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“It Is (Not) What It Looks Like”: Chen Hangfeng’s Liminality

Bérangère Amblard

- 1 Chen Hangfeng 陈航峰 introduces his viewers to a world where nothing seems to be what it looks like. A world of paradox and ambiguity, of movement and transformation. A blurred universe, which disorients, confuses and bewilders. He was born and studied in Shanghai where he is still based today. Growing up and living in this more and more Westernized, and permanently changing environment had a huge impact on his work. After graduating from a high school program dedicated to the study of art, he enrolled in the Fine Arts College of Shanghai University. There, he majored in oil painting, but the course content also included design, graphic design, photography, sculpture, print, wood cut, traditional Chinese ink painting and art history. When he graduated and made his debut as an artist, he had already “started mixing different types of logos and icons into patterns” but he quickly stopped and became a graphic designer specializing in logo design. In 1999, he started working in a design studio and an advertising company.¹ A few years later, he switched back to being an artist and started working on his papercut series of artworks, which he is most famous for.
- 2 Chinese paper cutting has a history of over one thousand years, and at first glance, Chen seems to follow the footsteps of his ancient masters. Taking the form of the Chinese zodiac’s twelve animals or of that of the double *xi* 喜, the character for happiness, his papercuts seem to imitate traditional forms of patterns and designs. It is only by taking a few steps forward and a closer look, that the spectators will appreciate the artwork’s complexity. What looks like traditional patterns is actually an arrangement of the logos of the world’s largest companies. The pig, which is a traditional symbol of prosperity in China, has eyes formed of the logo of the French supermarket Carrefour, its snout is decorated with that of the jewellery brand Omega, and its back is engraved with those of MacDonald’s, Adidas, Puma, Apple, Nike and Shell (Figure 1). The whole series was playfully entitled Logomania. This series of works sets up an apparent dichotomy between artistic media and practices which are considered traditional on the one side, and contemporary means of artistic expression or interpretation on the other; namely

between western “influences” and local “Chineseness”. The confrontation goes even further in the sense that the juxtaposition questions the challenging of ‘timeless traditions’ by modernity. This opposition is such that it stands out the most, but Chen Hangfeng’s art plays around with a great diversity of other dichotomies. They are anchored in his peculiar academic and professional background – which they might be a consequence of. Between movement and stillness, control and lack of control, the natural and the unnatural, action and inaction, real and virtual or East and West, the artworks seem to be the place where confrontation occurs. However, this paper aims at showing that Chen Hangfeng’s creations actually challenge the idea of a strict confrontation with two well-defined sides. The line where the contact is made is not a demarcation, it is neither definite, nor impermeable. The contact itself is neither fixed nor rigid. It is a moving, dynamic kind of encounter. This dynamism is embodied in different types of movement which can be found in the artworks. From them originates a sense of ambivalence that will be linked to the concept of liminality as a significant characteristic of the fourth generation of contemporary artists in China. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: an overview of the fourth generation of artists in China will precede a more detailed description of the movements. The final part will approach the notion of liminality and link it to contemporary creation.



Figure 1: Logomania Pig 疯狂标志之猪, 2007, Courtesy of the artist

Brands: The New Decoration of China

- 3 Chen Hangfeng was born in 1974. He belongs to the fourth generation of Chinese artists after the Cultural Revolution.² Artists from this generation were born after – or a few years before – the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, which marked both the end of the Cultural Revolution as well as the cessation of the Maoist era, and the launching of

President Deng Xiaoping's reforms and Open-Door policy.³ The Four Modernisations *si ge xiandaihua* 四个现代化 opened the way to the fulgurous transformations of the following four decades.⁴ The pace briefly slowed down after 1989 with the trauma caused by the Tian'anmen massacre, only to accelerate again in the 1990s. This decade started with Deng Xiaoping's trip to Guangdong province. His famous speech given in Shenzhen definitely set the tone for the following decades: "Reform and Opening". Indeed, the late 1990s and 2000s were dotted with major political, economic and social changes. The country's economy grew on average at an annual rate of ten percent between 1990 and 2004. China became increasingly involved in globalization and its entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 confirmed its entry in the capitalist world. This opening of the Chinese market facilitated foreign investments, of which China quickly became the second destination country and was soon to be the first. Artists of the fourth generation thus grew up during the country's transition into a market economy, a period of reform and opening up to the West which significantly modified its reality. What makes them a significant generation of artists, utterly different from previous post Cultural Revolution generations, is a matter of context as well as a matter of artistic forms and contents.

