

THE MODERN OR THE POST-MODERN

-- ON CHINA'S AVANT-GARDE

A Thesis

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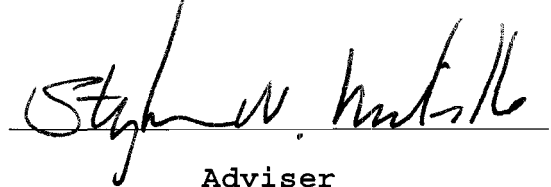
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To My Parents

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INTRODUCTION

As the extremely heavy gate of the "Forbidden City" was gradually pushed open, the past decade became an important period for the Chinese artists when they opened their eyes to the outer world and embraced it with enthusiasm, astonishment and sometimes, puzzlement.

It was a new, somewhat strange world for people who had lived within a confined country for more than thirty years. A torrent of western modern art with its own cultural and historical logic was poured all at once onto the arid earth. At the end of the 1970s, when Mao Zedong had just died and the Cultural Revolution had ended, Impressionism and Post-impressionism were introduced to the art circles of China approximately a century after they flourished in Europe. This was the second and large-scale meeting of modernist arts of the west with eastern culture and its long tradition of art.¹ Up through the mid-1980s, more and more modernist artists and

¹ In the end of the 1920s and the 1930s there were a few artists who applied themselves to the forms of early modernism. The small-scale experiment, however, waned mainly due to the war of resistance against Japan. In the entrance of exhibition hall in which "China/Avant-Garde" was displayed in 1989, there was a memorial-like device inscribed with the dedication -- TO THE PEOPLE WHO HAD DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO CHINA'S MODERN ART, which paid homage specially to those Chinese modernists of the 1920s-1930s.

schools became familiar to Chinese artists, especially to the younger generation, through such channels as original and translated publications, the mass media, exhibitions and visiting artists from the west. Not surprisingly, Post-modernism found a new bridgehead in China at almost the same time that modernism arrived.

When looking at what has happened in China in recent years, I find it extremely hard to draw a clear picture which adequately reflects the ever-changing, highly interwoven phenomena, especially since modernist art still is not a part of the main-stream in contemporary Chinese culture. The official ideological, propagandist art, while weakened and changed after Mao's death, still dominates the stage.² The double pressure of politics and economics since 1989 has weighed heavily on the vulnerable art, but this pressure has also stimulated the experimental art which has become in turn more and more deeply involved the current political and

² After the attacks upon the official art from different directions (the traditional, the academic and the avant-garde, etc.) for more than ten years, it was still strong enough to keep its established position. I, among many artists and critics, was really shocked when I entered the huge exhibition hall of the Museum of Chinese History, located in the east side of Tiananmen Square, where the "Exhibition of Celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party of China" was on display on July, 1991. More than five hundred works, including oil painting, ink painting, printmaking, New Year painting, watercolor, *gouache*, paper-cut, sculpture, and even collage, were crammed with the hall. I could not believe that there were still such an enormous amount of the official and semi-official artists who pledge their royalty to the party. Ironically, some techniques and styles from western modernism could be seen here and there.

economic situation. In the years after Mao's death the cultural environment, as well as art world, has changed dramatically and violently.³ Accordingly, new art styles and trends have emerged and been silenced with a high frequency. It seems to me that any attempt to delineate or classify the new art appearing in this period could be in vain, because of this state of artistic and cultural chaos. But it is just this "chaos" that reminds me of some features of post-modern culture and art. A few questions arise almost immediately: is it possible for a post-modern culture to exist in a nation which has not been fully industrialized? Is this a resurgence of pre-modern culture? Clearly there is considerable displacement, dislocation and confusion in the situation. Is this confusion itself a feature or symptom of post-modernism?

Here is an example of the perplexity that arises when Chinese artists make use of western terminology and try to reinterpret it.

³ There are, at least, five political events after Mao's death which led to the dramatic change:

1. The arrest of the "Gang of Four" (including Mao's widow), followed by the launch of economic reform and opening to the world during the end of the 1970s;

2. The campaign of "anti-spiritual pollution" launched in 1983 which suppressed first round of struggle for freedom of speech;

3. The campaign of "anti-bourgeoisie liberalization" launched in 1987 which fought against efforts of liberalization in various fields;

4. The pro-democracy movement and the massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989 followed by the retrogression in economics, politics and culture;

5. Restarting of economic reform after the patriarch Deng Xiaoping's inspection tour of southern China in 1992.

In February, 1989, a historic exhibition of art was held in the National Art Gallery, Beijing. The word "historic" refers not only to its scale, approximately 300 pieces of works by 185 artists which occupied most of the huge three-story of gallery, also to its impact on both the art world, and the larger society of the time. It was the first time that non-official and heterodox art were permitted in the highest state-run art temple of China. Interestingly, the period when the exhibition was held happened to coincide with traditional Chinese New Year -- the Spring Festival -- which celebrates getting rid of the old to make way for the new. The movement for democracy and the Tiananmen Square massacre took place a few months later. Because of the subtle relationship and sensed analogy possible between these two events, some hard-line critics condemned the show as a "rehearsal" of the democratic movement. What mostly impressed, and confused the western audience seems to have been the exhibition's title itself: "China/Avant-Garde" (the Chinese title "*Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu Zhan*", means "the exhibition of modern art in China", but the artists seem to prefer the English title). "Surely, in an age of post-modernism, the idea of an avant-garde was in itself out of date?" ⁴ Similar questions were raised by Professor Stephen Melville and members of audience at the symposium "Modernism

⁴ David Elliott, Introduction of China Avant-Garde, catalog, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 1993, p.7.

and Modernization in Contemporary Chinese Art and Culture", held in Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, October, 1993.

It is absolutely understandable that such questions were posed. For those who experienced high modernism and now live in a post-modernist culture, avant-gardism is a dated notion that had run its course by the 1970s.⁵ According to R. Mayer, "avant-garde" is "a term describing art that departs from the existing norm in an original or experimental way".⁶ For the Westerners, what the Chinese did in the 1980s seemed highly familiar. For the Chinese after the Cultural Revolution, however, this new art movement was like a shocking monster they had never seen before. The works of China's avant-garde, departing from established formal, moral, political and cultural norms, was seen as innovative, original or experimental. It was effective as the new in the context of this culture. At the same time, its forms and some concepts derived from worldwide modernism. The art itself may be considered the product of the multicultural interaction.

China's avant-garde is in a highly awkward and hard situation. It is caught in the narrow defile between two

⁵ Charles Jencks claimed, "Modern architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3,32 p.m. (or thereabout) when the infamous Pruitt-igoe scheme, rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final *coup de grace* by dynamite." The Language of Post-Modern Architecture, London: Academy Editions, 1977, p.9.

⁶ Ralph Mayer, A Dictionary of Art Terms and Techniques, Thomas Y. Company, New York, 1975, p.25.

cliffs -- one cliff consists of the age-old tradition and stiff state ideology, while powerful western art is on the opposite side. Going too far toward one side will likely appear as "imitation" of the west, while tending too far toward convention and tradition will fall into the stereotypes which they wanted to get out of. Walking in the defile with care and a heavy mental load is like high-wire walking: how to balance one's body is the point. China's avant-garde is the acrobat, and it is a courageous one. On the dim stage, the artists have perform a magnificent, sometimes chaotic drama.

What I would like to do in this thesis is not to define or classify China's avant-garde in a ready-made framework (I even doubt such a framework exists), but to see what kind of significant things happened in the 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, what issues Chinese avant-gardists faced, and how they have reacted to these issues in their own way. The emphasis will be on the last of them, and the description of artistic events and works in chronological order will give way to discussion of those theoretical or practical issues with which China's avant-garde was primarily concerned. Although these issues may relate to contemporary developments in the world's art, and the artists' responses to them may remind us of the ideas and works of modernist or post-modernist artists, the word "avant-garde" is nevertheless not a precise title for this new and experimental art movement since it refers too directly to western modernism. But until Chinese artists and

critics create an independent critical discourse which could be more appropriate to the movement,⁷ I have no choice but to label it in this way. The choice seems to me reasonable as long as we are aware of diversities of the cultural contexts. Accordingly, the terminologies and methods I will use reflect a certain cross-cultural uncertainty, and so should be taken as an experiment.

The issues China's avant-garde faced are related to something other than the "pure art" with which western high modernism was fascinated, and so coincide with the main concerns of contemporary literature, movies, music, philosophy, history, and politics. Among many issues, I am going to choose three pairs: autonomy of art and politicization of art, high art, low art and their fusion, tradition and modernization, which pick out some of the most significant subjects in the avant-garde movement, although they do not cover all its important aspects. We may see them as antitheses, but they are not necessarily as they appear. The definition and opposition are blurred in practice, which demands that we analyze them more carefully. These issues are

⁷ China has its own conventions of criticism on literature and arts called *wenlun* (theory of literature) and *hualun* (theory of painting) respectively. They still work in criticism of classical literature and arts now, but obviously are not enough or suitable for those contemporary works which are produced in an open context. In the 1980s, western terminology and methods of modern criticism were applied in China. More Chinese critics are currently thinking over an approach which could touch the object of criticism more properly and creatively. It, I believe, will be a significant and time-consuming job.

critical for the movement and are still active in China today in a way that encourages me to investigate them in order to draw a sketchy picture for further detailed study in the future.

Chapter I

Autonomy of Art and Politicization of Art

In the 1980s, both the trends autonomy of art and its politicization seemed to have kept abreast of one another for historical reasons.

The political art dominated by official ideology established since the 1950s reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution. Its hypocrisy, pseudo-realism, hero worship and falsehood were confronted by the independent awareness and critical realist attitude of many young artists after the Revolution. The "Star Group", which appeared in 1979, was the first to rebel by means of abstraction, symbolism, and critical realism. The artists denounced the ridiculous political reality and inhumanity of the Cultural Revolution. The group exhibited their works in Beijing, November 23 - October 2, 1979.⁸ Wang Keping's wooden sculptures, "Idol" and "Silence", represented main features of the group (figs. 1, 2). The combination of images of Mao and Buddha of the "Idol", obviously, remind us the reality that

⁸ See Gao Minglu, Zhou Yan, Wang Xiaojian, Shu Qun, Wang Mingxian and Tong Dian, *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Shi: 1985-1986* (a history of Chinese contemporary art: 1985-1986), Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 1991, pp. 37-39

Mao was deified during the Cultural Revolution; while "Silence" implies that one cannot speak not only because his mouth is clogged up, also because his eyes are blinded, and most importantly, he has no brain, so silence is the only reaction to the reality. In general, the direct criticism of ridiculous political reality and denouncement of inhumanity of the Cultural Revolution are primary subjects of the "Star Group".

As another approach, especially among academic painters, a sort of aesthetic formalism came out as reaction to the vulgar and visual asceticism reflected in the official art. There were not only many artists who practiced beautiful subject and technique, but also an influential debate in the main art magazines in the end of the 1970s. The key advocate of "beauty of form" was Wu Guanzhong (1919-), a professor at Central Academy of Arts and Crafts who studied in France during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Influenced by French academism of the 19th century, his formula of thinking could be summed up as,

visual perception -- beauty of form -- art

Wu Guanzhong believes that art creation should follow this process, that is, to observe the visual world, to find out the beautiful form of the world and to transform it into art. The narrative factors should for him be eliminated from art, or at least, be degraded to a subordinate position. The beautiful form here refers primarily to beautiful lines,

shapes, colors and rhythm formed by all of these elements. This idea was reinforced by Yuan Yunsheng (1940-), another academic painter. His mural "Hymn of Life" (fig. 3) lauding the human body became controversial right after it was unveiled in 1979. He was fascinated by the visual feast of linear art, "This is a linear world with varied and simple lines -- soft but springy lines, forceful but elegant lines, and also inflexible, sentimental and gossamer lines." ⁹

These two approaches were preliminary reactions to the official political art. One applied the strategy of doing unto him as he does unto you, that is, rebelling against political art and reality with another, critical political art. The other, however, tried to get back what it had been deprived of by that art. The art of the "Star Group" is more like an art demonstration in an expressionist way which inspired the development of politicization of art in the following years. For the academic approach, the artists tried to get out of mere propaganda art in terms of getting rid of narrative and illusionist factors. This awareness of formal elements of painting was the beginning of consciousness of autonomy of art which foreshadowed the further development of avant-garde in autonomy of art.

Up through the mid 1980s, avant-garde artists with stronger cultural idealism and more knowledge of achievement

⁹ Yuan Yunshen, "Dream of Mural," *Meishu Yanjiu* (art studies, quarterly), Central Academy of Fine Arts, 1980.1, p.11.

of modern art pushed the two approaches above forward in their own ways.

One of avant-gardists who addressed the nature of art seriously and thoughtfully is Wu Shanzhuan (1960-). His thoughts mostly focused on the ontology of art. He believed that the nature of art should be determined by its history. The relationship between an artist and art (or art language) is like that between soil and plant. Soil provides nutriment and so determines the quality and yield of an individual plant but cannot determine the species of its fruit, which is based on history of its own evolution. Thus the art work exists as object to which meaning is given externally. For him, the art work in isolation is so pure that it has no thought in itself, or in its expression. The artist's intention and means of creation do not explain the nature of art work. Nothing of an artist's self has anything to do with the nature of the art work itself. Even the title of an art piece exists as external to it. In sum, a work of art exists as a link in the chain of art history, while artist just forges it: "In the end, the art work uses a concrete person as a means. The concrete person will die, but the work may continue to exist."¹⁰

Accordingly, the autonomy of art for him is the autonomy

¹⁰ See Gao Minglu, Zhou Yan, Wang Xiaojian, Shi Qun, Wang Mingxian and Tong Dian, Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Shi: 1985-1986 (a history of Chinese contemporary art: 1985-1986), Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 1991, p. 201.

of art language: "The action of art precedes the effect of art." "The action of art precedes the essence of art, and the consciousness of action precedes the action of consciousness." "An artist acts passively in unison with the action of art. What he obeys is obviously thrust from art language itself." He called it "existentialist art", ¹¹ inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's idea, "existence precedes essence". ¹²

We can see from Wu's statements that he tended to separate the signifier out from sign. He stressed that there was a self-contained or self-sufficient world at the level of the signifier of art language. He tried to take the signified -- reference, meaning, conception, etc. -- out off art language so that art could become what he called the "static sea",

"It is a static and empty box without dimension. It is destined to accept what anyone gives, and will never be full. The box has no force from within to restrain itself. It is destined not to vanish into the void." ¹³

In de Saussure, "sign" as the whole is the combination of a concept and a sound-image in terms of linguistics. He used

¹¹ *ibid.* p.201.

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, "What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world - and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him as not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself." Existentialism and Humanism, trans. by Philip Mairet, London, 1948, p.27.

¹³ Wu Shanzhuan, "Our Paintings", *Meishu Sichao* (art trends), Hubei Art Center, Wuhan, 1987.1.

"signified" to indicate "concept", and "signifier" to refer to "sound-image". "The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary."¹⁴ It means that to the signified the signifier is arbitrary, generally speaking, for a single concept there are many different sound-images to refer to it. Now, for Wu, the order seems to have been reversed. In a broader sense (not only within linguistics), the sound-image of a sign could be an "empty box" which may be arbitrarily endowed with limitless concept or meanings. Based on this idea, Wu Shanzhuan used Chinese characters as the element of his experiments.

Chinese characters have been developed as an exceedingly complicated system of ideographs and pictographs since the Shang Dynasty (ca. 16-11th century B. C.) when the earliest pictograph -- inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells -- appeared. It became one of the most important carriers of Chinese culture and its spirit. We can say that the Chinese character as a uniquely written form of language is the key to solving the puzzle of Chinese culture. As Wu put it,

"Viewing either from the written language's role in the formation of a nation's way of thinking, or from its effect on the construction of a nation's psychology and spirit, the Chinese character is very peculiar among the family of written languages. Both its strict monosyllable-phonetic system and the particularity of its squarish form make it feel extremely lonely in the family. If we could say that written language is the key to a nation's spirit, then the loss of the key of Chinese character would mean that the greatest spirit of the

¹⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, trans. by Wade Baskin. N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966, p.67.

nation is locked in a safe forever." ¹⁵

Traditionally, besides the function as carrier of meaning, the Chinese character has also been appreciated as an aesthetic object in the form of calligraphy, which is always associated with the recognition of each character and the understanding of the content of the piece (mostly poem). Therefore, appreciation of calligraphic form of the Chinese character presupposes certain background knowledge. To avoid the conventional aesthetic significance of calligraphy of Chinese character, Wu chose print of Chinese to make an installation, "Red 75 %, Black 20 %, White 5 %" with his fellows in 1986 (fig. 4). He attempted to make use of the "neutrality" of print to "vacuumize" the characters, which were divorced from the context in which they are supposed to be. They were juxtaposed in a bold way. The juxtaposition created a new context. All "vacuumized" characters were to be endowed with a meaning different from the one they had originally. The most impressive piece is a board which has a pile made of characters for "garbage" (垃圾) with "nirvana" (涅槃) on the top. The juxtaposition of such signs of the holiest and the filthiest, the sacred and the profane, and the spiritual and the material makes Chinese characters a mere means of showing conflict instead of an object of appreciation or a vehicle of documentary. Wu tried to purify the art

¹⁵ Wu Shanzhuan, "On Chinese Characters", *Meishu* (Fine Arts, Monthly), People's Fine Arts Press, Beijing, 1986.8, p.32.

language by "vacuumizing" the signs he used, but new meaning arrives anyway. Like some artists of western high modernism, Wu attempted to separate form from content. The result, however, passes beyond his intention. The Chinese character can not be treated as a form in the way that color, line or light in painting can. The paradox is inherent in his medium. What I do not know is whether he was aware of this or not. He seems to be intelligent enough to know what would happen when a Chinese audience saw this work. An educated Chinese, living in a country where almost everything is politicized, cannot read his work with an "innocent eye." Absurdity, disharmony, conflict and confrontation were all there to be read. This case suggests that autonomy of art, one of the goals of modernism, seems not easy to realize thoroughly in China along this path at least in the near future, not only because of almighty communist politicized culture, but also because of the long tradition of written language as a whole which is hard to be separated in terms of signifier and signified.

For some younger artists, such as Feng Mengbo (1966-) and Zhang Bo (1966-), who graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in the beginning of the 1990s, the experiment of language seems to have more to do with material media and their qualities. Although they had no manifesto for autonomy of art as some artists did, they considered their experiment as an effort for autonomy of art. As students, both had been trained as masterful printmakers. Tired of the craftsmanship

of printmaking without any consideration of its nature, they were fascinated with the distinctive qualities of printmaking as a unique language of art.

