

# LOST AND FOUND IN TRANSLATION



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## **Abstract**

„Lost and found in translation“ explores gaps in communication and mistranslations between languages and cultural identities. My art practice has evolved from traditional printmaking in Shanghai to installations and screenprints as a student in the U.S., to my doctoral work which draws from my research and my experiences and encounters in London.

My research centres on three generations of Chinese artists who brought their own culture to bear on the experience of living and making work in the West. The first generation was led by Xu Beihong in the 1920s. The second generation was led by Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei and Tan Dun, who lived together in New York in the 1980s. The third generation, which includes myself, Yang Yuanyuan and Liu Yefu, were born in the 1990s and 2000s and studied abroad. This generation uses multiple media, including social media, in a globalized art world where their identity as „Chinese“ artists is less central. My own artwork is located also in the context of contemporary artists who use text in their work, such as Jenny Holzer and Jens Haaning.

When facing the clash of cultural and linguistic environments, my aim is to find a balance between inclusive and exclusive language systems. What seems to be „lost“ in translation can be used creatively in art practice, through hybridized forms and often through humour, to „find“ new meanings for myself, and hopefully for the audiences of my work.

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## Introduction

My doctorate research title is *Lost and Found in Translation*. The inspiration for my title is based on my fascination of when translation goes wrong. For instance, a few English mistranslations exist in Chinese public spaces. The actual meaning of the sign „Slip carefully,“ is „Be careful not to slip and fall.“ (Fig. 1) What is „lost in translation.“ will leave English speakers confused or amused. The mistranslation creates a new humorous meaning, what is „found in translation“ and highlights the genesis of my journey during the doctorate programme.



Figure 1.

Sign: Be careful not to slip and fall.

Xiaolong Fang, *Lost in Translation*, Digital-print, Varied Dimensions, 2017-2020

This report will begin with my past practice, which includes my artworks and curatorial experiences before coming to the University of East London to study on the Professional Doctorate in Fine Art programme. The main part of this report will concentrate on my artistic practice inspired primarily by three Chinese contemporary artists. The artists I am interested in are Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei and Tan Dun, who all have an interest in language and identity within certain aspects of their practice. For

me they all have the facility to be able to hybridize their artworks and blend their own Chinese culture with their experiences of living and making art works in a western context.

These three Chinese artists are the second generation of artists who have studied abroad; Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei and Tan Dun all lived together in the United States in the 1980's. This experience seems to have forced them, in making particular artworks, to rethink the relationship between language and translation through various art forms in order to reconstruct their identities and culture within another culture. Xu Bing plays with text to blur the boundary between East and West; Ai Weiwei initiates social and political conversations by text and uses the resulting interactions in his artworks; Tan Dun, as a contemporary musician, works with visual and aural elements of language to preserve the only existing all-female language in the world. Although their works are completely different in artistic form, they all are engaged in translating their experiences into artworks, from East to West and West to East in a constant loop of re-evaluation, navigating cultural lines of interpretation and expression.

As a Chinese artist/researcher living in a Western country, language barriers sometimes make me feel alone and embarrassed but they also enforce me to seek clarity and the balance between two cultures. When I confront the East-West cultural differences, I always question my beliefs and preconceptions of what constitutes an art practice, which then challenges my assumptions. This in turn makes me re-evaluate what I make and teaches me how I should „slip carefully“ in the future.

## **Personal and Creative Context**

### **BA Creative Practice (2009-2013)**

#### **Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, China**

I lived and studied in Shanghai, China for my BFA in printmaking at the Shanghai Normal University. I mastered the techniques of printmaking under the traditional method of Chinese art education which follows a strict master-student hierarchy.

When I was a child, I moved to three different cities with my family, across China from north to south. We settled in Shanghai when I was seven and have lived in this city ever since. Witnessing the city developing and expanding rapidly for the past two decades I began to feel like a resident at last instead of an outsider. Dialects and the spoken language are diverse throughout China, easily marking someone out as different; it takes a long time to be accepted as a native Shanghai resident. Over the past thirty years, Shanghai has emerged as a globalised city with shared international living standards. However, it retains the character of Shanghai traditional Nong-tang (弄堂) culture (Fig. 2).

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 2. Nong-tang culture, Shanghai, China. Photo

The old and new clash constantly in Shanghai and for me Nong-tang culture is a good example of this clash. Nong-tang evolved from a traditional building style called Shi-ku-men (石库门) (Fig. 3) found in Shanghai in the 1980s, which is a combination of Chinese post-liberation architecture and western features introduced into the city after two opium wars. But modernisation has come at the cost of the vanishing aesthetic of Nong-tang - certain kinds of buildings, the hanging clothes drying in the wind (Fig. 4), narrow alleys where the best local food was made. But the entwined wires still in use for the older homes posed a huge fire risk and this part of the city started to be torn down and redeveloped. I wanted to somehow preserve what I considered to be a beautiful part of Shanghai so I rented an apartment and lived in the environment for a year and Nong-tang culture became one of the subjects of my BA creative practice.