- 4 Even if they have not reached the renown of previous generations of artists, several exhibitions centred on fourth generation artists were organized in China and abroad: After 1970s: The Generation Changed by Market; Next Station, Cartoon?: Paintings from the post-70's generation; or My Generation: Young Chinese Artists.⁵ Each of them put forward a possible designation that would best characterize them. They were labelled as "the post-70's generation", "a generation of young artists", "the Young Chinese Artists" (YCA) – referring to the Young British Artists (YBA) –, "the "me" generation", or "the generation changed by market".⁶ Indeed, they are considered the heirs to Deng Xiaoping's political and economic reforms. Introducing the book *Young Chinese Artists: The Next Generation*, Xia Juan lists a series of milestones from the 1970s to the beginning of the twenty-first century in China.⁷ He juxtaposes the main political and economic events or reforms with changes which occurred in pop culture and people's lifestyle in the course of those three decades. Coca-Cola entering the Chinese market in 1979, aerobics becoming popular in the course of the 1980's, girls wearing bikinis and swinging hula hoops, young people singing karaoke, the arrival of the first mobile phones, the screening of Titanic along with other Hollywood movies, the appearance of international luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel or Armani, the sprouting of blogs or that of beauty contests; he takes his audience through the tremendous changes which lead to the fact that – as Chen Hangfeng rightly pointed out – brands actually became the new decoration of China.

- 5 Since those artists came at age in the unique epoch I just gave an overview of, the above-mentioned exhibitions were based on the hypothesis that

Young people's lifestyles - the clothes they wear, the food they eat, the home they live in, the level of education they have, and the way they spend their leisure time - have undergone radical transformation. This combination of factors affects one's perception, one's thinking: it created new values and an estrangement from older ones.⁸

- 6 As well as

Like their peers, many of the artists [...] are One Child prodigies and, as such, travel extensively, text constantly, play in rock bands and live by the latest fashion trends. They are empowered, [...] because they live in the fastest growing superpower in the world and are beneficiaries of its greatly expanding free market.⁹

- 7 Stating that new consumption patterns, massive population displacements to newly developed urban centres, and a recent fascination with personal economic gain, were all mutations that came to be driving forces for the artistic creation, those exhibitions rightly put forward the political, social and economic conditions in which the young artists were raised and create art.
- 8 Let us now consider the contents and forms of their artistic creations. Being "one child prodigies", one of the salient characteristics of this generation is a previously non-existing form of individualism. Under the Maoist era service to the state exceeded personal desires or ambition. Once they came of age, adults, rarely able to choose their own direction, were assigned work units. As for artistic creation, starting from the launching of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the policy that had been formulated by Mao Zedong in Yan'an in 1942 was reaffirmed: no form of art would be independent from politics. It stressed on an utilitarian type of art, which had to serve propaganda, revolution and the people. Socialist-realism was the official style. Art had to be *hong, guang, liang* 红光亮 [red, bright, and shiny], and had to express and represent the masses, by shedding light on the main three heroic groups: workers, peasants and soldiers.¹⁰ The post-1970s generation of artists is the first one which did not experience the Cultural Revolution. This period left a mark not only on the first, but also on the second and third generations of artists after the end of the Maoist era, composed of artists who were born in the 1950s and 1960s and whose careers started in the 1990s. Among them are many of the Chinese art market's big names: Yue Minjun 岳敏君, Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚, Liu Bolin 刘勃麟 or Wang Guangyi 王广义 whose works still engage with Cultural Revolutionary iconography. The fourth generation of artists enjoyed a new individualism where success was based on individual choices. Yet, it comes at a price: the pressure of succeeding academically and economically, both to live up to their parents' expectations, and in order to support them financially. Since they were not holding the Cultural Revolution period and its symbols as a point of reference, and as a source to oppose, they had to come up, as Barabara Pollock puts it, "with their own sense of contemporary aesthetics and find their own ways of bringing *frisson* to their work".¹¹ In doing so
- They often explore the psychological conditions of living in China, rather than confront social issues or political history, as was the case of an earlier generation of Chinese artists who came of age during the Cultural Revolution and lived through Tiananmen Square.¹²
- 9 The range of themes they focus on, as well as the artistic forms in which they express them diverge from earlier generations of artists. Those artists are indeed known to approach questions such as the rapid urbanisation of the country and the transformations of scenery it involved, the restructuration of social and family ties caused by the One Child Policy, the emergence of a materialistic consumer culture, or the advent of digital technologies and the development of internet. Whichever topics they focus on, the artists draw from their daily lives. Their artworks depict the social, economic and political landscape they experience living in China. They
- express a common feeling about their unique cultural moment, an understanding and acute perception about their world, and in so doing imbues the contemporary art scene with their generation's most pressing concerns.¹³
- 10 Thus, like many other artists from his generation, Chen Hangfeng can be said to be an observer and a commentator of the continuous upheaval of a Chinese landscape which is far from serene or impassive. Just like his peers, he works with every medium: painting,

