside of China, the two phoenix structures were exhibited at Mass MoCA in 2013, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York in 2014, and the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015.

[3] "What is an Expo?" Bureau International des Expositions," accessed June 22, 2018, https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/expos/about-expos/what-is-an-expo.

steel structure of the refurnished factory space makes them look like emblems of the nation's industrialization and workers' contributions, rather than contemporary artworks capable of offering a more comprehensive understanding of relevant social issues.

At least at state museums, established galleries, and private museums, the possibility of constructing an aesthetic space with sociopolitical implications has faded away in the 2010s. Though new contemporary art institutions have sprung up, their funding structures have largely followed those of the 2000s, including state and corporate sponsorship. Art discourse and education have yet to offer viewers shared interpretive frameworks for contemporary artworks. Yet, in a departure from the 2000s, there is no longer any urgency to make contemporary art legible to national viewers. The continuing development of the cultural industry has normalized contemporary art as a part of urban dwellers' leisure and tourism.

A new development in the 2010s is the expanding domestic market for contemporary art. At the Fifth Plenary Session of the Central Committee in 2010, former President Hu Jintao, for the first time, encouraged the cultural industry to become a "pillar of the national economy" by 2020.[4] This encouraged the emergence of art investment companies as well as speculation by the middle class. Notably, the State Council and the National Development and Reform Commission regulated overseas investment in 2017, limiting outbound investment in numerous industries.[5] In 2018, state media began encouraging the middle class to invest in art in order to boost the

[4] "Chinese and English Report of The Fifth Plenum of the 17th CPC Central Committee," China Daily, accessed April 23, 2018, http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/trans/2010-10/19/content_11430416.htm.
[5] Sara Hsu, "China's New Capital Controls Expected To Slow Real Estate, But Improve Country's Economic Health," Forbes, accessed April 23, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahsu/2017/08/28/chinas-new-capital-controls-expected-to-slow-real-estate-but-improve-countrys-economic-health/#e69b67b66fdf.

national economy.[6] This may lead to new dynamics in contemporary artists' conceptualization of spectatorship. In the 2000s, Cai, Yang, and Xu—all of whom had established markets for their work in the international realm—hardly had to consider the investment interests of the middle class. The lack of economic ties between contemporary art and middle-class viewers temporarily provided these artists with freedom to construct shared cultural frameworks. In and after the 2010s, the growth of economic connections between the middle class and contemporary artworks may give rise to new shared cultural frameworks more removed from sociopolitical concerns, such as contemporary reiterations of literati aesthetics inspired by Chinese ink and wash painting.

This does not necessarily mean, however, that socialist concerns and visual elements of socialist realism are now irrelevant to contemporary art. Based on my ethnographic observation in Beijing from 2016 to 2017, I briefly delineate two kinds of exhibition spaces in which afterimages of socialist realism may persist. One is the alternative art space. Starting from the late 2000s, a number of small contemporary art spaces emerged in residential areas of cities like Beijing and Shanghai. Most of the founders and staff members are individuals with mid-level incomes. Almost all of these spaces operate on a combination of founders' private income and friends' donations. They tend to maintain a nonprofit outlook and rarely represent artists or sell artworks—a funding structure that allows them to be relatively removed from state and corporate interests. Their exhibitions maintain a low profile and attract mainly art professionals and expatriates. Though this limits public access, it renders them more independent from market

[6] "央视财经：书画艺术品，将成为未来主要投资渠道"[Central television state finance channel: calligraphy and painting will become main investments in the future], Sohu, accessed March 26, 2018, http://www.sohu.com/a/192047753_584699.

concerns and less likely to become targets of state intervention. Unlike the larger and more established art institutions, these art spaces are more open to showing artworks that are unlikely to bring cultural prestige or economic profit. Their spatial location in either residential apartments or shop-fronts can facilitate modes of viewing outside established art institutions. Though exhibitions at these spaces have not shown a tendency towards sociopolitical engagement, they hold potential to generate a new spectatorship of socialist realism.