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Figure 3.

A traditional Shanghainese architectural style of Shi-ku-men, Shanghai, China.

Photo





Figure 4.  
Nong-tang culture, Shanghai, China. Photo

The grid, or as I see them dividing lines, have been a symbolic element in my works since 2010 when I first started working on the *Chinese-dry-out* (2013) (Fig. 5 & Fig. 6) series. While Nong-tang gives its occupants an indigenous identity, it also acts as a cage imprisoning occupants in poverty and hopelessness. There are three main ring-roads in Shanghai, inner, middle and outer. The three circles of inhabitants have changed over time. Foreigners and the middle classes are moving into the centre because it is old and picturesque while the native Nong-tang people are forced from the centre by high house prices as they cannot afford to improve and regenerate their buildings.



Figure 5.  
Xiaolong Fang, *Chinese-dry-out NO.1*, 60cm × 90cm,  
Reductive Coloured Woodcut, 2013



Figure 6.  
Xiaolong Fang, *Chinese-dry-out NO.2*, 60cm × 90cm,  
Reductive Coloured Woodcut, 2013

As an artist in the city, I felt the need to capture not only the atmosphere of Nong-tang, but the changing of Shanghai and China in general. It was the commonplace sight of

entwined wires that came to represent, for me, something about the improvised Nong-tang culture. The wires for me stand for its history and the dying of its history at the same time. In the series *Migration* (2013) (Fig. 7 & Fig. 8), I made details blurred and less sharp, representing something that is disappearing but somehow lingers as fragments of images and memories of interaction. The idea of using woodcut, one of the most traditional mediums for printmaking, came from the time I spent in my Nong-tang accommodation, where everything had a story about its past ready to be discovered.

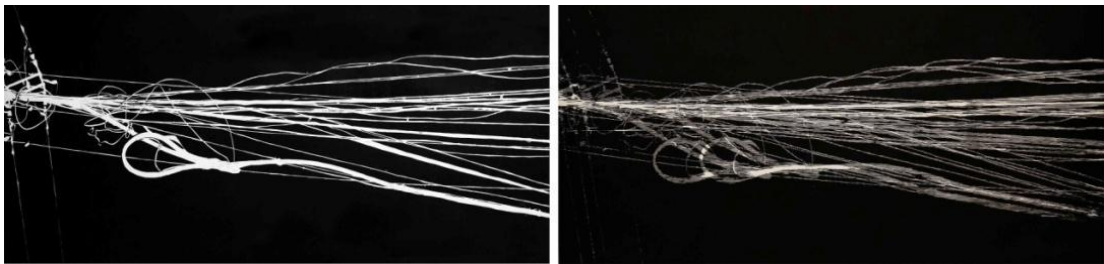


Figure 7. Xiaolong Fang, *Migration 2013-2*, 60cm × 240cm, Black and White Woodcut, 2013



Figure 8. Xiaolong Fang, *Migration 2013-2*, 60cm × 120cm, Detail (Right), Black and White Woodcut, 2013

During my BA, I was associated with a number of galleries in China, and my artworks were collected by museums such as LiuHaisu Art Museum and Shanghai Library in Shanghai, as well as private individuals. They were also selected for exhibitions such as the *Twelfth National Exhibition of Arts* and the *Fifth Beijing International Art Biennale* in China.

## **MA Creative Practice (2013-2015)**

### **Kendall College of Art and Design, Ferris State University, Michigan, USA.**

Born into a literary family where both of my parents are university professors, I realised the significance of education from an early age. After graduation with a BA degree, I decided to study for an MFA at Kendall College of Art and Design in the United States. I experienced dramatic differences between this MFA and the form of education I received previously. These differences became a significant influence on my creative works. In China, there is greater direction from the professors, resulting in a solid foundation of craftsmanship but little scope for students to develop their own creative concepts. At KCAD, with fewer restrictions from the instructors, and more acceptance for being an individual, I had the opportunity to experiment with various art forms.

In October 2013, I received the news of both my aunt's and my English tutor's death. As a consequence, I created *Fallen leaves return to the roots - to revert to one's origin* (2013) (Fig. 9), my first attempt in installation art. This piece was influenced by Chinese contemporary artist Ai Weiwei, and British contemporary artist Andy Goldsworthy. The work was constructed with fallen leaves I collected and arranged in a circle on the floor, with darker colours outside and lighter colours inside. In Chinese culture, the circle symbolises rebirth, and rings of flowers are used in funeral ceremonies. The cycle of the life of trees came to represent for me the larger cycles of life and death.