performance, installation, new media, video and photography. During our meeting in May 2017, he explained that, when he was attending university, the educational system was still based on realistic and figurative styles. A student would start by learning how to draw and sculpt. He would then move on to life drawing and oil painting, practicing on still lifes. The last step would be life portrait of the human figure. Chen recalls the course of the third year of university during which he "got bored with all of that", "went the opposite way and started exploring possibilities by [him]self".¹⁴ About the fourth-generation artists, Barbara Pollack said:

In between the extreme of the most traditional and the most innovative, lies a broad range of media, from digital processed photography to video, performance, sculpture, and artworks that exist solely in virtual form on the internet.¹⁵

- 11 As I am about to further elaborate in the section that follows, it could be said that Chen Hangfeng has developed an eclectic and protean work, which lies precisely in this in-betweenness.

Confronting or Interwining?

- 12 As previously stated in the introduction of this paper, Chen Hangfeng's creations seem to set up different types of dichotomy. According to me, what is of interest is the way the contact, the encounter is established. While they convey the impression of a strict opposition, they actually explore several forms of movement.

- 13 The first type of movement is such that it can be qualified as "physical". In some artworks, this physical movement takes on a particularly material or mechanical form. For the series *Wind from the West*, (Figure 2) Chen chose simple drawings of plum blossoms, orchids, or bamboos. While traditional Chinese literati used ink to draw them, he shapes them with plastic shopping bags. He cuts out the forms and mounts them on a wooden board using stick pins. The wind from the West takes the form of small fans set up on the side of the board. A movement sensor switches them on, they blow on the plastic leaves and petals which softly rustle. Introducing those artworks, the artist said

I think that from 2010 inward, I got interested in slowness and in mechanical movement. I got interested in the subtleness which can be brought by an installation. That's why I make those moving paintings.¹⁶

- 14 In the moving paintings, the movement indeed is quite subtle. It is light, delicate, ethereal in such manner that it is practically a "non-movement". First of all, because it only exists when the spectator comes closer to the painting, enough to activate the sensors, and is surprised to see the drawing enliven. Moreover, in the short descriptions he wrote about each artwork, Chen said about *Wind from the west* that "随着定时器的中止, 它们便恢复到原来的形状" [when the timer stops, they [the leaves] always return to their original position].¹⁷ *Blowing blowing*, a different work based on a similar system, is composed of a sentence written out of plastic bags which "不停得顺着风的方向摇晃, 同时又保持着它们的姿态" [ceaselessly sway in the wind, but through it all, maintain their posture].¹⁸ As soon as the wind stops blowing, everything goes back to its original position, it is almost as if nothing happened. This specificity of the artworks is embodied in the title of one from the same series which was paradoxically entitled *Don't move*. The last example is that of *Constructed shadows* (Figure 3). Using the same process the artist created shadows on an old decrepit wall, shaping a traditional-styled landscape with black acrylic paint and pieces of dark plastic bags. Even more subtle this time, the movement comes from the

gentle breeze that agitates the plastic leaves and makes them glisten and sparkle in the sunlight. Moreover, the form, intensity and orientation of the shadows casted on the wall, vary depending on the sun's position in the sky, and disappear on a cloudy day. A particularly patient spectator would notice those slow changes along the day. Never is the movement completely "sincere". All those artworks bear the intrinsic contradiction of a movement which is ephemeral, not total: in a sense, a half or a non-movement.



Figure 2: Wind from the West, Plum Blossom 风渐左西之梅, 2010, *Courtesy of the artist*



Figure 3: Constructed shadows 造影, 2010, *Courtesy of the artist*.

- 15 The second type of movement is one of proliferation, accumulation or transformation. Logos and brands invade Chen Hangfeng’s papercuts, which they shape the patterns of. On the occasion of the exhibition *Daily Prosperity*, they were stamped on other media as well (Figure 4).¹⁹ Proliferating on the walls and floor of the room, they became a decorative pattern on the wallpaper and carpets. During a special event, they even made their way to the skin of the exhibition’s visitors who were offered logo-themed temporary tattoos.²⁰ The form of proliferation embodied in those works are reminiscent of another kind of proliferation that one witnesses on a daily basis in China. The recent fulgurous development of rental bikes is one of many examples. Proliferation also concerns two other series of works. The first one, *Fengshui* (Figure 5), is composed of different drawings made in a modern “acrylic on magazine paper” adaptation of the traditional ink on rice paper style. The magazine photographs picture fashion models on whom the artist added a layer of paint. He used the same method with the series *Growing* (Figure 6), only replacing the magazine photographs with engravings that he collected in flea markets in Switzerland. This time, the title is more evocative of the proliferating effect conveyed by the artwork. However, in both series, the painted landscape seems to be in an in-between state at once masking and completing the original image. It seems out of place and, at the same time playfully blends with, and adds meaning to the partly hidden picture. In *Feng Shui*, the black line, one of the tree’s branches, settles as a stroke of eyeliner on the woman’s face. This in-betweenness comes in the way of what would otherwise be a pure confrontation between different media and artistic practices.