The other kind of exhibition space where afterimages of socialist realism persist is the art space institutionally detached from the realm of contemporary art. One example is the Culture and Arts Museum of Migrant Laborers, a museum run by the nonprofit organization Migrant Workers' Home. [7] Located in Pi Village on the outskirts of Beijing, where tens of thousands of migrant workers reside, this museum's permanent display retraces the history of the group and features sections on female migrant workers and workers' children, using bulletin boards and objects donated by migrant workers (fig. 85).[8] Visitors are mainly migrant workers who live in the village, journalists, and contemporary art professionals. Though access is hindered by the museum's remote location, the general public has showed considerable interest in its cultural activities.[9] The display includes few visual elements of socialist realism, to avoid implications of

[7] He Shan and John Sexton, "Migrant workers tell their story in new museum," China.org, accessed March 31, 2018, http://www.china.org.cn/china/features/content_16728913.htm.
[8] Ibid.
[9] An example is the popularity of a piece of writing "I am Fan Yusu" written by a female migrant worker Fan Yusu residing in the Pi village. The autobiographical writing recounts her thoughts of working as a migrant worker in Beijing and was written as part of writing activities organized by Migrant Workers' Home at the Pi Village. It went viral on social media in 2017. According to a report in 2017, more than one million people had read the piece. See Tom Philips, "'I am Fan Yusu,' China Gripped by Dickenson Tale of a Migrant Worker's Struggle," Guardian, accessed April 22, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/03/i-am-fan-yusu-china-gripped-by-dickensian-tale-of-a-migrant-workers-struggle.

social unrest and state intervention; yet the social concerns and cultural interests it evokes cannot be fully separated from socialism.

Interactions and collaborations between people working at these two kinds of exhibition spaces may bring about new representations of the working class. One notable example is New Workers' Video Group, an artist group associated with Migrant Workers' Home in Pi Village and dedicated to creating films of migrant workers. Members of the group include head of Migrant Workers' Home Wang Dezhi, curator of a private contemporary art space Song Yi, and film director Shao Renjie. Until 2018, it has produced two films.[10] The first one, *Second-Generation Migrants* (2016), focuses on the everyday life of a young migrant worker, who was born in Beijing to migrant-worker parents. Though the filming followed a script, all actors were young migrant workers.[11] The second film, *Wild Grass Anthology* (2017), documented problems with the school education of migrant workers' children in Beijing. Though New Workers' Video Group had yet to develop distinctive aesthetic strategies or to articulate socio-political standpoints, group members worked closely with migrant workers in film production and screening. They have screened their films in Pi village and in one migrant workers' factory, in addition to contemporary art spaces.[12] This not only created opportunities for migrant workers to develop new perspective on their living and working conditions, but also connected discussions of labor issues among workers with those in contemporary art. These connections may pave the way for artists to gain a deeper understanding of workers' lives, as well as for workers to develop

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[10] Li Jingyi, "离开还是留下？这些在北京的工人们拍了部电影" [To leave or to stay? These workers in Beijing made a film], Tencent Net, accessed August 3, 2018, https://new.qq.com/omn/20180117/20180117A0R0QR.html.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Zhang Hanlu, "新工人影像小组：对图像的权利"[New workers' video group: Rights to the image] , Sohu, accessed August 3, 2018, http://www.sohu.com/a/194965788_197308.

critiques of the present and creative imagination of the future, conditions that are necessary for the making of a new image of the working class.

Illustrations

Fig. 1 Cai Guoqiang, *Collection of Konstantin Maksimov's Works*, 2002. Installation view, the Shanghai Art Museum, 2002.

Fig. 2 Installation view of *800 Meters Under*, Long March Space, 2008.

Fig. 3 Installation view of *X-Blind Spot*, Long March Space, 2008.

Fig. 4 Xu Bing, *Phoenix Project*, 2008-2010. Construction debris, light emitting diodes. 27 and 28 meters in length, 8 meters in width. Installation view, Today Art Museum, 2010.

Fig. 5 Wang Guangyi, *Great Criticism: Coca-Cola,* 1990–93. Oil on canvas. 200 x 200 cm.

Fig. 6 Xu Bing, untitled print, 1975–76. In Chia Chi Jason Wang ed. *Xu Bing: A Retrospective*. Taipei: Taipei Fine Art Museum, 2012. 121.

Fig. 7 Ai Weiwei, *Fountain of Light*, 2007. Glass beads, steel, wood, lighting installation. 7 meters high, 4 meters wide.

Fig. 8 Cao Fei, *RMB City,* 2007 and later. Video still.

Fig. 9 Cao Fei, *RMB City Opera,* 2009. Performance. In Cao Fei, Renate Wiehager, and Christian Ganzenberg el. *Cao Fei: I Watch That Worlds Pass By*. Berlin: DAC, Daimler Art Collection, 2015. 196–97.

Fig. 10 Cao Fei, *The Birth of RMB City*, 2008. Installation view, Ullens Center of Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2008.

Fig. 11 Ma Kelu, *Morning Snow*, 1975. Oil on paper. 18.5 x 26 cm.

Fig. 12 Zhang Dali, photograph of his graffiti in Beijing, 1995–97.