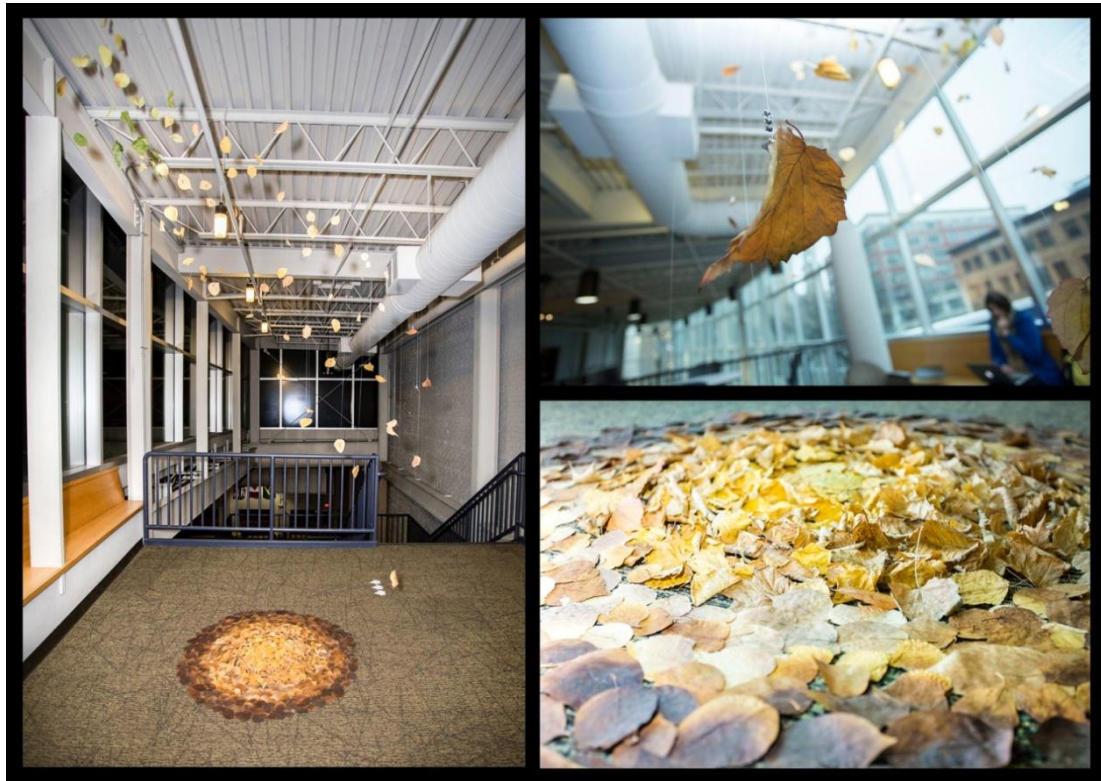


Figure 9.

Xiaolong Fang, *Fallen leaves return to the roots-to revert to one's origin*,  
Nature Leaves, Installation, Varied Dimensions, 2013

Installation View at Kendall College of Art and Design, Grand Rapids, MI, U.S.A.

I found Minimalism, Conceptualism, and Pop Art to be intriguing forms of contemporary art relevant to my research. After visiting exhibitions and researching artists including Andy Warhol, Wolfgang Laib, Mariana Abramović, Xu Bing and Gu Wenda, I began some experimental works. One of these works was *In fact, it is a bottle of real coke* (2014) (Fig. 10) which uses Coke, blue Gatorade, and seaweed instead of traditional inks. I experimented with new forms of making work and it was an exciting time as I became aware of artists I had not heard of before and I began to be exposed to the possibilities of how to make and present artworks. This worried me as it seemed I had so much to learn, but I was excited to discover new possibilities to incorporate into my practice.



Figure 10.

Xiaolong Fang, *In fact, it is a bottle of real Coke*, Screen Printing, 45cm×60cm, Ink: Coca-Cola, Gatorade Energy Drink, Seaweed, 2014

My next body of work was made from hair. Hair is given substantial meaning in eastern cultures, representing identity and love. The artwork *When your hair covers your waist, may your love cover the rest of my life?* (2013-2014) (Fig. 11) is composed of fifty panels, each containing an arrangement of hair in abstract patterns. Beyond being a piece of one's body, hair also contains DNA, the most fundamental information about a person. The linear nature of hair, for me, makes it look like a drawing and also like calligraphic marks. It was an exhilarating time to be developing work which was highly personal in its subject matter, and seemed to have begun to encompass my Chinese and newly found American experiences.



Figure 11.

Xiaolong Fang, *When your hair cover your waist, may your love cover the rest of my life?* Screen-printing, Varied Dimensions, 2013-2014

My interest in using hair as a medium led to my next series of works, *Love Letters* (2015) (Fig. 12). For *Love Letters*, I made paper from my old clothes (by soaking and pulping the garments in water) and glued my hair in the shape of letters, romantic sentences about love written onto lines, surrounded by a rectangle. My Chinese name is stamped in red characters (Fig. 13), as is traditional in Chinese paintings, letter-writing and calligraphy. Grids were commonly seen in traditional Chinese writings, where characters were arranged vertically. When English words are placed in these grids, despite the awkwardness of reading letters on their side, the viewer is still able to understand the sentence. The linguistic inconvenience can be seen as a representation of my encounter of another culture in the first months of my study in the U.S, where I constantly lingered between confusion and understanding, discomfort and awkwardness.