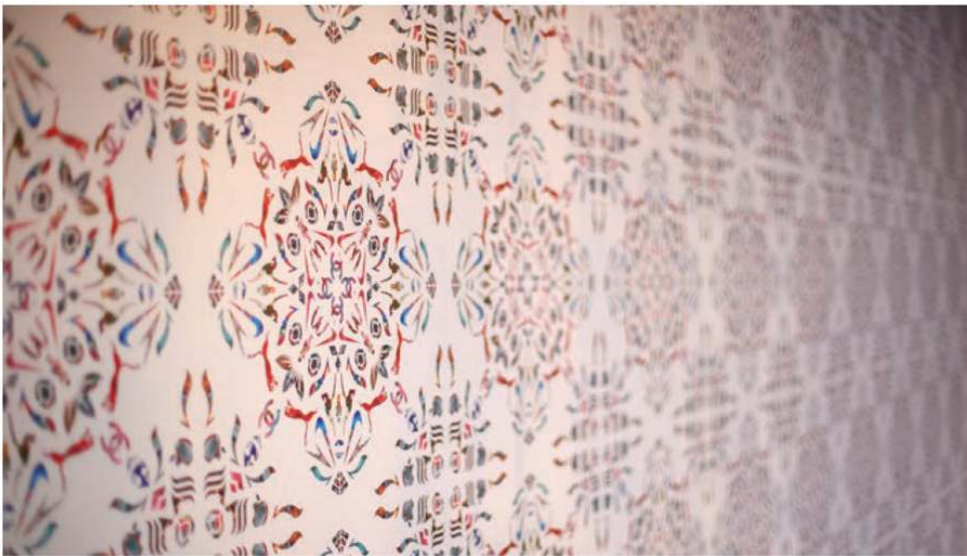


Figure 4: *Daily Prosperity* 欣欣向荣, Installation view, 2008, Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5: Fengshui 风水, 2015, *Courtesy of the artist.*



Figure 6: 生长 Growing, 2016, *Courtesy of the artist.*

- 16 Accumulation is also a big part of Chen Hangfeng's work. For some artworks, he used found or recovered objects that he accumulated and then put together in installations. The most prominent type of accumulation however, is an accumulation of layers in the artworks. Looking back at the previously described series *Fengshui* and *Growing*, it can be

stated that painting on the pictures, the artist adds both a layer of paint and one of meaning. *It comes and goes* (Figure 7) is also based on an accumulation of layers. It is a video recording of the process of making a collage. Chen cuts different blue-packaging consumer products out of advertisements. He places them on a white piece of paper and arranges two mirrors forming a 60-degree angle around them. Both the accumulation of the pictures of objects and the multiplication of their reflections in the mirrors, create the illusion of a snowflake. The spectator’s gaze gets lost in this illusion, which is a process that *Toss and Turn* (Figure 8) takes to another level. This installation is made of two cameras, one outside the museum, the other inside. Both are filming the museum’s visitors through kaleidoscopes which spin and turn in front of the lenses. An added device records the sound of the kaleidoscopes moving. The fragmented and moving image is projected on the wall of a hexagonal-shaped room, while the sound recorded from the kaleidoscopes plays. Not only is the image multiple, but the devices mobilized by the artist, and the spectator’s senses they stimulate are too. It results in a disorientating immersive environment. The above-mentioned artworks, whether based on proliferation or accumulation also engage with transformation. The images get transformed by the added media whether it is paint, mirrors or a more complicated set of devices. The matter of interest is in the movement of transformation which comes as a proof of the existing “interaction” between the different layers of media or content. Once again, the confrontation is merely an outward appearance.