Fig. 13 Cai Guoqiang, *Collection of Maksimov's Works*, 2002. Installation view, the Shanghai Art Museum, 2002.

Fig. 14 Cai Guoqiang, *Collection of Maksimov's Works*, 2002. Installation View, Shanghai Art Museum, 2002.

Fig. 15 View outside the Shanghai Art Museum, 2002.

Fig. 16 Cai Guoqiang, *Self Promotion for the People*, 2000. Installation view, *Shanghai Biennale 2000: Shanghai Spirit*, 2000.

Fig. 17 Cai Guoqiang, *DMoCA (Dragon Museum of Contemporary Art): Everything is Museum No. 1*, 2000.

Fig. 18 Cai Guoqiang, *UMoCA (Under Museum of Contemporary Art),* 2001.

Fig. 19 Installation view of *Cai Guo-Qiang*, Shanghai Art Museum, 2002.

Fig. 20 A two-page spread. In Zhang Qng and Cai Guoqiang eds. *蔡国强艺术展* [Cai Guoqiang's Art Exhibition]. Shanghai: Shanghai Shuhua Chubanshe, 2002. 32–33.

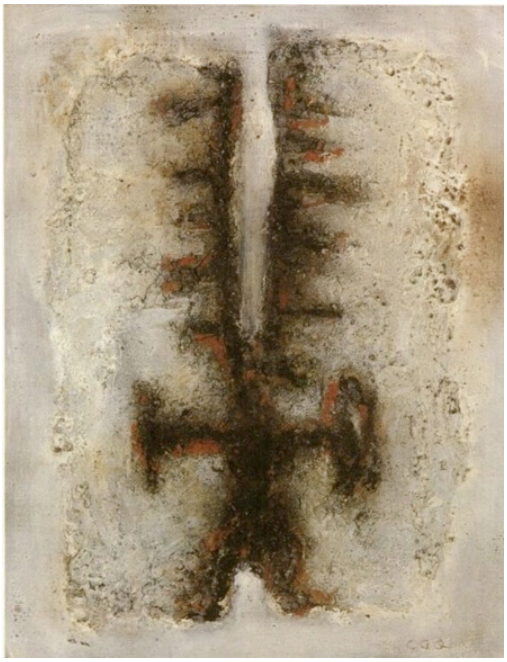

Fig. 21 Cai Guoqiang, *Gunpowder Painting—Ancestor with Feathers,* 1985. Oil and gunpowder on canvas.

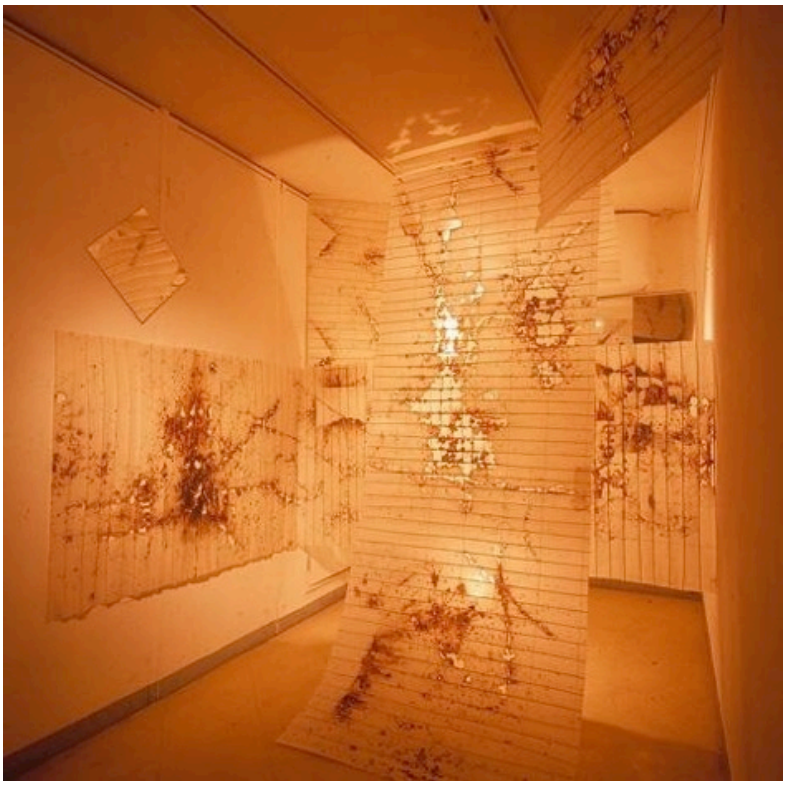

Fig. 22 Cai Guoqiang, *Space No.1*, 1988. Installation view, Kigoma Gallery, Tokyo, Japan, 1988.