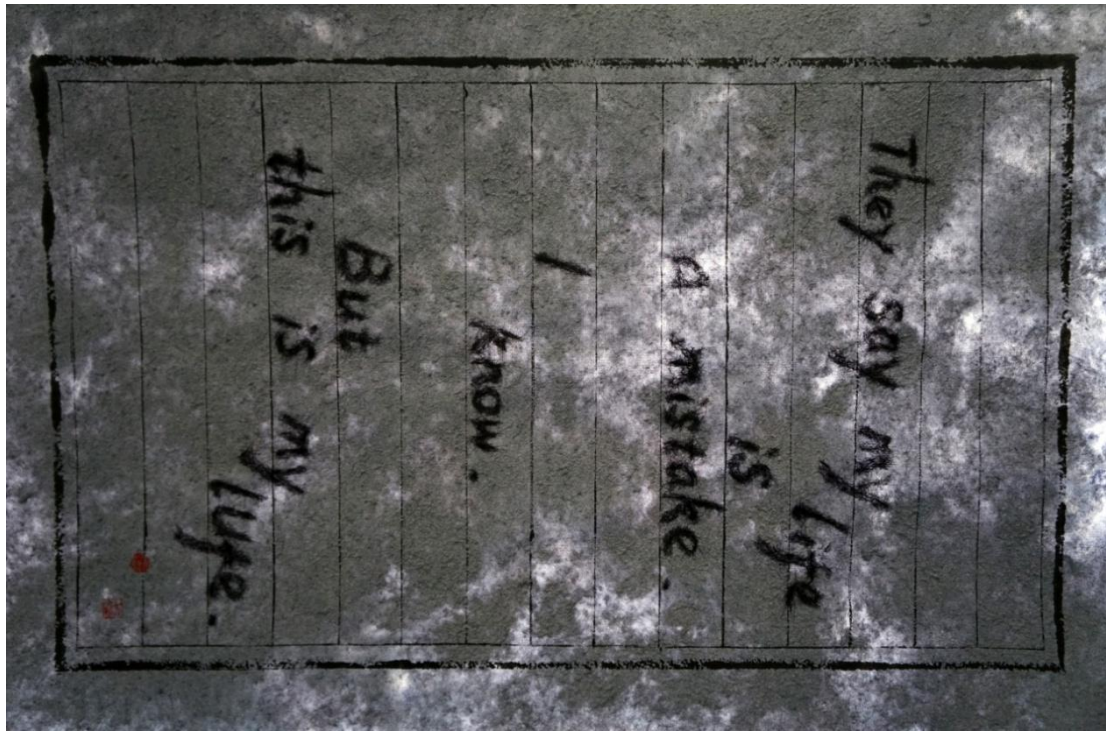


Figure 12.  
Xiaolong Fang, *The Love Letter* series, 60cm × 90cm,  
Paper hand-made from the artist's old clothes, Artist's real hair, Chinese Ink, 2015



Figure 13.  
Xiaolong Fang, *The Love Letter* series, Detail,  
Paper hand-made from the artist's old clothes, Artist's real hair, Chinese Ink, 2015



### Relevant Practice since MA (2016-2017)

After my MFA, I returned to China and worked as an exhibition curator. I have curated international art exhibitions, including *A Prayer, A Wish, A Spell: Individual and Collaborative Exhibition by Courtney Kessel and Danielle C. Wyckoff* in Shanghai which aimed to promote communication between the West and the East (Fig. 14), and the 2016 *Taobao Maker Festival Exhibition in Alibaba Group* (Fig. 15). Working as an artist-curator expanded my skills, and I used this period of time to make professional contacts to build my art career (Fig. 16 & Fig. 17). This experience of curating created great opportunities but it did limit the time I had to make my own work. I started to think about how I could develop my practice and also develop my research, and I decided to study in London for a Professional Doctorate at UEL. I hoped it would further my knowledge of contemporary art and give me insights and challenges to build on my experiences in the U.S.A.



Figure 14.

Curator: Xiaolong Fang, The opening ceremony of *A Prayer, A Wish, A Spell*, 10/06/2017, FOR Space, Shanghai, China.



Figure 15.

Curator: Xiaolong Fang, The exhibition view of *2016 Taobao Maker Festival Exhibition (the biggest exhibition in Alibaba Group)*, 22/07/2016~24/07/2016 Shanghai World EXPO Exhibition & Convention Center, Shanghai, China.



Figure 16.

Curator: Xiaolong Fang, The opening ceremony of *Connect with Auditory Sense and Visual Sense, Cross-border Photography Exhibition*, 09/08/2016, Shanghai Symphony Hall, Shanghai, China.



Figure 17.

Cultural exchange event organizer: Xiaolong Fang,  
*Stephen Halko's Tour-Lectures in China*, 12/04/2016,  
DongHua University, Shanghai

Stephen Halko: Dean of Academic Affairs at Kendall College of Art and Design of  
Ferris State University in the United States.