In his 1991 graduation exhibition, Zhang showed his "Report of Research on the Existence of Iron Plates and Organs," which consists of eight etchings, a bottle wrapped by cotton gauze, a rusty iron plate, and a printed report (figs. 5, 6, 7). The images of these etchings include apparent rusty iron plates, human organ-like shapes, hard-edge bottle shapes, etc. All of these pieces have concave and convex rubbings of metal spacers on the paper's margin (fig. 7). While it shares qualities of trace and repetition with other types of printmaking, Zhang believes that etching has its own features: corrosiveness, concavity and convexity, and property of metal,

"First of all, the trace of etching is 'squeezed out' by moderate pressure of the roller on the metal plate, so that the original 'concavity' is transformed into 'convexity', and vice versa, which made me consider 'concavity-convexity' as an important feature of etching. Secondly, 'corroding' as the main technique of etching leads to the quality of 'corrosiveness,' while 'concavity-convexity' is the inevitable result of corroding. Finally, the metal plate as the medium of etching is the precondition of 'corrosiveness' and 'concavity-convexity' on the one hand, while its corrosion resulting from nitric acid manifests and reinforces the 'property of metal' on the other." ¹⁶

Concavity-convexity, corrosiveness and property of metal are all considered as essential to printmaking, which broke away conventional conceptions of "academic" printmaking. In

¹⁶ Zhang Bo, Feng Mengbo and Zhou Yan, "Zuowei yizhong xiandai yuyan de banhua -- guanyu banhua texing de duihua" (Printmaking as a Language of Modern Art -- Dialogue on the Nature of Printmaking), 1991, Feng Mengbo's privata file, p.1.

a Chinese art school, all of these qualities, even if seen as important aspects of the teaching of printmaking, are just the means of conveying subject matter. Zhang's work for graduation shows no visible motif or readable subject for the faculty members of the department of printmaking, which led them suspect Zhang's qualification of bachelor degree. The reason for this suspicion sounds simple and specious: what did it convey except for showing us an iron plate and its representation? ¹⁷ For Zhang, the iron plate -- substantial one and the printed one -- is the epitome of the qualities of etching,

"The iron plate itself is the subject to me, because its state is in line with my thought of the quality of etching as an art language on the one hand, and the state itself presents a strong 'sense of substance' on the other. 'Substance' is what I emphasize in this work. I hope I can go a deeper level of existence by the exploration." ¹⁸

The iron plate he presented functions as an object carrying etching's qualities -- concavity-convexity, corrosiveness and property of metal.

Unlike Zhang Bo's austere attitude and work of art, Feng Mengbo's experiment looks relaxed and humorous (figs. 8, 9, 10). The work, entitled "Bible: St. Luke", is made of hand-

¹⁷ Zhang Bo and Feng Mengbo had some trouble that they almost could not graduate on time because their graduation works look not like printmaking according to the "academic" standard: visible subject matter supported by masterful techniques of traditional printmaking.

¹⁸ Zhang Bo, Feng Mengbo and Zhou Yan, "Zuowei yizhong xiandai yuyan de banhua -- guanyu banhua texinf de duihua" (Printmaking as a Language of Modern Art -- Dialog on the Nature of Printmaking), 1991, Feng Mengbo's private file, p.2.

made paper by the artist himself. He collected magazines, newspapers, posters and various books, which he called "print garbage," then mixed them with water, so all paper went back its original state -- pulp. The pulp was molded into a sort of ready-made image: jeans (fig. 8), shoes, cakes, hands and feet which models are from real products or human parts. Some pulp was colored and then made into "documentary photographs" by hand (fig. 9). The artist spoke of his understanding of printmaking,

"I have no interest in the printing of color and the repetition of printmaking, even though they have been believed the most important components of printmaking language. I believe that the mark and the trace of print are essential to printmaking. In this I am fascinated with blind printing which I see as the purest language of printmaking. In making my work, however, I pay little attention to the marks and traces' similarities to relief -- volume and space. What I was concerned about was the process in which these marks and traces were produced when the pulp had been molded in the casting mold." ¹⁹

While Zhang Bo chose iron plates as carriers of the quality in etching, Feng Mengbo settled on paper. Paper has at least two significant aspects in his work: it is the surface receiving printing or mark-and-trace production in terms of the printmaking art; and it is one of the four great inventions of Chinese culture. ²⁰ Therefore his choice of medium has to do both with art language and with culture in general. Looking at his "printmaking" pieces, people may tend

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.5.

²⁰ Four great inventions by Chinese are paper, printing, gunpowder and compass.

to be amused by the Chinese Pop images rather than contemplate the art language behind the images. Compared with Zhang, Feng's experiment of language is not explicit; he prefers to conceal his experimental intention behind ready-made and extremely readable images. For him, the process of experiment is a private experience:

"People use various papers: Xuan paper ²¹ is used for painting and calligraphy, and cardboard for packing. Nobody cares about how they are made, which is exactly what I concern myself with. Some newspapers, a few copies of old magazines, occasionally homework books I used in childhood were torn to pieces, and mixed with water into a gruel-like pulp in a mixer. Then I molded it or 'portrayed' images. The transformation of a pile of waste paper into this kind of thing is an intriguing process which, for me, is too wonderful for words. I conceived many figurative images meticulously, and made pulp with extra care. Doing so, on the one hand, presented the sheer property of paper from my hand-made paper work. The paper, which excludes our idea of paper in everyday life by its objectivity and purity, is purely material. Paper returns to paper itself, the existential state of matter. On the other hand, I gave the pure paper a figurative form seen in everyday life. To paper, the shoes, jeans, and cakes I made, reversely, became means by which paper presented itself. For the viewer, the figurative images are an interference with his/her cognition of paper as an existential state of matter." ²²

Feng was intoxicated with his studio experience of experiment while the spectator can read humor, jocularly and burlesque from his paper stuff. He isolated himself from the

²¹ Xuan paper is a fine white paper made of bamboo, made especially in Xuan city, Anhui province, China, especially suitable for Chinese painting and calligraphy, also called rice paper.

²² Zhang Bo, Feng Meng-bo and Zhou Yan, "Zuowei Yizhong Xiandai Yuyan de Banhua -- guanyu banhua texing de duihua" (printmaking as a language of modern art: dialogue on the nature of printmaking), 1991, Feng Meng-bo's private file, p. 6.

potential viewer and enjoyed the frustration and excitement of his experiment of language in "printmaking". I cannot forget Feng's intoxicated expression when he had described details and the feeling of his studio process when we talked about Zhang Bo's and his works in 1991. Marks and traces left from molding and modelling of pulp fascinate him and even gave him a big room for imagination,

"In the exhibition, my works of paper are displayed in glass boxes. The 'paper' in its pure state of substance is parallel to the reflective glass surfaces, the dark green velvets and the metal holders (fig. 10). In this new context, it looks as if it is a certain phase of evolution of life or a holy and historical relic. I love this manner of display like that of museums of nature and history." ²³

If we could say that Zhang Bo defined his approach to printmaking with no tension between his intention and final result, then Feng Mengbo's making of works of paper went beyond conventional boundaries of printmaking, and more or less, led to conflict between his goal of language experiment and the visual and social impact at the works themselves. Actually, it is hard to consider him a mere formalist. He claims that he tried, in his work, to re-interpret such qualities as complexity, representation and even narrative which modernism had stripped away. As Renato Poggioli points out:

"The modern mystique of purity aspires to abolish the discursive and syntactic element, to liberate art from any connection with psychological and empirical reality, to reduce every work to the intimate laws of its own expressive essence

²³ *ibid.* p.6.

or to the given absolutes of its own genre or means; ..." ²⁴

From this point of view, Feng is not well classified as a modernist, even if he has sought for a purest language of printmaking in the mark and trace.

The formalism of modernism has, I would argue, never culminated in China. Chinese avant-gardists such as Feng Mengbo, Zhang Bo and Wu Shanzhuan are eclectic in their combination of an exploration of art language with a sustained concern beyond the language.

In comparison with the deliberate and active efforts towards autonomous art, politicized art in China's avant-garde movement seemed to have grown up "naturally." If one can say that most of artists in 1980s alienated themselves, intentionally or unintentionally, from politics to focus on art in a narrow sense or on culture in a broad sense, one can also say that since 1989 an interest in political themes has become common in avant-garde circles. One interpretation is that this is direct result of and reaction to the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 4, 1989 and its aftermath. The real cause, I believe, is more complicated, because not only the political situation changed, but also cultural atmosphere varied after 1989.

On June 7, three days after the suppression of the pro-

²⁴ Renato Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. by Gerald Fitzgerald, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968, p.201.

democracy movement in Beijing, two Zhejiang artists got some photographs of the victims killed by the army. They reproduced two huge pictures from the photos and displayed them in Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang province, about 100 miles southwest to Shanghai. Both pictures, measuring 3 x 7 meters, were installed at a crossing in one of the most important junctions within the town center (figs. 11, 12). Like most Chinese artists (not only avant-gardists), these two artists got involved in the pro-democracy movement before the Tiananmen Square massacre. The photographs they reproduced are part of the movement. They were, at that time, fighters for democracy rather than artists. I talked to one of them a couple of months after the event. For him, the work was a natural reaction as an ordinary human being to the massacre; the only difference between him and other participants is that he uses his brushes instead of his mouth, body or life. In that time, the faster the better; the more eye-catching, the stronger. Artists worked as the objective broadcasters that were not be allowed to exist in the country. Such work is considered political action rather than artistic activity.

This direct and journalism-like reaction to a political event, after all, is an exception. Most works related to political subjects appear "artistic". Thus what I would like to discuss is a spectacular trend of the post-1989 art, which was extremely politicized in theme as well as style, called "Political Pop" by some critics. The question is, why

"political Pop" appeared after 1989 rather than after the April 5th movement of 1976 ²⁵? Although the scale of the April 5th movement was not bigger than the proto-democracy movement of 1989, it was a milestone of contemporary Chinese history. But "Political Pop" did not appear until 1990. There would be a cause inherent in avant-garde on its development.

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) is a period when political art as part of state ideology reached its peak. Almost every artist, wittingly or unwittingly, was involved in it. I agree with the distinction made by Gao Minglu. He divides the art of the Cultural Revolution into two phases: Red Pop (ca. 1966-1969), and the trilogy of icon, history of glory and happy life (ca. 1970-1976). The former is mass art carried through such media as the movies, newspapers, posters, cartoons, leaflets, banners and badges, while the latter is a Chinese version of conventional totalitarian art mainly in form of easel painting. ²⁶ (figs. 14, 15) Disgusted with the ideological art, artists, especially avant-gardists, were

²⁵ At April 5, 1976, Qingming Festival, the day Chinese hold a memorial ceremony for late relatives and ancestors, thousands of Beijing citizens memorialized Zhou Enlai, the late prime minister, and demonstrated against the "Gang of Four" in Tiananmen Square. The demonstration was extinguished with tens dead, hundreds wounded and further hundreds arrested (the exact numbers have never been announced. My school mate, who was a member of the Beijing militia which assisted the suppression, told me the approximate numbers. Also see *New York Times*, April 6-8, 1976.

²⁶ Gao Minglu, "Lun Mao Zedong de dazhong yishu moshi" (on Mao's Mode of Mass Art), *Ershiyi Shiji* (The Twenty-first Century, Journal), Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1993.2, pp. 61-73

extremely reluctant to touch any motif associated with politics in the years immediately after the Cultural Revolution. The only exception is the "Star Group".

For most avant-garde artists in the 1980s, any political action is a sort of cultural conduct, therefore, compared with direct political criticism, cultural criticism appeared more powerful and more likely to penetrate the focus of infection. The idea of the "Northern-art Group", founded in 1984, is representative. The artists of the group, six men and four women, believed that the eastern as well as the western cultures were faced with dire straits and the "temperate zone" color of the world's culture has faded. The cultural center of gravity, they claimed, has moved north worldwide. A new tendency of culture, namely, a more rational, sublime, healthy and humanistic culture with a close connection to the "frigid zone", was coming about. While the truth of this assumption remains to be proved, what I am interested in is its genesis. What the assumption is directed against is realistic, practical and clear: an abhorrence of cultural phenomena with symptoms of cultural morbidity, servility, sentimentality, Rococo and hysteria impelled the artists to advocate a sort of spirit of sublimity, and to recover a spiritually healthy and humanistic state of human beings, in order to perfect human dignity and sublimate the human spirit in the unrelenting pursuit of eternal principle and ultimate existence. The romanticized or somewhat utopian ideal manifests their

repulsion toward the political contents of dominant and official art with political contents and their concern for a broader cultural arena for human and social action.

Although art with political implications was not the main trend of the avant-garde movement of 1980s, there was still some art works made in the 1980s with distorted form of "Red Pop" of the Cultural Revolution and some of them with politically ironic implication. These works are fundamentally different from "Red Pop" in terms of iconography, although the inspiration was, obviously, from the "Red Pop", as we could see in Wu Shanzhuan's "Red Humor: Big-character poster" (fig. 15).

The complicity of the avant-garde movement can also be seen in another of its trends in the 1980s, the trend opposed the aestheticist and formalist approach of the academicists. The aestheticist and formalist approach, to the academists, tended to the autonomy of art. But this approach, to some avant-gardists, will lead to nothing but play of points, lines, planes and colors. For the artists of the "Group of Art Studies of the Southwest", the biggest and most influential avant-garde group in southwest China in the 1980s, the stimulation of the visual organ should give way to the shock of soul. They called their art "new figuration" opposed it to both the ideal realism -- a figurative painting without truth -- and more importantly, to so-called "pure form" -- abstract painting which provoked merely physical stimulation

by playing with colors and forms -- on the other. Their art required "truth", a truth "close to the essence of the world", which meant the presence of internal reality, namely the "figurative scheme of life that dashes into the dark and chaotic inner-image world in the deep level of consciousness."

²⁷ "What puzzles them is not superficial formal issues, but instead, the potential power which is hard to describe but dominates their lives." ²⁸ Therefore they treated forms pragmatically, as Li Hongyun, one of the members of the group, said, "Apply them [various forms] as long as they are suitable to us, like using seasonings while cooking. As a result, we would destroy the old artistic types by mixture of the types to create new types." ²⁹ The power is to come from the artists' own vibrations of the soul: "With particular and marvelous multiplex forces, the vibrations enable the soul to expand itself in fighting with chaos, to shake off its own weak body, and finally to become a rare, cruel and direct revelation of splendid, natural and real sentiments." claimed Pan Dehai,

²⁷ Mao Xuhui, "*Xin juxiang -- shengming juxiang tushi de chengxian yu chaoyue*" (New Figuration -- Presence and transcendence of the figurative scheme of life), *Meishu Sichao* (Art Trends, Quarterly), Hubei Art Center, Wuhan, 1987.1. Mao was the leading figure of the "Group of Art Studies of the Southwest".

²⁸ Mao Xuhui, "Letter to Gao Minglu, Nov. 11, 1986", see Minglu, Zhou Yan and others, *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Shi: 1985-1986*, p.246.

²⁹ See Gao Minglu, Zhou Yan and others, *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Shi: 1985-1986*, p. 246.

another key figure of the group.³⁰

The abhorrence of formalist aestheticism was caused by what the avant-gardists believed to be the weak and morbid state of mind behind the play of colors and forms and far removed from the real state of life. So for them, humanist concern was much more important than the autonomy of art. Like the artists of the "Northern-art Group", however, they rarely touched political content and images either directly or indirectly.

In the 1990s, China began its unique and somewhat contradictory approach toward development: a semi-capitalist free-market economy, and a pragmatic commercial culture have flourished on the one hand while the centralization of state power and single-party autocracy in politics have been much reinforced since the 1989 massacre on the other. Whether this approach will work or not is beyond the scope of this thesis, although it will, no doubt, affect the development and direction of China's avant-garde. The fact, however, is that the new situation appeared accompanied by two significant phenomena -- which I hesitate to call "significant trends" -- politicization and escapism. The latter, escapism, seems hard to be classified as avant-garde because of its close connection to academism in style and state of mind. The former, politicization of art, however, appears to be an

³⁰ Pan Dehai, "*Linghun qiyi de lilian*", (The Marvelous Power of Soul), see Gao Minglu, Zhou Yan and others, *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Shi: 1985-1986*, p.246.

extension or concretization of the cultural concern of the avant-garde of 1980's. It can be also seen as a break in the process of the movement because of its commercial implication and changed attitude to politics.

Zhang Peili (1957-), an active avant-gardist since the mid-1980's, made "The Standard Pronunciation of 1989" in both oil painting (fig. 16) and videotape in 1991. In the big vertical triptych, each panel 100 by 80 cm, the image of one of the best-known female TV newsreaders shown in both positive and negative is repeated, while in the twenty-minute video she is seen repeating over and over again an item from a Chinese dictionary in a matter-of-fact voice. Her image is so popular that even the people from remote rural areas know who she is and are very familiar with her voice. At the same time, she is notorious not only because she announced "the victory over the counter-revolutionary rebellion" -- the official statement referring to the Tiananmen Square massacre -- in an arrogant victor's manner,³¹ but also because of her allegedly callous attitude toward the hunger-striking students a couple of days before the massacre: she told the collector of donations for the students that she preferred to buy feed for pigs rather than donate towards the students. Behind the cool image of the hostess is the reality of the butcher. As in most of his early works, Zhang Peili presented something that

³¹ Two other newsreaders, a male and a female, appeared in black suits and read the news in a low and sad voice. Not surprisingly, both were dismissed from their positions.

looks indifferent and objective but which penetrates through the nature of "object". The calm face with no expression, the monochromatic and cold color in the painting, and the repetition of the image in the painting and that of voice in his video piece, all give us a sense of suppression and suffocation. What we have to keep in mind is that Zhang Peili, although concerned with the issues beyond form or language, had never touched political subject matter before 1989. But he was one of the two artists who reproduced the huge posters of victims of the massacre, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. For this he was summoned several times by the local public security bureau. It would not be true to say that the massacre which shocked the whole world had little effect on Chinese artists, especially given the tradition in which Chinese intellectuals consider taking social responsibility as their vocation.³² Still, one can ask: why did he react in such a direct way, since traditional Chinese aesthetics has as its primary tenet *hanxu* (the implicit)³³? This is a rather

³² Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), a writer and official of the Qing Dynasty, insisted that "*Tianxia xingwang, pifu youze*" (every man has a share of responsibility for the fate of his country), which summarizes a moral imperative and principle formed in history. "*Pifu*" (ordinary man) refers mostly to intellectuals when people cite the tenet. From *Hanyu Da Cidian. diyi juan* (a Chinese Dictionary. vol. I), Joint Publishing Co. (H.K.), 1987, p.948.