Fig. 23 Cai Guoqiang, *Space No.2*, 1988. Installation view, Kigoma Gallery, Tokyo, Japan, 1988.

Fig. 24 Cai Guoqiang, *Human Abode: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 1,* 1989. Installation view, 89 Tama River Fussa Outdoor Art Exhibition, Tama, Japan, 1989.

Fig. 25 Cai Guoqiang, *Human Abode: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 1,* 1989. Gunpowder on Paper. 212.8 x 154.3 cm.

Fig. 26 Cai Guoqiang, *Project to Extend the Great Wall by 1000 Meters: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10*, 1993. Installation view, Jiayuguan, China, 1993.

Fig. 27 Cai Guoqiang, *Rent Collection Courtyard*, 1999. 60 tons of clay, wire and wood armatures.

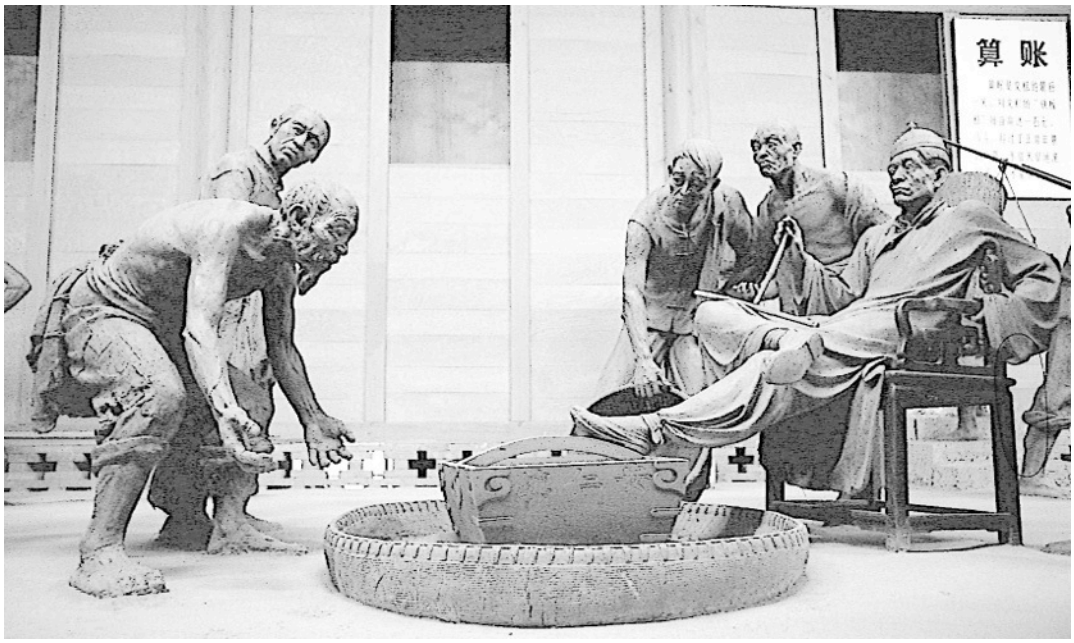

Fig. 28 Students and Professors at Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, workers, and peasants, *Rent Collection Courtyard*, 1965.

Fig. 29 Cai Guoqiang, *Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard* (detail), 1999.

Fig. 30 Liu Chunhua, *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan*, 1967. Oil on canvas.

Fig. 31 Cai Guoqiang, *Collection of Maksimov's Works*, 2002. Installation View, Shanghai Art Museum, 2002.

Fig. 32 Unknown photographer, 1955–1957.

Fig. 33 Unknown photographer, 1955–1957.

Fig. 34 Konstantin Maksimov, *Pianist*, 1955–1957. Oil on canvas.

Fig. 35 Yan Han, *Soldiers and People Collaborating to Protect the Country*, 1944. Print on paper.

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Fig. 39 Yang Shaobin, *No. 7,* 2006. Oil on canvas. 260 x 450 cm.

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Fig. 41 Installation view of *800 Meters Under*, Long March Space, 2008.

Fig. 42 Yang Shaobin, *Aboveground Underground* (part), 2006. Installation view, Long March Space, 2006.

Fig. 43 Yang Shaobin, *Aboveground Underground* (part), 2006. Installation view, Long March Space, 2006.

Fig. 44 Yang Shaobin, *Aboveground Underground* (part), 2006. Installation view, Long March Space, 2006.

Fig. 45 Zhang Jianhua, *Coalmine Accidents! Coalmine Accidents!,* 2006. Sculpture.