## **Creative Practice and Theory**

In the twenty-first century, I, as a member of the Millennial generation, am experiencing the concept of a global community which encompasses the entire world. As the founder of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg addressed on the commencement of Harvard University in 2017: “We get that our greatest opportunities are now global. Millennials no longer define themselves by nationality, religion or ethnicity. Instead, they are citizens of the world. That’s a big deal.” „Citizen of the world“ embodies my nationality as Chinese, my studying experience in the United States and my career path in the United Kingdom. Broadly speaking, defining myself as a „citizen of the world“ became the basis of my artistic enquiry and my works mostly circulate around the theme of attempting to understand how my Chinese and Western experiences interact and are then transformed and translated into artworks.

As a Chinese person who has lived abroad, I am interested in exploring Chinese contemporary artists who see themselves as „citizens of the world“ working in a context of global contemporary art. Hence, my artists and theory research concentrates on Chinese contemporary artists who have an international profile and their transnational artistic creations. I will mainly focus on the second and third generation of Chinese artists studying in the West. Xu Bing (徐冰), Ai Weiwei (艾未未) and Tan Dun (谭盾) all studied and lived in New York City in the 1980s. Language was the first barrier these transplanted artists experienced. As the leading figures in the second generation, the situation of living in the United States forced them to rethink the relationship between language, identity, and culture. After many years Xu Bing said, “If I had continued living in China, this work never would have arisen ... Once you get to the United States, language and communication become a direct problem in your daily life. Your life becomes awkward because your level of thinking is mature, but your abilities of speech and expression are those of a child.” (Xu Bing, 2014, pp.88-89)

Xu Bing plays with text to blur the boundary between East and West; Ai Weiwei initiates social and political conversations by text and uses the resulting interactions in his artworks; Tan Dun as a contemporary musician works with visual and aural elements of language to preserve the only existing all-female language in the world. Although their works are completely different in artistic form, they all explore languages, written, spoken or sung. The situation forced them to rethink the relationship between words and culture. It seems that the work of Tan Dun, Xu Bing, and Ai Weiwei all are involved with „cultural translation,“ transferring Chinese contemporary art into a Western context, though the translation is no longer one-way, but a bi-directional exchange.

The third generation of Chinese artists, born in the late twentieth century, has a different perspective of looking at the world. The language barrier is less of an impediment and the cultural shock seems subdued through greater exposure to western culture possibly because of social media. These young Chinese artists aim to focus more on their own perception of the contemporary art world. Liu Yefu (刘野夫) re-examines the status of Chinese artists in the Western world by using texts in different languages in his video installations. Yang Yuanyuan (杨圆圆) examines the role of female performers who retired from Chinatown nightclubs in the twentieth century; her work provides an insightful exploration on the time when Asian Americans pushed against racism and exploitation among white Americans. They were young Chinese Americans „dreamers“ who established Chinatown in San Francisco and created the Forbidden City nightclub. They are now considered to be the predecessors who broke Western stereotypes of Chinese culture. I have also explored Western artists such as Jenny Holzer and Jens Haaning whose artworks have had an impact on the formation of my own ideas. They both use different approaches to language and text to create tensions and explore the conflict of complex cultures in the West.

My interest in language, communication, and cultural difference comes from my

childhood experience of moving to Shanghai and feeling like an outsider to begin with and from studying and living abroad, both in the United States and in London. What fascinated me the most was the moment when I had my first graduate class in the United States, and my classmates and professor could not precisely pronounce my name Xiaolong Fang, or even remember it. For the sake of their convenience and also for my own, I started to call myself Paul, an English name taken from my favourite musician Paul McCartney. However, the situation became much trickier since they only knew my English name Paul, but could not memorise my real Chinese name, Xiaolong Fang. When others called me Xiaolong Fang, they thought Xiaolong Fang was someone else because they only recognised the person who stood in front of them as „Paul.“ Such misapprehension happened almost every day in my experience in the United States, thus provoking me to think deeply of the relationship between language and my own identity.

Even after stepping into the sphere of contemporary Chinese art, I found it was difficult for myself as a non-Western artist to balance the language barrier and my cultural identity. As I deepened my research into contemporary art it became clear that contemporary Chinese art seemed to be placed in an unfavourable position within the context of global art. The reason might be, first, that contemporary Chinese art was following the lead of Western art in its initial phase. Curator Karen Smith said,

*Chinese art in China was forged in the intense climate of a culturally-specific framework that continued to be dominated by political ideology into the post-Mao years...as Chinese artists believed, contemporary art was about breaking rules, about challenging the status quo, about using art as a conduit to provide viewers with out-of-the-ordinary experiences that forced them to consider philosophical questions from unconventional angles... (Simon, 2007, p.18)*