³³ This tenet, to a great extent, coincides with the traditional creed of morality -- the doctrine of the mean which is essential to Confucianism. The creed requires eclectic, concessive, compromising and impartial conduct in social life, while the tenet *hanxu* in aesthetics considers the manners, such as the modest, moderation, drawing the bow

complicated question. Even though antagonism, just as in the western counterpart, has been typical of Chinese avant-garde since 1980's, the artists have done their utmost to avoid directly political statement or declaration, partly because of the official censorship on the one hand, and partly because of the tradition of *hanxu* on the other. After the Cultural Revolution, most artists were extremely antagonistic toward art as a mere means of political propaganda. As a result, all art directly pertaining to political issues was considered superficial and inferior. The phenomenon of such an overcorrection was widespread, especially in the circle of the avant-garde. Actually, political subject matter is not necessarily the cause of inferior art, just as non-political themes do not guarantee masterpieces. Zhang Peili faced not only the risk from official censorship, particularly for his "file of credit" in the local public security bureau, but also the one from his comrades: the probability of being eliminated from art circles for the way he responded to the political situation right after the massacre. He challenged all of these successfully, perhaps even before he overcame the psychological obstacle of himself. He told me that he would

without shooting, hiding a needle in silk floss, etc. superior to the straightforward, the blunt, the aggressive, the extroverted. See Li Zehou, Huaxia Meixue (Chinese Classic Aesthetics), Joint Publishing (H.K.) Co., Ltd., Hong Kong, 1988, pp.10-24. Li Zehou and Liu Gangji, edited, Zhongguo Meixue Shi. diyi juan (A History of Chinese Aesthetics. volume. I), The Social Sciences Press of China, Beijing, 1984, pp.147-151.

feel guilty if he maintained a silence on the tragedy as if it never happened. And most importantly, to him, the way he reacted is related to his interest in art language instead of opportunistically or superficially artistic demonstration. Before this work, Zhang had made several video pieces to experiment with the medium, so it was significant to him not only for its response to current political reality but also as an integral link in his long-term experiment with media and language.

The frank political statement he made reminds me of the videotape of the beating of Rodney King displayed in the Whitney Biennial of 1993. I would not like to compare them in political implication, but with respect to the way each was made. The King piece was made by a passerby, who is not a professional video photographer, at random. Therefore it was made with no "artistic" intention at all. A merely documentary tape became an extremely powerful political statement in the public media and a really impressive art work when installed and displayed in a museum. By contrast, the video version of "The Standard Pronunciation of 1989", made a couple of months after the painting version, was planned and executed elaborately.³⁴ I thought that the picture of video had been recorded from the regular evening news and the voice dubbed by somebody else, inasmuch as the hostess, who works in

³⁴ Information from personal communication, January, 1995.

the state-run central TV station in Beijing, was unlikely to be accessible. What surprised me is that the piece was videotaped specially for the artist himself, in other words, it was made absolutely according to the artist's initial purpose. He did not know the celebrity, so he contacted her through a friend who was on somewhat familiar terms with her. Surprisingly, she accepted the "commission" even though she was suspicious about the purpose of reading those "meaningless" items from Chinese dictionary which starts with the character "shui" (water), such as "shuiba" (dam), "shuicai" (watercolor), "shuilongtou" (faucet) and so on. The friend asked Zhang to make up a high-sounding reason which could bring her round. The final subterfuge was that it would serve as a supplementary means for an exhibition entitled "Water and Environment" or something like that.

For the artist, politicized art might need political strategy. The tactic he used here, i.e. deception, became a part of his final work. Ironically, the notion that you can do it by fair means or foul as long as it is "politically correct", sincerely believed in by Chinese communists, was used against the communist ideology itself.

The most popular political icon, capable of arousing powerful and strongly mixed feelings in all Chinese, is the image of Mao. A new cult of Mao arose not long after the Tiananmen Square massacre. Mao's portraits were hung in the windshields of thousands of taxis nationwide, which was said

to be able to save drivers from accidents and to bless them to make more money. The old songs which praised Mao and his "revolution" could be heard again everywhere more than a decade after they had disappeared, even in the form of rock-n-roll. It is hard to tell why this bizarre phenomenon happened, but even many avant-gardists, some of whom once had been fascinated with pure formal experiment in the 1980's, devoted themselves to the new cult in either a critical or an indifferent way. Yu Youhan (1943-) is among these artists. During the 1980s, not only had the Shanghai-born painter made some minimalist-like paintings himself, but also had some his students who had followed his approach to formal experiment. Since 1990 he has made a series of images of Mao, as folk art, as wall paper, and as photograph (figs. 17, 18) which deviated dramatically from his minimalist approach of the Eighties. In "Mao Zedong's Periods of Life" (fig. 17) he put a number of different images together, such as the images of Mao's different periods, the communist emblems, the typical images of good pupils with red scarf popular in the "revolutionary" period, the traditional symbolic motifs including the dragon and phoenix (the emperorship), mandarin ducks (happy and satisfactory marriage), blossoms, and so forth. Another piece (fig. 18) shows Mao resting on a lounge chair within a Matisse-like setting (in the photo as the prototype, which is familiar to many Chinese, Mao was resting on the chair against a swimming pool as background) covered by folk ornamentation

common in the rural areas. All these images use a manner highly familiar to the masses, particularly to the peasants that constitute more than eighty percent of whole population of China: flat treatment of figures and settings, juxtaposition of different motifs, flamboyant and somewhat vulgar coloration, and a jubilant atmosphere. The viewer, if he knew the principles from Mao's well-known essay, "Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art", that are, "art for the proletarian politics, and art for the pleasure of the masses", would be naturally feeling the irony from Yu's works. Yu, born just one year after the "Talks" was published in 1942, had been affected deeply by and suffered from the "Talks" for decades. In style he made use of the manner loved by the masses in order to subvert the myth of "art for the proletarian politics." The treatment of flattening of Mao's face and upper part of the body in "Mao in a Colorful Lounge Chair" (fig. 18) made him somewhat strange and unfamiliar, so that the icon with the meaning of "great leadership" seems to be vacuumized; while the whimsical and seemingly spontaneous juxtaposition of Mao's images and others in the first piece is likely to puzzle the viewers who were used to the standard composition of paintings of the "great leader". Yu Youhan criticizes Mao's hypocrisy by dismantling Mao's discourse even as he sneers, out of goodwill, at the fetishism of the public, i.e. the new cult or re-deification of the late communist monarch, with an iconoclastic attitude that seems to please

them at the first glance but to shock or wake them.

One of the most well-known so-called "Political Pop" artists is Wang Guangyi (1956-), who is called by some critics "China's Andy Warhol" because of his similarities to Warhol in various aspects -- self-promotion, consumerist attitude, the celebrity-crazed and the sensation-seeking. As a controversial and successful artist, Wang's career sounds like a sort of legend. He was one of the key figures of the "Northern-art Group", and became well known for his early works such as the "Frozen North Pole" series and the "Post-Classic" series in the mid-80's, which were seen as representative of "Rational Painting", as coined by Gao Minglu.³⁵ This Bohemian-like artist loves to issue manifestoes which always sound ambiguous. In 1988, a few years after he engaged in the "Rational Painting" that focused on the subject about civilization, humanism, and belief, he claimed that we ought to "purge humanist enthusiasm"³⁶ which immediately became a hot subject among the avant-garde artists and critics. It would not be unfair to say that the slogan has more value as advertisement than as theory. The

³⁵ Gao Minglu, "Guanyu lixing huihua" (On Rational Painting), *Meishu* (Fine Arts, Monthly), Beijing, 1986. 8, pp.41-47.

³⁶ Wang's complete statement of "purge humanist enthusiasm" is, "From this year on, my main task is to purge the irrationalization of humanist enthusiasm in order to go out of the straits resulting from it." see Lu Peng and Yi Dan, Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu Shi: 1979-1989 (A History of China's Modern Art: 1979-1989), Hunan Press of Fine Arts, Changsha, 1992, p.167.

manifesto, however, marked at least his shift from serious and purely spiritual exploration to an approach he called "immediately culturally effective".³⁷ With careful contrivance, he chose Mao's portrait as his subject. Three of them (he painted five pieces totally) were displayed in the exhibition "China/Avant-Garde" held in Beijing, February, 1989 (fig. 19). He knew very well how to make his works a focus of the spotlight. Without other performances, such as shooting at an installation, selling shrimps, hatching hen eggs, throwing and distributing condoms, and bomb threats, which happened in the show, his "Mao" might have drawn much more attention from the audience, including hundreds of reporters from home and abroad. Most of these reporters, obviously, were interested in political affairs rather than art. Even those performances were front-page news in many newspapers, the Maos behind red grilles appeared in several magazines and

³⁷ I once called Wang's early works "art of metaphysics" in an essay in 1987 which is my only review in Chinese to date of the art of an individual artist so. Under the subheading "Towards the Other Shore", I wrote,

"This approach, naturally, is interlinked with 'art of metaphysics'. The 'consciousness of the Other Shore' is the common one shared by the young artists who work on 'rational painting'. 'The Other Shore' here has two meanings: it is the spiritual shore opposite to the material 'this shore', and represents the most superior spirit and the ultimate principle they advocate and seek, on the one hand; and it refers to the ideal shore opposite to the secular 'this shore', thus is the one significant of religion, on the other." -- *Hsiung Shih Meishu* (Hsiung Shih Art Monthly), Taipei, Taiwan, 1988.5, p.115.

I had been really moved by and paid great respect to Wang and his comrades then, and naturally, was shocked by his shift.

newspapers at home and abroad, including Time. Wang Guangyi seemed to have played a dual role here: a dissenter in politics and a heretic in art. To me, this was nothing but a successful application of marketing strategy, because it met the need of "consumers" including ordinary Chinese and the media. People had looked forward to rethink and reevaluate Mao's role in Chinese history. This work was the first re-interpreted image of Mao after Mao's death. The point here is that you have to be quite careful to choose the image and the manner, so that you can arouse or gratify the curiosity of the public at home and abroad without breaking the final line drawn by official censors. This is, of course, to take risks. The law of investment works here, too: the more risks you take, the more benefits you may get. In fact, he had gotten more substantial awards from his "strategic" art than fame so far: approximately a million Chinese yuan (about US\$ 115,000) in savings and property, including two apartments, which is, to ordinary Chinese whose annual income is about 6000 yuan (about US\$ 690) , an astronomical figure. A crafty use of media and a deliberately Bohemian appearance may be the secret of his fortune.

The "Great Criticism" series is representative of his latest "Political Pop" productions. We should admit that Wang is very sensitive and acute culturally, and knows how to transform his sense of cultural impulse into an appropriately artistic incarnation. In 1990, a year after the Tiananmen

Square massacre, the economic reform launched around 1980 almost stopped because of the dual crises of authority and economy. The undercurrent of commercialism, however, was still strong enough to initiate a new round of activity. Wang sensed the potential and found a connection between two kinds of fever: the political fanaticism of the Cultural Revolution and the contemporary fetishism of money and consumer goods. By means of popular images both of the Revolution and the present time, he composed a series of propaganda-poster-like oil painting (figs. 20, 21) entitled "Great Criticism", a common expression of the Revolution which referred to the critique of feudalism, capitalism and revisionism. The standard figures of this kind of critique and the emblems of the time -- workers, peasants and soldiers in the posture of "criticism" with their weapons of "criticism" such as small red books, hammers, pens, Chinese writing and painting brushes, or even simply their fists -- dominate the composition. The object of "criticism" is not, however, the three "-isms". Instead, the trade marks of imported products including cigarettes, films, beverages, cosmetics, etc., which might be seen as a sort of symbol of capitalism, are in the dock. It is, of course, not the kind of revolutionary "criticism", in which main figures were usually painted with the brightest and most intense colors. But what we see here are the recessive and faded color of main figures, the digits scattered all over the canvas with no compositional purpose,

and the hard-edge black pattern of explosion of the logos. The bizarre and anachronistic juxtaposition of these two apparently historically opposed images can be taken to both show and mock the awkwardness of the current political reality and social state. Probably he would not consider himself as a subject of its mockery, but he ought to, because he himself participates in what he shows. In this sense, the work has little to do with the self-criticism which is characteristic of modernism. And unlike Zhang Peili's "The Standard Pronunciation of 1989", the "Great Criticism" lacks the power of real political criticism of political reality; rather, it adds a somewhat spicy irony to a factual compromise with the awkward reality, which explains why the series could be published in a semi-official newspaper, "Beijing Youth", where it caused a minor scandal.³⁸ In the end, the work sold for a high price. Zhang Peili and Yu Youhan had no such luck. Zhang showed his video piece only in Europe, while Yu sold his works overseas only.

If we could say that Wang Guangyi's notion of politicized art remains within a single culture and treats it in an

³⁸ A few days after the publication, the department of propaganda of Beijing Communist Party Committee sent a document to the editor office and suggested that the editors should consider probable social effect before they decide to publish such sensational pictures in the future. It was surprisingly moderate reaction from the authorities, especially during the period of censorship right after the 1989 massacre. The information came from personal communication with Wang Youshen, a member of the editorial department of "Beijing Youth".

attitude of play and pragmatism, then the Guangzhou-based group "Big-tail Elephant" tried to think about China's avant-garde from an international point of view and with a serious sense of mission. The group, consisting of three devout artists, Lin Yilin (1964-), Chen Shaoxiong (1962-) and Liang Juhui (1959-), claimed that they had an aversion to the continuous exploration of form and language. The thought of Lin Yilin, key figure of the group, sounds like that of a statesman instead of an artist,

"Does China need contemporary art? If yes, is it possible? From a viewpoint of historic development, I am optimistic about it. The global village is about to emerge. Environment, arms expansion and nuclear weapons have become the matters of common concern to the world. The critical factors which threaten directly the existence of mankind tie all countries to each other in spite of the difference of various ideologies. The co-operation of transnational economies enables us to make a contract between the developed and the developing countries, and the principled mutual accommodation between them becomes the basis of further co-operation. When the developing countries gradually transform their increase in wealth into higher demands for cultural life, the art there will take a leap forward. Because of the progress of communication and media, people will find more tastes common to all human beings. China has its own profound foundation and history of culture, so that its art will not stay in its current state. Faced the boasting of superiority of the culturally developed countries, China will not look upon with folded arms as long as it accumulates sufficient wealth. The participation in the contemporary process of the world's culture should not be taken in a way of digging antiques or anachronistic stuff to antagonize the process. The approach might be identification with the world's contemporary art first, then influence on it in the future, and eventually integration into it." ³⁹

³⁹ "Dangdai yishu de huazhao: Lin Yilin yu Chen Shaoxiong duihua" (Pattern of Contemporary Art: Dialogue between Lin Yilin and Chen Shaoxiong), *Guangdong Meishujia* (Guangdong Artists, Quarterly), Guangdong Artists Association, Guangzhou, 1993.4, p.14.

I offered such a long statement not only for its significance as a manifesto of art, but also for its embodiment of many avant-gardists' cultural and artistic viewpoint in an open and more diverse context. People may notice that the avant-gardists in 1980s fought in a domestic battlefield, and that they used the imported arms to fight against the "enemy" from different directions. When they got more chances, at the end of the Eighties and the beginning of the Nineties, to make and exhibit their art abroad, accompanied by more knowledge of contemporary development of the world's art, they realized that Chinese artists could no longer see the external world with the perspective of "a frog of a well" ⁴⁰, and that a widening of viewpoint would be the first step of "going towards the world" -- a long-cherished wish in the mind of intelligentsia and ordinary Chinese since the Opium War of 1840 or even the earlier period. ⁴¹ It should

⁴⁰ *Jingdi zhi wa* (a frog in a well), a Chinese idiom that means a person with a very limited outlook.

⁴¹ Hu Ch'uiyuan (historian and political writer, Taiwan) claimed: "Although the large-scale cultural exchange between China and the west have been made since the Opium War, the beginning of this exchange should be traced back to a much earlier period." *"Kuanyu chintai chungkuo chi hsifang jenshi' ping lun chintai chungkuo ssihsiang shi went'i"* (On "the Knowledge of the West in Modern China" and the Issues of History of Modern Chinese Ideology), from Chang Hao and others, *Chintai Chungkuo Ssihsiang Jenwu Lun -- Wan Ch'ing Ssihsiang* (On the Thinkers of Modern China -- the Late Qing Dynasty), Taipei: Times Publishing Co., 1980, pp.701-702. In this article, Hu analyzed the course that Chinese have learned and studied the western culture and have developed its own culture since late Yuan Dynasty (about the 14th century).

not be surprising to see an artist state his views like a political or cultural strategist since Chinese intellectuals, including artists, have a tradition that they should be representatives of the social conscience, prophets and forerunners of cultural orientation and evolution. I remember that Fei Dawei, an art history student in the Central Academy of Fine Arts and critic living in Paris now, said about five years ago, in a jocular tone, "now it is not exciting enough to fight against the Chinese bureaucracy, we have to go toward the world to measure our strength against the real 'bourgeoisie' (a synonym for western politics and culture in Mao's discourse)." Unlike Fei, who wished to open a larger "battlefield" for Chinese artists, Lin Yilin's thought might base on his angst and anxiety about the marginal state of Chinese art in contemporary art of the world. He argued that it is necessary and practical for Chinese artists to work and exhibit their art overseas in order to get involved in the development of the world's art,

"The greatest change in the artists who went abroad is that a sort of vernacular perspective, which limited our understanding of contemporary art, gave way to a more cross-cultural one."⁴²

Lin and his comrades, I believe, thought about art in a much broader political and cultural context, and tried to place their art in such a setting. Art creation for them

⁴² "Dangdai yishu de huazhao: Lin Yilin yu Chen Shaoxiong duihua" (Pattern of Contemporary Art: Dialogue between Lin Yilin and Chen Shaoxiong), *Guangdong Meishujia* (Guangdong Artists), 1993.4, p.13.

seems to be part of a greater political project, although their works appear devoid of explicit political themes.

We can see this in Lin's installation, "Equipment for Living" (figs. 22, 23), made in Guangzhou, 1992. Even as he poses a grand strategy of culture which is, to him and his two fellows, superior to mere formal experiment, the artist tries to use so-called "international language" to bring the art within the orbit of world's art. It is hard to tell what type of art it is supposed to be: metal and cage-like grilles, suspending aluminum pipes, bricks and bathroom plungers are constructed into an ambiguous object wavering between architecture and sculpture. An obvious aspect is his interest in material and construction. The grilles recall Sol LeWitt in a sense. All other elements and the actual arrangement, however, tend to deny such an association because of the irregularity of the shapes and the seemingly random placement of pipes, plungers and bricks. The title, "Equipment for Living", gives us a hint of architectural elements, at least a wall-like stuff. Lin is fascinated with construction of architectural materials. The fascination can be seen also in his "Standard Series of Ideal Residences" (figs. 24, 25) installed a year before the "Equipment for Living" -- again we see the building materials: angle-irons and bricks. The idea and manner of construction seems loosely derived from modern architecture. The actual meaning, however, may lie in China's traditional aesthetics: a dialectical interaction of opacity

and transparency, and of fullness and emptiness, one of the art principles which is applied often in traditional Chinese landscape painting, and most importantly, Chinese garden architecture.⁴³ Is it his strategy to express his own understanding of today's multi-cultural world by means of a synthesis of "common language" and oriental principles of aesthetics? I am reluctant to conclude in a simplified manner. It would be safe to say that it could be seen as an attempt at synthesis, and that Lin is an "earnest practitioner" of what he advocated -- a cultural mission in an international context.

The autonomy of art, to the academic artists, was a formalist slogan for deviation from official political art; in other words, for the visual pleasure was the key to the autonomy of art. The avant-garde focused on the experiment of art language and material, and wittingly or unwittingly, injected certain implications into the products of those experiments so that the autonomy of art was not a purely visual goal, but led them into a laboratory of language.