Fig. 46 Zhang Jianhua, *Coalmine Accidents! Coalmine Accidents!,* 2006. Sculpture.

Fig. 47 Yang Shaobin*, No.8*, 2006. Oil on canvas. 260x450 cm.

Fig. 48 El Lissitzky, (in collaboration with Sergei Senkin), Photofesco in *Pressa.* Installation view, International Press Exhibition, Cologne, 1928.

Fig. 49 Yang Shaobin, *No.12,* 2006. Oil on canvas. 180 x 130 cm.

Fig. 50 Yang Shaobin, *No. 13*, 2006. Oil on Canvas. 180 x 130 cm.

Fig. 51 Yang Shaobin, *No. 2*, 2007–08. Oil on canvas. 240 x 354 cm.

Fig. 52 Yang Shaobin, *No. 15*, 2008. Lightbox Installation. 100 x 75 x 88 cm (each lightbox). Installation view, Long March Space, 2008.

Fig. 53 Yang Shaobin, *No. 8*, 2007–08. Oil on canvas. 280 x 210 cm.

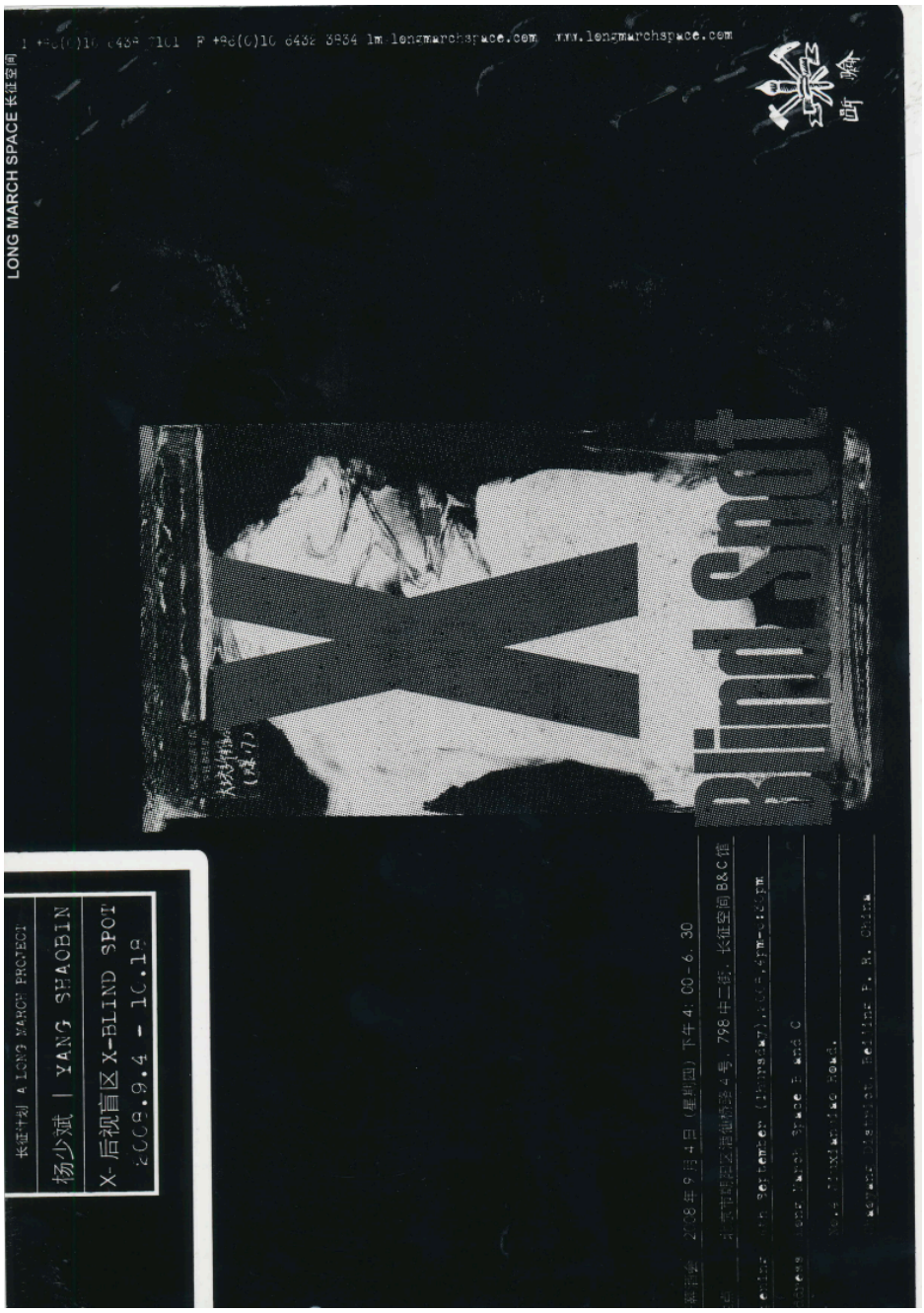

Fig. 54 Invitation card of *X-Blind Spot,* 2008.