What I found interesting in my research when speaking to other Western artists about contemporary Chinese art, especially some well-known pieces of art which frequently

appeared in global art fairs, art museums and mainstream art magazines, they could remember the work but not the Chinese names of the artists. For example regarding Xu Bing's (徐冰) *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 18), Zhang Huan's (张洵) *Family Tree* (2001) (Fig. 19), Cai Guo-qiang's (蔡国强) explosive art (Fig. 20) and Gu Wenda's (谷文达) *United Nations* (1993-ongoing) installation (Fig. 21). In other words, although Western artists have seen and appreciated these works of art, when hearing the names Cai Guo-qiang or Xu Bing, they had no idea that these well-known artworks were actually created by these specific Chinese artists. For this reason, I became aware of the power of language and how language can be hidden when it is not familiar. I thought about the power of images and objects that hold meaning and can be recalled to memory while language can be more elusive.

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Figure 18.  
Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, Installation, 1986-1991  
Installation View at “徐冰: *Xu Bing*”,  
United Art Museum, Wuhan, China, 2017

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 19.  
Zhang Huan, *Family Tree*, Nine chromogenic prints, 2001

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 20.  
Cai Guo-qiang, *Remembrance*, Chapter two of *Elegy: Explosion Event for the Opening of Cai Guo-qiang: The Ninth Wave*, 2014



This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 21.

Gu Wenda, The series of *United Nations*, Installation, 1993-Ongoing  
Installation View at PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York City, U.S.A, 1998

When I moved from Asian culture to Western culture, which was totally unfamiliar to me, I always felt very lonely because my command of English was not strong enough to talk confidently with people in the West. When I need assistance or I wanted to help others, I could hardly express myself. Even if some Western people positively took the initiative to start a conversation with me, they were uncertain about whether their words made sense to me. Such awkwardness made me even more afraid of speaking aloud, thus obstructing my engagement in Western culture. I feel there always exists an invisible wall between myself and others due to the gap in understanding through speech and the written word.

When developing the possibilities of my works in the context of language I started to be particularly interested in what happens when translation goes wrong. I spoke earlier of English mistranslations that exist in Chinese public space. Along with my example of „slip carefully“ here is another illustration. The actual meaning of the sign „Beware of safety,“ is „Caution.“(Fig. 22) What is lost in translation will leave English

speakers confused or amused. Again, this example, although inaccurate, the mistranslation creates a new humorous meaning, what is found in translation.



Figure 22.

Sign: "Caution"

Xiaolong Fang, *Lost in Translation*, Digital-print, Varied Dimensions, 2017-2020

With increasing global interaction in a variety of fields, translation is crucial to understanding and working with different customs and ways of communicating. Brian Nelson writes in the preface to *Translation Lost and Found*:

*„Real translation between languages is impossible because the original meaning is always lost: the translated text is tainted by the translator’s own cultural beliefs, knowledge and attitudes.“* The significance of translation is that *„Translation plays an indispensable role in creating a space of real cultural encounter... Translation gives life to the work it translates; it performs it and interprets it even as it transforms it imaginatively in order to connect it with a new cultural space.“* (Nelson, 2010, p.3)

What is suggested here is that creativity is involved in the process of translation, and the circulation and transmission of text across languages. The way in which an audience accepts these translations is determined by the new contexts.

The concept of translation is central to my doctoral research, and my artworks relate to anomalies that arise from the rupture between the spoken and the written word. The linguistic disadvantages leave me at times feeling very alone and helpless but also highlight the humor within my situation of seeking clarity. When I face East-West cultural differences I see my identity modify and oscillate, making me rethink my cultural background. Questioning my beliefs and preconceptions of what constitutes an art practice challenges my assumptions and this in turn makes me re-evaluate my thought process.

Art critic Dave Beech writes:

*Ludwig Wittgenstein stated that to understand a language is to understand a way of life, and it therefore follows that to interrogate language is to interrogate the social and cultural landscape itself...An art made of language is not an art limited to language but necessarily-by virtue of language-draws us into questions about how we think, how we live, how we judge, how we feel, how we differ and how we try to resolve our differences. (Selby, 2009, p.27)*

Beech's statement indicates to me that language becomes the formative social condition for art practice. It also contains close relations to broader social and political forces. Language embodies various functions that are installed not only in our linguistic systems, but also in the social context.

## *Intermittent Aphasia*

During my first month in London, I liked to take the underground to get familiar with the city. I found it interesting that most of the citizens chose to read books or newspapers, which was totally different from China. China is experiencing such a rapid development in the information era, especially with social media like WeChat and Weibo, and Mobile phones have replaced cash and face-to-face communication. In China we get almost all the information including weather, and the news from applications and official government pages on our mobile phones. In China, traditional printed media and news publishing houses are facing closure. It has become quite difficult to buy newspapers, which leads to more and more newspapers facing collapse. Those who read the newspaper are almost all retired, an older generation of people who have used this method of receiving information all their lives. There is discussion in China that the move away from print media has led to short attention spans and superficiality of communication.