⁴³ Ge Lu (aesthetician, professor of Beijing University) pointed out that *he* (harmony) in art is the unity of opposites such as emptiness and fullness, opacity and transparency, openness and closeness, and so on, which is one of canons of Chinese painting. See Ge Lu, Zhongguo Huihua Meixue Fanchou Tixi (The System of Aesthetic Category of Chinese Painting), Li River Press, Guilin, Guangxi, China, 1989, pp. 23-26.

F.L.Powell described her experience of the beauty of he in Chinese gardens, 1926, and realized it true that the builder of this kind of garden is the combination of a philosopher, a painter and a botanist. Florence Lee Powell, In the Chinese Garden, New York: The John Day Company, 1943.

As the apparent opposite to autonomous art, the politicization of art appears more complex. China's tradition of literati and officialdom ⁴⁴ may be a factor that led the avant-gardists to become involved in politics in terms of art. However, they never thought about to control the ideology and art policy, as many traditional intellectuals and contemporary academic artists have done, rather, their political concern have been a part of proposed cultural project. In Zhang Peili, the artistic protest was combined with the experiment of media. Yu Youhan tried to subvert or deconstruct the almighty Mao's discourse and myth in the guise of nostalgia. Wang Guangyi walked on the wire to find out the balances of political risk and art freedom, official censorship and sensational effect, and fame and gain. And Lin Yilin was fascinated with the ambiguous boundary between architecture and sculpture which is a part of his exploration of cross-cultural language and personal effort toward assimilation and integration of culture in general as a statesman in the field of art.

⁴⁴ Traditionally, intellectuals enter official circles through imperial examination and get involve in political affairs in literati capacity. Accordingly, traditional Chinese intellectuals have concerned themselves deeply with state affairs even though they are outside the ruling circle.

Chapter II

High Art, Low Art and Their Fusion

In a sense, there had been no high art in China since 1949, ⁴⁵ because all arts had to serve the people and the masses according to the official ideology. The Communist Party's slogan was that "arts serve workers, peasants and soldiers; arts serve socialism". In China's social system, art is truly a servant. No "polite society" can exist. The search for art's independent role and position in society was criticized as a deviation from orthodox Marxist line, and was attacked in the Cultural Revolution. For the young generation, tired of arts manipulated by the state machine, the modern art they were looking for seemed to be much higher either in form or spirit than the puppet-like official art.

⁴⁵ There was a concept of high and low "art" in traditional China, called *ya* and *su*. Literally, *ya* refers to the standard, the proper, the refined and the elegant, while *su* refers to the vulgar, the coarse, the common and in poor taste. Literati painting and calligraphy represent *ya* in terms of art, which was defined as part of elite culture; while almost all non-literati arts, such as ceramics, New Year picture, printmaking, embroidery, lacquer, folk art, even sculpture, belong in *su*, which even were excluded from art, instead, were just crafts or handiwork. After 1949, literati art had been changed in essence, and almost been extinguished during the Cultural Revolution. Anne Burkus-Chasson discussed a case in which the professional status of a late Ming Dynasty painter seemed to be between *ya* and *su*, or a literati artist and a "painter-laborer". See Anne Burkus-Chasson, "Elegant or Common? Chen Hongshou's Birthday Presentation Pictures and His Professional Status", *Art Bulletin*, June, 1994.

The latter is, in their eyes, obviously "kitsch", appearing as a sort of patchwork made of Chinese ink painting, folk art, Soviet Socialist Realism, Russian Wanderers school, and even French academic painting of the 19th century without any of their spiritual meanings (figs. 26, 27, 28). They believe that in the Cultural Revolution, the pattern of the "kitsch" had developed to its peak (figs. 29, 30). With hatred to the puppet-like mode, the young artists tried to find something beyond the discourse of official ideology.

Thus, in China, the mainstream, with its strong color of official ideology, could not be seen as "high". This was true for mainstream artists as well as avant-gardists. The self-censorship of the former forced the artists to believe that making anything different from official demands and mass taste would isolate the artists themselves from the people, and hence should be accused. For the avant-gardists, on the other hand, the official art, no matter how elegant and delicate its language and technique, was no more than cheap propaganda or flattery. The art for didactic purpose and the art for pleasing the masses, which embody the official principle of art policy, have no significant difference: both are the tool used for extremely practical purposes, and their real role could be seen only in relation to something higher in social level, that is, servant of ruling class. One could not imagine how this sort of art could survive without the support from the authority and the appreciation of the masses. In

addition, the low educational level of most government officials charge of all the affairs (of course, including the art affairs) of people's life made young artists believe that the officials were part of the low culture no matter how high their rank in office was.

Naturally, China's avant-gardists, wittingly or unwittingly, rebelled against this sort of art by searching for something deviated from the mass taste or something especially for highly-educated people, even the circle of "elite". It may be seen as "high art" in their mind.

1985 and 1986 were the years China's avant-garde flourished. Almost a hundred art groups were founded nationwide. Although the manifestoes sounded different, the primary destination seemed to be common: modern art with modern conceptions in a modern society. For eyes used to the didactic, readable, pleasing and stylistically realistic art, this "modern art" with little visible meaning, narrative or figurative image was nothing but a monster from another planet (figs. 31, 32). Stylistically, these new works look seemingly like Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism or Metaphysical painting. "What is this?" is always the first reaction when the audience gets in an avant-garde show. And "why did they make this?" seems to be the second question shared by the viewers. If you cannot educate or teach the people, you must at least please their eyes. But now, you just shock them, confuse them, or even make them vomit or feel disgusting. So,

the avant-garde's support came mostly from the intellectuals, particularly college students -- "intellectual aristocrats" as they were usually called by the official media and sometimes by the audience themselves. One can read the extremely opposed comments in the visitor's books from avant-garde exhibitions:

" A garden that is overgrown with weeds."

"Finally it came although it is so late."

"We want to get refund!"

"Today's art students became a gang of robbers who swallow foreign thing raw and whole. Neither fish, nor fowl."

"We got back what we lost here. Thank you!" ⁴⁶

Obviously, most of the public was not ready to accept the shock of this work. Some of the potential audience might have been tired of a propaganda art imbued with political myth or lies especially after the propaganda bombing during the Cultural Revolution. They had looked forward to something beautiful, lyric, melancholy or sentimental to please their visual organs, and to soothe their long-suffering hearts. Beautiful landscapes, delicate portraits, elegant still lifes and conventional Chinese paintings are their favorites. For a public hungry for a serenade with sweet melody, little

⁴⁶ Quoted from the visitor's book of "Modern Art Exhibition of Jiangsu Province", see Gao Minglu, Zhou Yan and others, Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Shi: 1985-1986 (A History of Chinese Contemporary Art: 1985-1986), Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 1991, p.127.

tough structure and meaning, a modern symphony with atonality, unconventional composition and ambiguous melody seemed no more than the bitter and hard-to-swallow pills.

On the side of artists, few cared about communicative with the public through their art. They wanted to escape from the poisoned political art and to express themselves freely for first time. Besides, they were idealists whose enthusiasm for an ideal seemed to be no less than in the generation of their fathers who had struggled for a utopian ideal in their own lives, although the young generation tried to look for a supra-ideological and individualist culture other than the Communist ideal imported from Germany and Soviet Union. It is probably a rule that utopia-seekers are always far from the masses. What the avant-garde wanted to do was to save the falling culture as well as the falling individuals. Although they held a flag with the sign of "anti-tradition", the avant-garde kept the essences of the traditional Chinese intellectual in its nature. No matter how small their role in society could be, contributing to the society is the mission. This sense of vocation is by no means less developed than the Protestant ethic that Max Weber praised in his well-known book, The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism.⁴⁷ That "a virtuous man should be a person who concerns himself with his country and his people before others, and enjoys

⁴⁷ Max Weber, The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism, New York: Scribner, 1958.

happiness after them", as Fan Zhongyan (989-1052), a writer of North Song Dynasty, put it, has been the motto by which Chinese intellectuals are defined and guided. But, the avant-gardists who presented themselves as saviors of society and culture cared little about public acceptance. Their spirits are thus a combination of idealism and heroism. They consider themselves pioneers of culture and the public, and always discuss the such issues as the vicissitudes and evolution of civilization, the rejuvenation of culture or even, the creation and establishment of a new culture, a posture ossified official ideology could not tolerate and to which the suffering people could pay little attention.

Chinese people are, in general, quite practical and realistic. This is probably one of the reasons that the thoughts of astuteness, strategy and ethics had been much more developed than metaphysics and theology in the western sense. For those who have toiled all year around for the basic need of life, the ideas and activities of avant-garde seem to have little to do with their life and practical needs. The avant-gardists, however, believe that Chinese art and the culture in which the art exists need to be reconsidered and renewed, even if the society is still in a so-called "pre-industrial state. Without some idealists striving for the establishment of high culture, low culture would lose its guide and be totally vulgarized or engulfed by traditional and foreign cultures. As a result, a really new and healthy culture, either high one

or low one, would be nothing but mirage forever. This is the reason that the avant-gardists upheld their ideal, the ideal as pointed out by Gao Minglu,

Modernism "as a movement of culture inevitably takes historical transformation as its strategic goal, which means that it searches a new form for a prospective culture, is diametrically opposed to conventional conceptions and promotes new ones by means of this revolutionary form." ⁴⁸

Modernization is a common goal for all Chinese who have suffered from economic and cultural poverty in recent decades. Chinese avant-gardists also want to improve their living conditions. The difference is that to them the modernization is more critical and should come at the same time as the reform of economics, if not before it. And the avant-gardists deem art the forerunner of new culture because it is the most active and dynamic part of culture. An artist, if he is sensitive enough, can sense the pulse of his times through various cultural phenomena. This is possible because the blood of this culture flows in their bodies, because they are confident of their sensitivity to the ever-changing environment, and because they take the attending to culture as their role and responsibility. It is necessary because they think it true that "*Zhongren Jie zui Wo Du Xing*" (everybody is drunk but me), and that, without their sensitive search and exploration, the obtuse people would grope their way in the dark forever.

⁴⁸ Gao Minglu, Zhou Yan and others, *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Shi: 1985-1986* (A History of Contemporary Chinese Art: 1985-1986), Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 1991, P.657.

During the mid-1980s, when the art movement was surging forward, there were still some young artists who wanted to attract an audience and to engage it, and so tried to make their art participate in the everyday life of ordinary people. The "Series of Yang's *Taiji*" (fig. 33) by the artist group "Pool Society" in 1986, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, is an example. The artists cut many life-size images in paper with awkward postures of traditional Chinese boxing which were simplified and slightly distorted. Then they pasted the paper-cut pieces up the wall of a lane near Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts with total length of 60 meters. Because of the subject's familiarity to the public, and the free way of display, the work drew much more attention from passersby than the artists had expected. They found it pretty exciting that the work conversed with the viewers in this way. "The art of the whole nation could get limitless energy only from the people's participation and their feedback", ⁴⁹ said Bao Jianfei (1959-), a woman artist of the group.

For most of China's avant-gardists, the awareness and the confidence of combining high art with low art was not on until the 1990s. If we could say that the rival they faced in 1980s was mainly the political monolith and its discourse, then they were caught between Scylla and Charybdis in the 1990s. The Tiananmen Square massacre and its aftermath led to a terribly high pressure on the people, especially on the intellectuals.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.162.

Avant-gardism with strong color of rebellion could not act publicly. Unless they weakened the power, hid metaphorical meaning, or changed their "bizarre" appearance, any heterodox art work would be hardly exhibited, published and criticized (except for the attack from hard-line critics). At the same time, the utilitarianism of the people and the government's open policy in economics had drawn the nation into a huge whirlpool of commercialism and consumerism. Except for some Chinese paintings sold in tourist stores, there had been almost no art market in the first three decades of the republic, and professional artists had drawn salary from government. The opportunity to sell their works was rare because there were few commercial galleries, and, most importantly, no collectors with sufficient financial capacity. The government had been the largest and almost only patron by the mid-1980s. Gradually, more and more foreigners and overseas Chinese became interested in and bought works by Chinese artists in the 1980s. But these customers were, after all, from the west and the southeast Asia, instead of the country itself. In the 1990s, establishing China's own art market -- from production, exhibition, and selling to collection -- became an issue for Chinese artists. They hoped to shake off the control of overseas businessmen and finally to dominate the direction of art market.

There are roughly three attitudes to the new-born art market and business in avant-garde circles. The first is to

get involved in the business actively, with the sale of work becoming main purpose of art and life; the second is to embrace and interpret it through their arts with little selling; and the third is to criticize it and to concentrate on art which has little to do, at least directly, with the art business.

Traditionally, Chinese artists as part of literati circle feel ashamed to talk about money. Exceptions, such as Zheng Xie's (Qing Dynasty, 1693-1765) fixing the price according to the size and format of the work,⁵⁰ have always been seen as extremely utilitarian behavior. After 1949, this internal moral consciousness was reinforced by the external Communist ethical imperative -- "serve the people."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Zheng Xie put a price list for his works in 1759:

"A large hanging scroll costs six taels, a medium-sized one is four, a small scroll costs two. Couplet and streamer are one tael a pair, while album leaf and fan are a half tael each.

Those who bring gifts and food are certainly not as welcome as those who come with white silver, because what you give is not necessarily what I desire. If you come with hard cash, my heart will be fill with joy, so that both painting and calligraphy will be excellent. Gifts cause nothing but trouble, not to mention deferred payment which is most unreliable, like bad credit. Furthermore, my body gets tired of in my old age; therefore, please excuse me from accompanying you gentlemen in unprofitable conversation."

Zheng Xie, Zheng Banqiao Ji (Anthology of Zheng Banqiao), China Publisher, Hong Kong, 1979, p.195, English translation from Hsu Cheng-chi, Patronage and the Economic Life of the Artist in Eighteenth Century Yangchow Painting, U.M.I. Dissertation Service, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1991, pp.232-233.

⁵¹ No waiter or servant would take tip before 1980s, for service is always the duty. Tipping could be seen an insult in that period.

In the 1980s, the "commercialization" of art became a popular issue discussed in various art magazines and papers, but selling work was still sporadic and occasional. In the beginning of the 1990s, the discussion gave way to large-scale business activity. One of the biggest experiments was the "Guangzhou Biennial" held in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in 1992. The curators tried to sell avant-garde works in cooperation with an art development company.

In this situation, some of the avant-gardists seemed wholly dedicated to pure art in the middle of the 1980s began actively marketing their works. One of them, Wang Guangyi can be seen as representative. His "Frozen North Pole" series and "Post-Classic" series, painted in the mid-1980s, were defined as "Rational Painting" or "art of metaphysics" (see Chapter I and the footnote 37). Now his goal is shifted: to be a star and a best-seller. He tried and succeeded. His works have been exposed and criticized in press and exhibition very frequently since 1985, and even were selected for "Venice Biennial" in 1992, while the price of his work reached 40,000-80,000 Chinese yuan (about \$5,000-10,000) in the beginning of the 1990s, which is an astronomical figure to his comrades. For him, fame and gain seem to be equally important, and Van Gogh's myth became a laughingstock. This commercial success proved that "high" art could find a way to combine with "low" culture. Furthermore, his undisguised utilitarianism has made him and his art more controversial, and thus much more well-

known.

Wu Shanzhuan, another avant-gardist who embraces commercial culture, tends to interpret the relationship between art and business, art and popular culture in conceptual way. Unlike Wang Guangyi, he sold no paintings but real commodities and even himself, thus he is "conceptual" rather than "substantial" in the subject of art business. As early as late 1980s, he claimed that art was big business.⁵² In the exhibition "China/Avant-Garde" held in 1989, he sold live shrimp carried to Beijing from his hometown, Zhoushan, Zhejiang province. Although the goods were not sold out because of police interference, the half-hour action embodied his central idea: art is nothing but part of everyday life. In time when commerce dominates people and society, art is not except from buying and selling. Not only such consumer goods as shrimp or toy panda (which he sold in the exhibition "Fragmented Memory: the Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile", the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, in 1993), but also himself, an artist, could be sold as a special item -- a quantity of manual labor. In 1992, he worked in Kassel, Germany, during "Documenta IX". Now, since the activity in an art exhibition, in the final analyses, is trade, and art is also a means of earning for living as all other jobs, all of

⁵² See "The Context in the Text: Meaning in Wu Shanzhuan's Work", Fragmented Memory: The Chinese avant-garde in exile, catalog, Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University, 1993, p.33.

his works for the coffee shop, ticket booth, security office and preparation team in Kassel is hardly defined either an art or a job. In this way, Wu not only put art on a level with everyday business, but put being an artist on a level with any other work or profession.

For some avant-garde artists, however, consumerism was a potential corrosive to culture, and particularly to art. They used mass media and industrial products as material, but with a critical attitude. A representative work is the installation "Seventy-two and a Half Hours Electricity Consumption" made by Chen Shaoxiong, member of the Guangzhou-based group "Big-tail Elephant" (fig. 34). He installed a few incomplete skeletons made of colorful fluorescent tubes, some of which were covered with transparent raincoats. The skeletons were displayed as if in shop windows. The artist recorded power consumption on a board behind the skeletons every hour. As Chen explained his work,

"The colorful fluorescent tube symbolizes sumptuousness and philistinism. I made it into a symbol of death in order to call attention to the hidden crisis in consumerist society. The 'shop window' here looks to me exactly like a joyful 'morgue', while the raincoat is for keeping the corpse fresh, which implies that people will not scruple to lose their soul to protect their wealth." ⁵³

Unlike Dan Flavin, who used fluorescent tubes to make his minimalist art, Chen's concern obviously is not with

⁵³ See Zhao Bing, *Houxindai qingjing -- daweixiang. lianhe yishu* (Post-modern Situation -- Big-tail Elephant. United Art) *Dangdai Meishu* (Contemporary Art), Guangzhou, Guangdong, 1993.1, p.4.

literalness of the mass-produced artifact but its potential symbolic meaning in modern consumerist culture. Like neon lights and signs, fluorescent tubes for many Chinese seem to be evidence of wealth. But the by-product of economic success is moral decline, as this work suggested. While people celebrate the success of market-oriented reform in economics, Chen's work, as an indicator of cultural atmosphere, is a reminder of moral crisis and cultural corrosion. Unlike some avant-garde artists who live as if outside the current society, Chen tries to get involved in a real and lively cultural environment, and to find out its negative aspect, warning us of its potential danger. It is partly because he lives in Guangzhou, a southern city close to Hong Kong, where the commercial trend became more powerfully dominating the life of people than the rest of the country, that he had so strong consciousness of the crisis. How to fuse high culture and low culture without losing the critical spirit of art will be Chen's and his comrades' homework now and in the future.

Chapter III

Tradition and Modernization

Any artist who wants to go forward cannot evade the context which he or she lives in and on which the work is based. Tradition, flowing in him like the blood in his or her body, profoundly affects the artist's way of thinking and of making of art. Not every artist realizes this until a long and seemingly vain struggle for freedom from the heavy burden of tradition; China's avant-gardists are no exception. For them the notion of "tradition" has taking on different meanings and boundaries which has never been signified a fixed concept or idea. When the western avant-garde made the revolution to change the art tradition, it was not in the context which political revolution had took place already; most of Russian avant-gardists, however, got involved in the revolution launched by Bolshevik, thus Russian avant-garde became part of the revolution. Unlike both the western and the Russian counterparts, China's avant-garde has faced and tried to rebel against the traditions both in politics and art, that is, the revolutionary order of power and the art under the official ideology.