Fig. 55 Yang Shaobin, *Policeman,* 1993. Oil on canvas. 170 x 170 cm.

Fig. 56 Yang Shaobin, *Untitled 4*, 1997–98. Oil on canvas. 230 x 180 cm.

Fig. 57 Yang Shaobin, *Black Shadow*, 2002. Oil on canvas. 140 x 160 cm.

Fig. 58 Yang Shaobin, *The Fish Bites It?*, 2003. Oil on canvas.

Fig. 59 *The East is Red*, 1964. Opera. Video still.

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Fig. 61 Luo Zhongli, *Father*, 1980. Oil on canvas. 216 x 152 cm.

Fig. 62 Jin Shangyi, *Tajik Woman*, 1983. Oil on canvas. 60 x 50 cm.

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Fig. 64 Liu Xiaodong*, Disobeying the Rules*, 1996. Oil on canvas. 180 x 230 cm.

Fig. 65 Xu Bing, *Phoenix Project* (detail), 2008-2010.

Fig. 66 Installation view of “The Story of the Phoenix,” Today Art Museum, 2010.

Fig. 67 Installation view of “The Story of the Phoenix,” Today Art Museum, 2010.

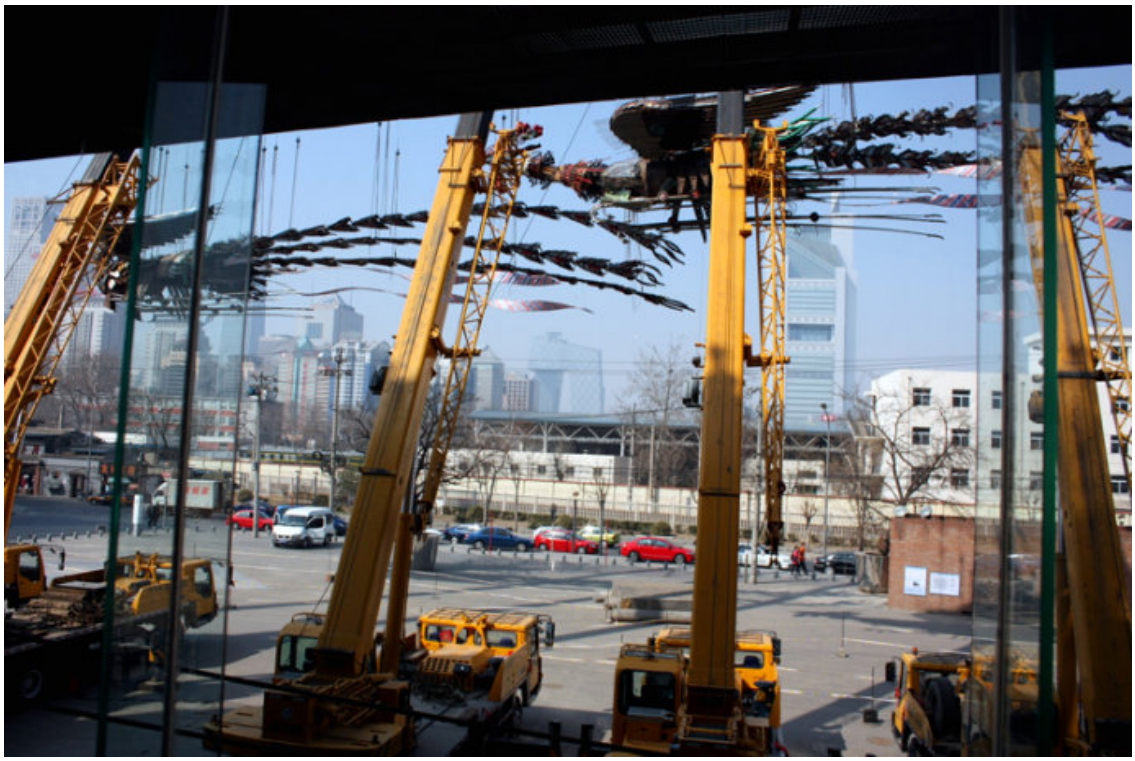

Fig. 68 Installation view of *Phoenix Project* from inside the Today Art Museum, 2010.