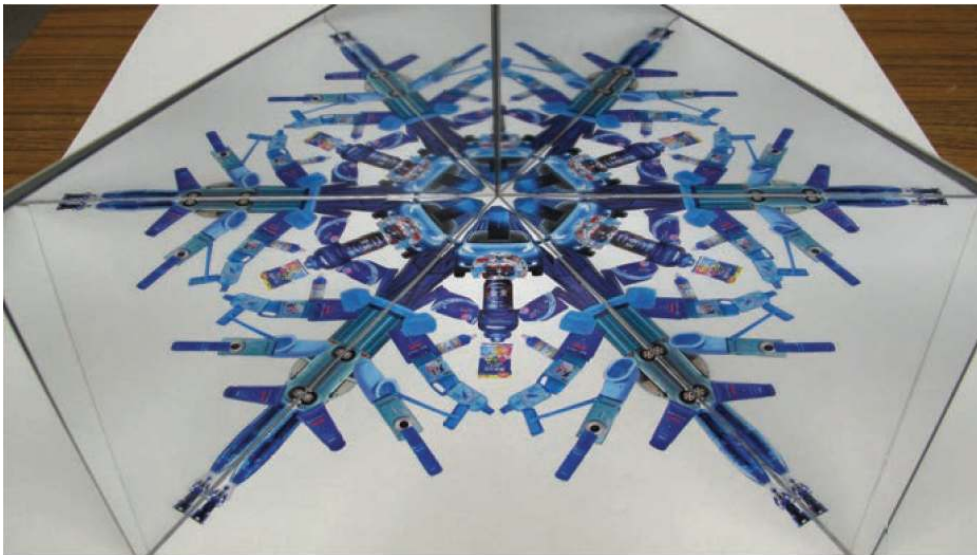


Figure 7: *It comes and goes* 来来去去, 2007, *Courtesy of the artist.*

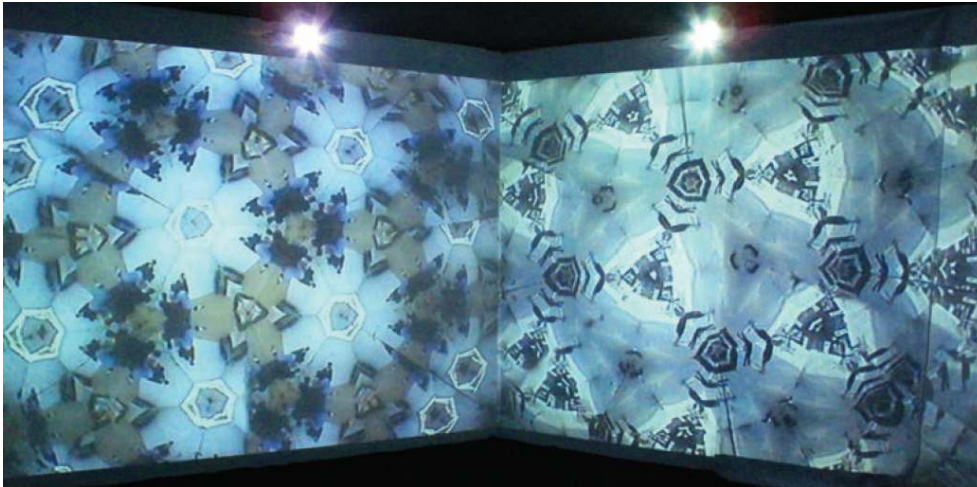


Figure 8: Toss and Turn 翻来覆去, 2009, *Courtesy of the artist*

- 17 The last type of movement this paper mentions is the one of the spectator. Many of the described artworks require participation of the spectators, and the mobility of their position in front of the picture. To appreciate the complexity of the artworks, one has to physically come closer to them; either to activate the hidden sensors or to realize that what looked like a traditional pattern is made of logos or pieces of plastic. There are several layers to each artwork and the spectators' gaze has to be mobile in order to notice them all. Like the famous drawing of an animal that can either be a duck or a rabbit, depending on the way one looks at it, Chen's creations require a mobility of the spectator's gaze – a characteristic that embodies their ambivalence in a perfect manner. The artworks are multifaceted. Before further elaborating on the question of the ambivalence in Chen Hangfeng's artworks, let us consider the concept of liminality.