Extremely tired of the conventional and ossified system

of art education, by which they are formed, the young generation of artists revolted against almost everything associated with the system when their country opened to the world and the political pressure had been slacken after Mao's death. For them, there were too many rigid regulations and rules suppressing the young artists' energy and creation in every institute and department of fine arts. In the middle of 1980s, the Chinese intelligentsia debated on the role and value of culture and tradition nationwide. Most opinions tended to assign them a negative value which was coincident with these young artists' experience and influenced their thinking. For these art students, the tradition they confronted directly was the system of art education. According to my observation (I studied and then taught in the Central Academy of Fine Arts, China's "royal academy of fine arts" as many art students called, for eight years), this institutional art education was a mixture of three sources:

1. European, especially the influence of 19th century French academic art;
2. Traditional Chinese art theory and practice permeated with moral doctrine;
3. The official propaganda art formed from and blended of the art of the liberated area of the 1940's, folk art, and Soviet-type socialist realism.

Each of these elements had its impact on the China's avant-garde because the artists on different levels have

responded in various ways to the three elements. The western modernist imagination of tradition and modernity seemed to play a role of a catalyst outside those traditions, stimulating their transformation.

When the strict and somewhat boring four-year training in realistic drawing and coloration has been completed, the final opportunity to make work for graduation arrives. It will be the only chance for students to express their own idea and creativity, yet it remains bounded by Chinese-type socialist realism in subject and style. This led the young generation of artists to believe that the institutional tradition was the yoke that had to be shaken off in order to express their new-born individualism and liberal consciousness, even though the artists themselves did not have an exact idea about the shape of such new consciousness. Tradition here was perceived as the enemy of modernity.

"In the New Era -- The Revelation from Adam and Eve" (fig. 35) painted by Meng Luding (1962-) and Zhang Qun (1962-), two graduating seniors of the Central Academy of Fine Arts at Beijing, is a good illustration of state of mind of this generation. This painting, shown at the "Art Exhibition of the World's Year of Youth" at the National Art Gallery, Beijing, in May, 1985, was displayed intentionally in an inconspicuous corner by the curators for a simple reason: there are two nudes in it. It drew much more attention than the rest of works of the show, probably for the same reason.

The painting reflects a surrealist manner popular in China at the time. Two giant nudes, male and female, with apples in their hands stand on the beach and the cliff respectively, and they seem to just come out from the big frames behind which appear the heavy gates of "Forbidden City" with tiger-head decoration. A young girl in the air bearing a plate of apples comes forward toward us by breaking through a series of frames. Broken glass falls from frames. A male figure at the lower right corner sits at a table on which there is a broken emblem of *Yin-Yang Taiji* -- a symbol of Chinese philosophy and culture. The message here is not hard to read: the apple represents temptation as well as hope for a new era which would lead people to go out of the utopian Eden set up by the communists. It presents this in terms of a complete break with tradition represented by the frames and breaking glass. I remember that I was very moved when I saw this painting at the first time because of its spiritual resonance. This attitude to tradition, as Renato Poggioli points out in discussing Italian futurism, can be analyzed differently,

"This negative credo is bound, on the purely psychological level, to what we call avant-garde nihilism; on the sociological, however, it is joined to antagonism toward the public; on the aesthetic level, to the unpopularity of modern art, its hermeticism." ⁵⁴

Such "anti-traditionalism", I believe, is these young artists' natural, radical and, at the same time, logical

⁵⁴ Renato Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. by Gerald Fitzgerald, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968, p.54.

response to the monolith in front of them. There was not enough time for them to sort out the monolith, so they threw out the baby of the essence of tradition with bath water of its dross in order to find their own approach to modernity. As I mentioned above, the tradition of art education they faced could be at least analyzed into three different sources. Almost each of them became a part of the artists' life as an artist as well as a human being. The four-year training -- primarily the technique and method of academic art -- still worked here. Obviously, the artists really enjoyed their craftsmanship manifest in the nudes, the surrealist perspective, and classically balanced composition, etc. What once tortured the art students is, not surprisingly, helpful to and linked with the conveyance of the subject of enlightenment which represents the desire of many intellectuals of the 1980s: educating people to break the superstition of historical heritage. "Traditional" training was used to revolt against tradition itself. What we have to keep in mind are two notions of tradition here: the former, the European tradition of academic, basically, is imported and was established a century ago, whereas the latter, including the traditional culture and the official ideology, is domestic and persistent.

Compared with Meng and Zhang's work, Xu Bing (1955-), a printmaker from same academy, appeared to his series of unreadable book with a deeper and broader understanding of

tradition (figs. 36, 37, 38). After three years of intensive labor (1985-1988), Xu carved by hand more than two thousand pieces of wooden type to print what look like Chinese characters in the Song dynasty style. All of those, however, were pseudo-characters, since they are all invented by the artist, and composed of rearranged elements from real Chinese characters. Then he printed them on special Chinese rice papers for painting, printing and calligraphy and bound some of them in purely conventional way: vertical typesetting, blue cover and thread binding. The work is entitled "Books from Heaven"⁵⁵, which means in Chinese (*tianshu*) roughly what English speakers mean by saying "is all Greek to me". But the difference is: this Chinese phrase does not mean that they are meaningful but can not be understood by ordinary people; instead, it means they have no literal meaning at all. In the guise of pure traditional form, Xu showed his uniquely critical understanding and interpretation of tradition. China has a very long written history and a rich cultural heritage of which the Chinese are proud. The difficult question is why the country is backward in modern times. Many scholars of

⁵⁵ The original title, "*Xishi Jian*" (a mirror to analyze the world), sounds more serious and austere. It was, obviously, inspired by a Chinese tenet of ethics, that is, "*Yi Gu Wei Jing, Keyi Zhi Xingti*" (one can know the cause of rise or fall of a nation through a historical mirror). *Zhong Wai Diangu Da Cidian* (A Dictionary of Chinese and Foreign Idioms), Press of Sciences, Beijing, 1989, p.130.

Having been called "books from heaven" by many audience and critics after its first display of 1988, Xu used the current title with implication of absurdity.

culture and history have tried to answer this in terms of politics, economics, education, ethics or science and technology. Xu Bing, a traditional scholar-type artist, was sought for an answer by means of art. Chinese history and culture are embodied in an immense number of documents and literatures in the form of unique Chinese characters which Xu believes to be the key to both their achievements and their defects as well. Imagine, how surprising and shocking it would be if one realized suddenly that all of written culture and history were unreadable and meaningless after devoting one's life to studying the numerous classics! There was one aged philologist who spent a couple of days in the National Art Gallery, where the "Books from Heaven" were displayed in 1988, trying with magnifier to find readable character in the work, and finally failing. The enlightenment offered here is at the level of philosophy of culture: we need to rethink and reinterpret our written civilization. There is a strong implication of absurdity or even tragic fatality to the piece. Its lesson, I believe, is that we have to really re-enter tradition before we can criticize it profoundly and effectively. The conflict of the old and the new lies not at the level of form, but at the level of essence. From this point of view, there is an even more extreme cultural nihilism in Xu's work than in Zhang and Meng's. But I would say there is serious skepticism and criticism rather than simple antagonism and rejection here because Xu's work was based on

a profound thought: deconstruction is the precondition of reconstruction of a culture.⁵⁶ A final message would be that the critique of tradition could be, in a deep sense, a critique of written language.

Since Xu Bing immigrated to the United States in 1991, his field of vision has widened. Tradition is for him no longer a category within a single culture but one to be examined in a broader context. In the exhibition "Fragmented Memory: The Chinese avant-garde in exile" at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, in 1993, Xu dealt with the issue of confrontation and negotiation of two traditions with his huge installation "Cultural Negotiation" (fig. 39). This time, he added hundreds of copies of an English-language text, the so-called "Post-Testament", to his "Books from Heaven". Consisting of merged texts of the "New-Testament" and a contemporary pulp novel, the "Post-Testament" contains the conflict and coexistence of past and present, religious and secular, and high and low. Bringing texts from the Orient and the Occident together, the installation as a whole reminds the viewer that, instead of military and economic wars, cultural war and peace between the different traditions of civilization may be the primary subject of the 21st century. That an equilibrium of forces has not been set up yet indicated in the work by the position of the Chinese texts beneath the English ones on the gigantic conference table (fig. 32).

⁵⁶ From personal communication with the artist.

Unlike Meng, Zhang and Xu, all of whom has a negative attitude to tradition and criticizes it in a radical way, some artists do not make a judgement of value with respect to tradition. Instead, they remain in somewhat neutral position by just making use of it, no matter where and when it came from. Even "modernism" itself is just another tradition for them. Zhao Bandi (1963-) gave us a good example of the indifferent attitude to the given tradition: a huge painting, "Listen to me!" (240x120 cm, fig. 41). He just crumpled up almost everything he knew into a bizarre mixture. The rostrum of Tiananmen is no doubt one of the most familiar images to Chinese. The painter put this image with incomplete dragon-pillar and lion in the background. Noticeably he used the manner of *yuefen pai* (pictured calendar) popular after 1920s: delicate and really smooth modelling, arbitrary and vulgar primary colors -- red, yellow and blue -- plus white, and jubilant ambience cause nothing but funny feeling. Two figures and the foreground setting, however, are rendered in another way. First, poses of the figures, the artist himself and his girlfriend, are eccentric: the topless artist holds a black umbrella and turns his back toward us and gives us a baffling gaze, whereas the girl appears in an odd posture -- apparently a dance gesture -- and shouts for something to another direction. Secondly, we can see loose and feathery brush strokes here and there, as on the lower part of the male's body, the inside of umbrella, the shadow cast by two

figures and the fence, and the fence itself. All of these, in addition to the incomplete images, recall the technique of Impressionism. However, other elements -- the female's body and upper part of the male's body, including modelling of muscles and draperies, treatment of lighting -- are rendered realistically. The entire composition appears inspired by Chinese traditional painting, especially "four Wangs" of the Qing dynasty (active in the 17-18th century) with its overall coverage, high distance perspective,⁵⁷ and shallow space between background and foreground. As a result of such arbitrary juxtapositions, we see no unified style. Tradition for Zhao functions as a mere visual source of art making, as easy to pick up as to throw out.

Modernity and modernization are naturally a practical issue and an on-going project in China now. In the field of

⁵⁷ Gaoyuan (high distance perspective), one of the three types of mountain perspective in Chinese landscape painting, refers to the view from foot of mountains looking up to the peaks, in which the aspect is abrupt. Guo Xi (Kuo Hsi, after 1000-ca. 1090) defined these three perspectives in his The Lofty Message of Forests and Streams, "Mountains have three types of distance. Looking up to the mountain's peak from its foot is called the high distance. From in front of the mountain looking past it to beyond is called the deep distance. Looking from a nearby mountain at those more distant is called the level distance. High distance appears clear and bright; deep distance becomes steadily more obscure; level distance combines both qualities. The appearance of high distance is of lofty grandness. The idea of deep distance is of repeated layering. The idea of level distance is of spreading forth to merge into mistiness and indistinctness." from Early Chinese Texts on Painting, compiled and edited by Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, published for the Harvard-Yenching Institute by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA. 1985.

art, we can see a range of artistic responses to the relationship of tradition and modernity. Some of the reactions may appear simplified and naive, but they are nevertheless energetic, enthusiastic and ambitious, as positive as what in their way as the works of high modernism. Looking at the development of contemporary art, we see that different traditions are an organic and indispensable element which can and must be integrated into contemporary culture as a whole. In Meng and Zhang, the academic art tradition was applied for the purpose of enlightenment in modern times. Xu Bing created a modern image of China's tradition of literati spirit so that he injected a new element of self-criticism into that tradition, and showed us a probable approach of this self-criticism -- critique of written culture and history. Have taking advantage of tradition in an eclectic and somewhat cynical way Zhao Bandi seems to have dissolved the difference of various traditions, therefore, in a sense, to have illustrated a post-modernist attitude to the tradition as a whole.

Conclusion

As an advocate and a critic who has been involved in the China's avant-garde movement for several years, I have mixed feeling in writing this thesis. I have known most of the artists I discussed above very well, and like them, I was an artistic and cultural radical. The neutral position which a critic should assume is not easy for me to take, because some of these artists were my friends and comrades. Being outside my motherland may enable me to have a more level-headed state of mind, a relatively objective perspective, and an international point of view from which to look, but the price for this may be the loss of the direct experience of engagement -- like, in a Chinese idiom, *ge xue saoyang* (scratching an itch from outside one's boot). Even so, I am proud that I was in the right place in the right time, and as a member of the movement, I need to maintain a good tradition of modernism -- self-criticism -- which is one of the reason I chose this topic and the motivation for writing the thesis.

I agree with Habermas' statement of that modernity is an incomplete project, and find it especially true for China, although this statement has its unique situation and significance in that nation. Probably any judgement of

China's avant-garde in terms of modernist or post-modernist theory is a simplification. Labelling should give way to careful observation and serious analysis. I hope my thesis can provide the reader with such observations and analyses. I was really moved and had same feeling as the author while reading this passage by Liu Dong, a scholar of Chinese culture and philosophy:

"Having looked at whole history of the world after Confucius, Socrates, Sakyamuni and Christ, there is no people of any time in modern and contemporary times that has suffered from drifting outside the various established orders of culture as much as Chinese. For the same reason, however, there are no people closer than Chinese to approaching, from the bottom of their heart, a new 'axial age' which will provide the greatest opportunity for creation. In order not to lose such a historically golden opportunity which would enable us to ruminate over our tradition and to open a new era, or put it in a straight way, to retrieve something valuable from the tortures of our nation over the centuries, the effective approach of development of contemporary China should be neither that Chinese culture is mutated gradually, in essence, into a 'sub-culture' of distorted western culture, as some advocate, nor that some essential aspects of the spirit of China's tradition are degraded to the instrumental ethics of economy for rapid modernization, as has happened in Taiwan, but should be that we, with calm feeling, refer to all positive and negatives from the processes of Chinese, western and other civilizations, be sensitive to all current problems which are challenging human beings, compare and examine the right and the wrong, advantages and disadvantages of those great prophets, so that we can found more proper concepts of value which would absorb the merits of oriental and occidental civilizations, and then inject it into China's ready-to-be-activated tradition. Only after the success of such a change of cultural genes, can Chinese civilization have an internal cultural momentum which could last longer than all of the past civilizations, and China's history before and after the change be able not to be laughed at as a continuing error. Also only after this, can the Chinese be free from the reading based on the west-centralist mode of 'pre-modern -- modern -- post-modern': your today is the other's yesterday, while your

tomorrow is the other's today." ⁵⁸

Liu proposed a wonderful and somewhat idealized project for the future of China's culture which originates from the consciousness of a crisis of that civilization, one of the four oldest and richest civilizations of the world's history. This consciousness lies also in the mind of the avant-gardists. Autonomy and politicization, high art and low art, tradition and modernization, are just a few of the subjects they dealt with when they were seeking for a way to develop China's art and culture. There is no ready-made sound strategy for them. In the beginning of the movement, western modernist influences can be seen in their manifestos and works. Gradually, they learned more about the achievement of post-modernism, but at the same time, the self-consciousness and identity of China's contemporary art became one of the main concerns. Modernist concepts and practices are, in a sense, harder for China's culture to accept than post-modernist ones, and, I believe, this is a tougher project for the artists. The reason seems to be that China has been a nation in which collective and social values are considered much more important than individual value, while individualism is a cornerstone of modernism. For instance, the autonomy of art emphasizes the independent value of art apart from social ideology and other practices, which obviously deviates from

⁵⁸ Liu Dong, "*Huidao zhouxin shidai*" (Back to the Axial Age), *Dushu* (Reading, monthly), Joint Publishing Co., Beijing, 1992. 11, pp.98-99.

the canon of China's art theory, that literature and arts have to convey and serve "Dao" (metaphysical spirit and principle, or social norm and morality, etc.). Politicization of art as a conspicuous phenomenon of post-modernism, however, seems to find better ground in China, not only because of the pan-politicized official ideology set up after 1949, but also for the convention of pan-moralized and pan-socialized philosophy since Confucius.⁵⁹ Therefore how to combine the project of modernity with the so-called "change of cultural gene" in the art field may be more urgent and difficult for the avant-gardists than how to keep in step with post-modernism, which is especially significant in China today when a mixed culture of commercialism, money worship, fetishism, pragmatism and materialism has become the dominant trend, and the avant-garde faces a grimmer and more severe situation.

⁵⁹ As early as Six Dynasties (265-581 A.D.), the subject matters of loyalty, filial piety, moral integrity and fraternal duty, which are main principles of morality of Confucianism, were represented in painting, decoration of funeral devices. See Michael Sullivan, The Arts of China, the third edition, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1984, pp.91-95.