Unlike China, I can find bundles of the latest newspaper at every London tube station every day. Especially during rush hour, there are volunteers at every station entrance distributing the newspaper. I observed that the majority of London commuters will pick up a newspaper when entering the station and start reading on the train. One may put the newspaper on the seat and the next passenger will pick it up and start reading it. Sometimes a newspaper will be passed on by many different passengers.

I spontaneously started to pick up a newspaper when taking the underground. For me, there was no specific reason to do this in the beginning. But I started to collect them each day until I had my own bundle (Fig. 23), which was like a daily archive of my London life.



Figure 23.

At first I did not know what to do with this growing mountain of newspaper although I knew I would do something with them in relation to my research. I had studied printmaking for almost ten years. It occurred to me one day that the newspapers are a form of print that relate language to text and I had been using them to increase my command of language and the written word by attempting to read them each day.

Since the late 1980s the artist Xu Bing invented thousands of fake Chinese characters (Fig. 24) in his best-known work *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991) (Fig. 25). That has become a classic in Chinese contemporary art history and has been very influential on my work and my thinking. „The pages of Bing’s piece carry the appearances of legibility, but ultimately deny linguistic engagement, contrasting the experiential impact of being confronted by the monumental volumes of text with their absurdity and ultimate meaninglessness.“(Selby, 2009, p.247)

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 24.  
Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*,  
Engraved Wooden Plates of Title Page,  
39.5cm × 21.5cm, 1986-1991

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 25.

Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, Mixed media installation/hand-printed books and scrolls printed from blocks inscribed with “false” characters.

It took four years for Xu Bing to complete this work. In relation to my own project, *Book from the Sky* provides a creative model for my piece *Intermittent Aphasia*, inspiring me to create a large-scale installation by using newspapers as the medium. Based on this concept, I began to consider the attribute of newspaper: first it is a form of print; it is easily accessible and low-cost; as a kind of mass culture, it appears in every corner of the city. Even if reporting the same events, different news and media companies from various countries have their own interpretations from different perspectives. For this reason, the news has already been „translated.“ Here, the translation symbolises the process of transfer from the event itself to the written words on the newspaper based on the reporters’ interpretations and the political stance of the paper. Sometimes it takes artists such as Ai Weiwei to highlight the realities of interpretations of news events. For instance, following the Wen Chuan Earthquake in Sichuan Province, 2008, where thousands of young students lost their lives because of poorly constructed buildings, the Chinese government blocked information on the death toll. Ai Weiwei used his blog to invite volunteers to participate in the

investigation by collecting the names of victims. He asked netizens on Twitter to read the name of victims; then he edited the voices to compose a seven-hour voice work in his studio, *Remembrance* (2010).

He also created a public installation piece called *Remembering* (2009) (Fig. 26 & Fig. 27) which assembled nine thousand different colored backpacks to form a Chinese sentence, a statement from the mother of one of the victims, translated as: „She lived happily for seven years in this world.“ The significance of this work is not only to use objects to make words to commemorate the students, but to invite netizens to participate in his work through language spread by social media.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 26.  
Ai Weiwei, *Remembering*,  
Installation, Backpacks, Detail, 2009



This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 27.

Ai Weiwei, *Remembering*, Installation, 2009

Installation of backpacks for the facade of the Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany

Ai Weiwei says:

*The idea to use backpacks came from my visit to Sichuan after the earthquake in May 2008. During the earthquake, many schools collapsed. Thousands of young students lost their lives, and you could see bags and study material everywhere. Then you realize individual life, media, and the lives of the students are serving very different purposes. The lives of the students disappeared within the state propaganda, and very soon everybody will forget everything. (Siemons, 2009, p.14)*

Through my observation of the newspaper, and Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky*, I decided on the form of the final installation for my second year Professional Doctorate showcase exhibition. I wanted to work with opposing attributes of the newspaper. Although the newspaper is cheap, it is also meticulous in terms of its production process so that it can be elegant and exquisite as well. The newspaper itself is a print. If I reprint it using the skills and techniques of printmaking, what kind of effects can it create? At first, I planned to duplicate the newspapers through screen printing. This proved to be too time-consuming, so I chose a photocopy technique instead. I scanned a piece of newspaper to the computer and then printed the image of

the newspaper through a printer. I then used this photocopy to do the printmaking process for the final version (Fig. 28). On the left is my final printmaking version by using photocopy, while on the right is the visual representation of the printed newspaper.



Figure 28.

*Intermittent Aphasia*, Working in process photo, Photocopy

The photocopying process reversed the image and text, as well as blurring some parts of the surface. While the images reversed were still readable, the text was not, even for native English speakers. (Fig. 29)



Figure 29.  
*Intermittent Aphasia, Work in process photo*

After collecting newspapers in London, what I learnt from this seemingly lengthy process was the awareness of time. How quickly news changed from one day to the next, stories came and then disappeared just as quickly. While I was writing this report, Xu Bing's words always came into my mind: *„the creations of an artist are the most realistic reflection of what kind of person the artist is,“* as well his famous saying *„art is the most honest form.“* Using a black sharpie, I started to conduct an experiment on the newspaper by redacting all the English words which I did not recognise (Fig. 30). The more I learnt to read, the less time I spent covering the newspaper with a black marker, recording my learning while creating my own visual documentation of my learning experience.