The Ambivalence of Liminality

- 18 The word "liminality" is based on *limen*, the latin word for "threshold". The concept of "liminality" originated from anthropology. The French researcher Arnold van Gennep was the first to use it. Talking about "un stade liminaire des rites de passages" [a liminal stage in rituals of passage], he linked the study of the ritual of passage and the idea of in-betweenness. In *Rites de passage*, published in 1909, "le stade liminaire" characterizes the intermediate stage of rituals, during which participants have already departed from their pre-ritual status but have not yet transitioned into their post-ritual one.²¹ However, the concept, as well as the rest of his work, long remained unknown. Victor Turner rediscovered the theory of which he adapted the terms. "Le stade liminaire des rituels" thus became "the liminal stage of rituals" which translates a state of "liminality". Whereas Arnold van Gennep stressed on the rituals' tripartition, Victor Turner got interested in the intermediate stage. He isolated and scrutinized it in order to identify and name its main features. His essay "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage", opens with a reminder of van Gennep's analysis of rites of passage.²² Turner reminds his readers that they accompany a change in place, social position or age – situations that he qualifies as "state". Interested in the difference between "state" and "transition", he argues that "a transition has different cultural properties from those of a state".²³ Following van Gennep's tripartite model, he noticed that the first stage, the stage

of separation marks "the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural condition (a "state")". After the final stage, the aggregation, the subject goes back to a "stable state". In-between though, in the course of the liminal stage "the state of the ritual subject (the "passenger") is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state".²⁴ The rite thus engineers the shifting from one stable, structured state to another. The liminal stage differs by its ambivalence. This is how Victor Turner characterizes it: "paradox", "confusion", "indefinable", "essentially unstructured".

- 19 "Betwixt and between", liminality is neither this nor that, as well as both this and that. During rituals, the liminal stage is thus associated with symbols which reflect its peculiar condition. Huts and tunnels, that are at once tombs and wombs; lunar symbolism, for the same moon waxes and wanes; or snake symbolism, for the snake appears to die, but only shades its old skin and appears in a new one.

This coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterizes the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that, and yet both.²⁵

- 20 The concept's ambivalence comes from what Turner calls "the peculiar unity of the liminal". From this ambivalence results the ritual neophytes' 'undefinition'. Divested of their name, they are often considered to be sexless or bisexual, as well as neither dead nor living.

The neophytes are neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another. Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, confusion of all the customary categories.²⁶

- 21 In that sense liminality can also be understood as "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configuration of ideas and relations may arise".²⁷

- 22 I opened this essay stating that in Cheng Hangfeng's artworks nothing is what it seems. Looking back at them through the lens of liminality enables to understand that "it is not what it looks like" because they are neither one nor the other, and both at the same time – they are in-between. More than a confrontation, they embody a movement of oscillation between several states, movement from which originates the sense of 'undefinition' and ambivalence. Labelling Chen Hangfeng's work seems impossible. The series *Wind from the West* resembles ink painting, but the leaves are made of plastic and the noise of the fans which blow on them does not let the viewer forget about their presence. In the paper cut series, it is hard to tell if the medium is paper or logos. In fact, about his usage of logos and brands the artist said: "In my opinion, these logos are very concise images on their own. Used in different situations, they say something far beyond their own meaning".²⁸ Moreover, Chen Hangfeng also used the same patterns on different objects – including carpets, tattoos or screens – thus blurring the line between artworks and by-products, or that between artworks and decorations, when they are infinitely stamped on wallpapers, or engraved on a plastic Christmas tree.

- 23 The artworks also oscillate between the real and the virtual. Introducing *Toss and Turn* Chen explains that

万花筒的转动及持续变化的图像输入使得六角型房间内的影像变幻莫测，每天不断的将美术馆内外的景象变成超现实般移动的墙纸。²⁹

[The motion of the kaleidoscopes and the constantly-changing images make the hexagonal room's landscape unpredictable, continuously transforming everyday scenes from inside and outside of the museum into surrealistically moving wallpaper.]