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figure 1. Wang Keping, "Idol", 1979. wood

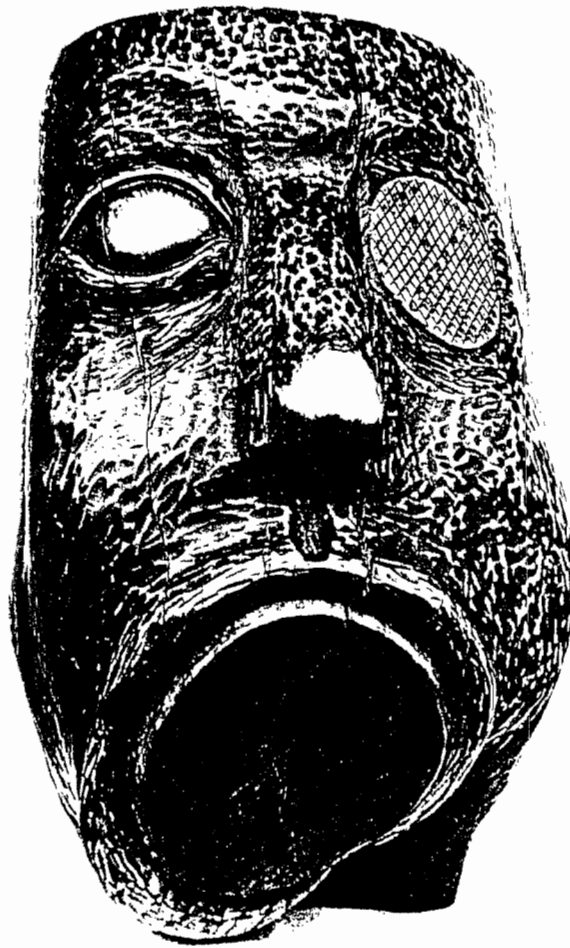


figure 2. Wang Keping, "Silence", 1978. wood



figure 3. Yuan Yunshen, "Hymn of Life", detail, 1980. mural



figure 4. Wu Shanzhuan, "Red 75%, Black 20%, White 5%", detail, 1986. installation, mixed media

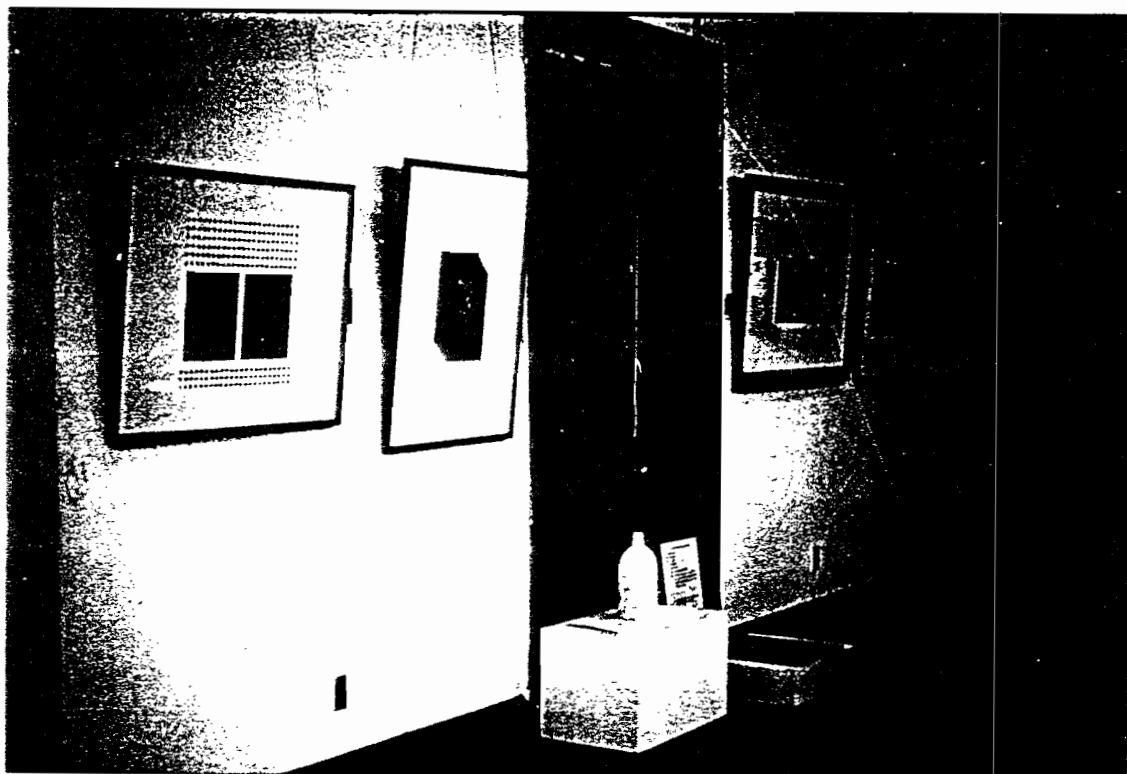


figure 5. Zhang Bo, "Report of Research on the Existence of Iron Plates and Organs", 1991. installation, mixed media

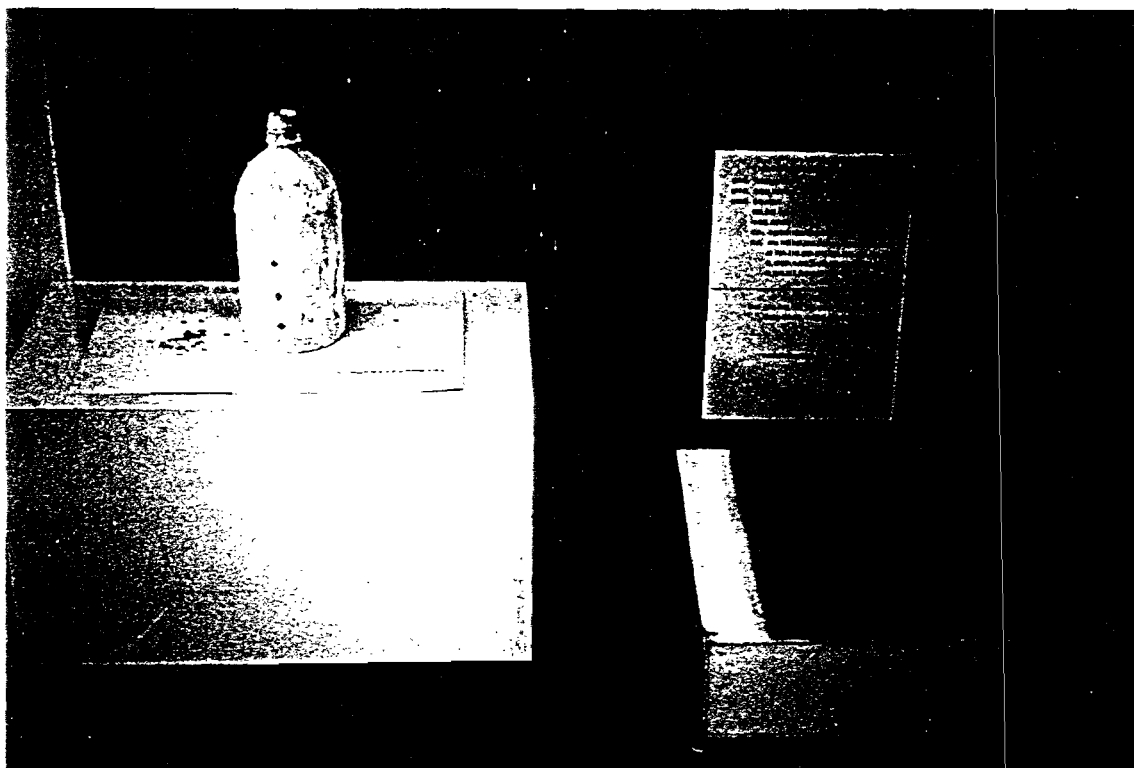


figure 6. detail of figure 5

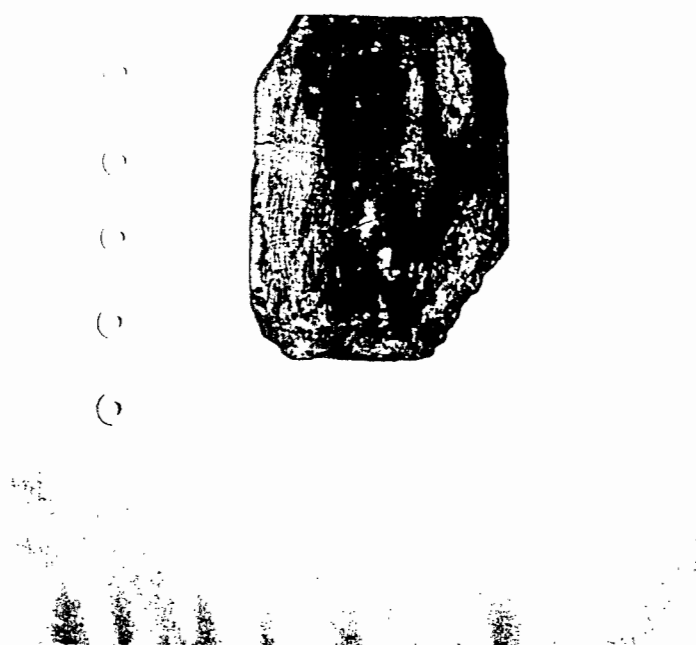


figure 7. detail of figure 5



figure 8. Feng Mengbo, "Bible: St. Luke",
1991. hand-made paper

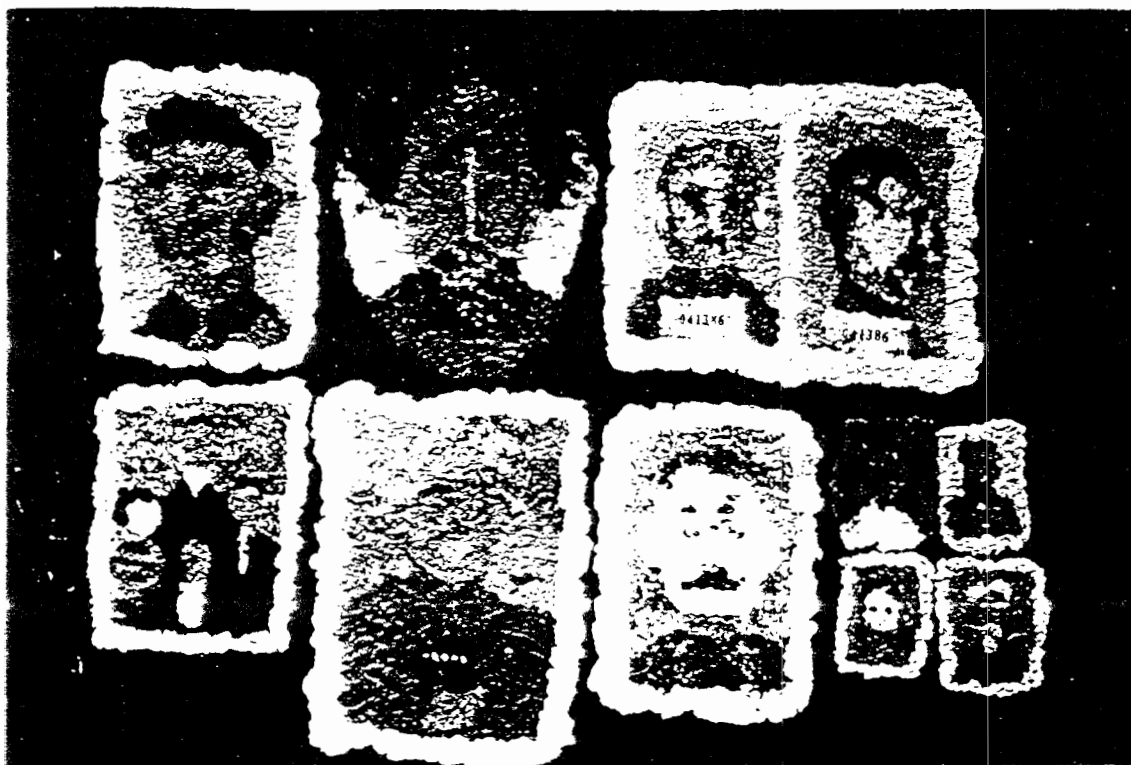


figure 9. Feng Mengbo, "Bible: St. Luke",
1991. hand-made paper



figure 10. Feng Mengbo, "Bible: St. Like",
1991. hand-made paper



figure 11. Banners made by artists in a reaction to the event of June 4th, June 7-8, 1989. Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province

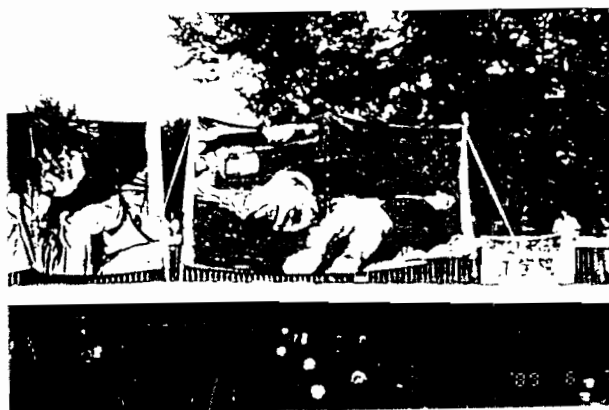


figure 12. detail of figure 11



各族人民大团结万岁

figure 13. anonymous, "Long Live the Unity of the Chinese People of All Nationalities!", 1975. gouache

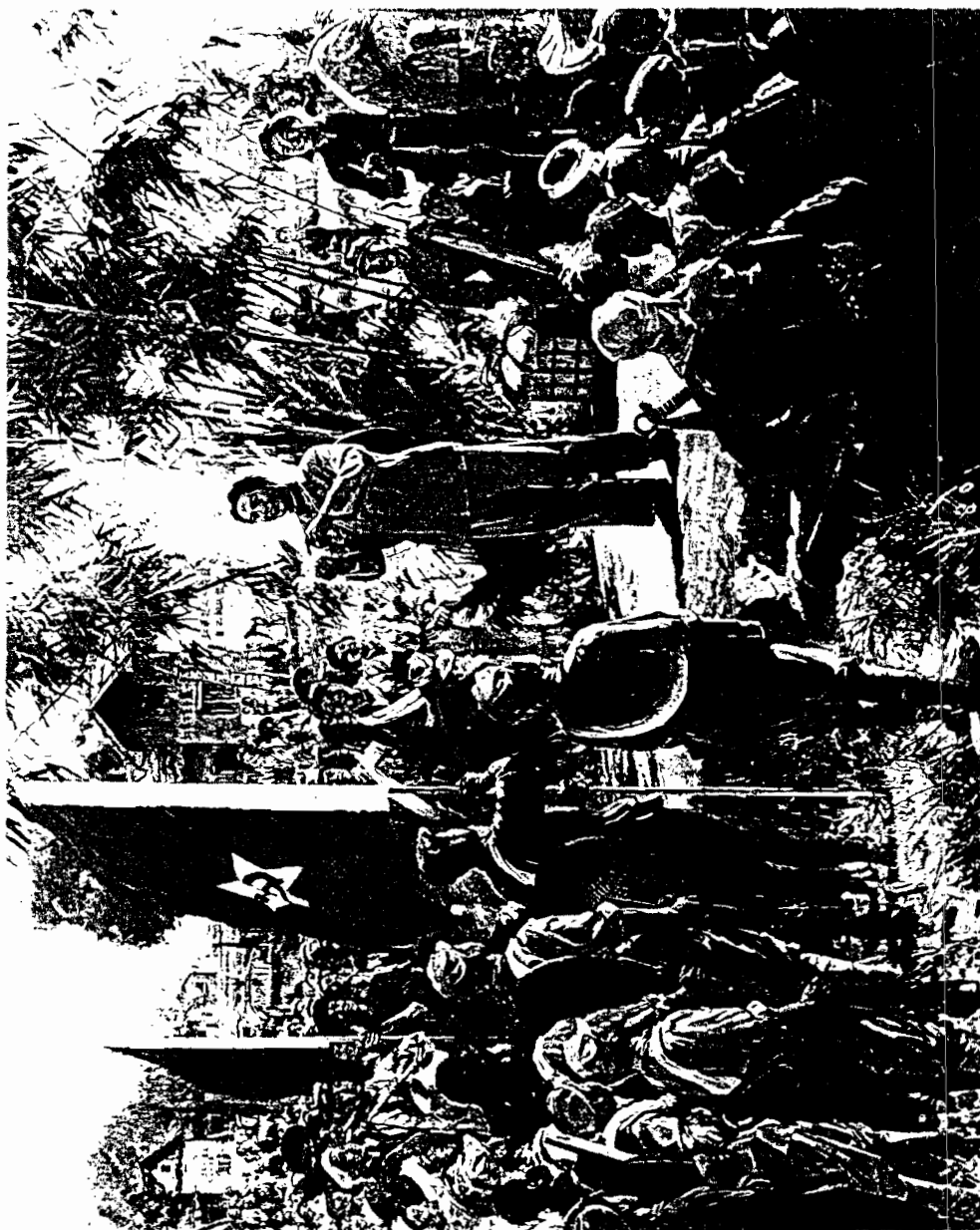


figure 14. Gao Hong, Peng Bing and He Kongde, "Unity is Victory", 1975. oil on canvas



figure 15. Wu Shanzhuan, "Red Humor: Big-character poster", 1989.
installation, mixed media



figure 16. Zhang Peili, "The Standard Pronunciation of 1989", 1991. vertical triptych, oil on canvas, 100x80 cm each



figure 17. Yu Youhan, "Mao Ze-dong's Periods of Life", 1990. oil on canvas, 100x280 cm

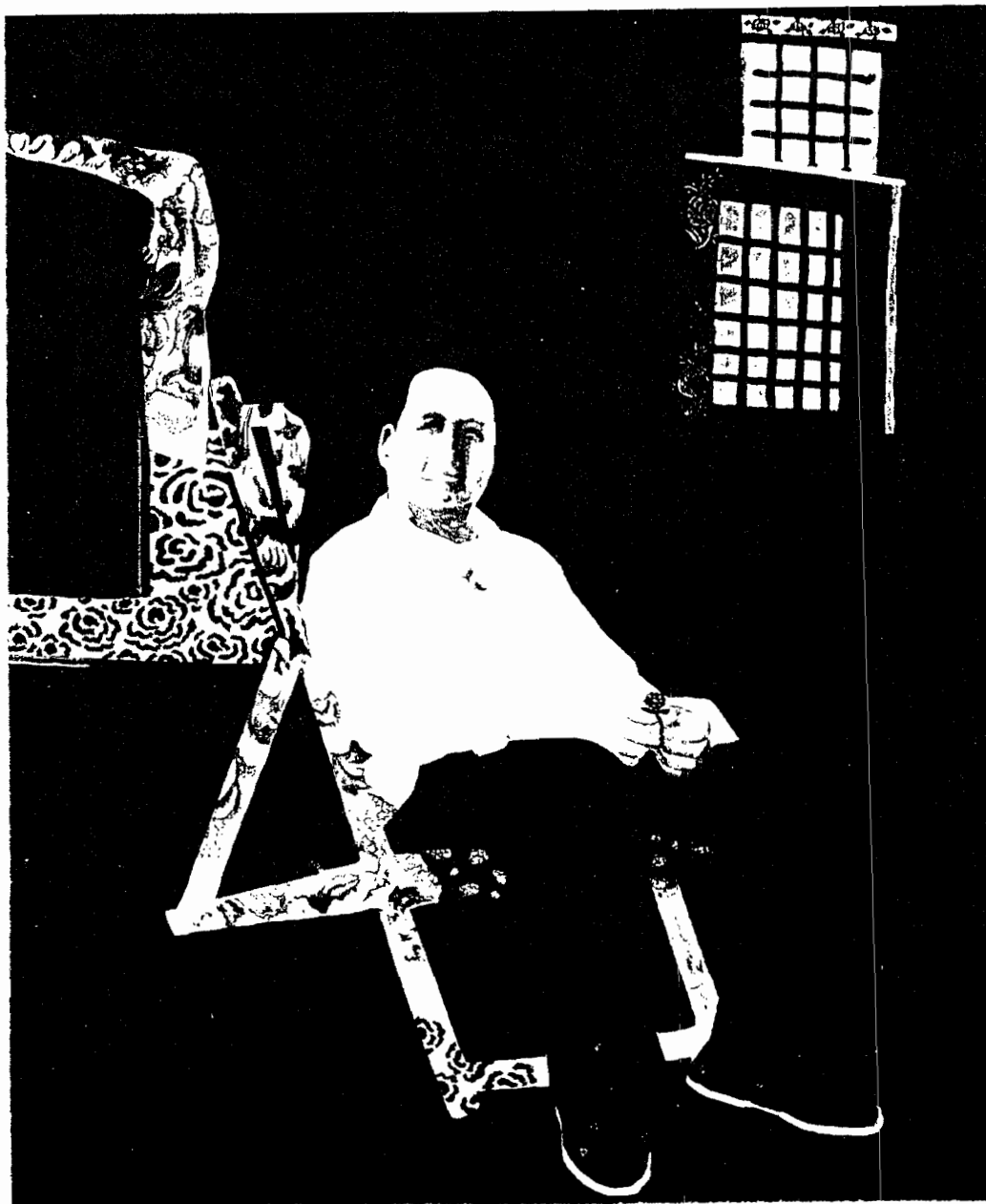


figure 18. Yu Youhan, "Mao in a Colorful Lounge Chair", 1992. acrylic on canvas, 118x98 cm