Fig. 69 Untitled photographs. In Xu Bing Studio. *The Story of the Phoenix*. Beijing, 2014. 3.

Fig. 70 Untitled photograph. In Xu Bing Studio. *The Story of the Phoenix*. Beijing, 2014. 2.

Fig. 71 Untitled photographs. In Xu Bing Studio. *The Story of the Phoenix*. Beijing, 2014. 4.

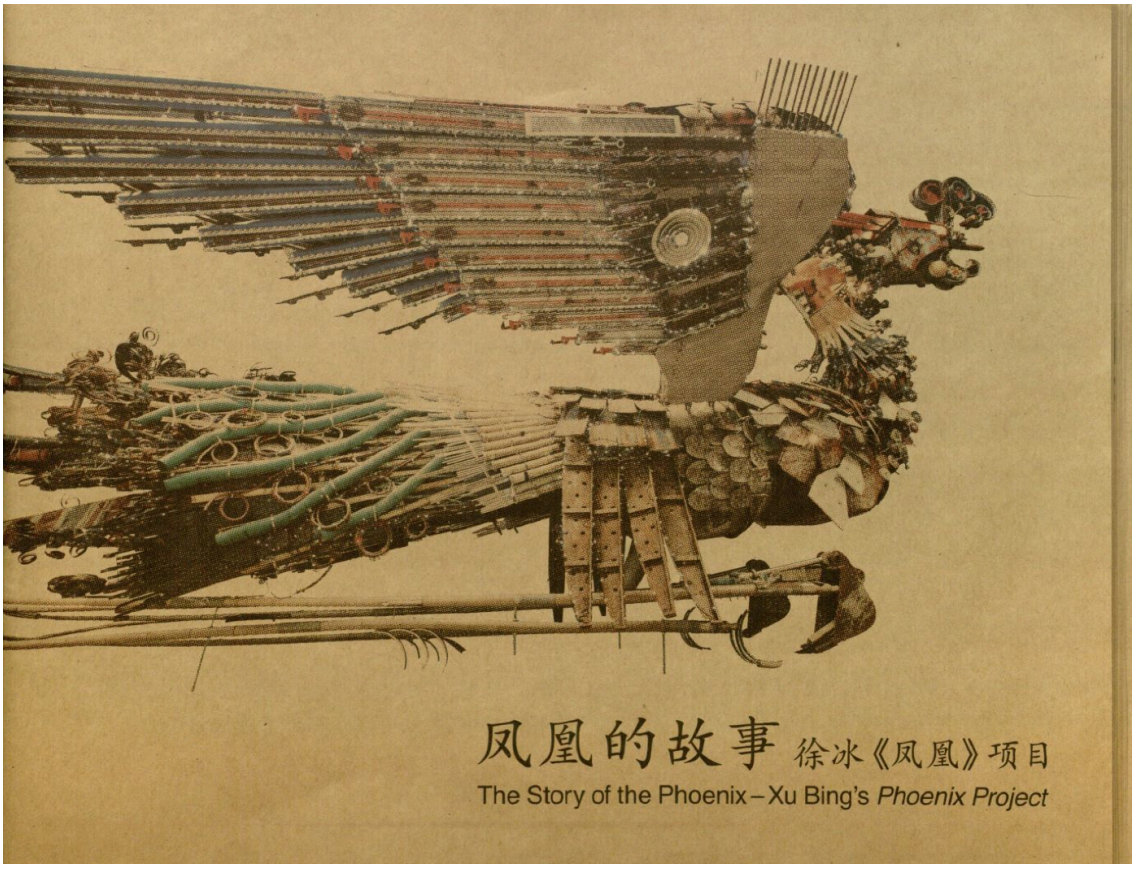

Fig. 72 Cover of *The Story of the Phoenix.*

Fig. 73 *Fight the People's Battle of Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius* (1974). Chinese Posters, accessed July 21, 2018, https://chineseposters.net/themes/criticize-lin-biao-confucius.php.

Fig. 74 *Fight the People's Battle of Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius* (1974). Chinese Posters, accessed July 21, 2018, https://chineseposters.net/themes/criticize-lin-biao-confucius.php.

Fig. 75 Xu Bing, *Art for the People*, 1999. Dye sublimation on polyester. 274.3 x 1087.3 cm. Installation view, MoMA New York, 1999.

Fig. 76 *Hold High the Great Red Banner of Mao Zedong Thought—Thoroughly Smash the Rotting Counterrevolutionary Revisionist Line in Literature and Art* (1967). Chinese Posters, accessed July 21, 2018, https://chineseposters.net/themes/cultural-revolution-campaigns.php.