- 24 Not only do the artworks transform images extracted from reality into something surrealistic which is used as a wallpaper, but the set of devices ensures an unpredictable flow of continuously transforming images. The immersive experience creates an effect of disorientation, blurring the limits between what is inside and outside the museum and what is real or not. The video *Three Minutes*, is composed of a succession of pictures taken and collected by the artist over a range of ten years from 2000 to 2008. Close ups of everyday life scenes, urban landscapes and portraits succeed one another in a random order, while the sound of a siren plays in the background. The video lasts for three minutes, which are the three minutes of silence that were observed after the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan province. The moment of tribute itself is liminal, at the threshold of reality. During those three minutes, life stopped running, people remained still and silent, only listening to the sound of the siren. This impression is conveyed in the video by the fact that each photograph has been animated. The almost imperceptible movement of a unstable photograph which is supposed to be unanimated challenges the line between reality and fiction.
- 25 The artist also plays with the notion of simulacrum. He classified the series *Growing, Wind from the West* and *Don't move* under the name *Fake tradition series*. *It comes and goes, Toss and Turn* and *Three minutes*, are part of the group of artworks entitled *Simulacrum reality*. "Fake tradition" and "simulacrum reality", are two oxymorons which echo Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum.³⁰ The simulacrum concerns postmodern societies that have lost all contact with reality. In the third order of simulacra, which is associated with the postmodern age, the simulation or the representation even determines reality. The consequence is the disappearance of any distinction between reality and its representation. He argues that simulation threatens the difference between "true" and "false", and between "real" and "imaginary", features that can be found in the studied artworks. The video artwork *It comes and goes* even goes as far as recording the process of creating fakeness, displaying the mirrored image of the illusion of a snowflake, made out of superficial consumer goods.
- 26 Chen Hangfeng's artworks engage with liminality in many different ways. They go beyond a simple confrontation or dichotomy and set up dynamic, intermingled, intertwined encounters of media, practices, histories, memories and even temporalities. The topics he approaches and the way he addresses them are typical for the fourth generation of artists. Artists from previous generations sought to establish a modern aesthetic. Their artworks – grinding and confronting different artistic practices and media – attest to a conscious intention to create "modernity". Those considerations and oppositions are now out of date. There is, in contemporary creation, an evident and assumed hybridity of practices where the "modern" goes alongside the "traditional", without any willing confrontation, or questioning of the use of one or the other. That is one of the reasons why I consider that artists from the previous generations fall into the category of modern art, and argue that the fourth generation of artists actually is the real first generation of contemporary artists in China. A generation where hybridity became more of a "state of affairs" than a confrontation. The ambivalence and 'undefinability', the sense of in-betweenness which comes from this hybridity are embodied in the artworks' liminality. They are symptomatic of many fourth-generation artists, Cao Fei 曹斐, Yang Yongliang 杨泳梁, Maleonn 马良, Tamen 他们, amongst others. The indefinite state of their creations translates the lack of definition of the landscape they grew up in. That of a country which has been for the last three decades, and still is, in a state of transition. A

state in which it is fashioning its identity, that involves both revising its past and inventing its future. A state, which can be illustrated by what the Queen of Hearts says to Alice when trying to make her way through the chessboard in the looking-glass world: "Now, here you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place".³¹

NOTES

1. This quotation was extracted from an interview the artist gave the author in Shanghai in May 2017, in the following footnotes it will be referred to as "Cheng Hangfeng's interview, May 2017".

2. Confronted to the Great Leap forward's failed attempt to catch up with the economic development of the main European powers, Mao Zedong was hoping to strengthen his power by relying on the country's young people. Millions of them rose to his call and joined factions of Red Guards *hong weibing* 紅衛兵. They were encouraged to track and destroy the 'four olds' *sijiu* 四旧 namely old ideas *jiu sixiang* 旧思想, old culture *jiu wenhua* 旧文化, old customs *jiu fengsu* 旧风俗 and old habits *jiu xiguan* 旧习惯. The Cultural Revolution *wenhua da geming* 文化大革命 drew all its strength from the Chinese youth's aspirations. In charge of the revolution's destiny, the red guards damaged or destroyed monuments and places of worship, which were seen as symbols of outdated traditions. They tracked down, harassed, humiliated, brutalized or killed anyone considered to be counter-revolutionary. University professors, writers, artists, politicians and every opponent of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were among the victims, the exact number of which still remains unknown.

3. The structure of modern and contemporary Chinese art history often leans on the succession of artistic genres and movements that developed and intersected after the end of the cultural revolution. Following Li Xianting's approach I take a different point view and base it not on a series of styles, but on the different generations of artists from which they originate. This division slightly diverges from that of Li. The first generation (1976-1983) consists of artists born in the 1940s and 1950s who were trained in propaganda painting. They experienced the cultural revolution from which their artworks began distancing themselves. Artists of the second generation (1984-1989), followed their example taking it even further. Stimulated by the effects of Deng Xiaoping's reforms, they tried to determine what would be the style of modern Chinese art. The third generation came out of the ashes of the 1989 Tian'anmen massacre. Artists born in the 1960s, are characterized by a feeling of disillusion. Unlike their predecessors, they do not aim at the construction of a new Chinese culture, but cynically confront their lived reality. See Xianting Li, "Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art", in *New Art from China, post-1989*, Marlborough fine art (London, 1993), for further information on Li Xianting's approach.

4. In December 1978 at the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee, Deng Xiaoping launched a campaign of reforms and modernisation of agriculture, industry, national defense and science and technology.

5. "China and abroad: After 70's: The Generation Changed by Market" is the name of a 2005 exhibition at the Today Art Gallery in Beijing. "Next Station, Cartoon?: Paintings from the post-70's generation" is the name of a 2005 exhibition at the He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen and the Star Gallery in Beijing. "My Generation: Young Chinese Artists" is the name of

a 2014-2015 exhibition in Tampa Museum of Art in St. Petersburg, Florida and in Oklahoma City Museum of Art.