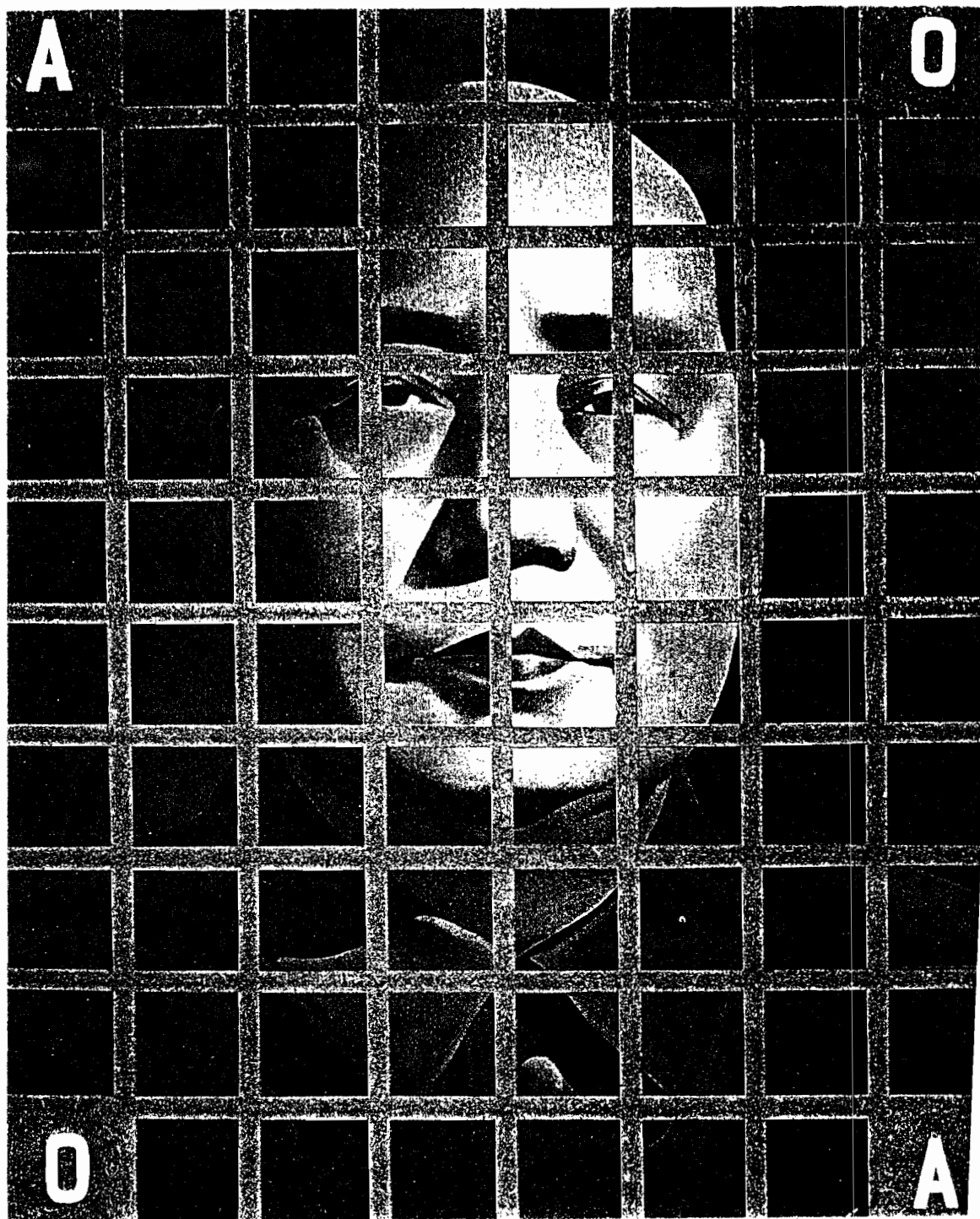


figure 19. Wang Guangyi, "Mao Ze-dong --
Red grid #2", 1988. oil on canvas,
148.5x120 cm



figure 20. Wang Guangyi, "Great Criticism: Kodak", 1990. oil on canvas, 150x100 cm



figure 21. Wang Guangyi, "Great Criticism: Nikon", 1992. oil on canvas, 148x119 cm

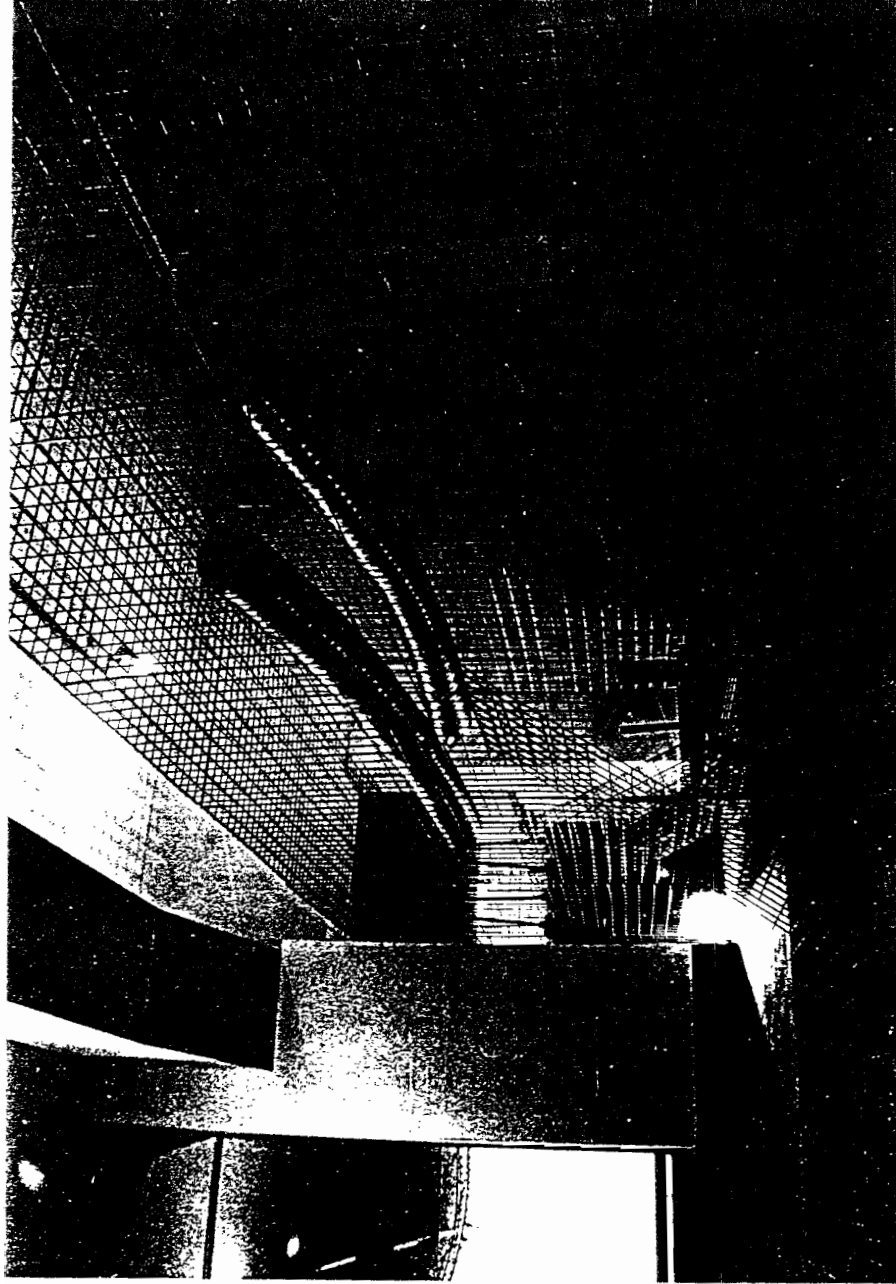


figure 22. Lin Yilin, "Equipment for Living, II",
1992. installation, mixed media

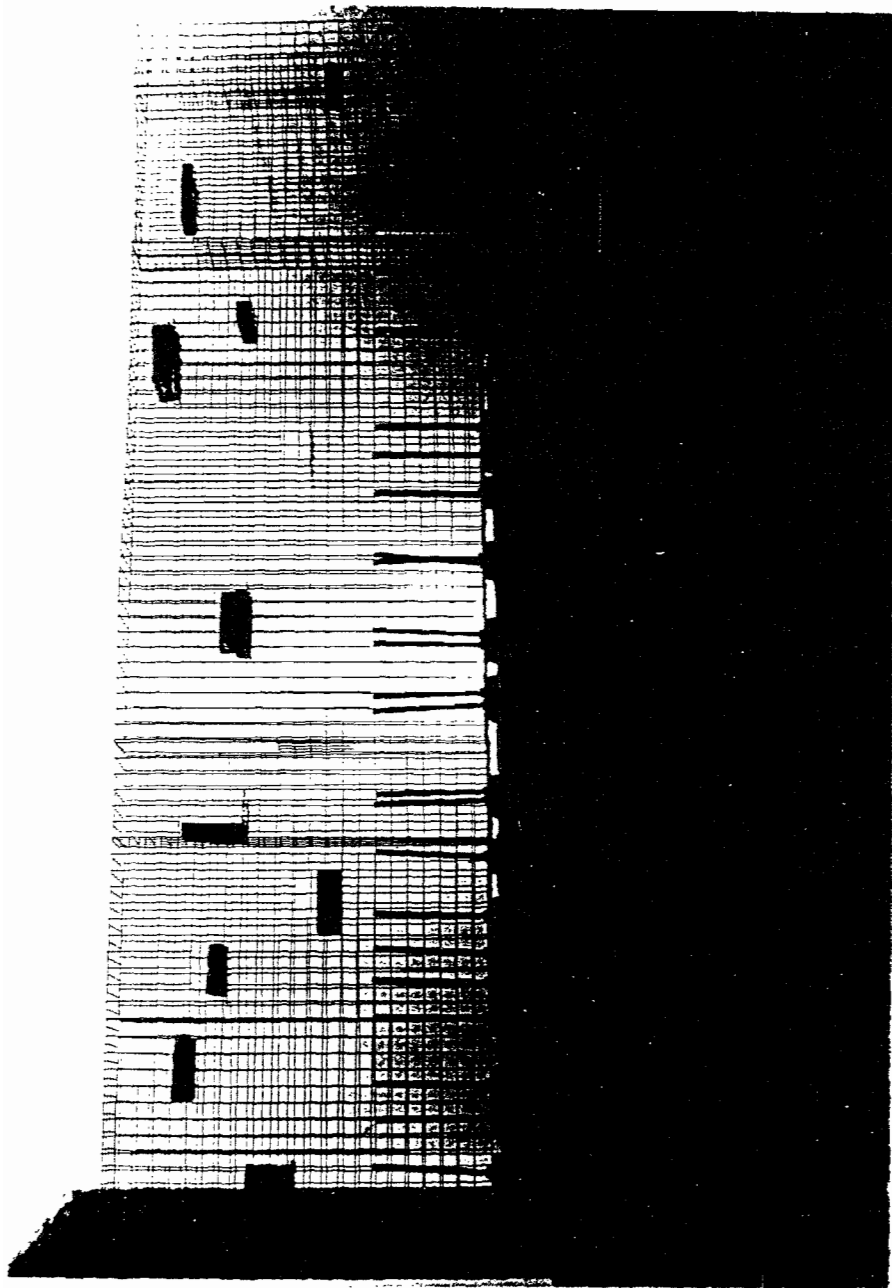


figure 23. Lin Yilin, "Equipment for Living, I",
1992. installation, mixed media

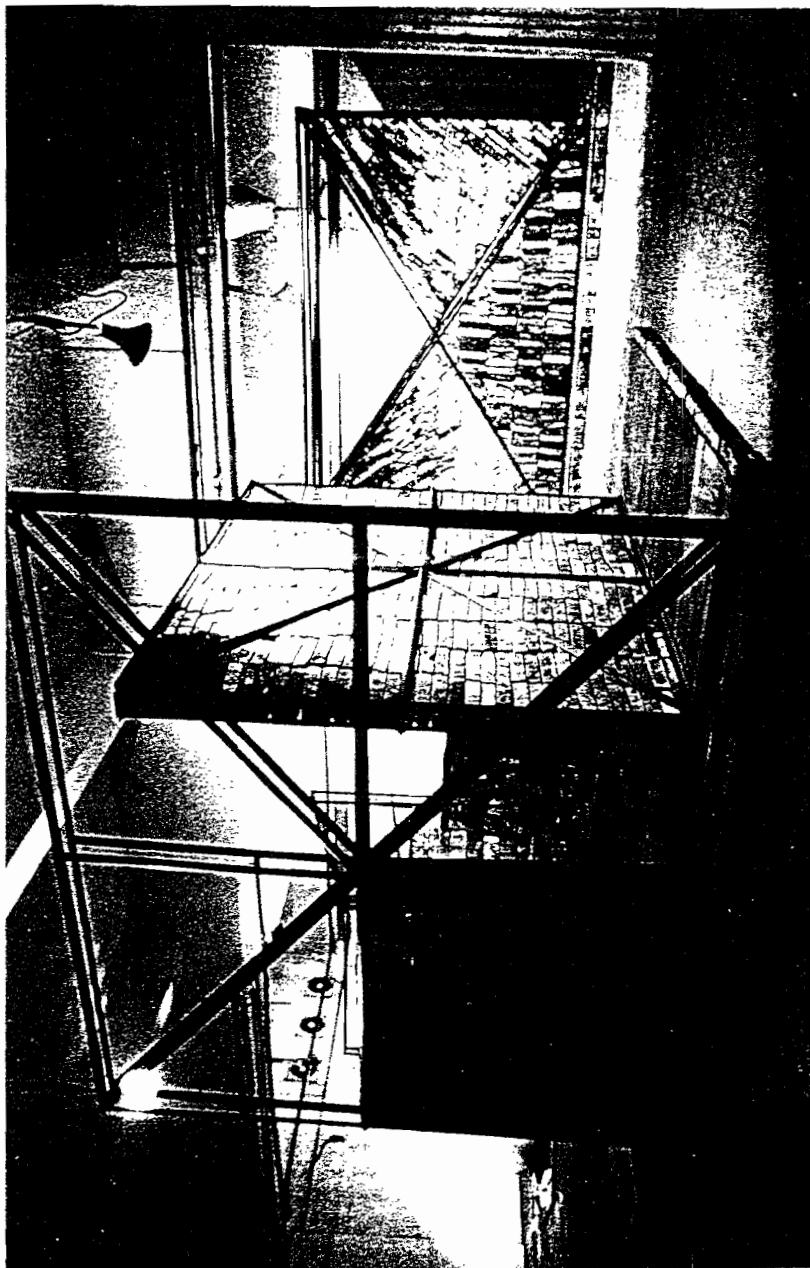


figure 24. Lin Yilin, "Standard Series of Ideal Residence, I", 1991. installation, mixed media

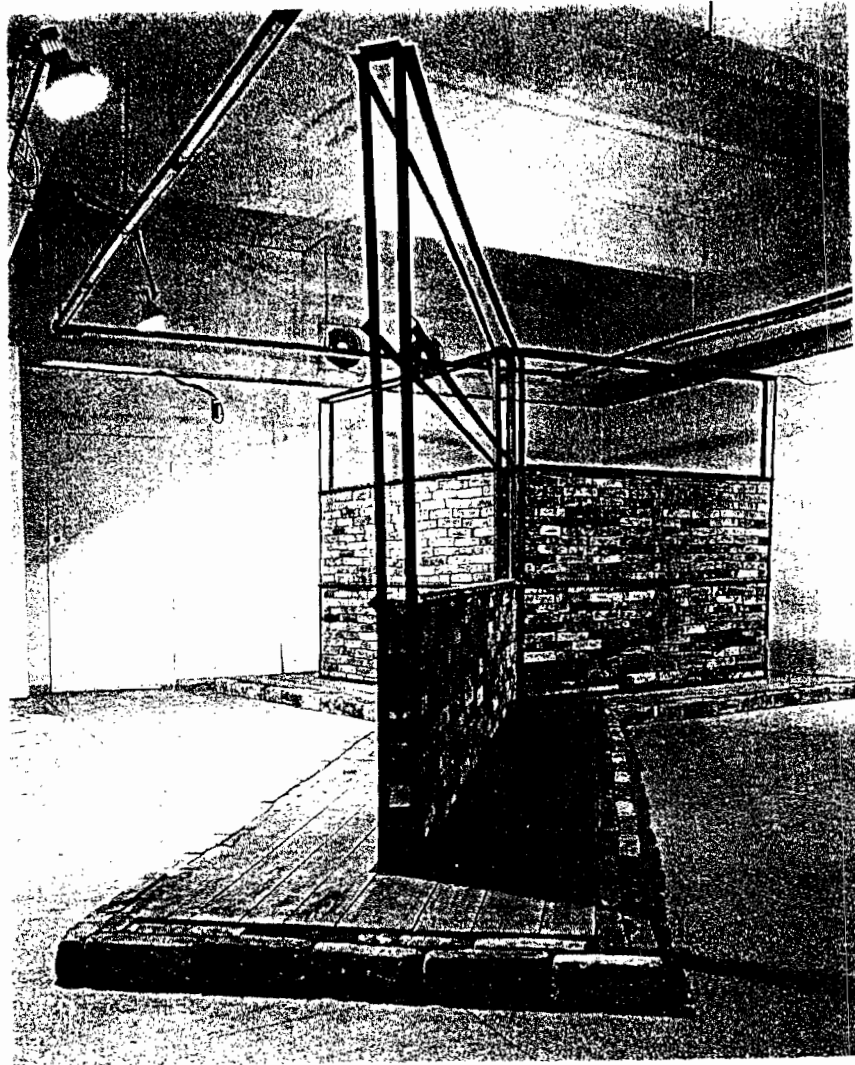


figure 25. Lin Yilin, "Standard Series of Ideal Residence, II", 1991. installation, mixed media



figure 26. Hou Yimin, "Comrade Shaoqi and Miners of Anyuan", 1960. oil on canvas, 160x332 cm