Fig. 77 Xu Bing, *Family in Shanbei*, 1982. Woodcut on paper. In Chia Chi Jason Wang ed. *Xu Bing: A Retrospective*. Taipei: Taipei Fine Art Museum, 2012. 131.

Fig. 78 Gu Yuan, *Chairman Mao Talking with Peasants,* 1952. Printed poster. Tianjin: Tianjin Fine Art Press, 1952.

Fig. 79 Xu Bing, Sketch for *Family in Shanbei,* 1981–1982. Pencil on paper.

Fig. 80 Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky,* 1987-91. Hand-printed books and scrolls printed from blocks inscribed with "false" characters. Dimensions variable. Installation view, China Art Gallery, 1988.

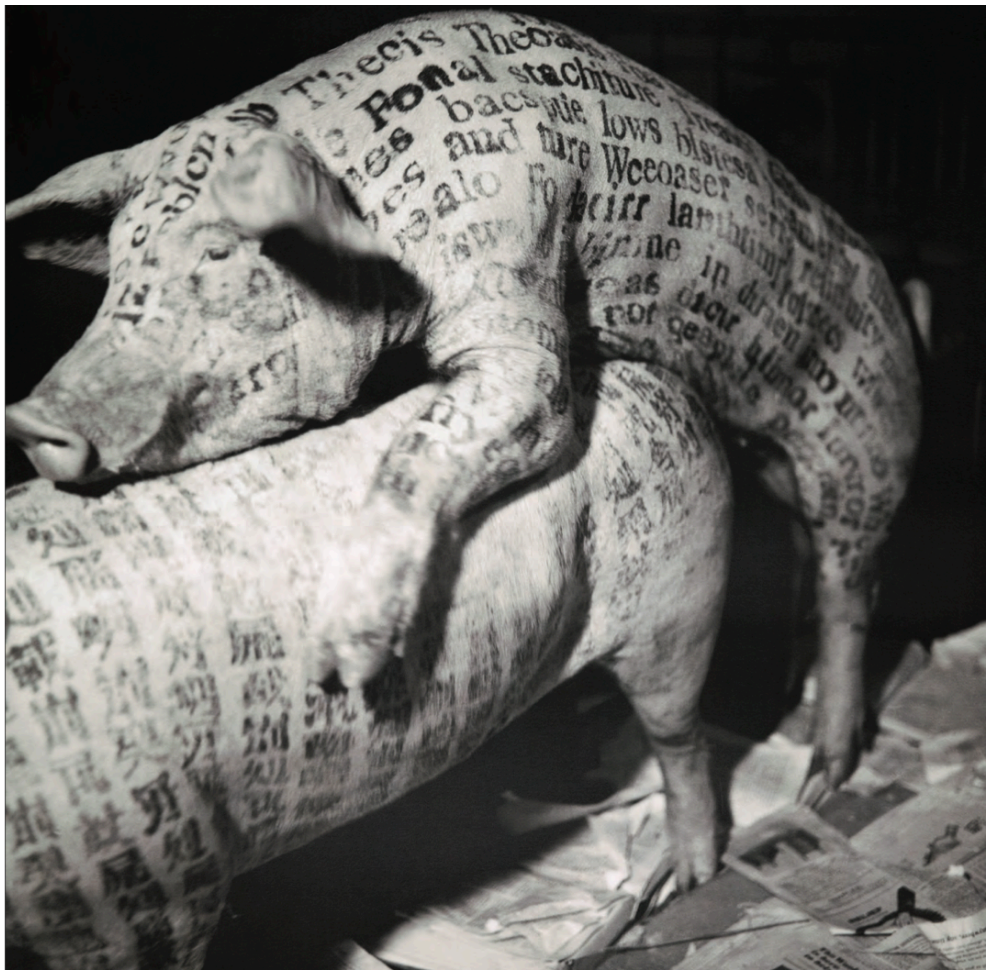

Fig. 81 Xu Bing, *A Case Study of Transference: Cultural Animals*, 1993–94. Performance with pigs. Installation view, Han Mo Arts Center, Beijing, 1994.

Fig. 82 Xu Bing, *A Consideration of Golden Apples*, 2002. Installation view outside the National Agricultural Exhibition Center, Beijing, 2002.

Fig. 83 Untitled photograph, 2008–2010. Installation view, Today Art Museum, 2010.

Fig. 84 Wall panel of “The Story of the Phoenix.” Installation view at the Today Art Museum, 2010.

Fig. 85 Installation view of the Culture and Arts Museum of Migrant Laborers, 2010.

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