6. Barbara Pollock refers to them as the 'me' generation and the YCA in *My Generation: Young Chinese Artists*, Exhibition Catalogue, London, London, 2014.

7. Xia Juan in Cristoph Noe (ed.), *Young Chinese Artists: The Next Generation*, London, Prestel, 2008, p.14-15.

8. Cornelia Steiner, Cristoph Noe, *ibid.*, p.6.

9. Barbara Pollock in *My Generation: Young Chinese Artists*, Exhibition Catalogue, Giles, London, 2014, p.13.

10. It is important to keep in mind that a relative diversity of practices persisted in spite of the imposed stylistic homogeneity. See Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A Critical History*, London, Reaktion Books, 2014, p.67.

11. Pollock, *op. cit.*, p.15-16.

12. *Ibid.*, p.14.

13. Steiner, Noe, *op. cit.*, p.9.

14. Cheng Hangfeng's interview, May 2017

15. Pollock, *op. cit.*, p.9.

16. Cheng Hangfeng's interview, May 2017.

17. Chen Hangfeng 陈航峰, 非自然选择: 陈航峰作品选集 *fei ziran xuanze: Chen Hangfeng zuopin xuanji* [Unnatural selection: Chen Hangfeng's selected portfolio], Curtesy of the artist.

18. Chen, *ibid.*

19. Daily Prosperity, Art Labor Gallery, Shanghai, 29 November, 2008 - 16 January, 2009.

20. Neospring alternative culture festival on April 14, 2007.

21. Arnold van Gennep, *Les Rites de passage*, Paris, A. et J. Picard, 2000 (1909).

22. Victor Turner, "Betwixt-and-Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage" *In The forest of symbols: aspects of Ndembu ritual*, London, Cornell University Press, 1967, p.93-111.

23. Turner, *ibid.*, p.94.

24. Turner, *ibid.*

25. Turner, *ibid.*, p.99.

26. Turner, *ibid.*, p.96.

27. Turner, *ibid.*, p.95.

28. Chen Hangfeng's interview, May 2017.

29. Chen, *op. cit.*

30. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation*, Paris, Galilée, 1981.

31. Lewis Carroll, "Through the Looking-Glass" in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009 (1865), p.145.

ABSTRACTS

Born in 1974, Chen Hangfeng belongs to the fourth generation of Chinese artists after the Cultural Revolution. A generation of artists who were born after the Maoist era and grew up during the years of modernisation and opening up of the country. He is based in Shanghai where he was born and studied. Growing up and living in an increasingly westernized and permanently changing environment had a great impact on his work. His series of artworks seem to establish a

confrontation between, on one side contemporary means of artistic expression or interpretation, and, on the other, forms of art which are considered to be traditional; namely between western "influences" and local "Chineseness". Of interest is how the contact between those different forms is established. While the encounter seems to take the form of a dichotomy, it actually challenges the idea of a strict confrontation with two well-defined sides. The line where the contact is made is not a demarcation, it is neither definite, nor is it impermeable. The contact is not fixed or rigid. It is a moving, dynamic kind of encounter. The artworks consist of an intermingling set of practices, histories, memories, and even different temporalities. The now, the present of the image seems to contain the trace of the future along with that of the past.

Né en 1974 Chen Hangfeng appartient à la quatrième génération d'artistes chinois après la Révolution culturelle. Une génération d'artistes nés après la période Maoïste et ayant grandi durant les années de modernisation et d'ouverture du pays. Il est aujourd'hui basé à Shanghai, ville dans laquelle il est né et a étudié. Vivre et avoir grandi dans cet environnement toujours plus occidentalisé et en constante évolution a eu un impact notable sur son travail. Ses séries artistiques semblent établir une confrontation entre des media artistiques contemporains d'un côté et des pratiques considérées comme traditionnelles de l'autre ; entre des « influences » occidentales et une « sinité » locale. Il est toutefois intéressant de se pencher sur la manière dont le contact, la rencontre est mise en place. Si elle paraît prendre la forme d'une dichotomie, elle défie en réalité l'idée d'une stricte confrontation. La ligne de contact n'est pas une ligne de démarcation, elle n'est ni définie, ni imperméable. Le contact n'est pas fixe ou rigide. Il s'agit au contraire d'une rencontre dynamique et en mouvement. Les œuvres se composent d'un entremêlement de pratiques, d'histoires et de souvenirs, où les temporalités même se mélangent. Le maintenant, le présent de l'image semble contenir des traces du passé aussi bien que du futur.

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