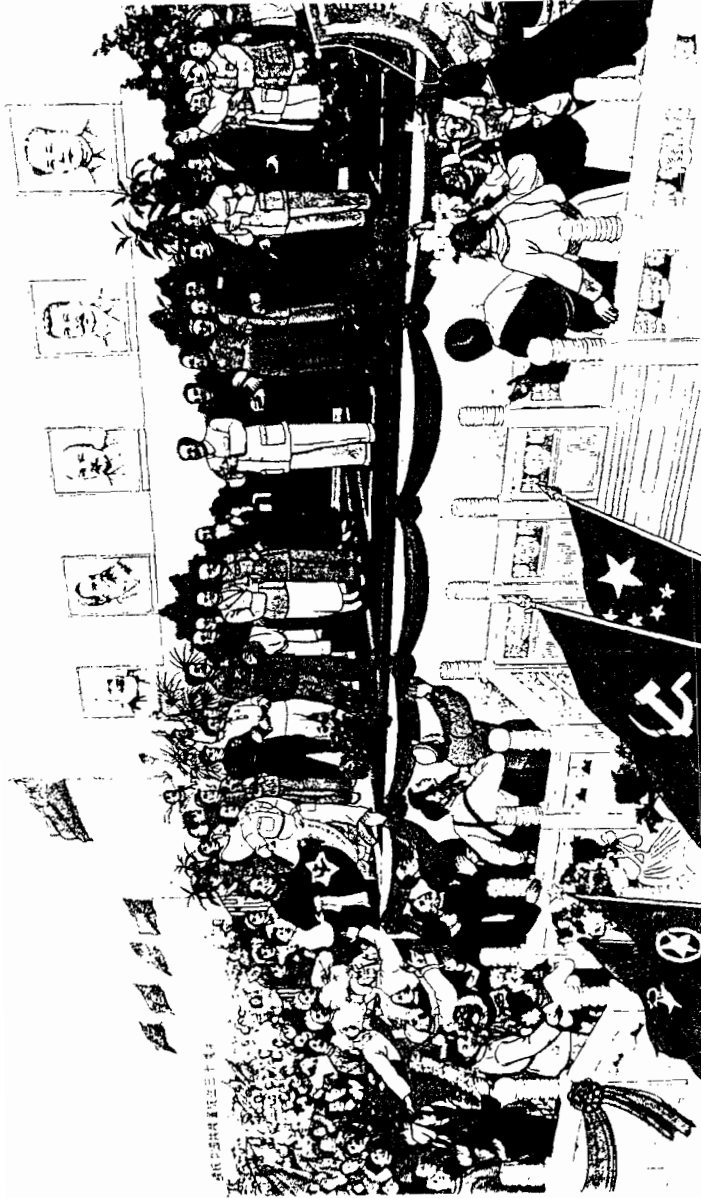


figure 27. Hou Yimin and Deng Shu, "Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Communist Party of China", 1951. ink and color on paper, New Year's picture

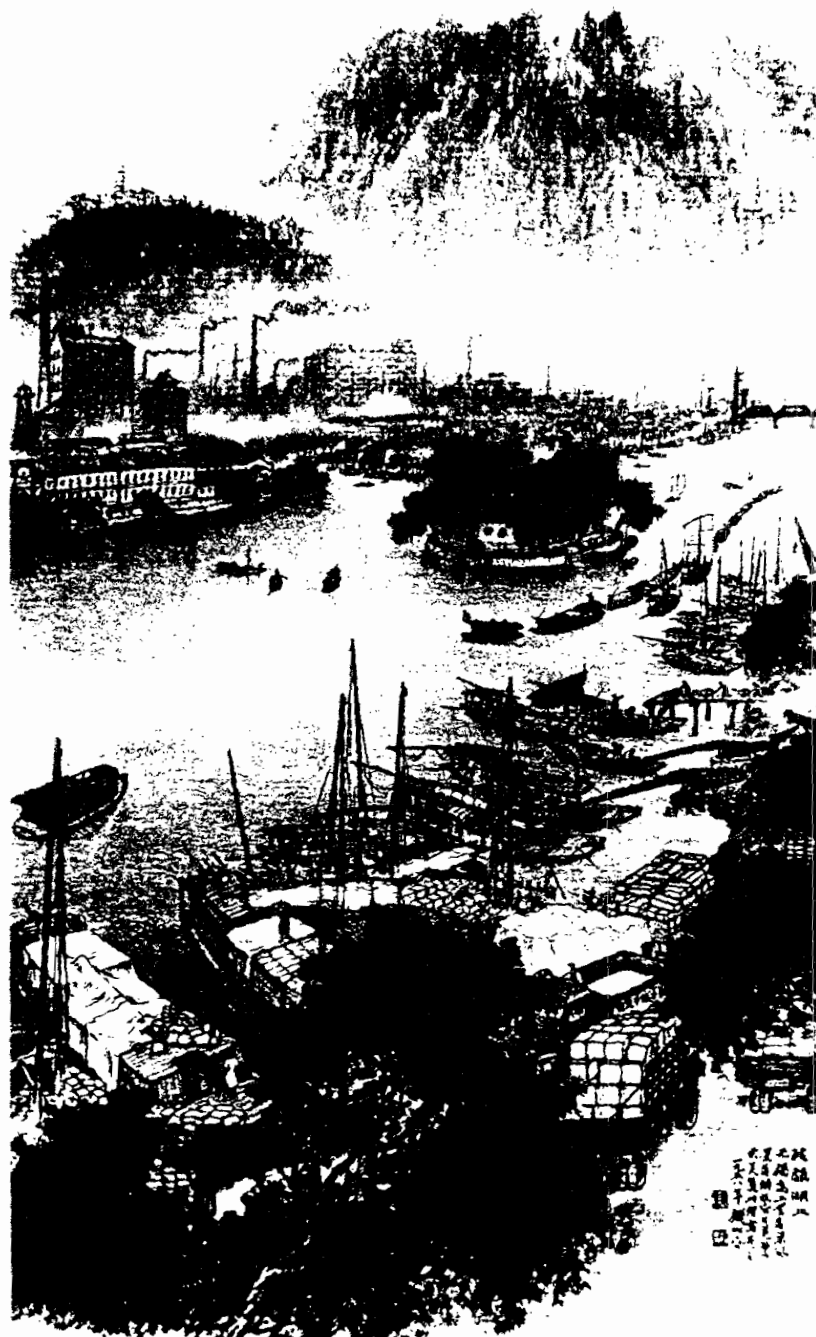


figure 28. Qian Songyan, "On Furong Lake", 1958.
ink and color on paper, 108x65.5 cm



Figure 29. Wu Qizhong, Zhou Bo and Lin Yong,
"The Gifts from Beijing", 1974.
ink and color on paper



figure 30. Chen Yifei and Wei Jingshan,
"Overturning the Dynasty of Jiang
Jieshi", 1977. oil on canvas



figure 31. Zhang Jianjun, "Mankind and Their Clock", 1985, oil on canvas, 220x340 cm

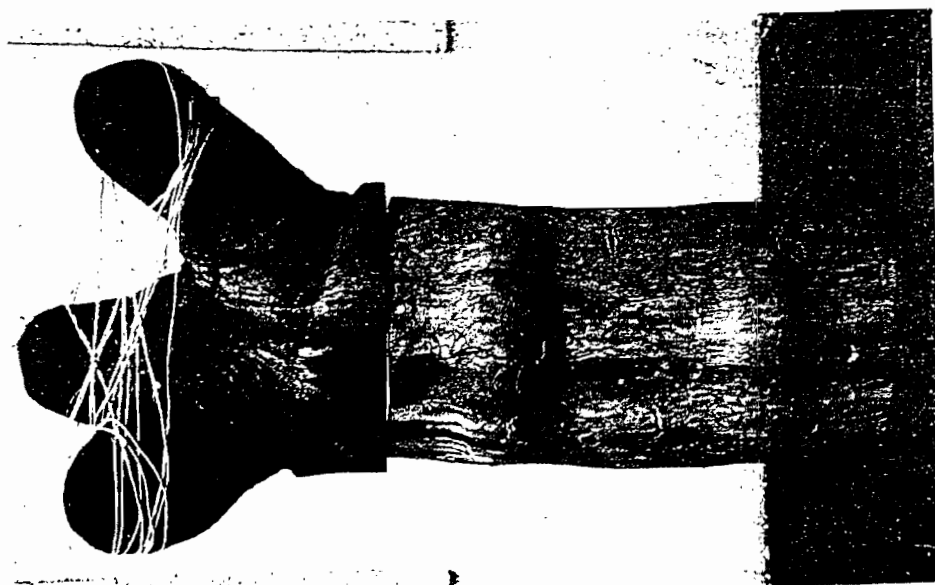


figure 32. Yang Shufeng, "Play",
1985. wood



figure 33. Pool Society, "Series of Yang's Taiji",
1986, cut papers pasted on wall

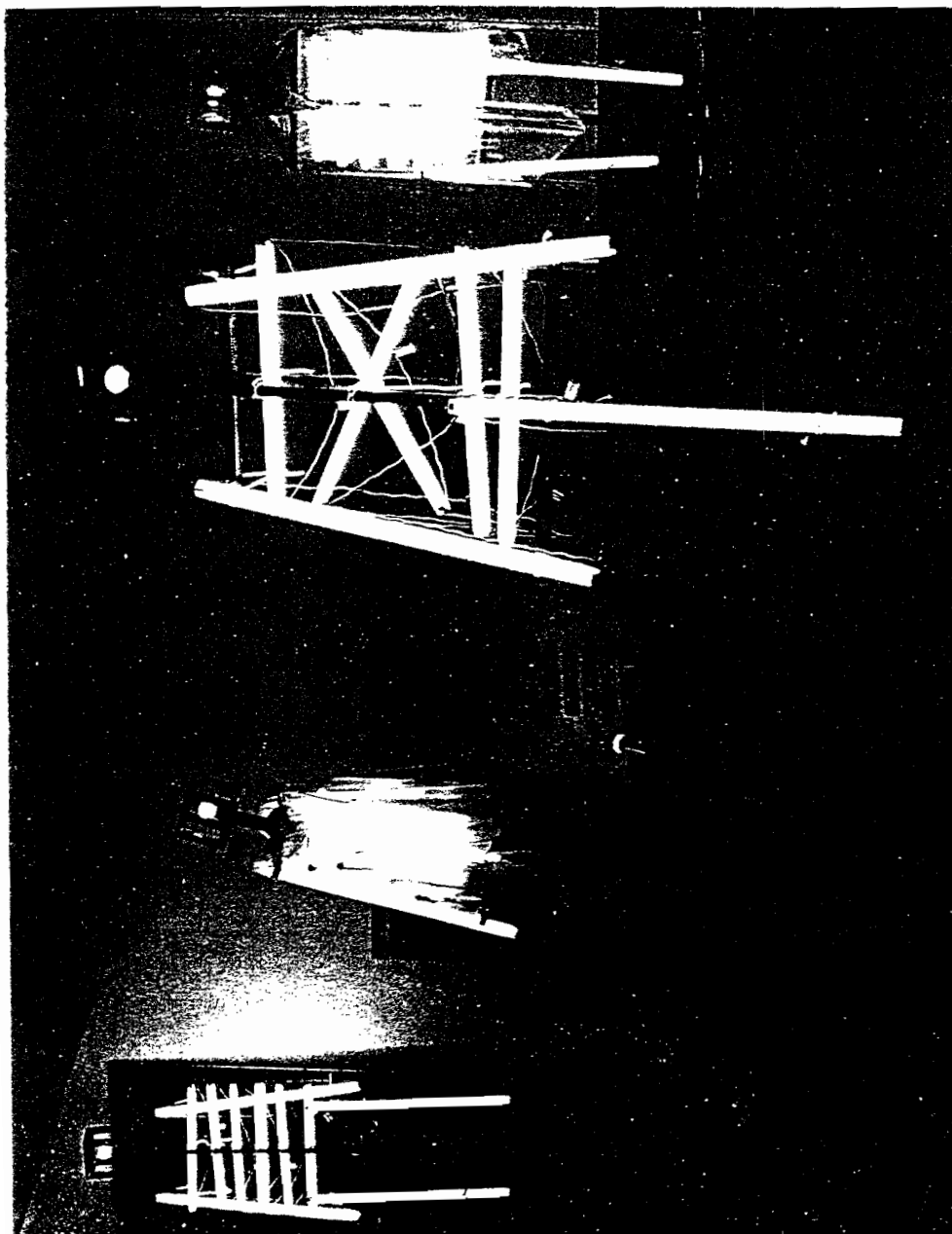


figure 34. Chen Shaoxiong, "Seventy-two and A
Half Hours Electricity Consumption",
1992. installation, mixed media



figure 35. Meng Luding and Zhang Qun, "In the New Era -- the Revelation from Aden and Eve", 1985. oil on canvas, 197x165 cm

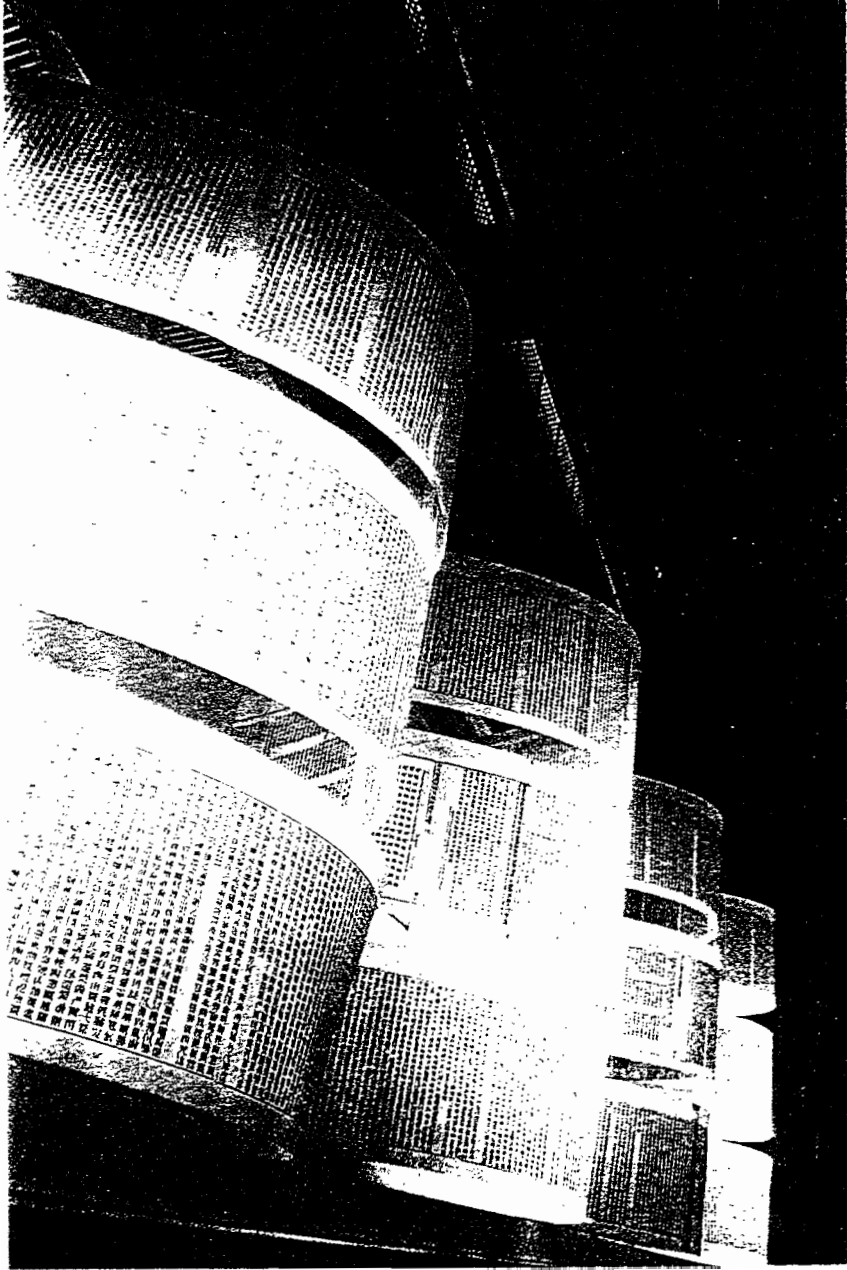


figure 36. Xu Bing, "Books from Heaven", 1988.
installation, printing on rice paper

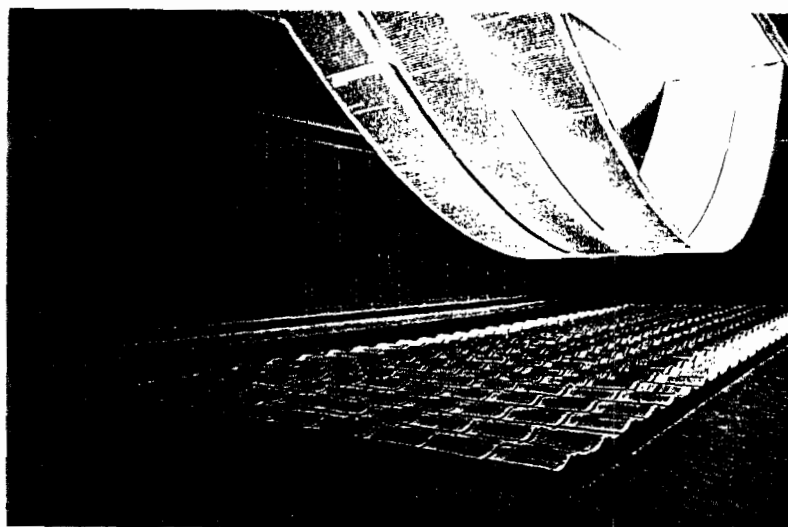


figure 37. Xu Bing, "Books from Heaven", 1988.
installation, printing on rice paper



figure 38. detail of figure 37



figure 39. Xu Bing, "Cultural Negotiation", 1993.
installation, printed books

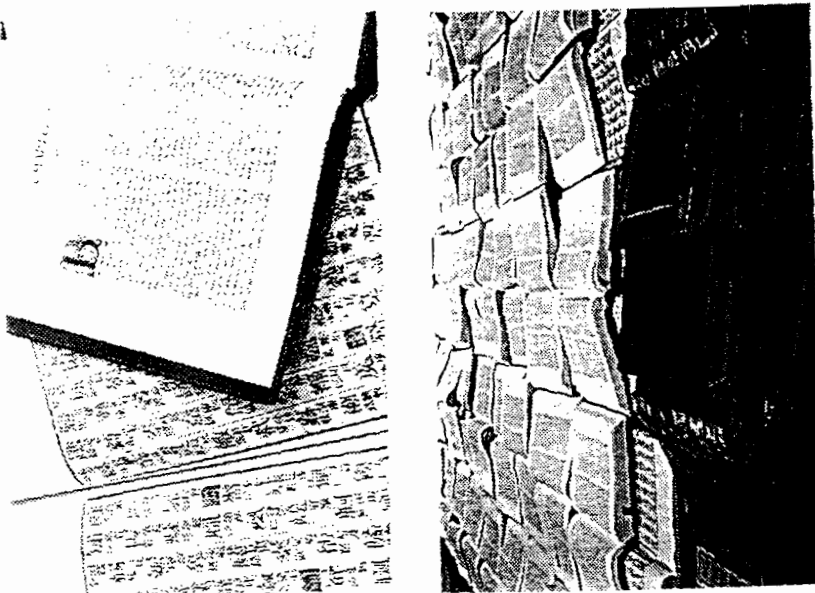


figure 40. detail of figure 39



figure 41. Zhao Bandi, "Listen to Me!", 1992, oil on canvas, 240x120 cm