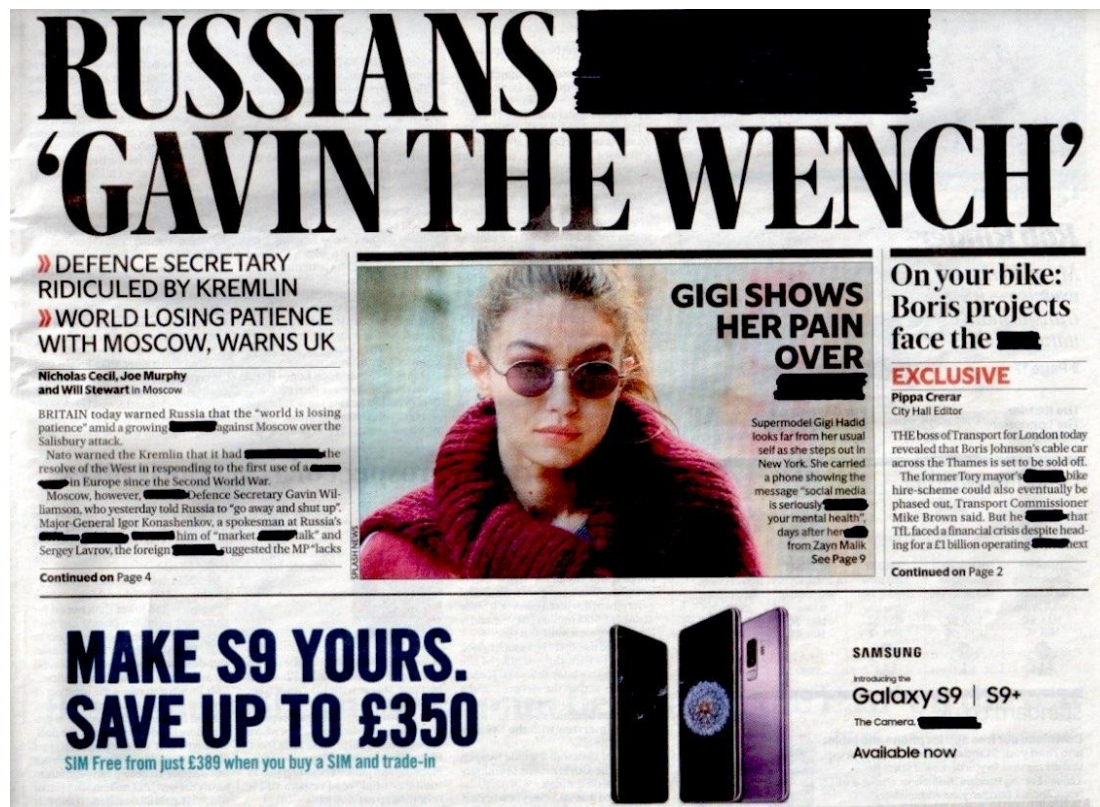


Figure 30.  
*Intermittent Aphasia*, Working in process photo

When those whose native language is English see this installation, they may wonder what is under those covered words? Are there any politically sensitive words? Or is there anything else we don't know? As a result, through the process of removal, a new meaning is created with headlines, sentences and phrases where words are missing. The sentences and grammar are inconsistent or illegible and it becomes a game for the viewers to imagine which words are covered or what was the original meaning. It reminds me of my experience in the United States and London when I am in conversation with people. Sometimes when people talked to me I often did not understand so I had to guess what they wanted to say through their body language or facial expressions. It was easy to misunderstand, a combination of humor, absurdity and frustration usually followed for myself and whoever I was talking with.

During the Christmas break in 2018, I returned to my homeland China and researched the four treasured materials of Chinese study. This comprises of brush, tusche, rice

paper, and inkstone. I considered different papers to use in my projects, which included a variety of rice papers that were used in traditional calligraphic works or in the manufacture of scrolls. At this point, I chose digital printing for this project because of the size and scale of the project. Digital print is not regarded as printmaking in contemporary Chinese art and remains controversial because of the deeply held traditions of this ancient medium within Chinese culture. In the U.K digital print has now been categorised as printmaking from the perspective of technique and is accepted as a new form of printmaking which has helped me recognise the possibilities of new projects.

When I chose the paper for digital printing I wanted it to be translucent so the viewer can see both sides of the paper clearly. The visual effect I want to achieve is that from the front side, it is a normal newspaper, while from the other side, the text should be inverse, just as the photocopy appeared in my early experiments which created a new form of written text when it was back to front. I chose silk paper for making rubbings from inscriptions and traditional Chinese rice papers with various textures, colours, and sizes. I conceived these papers could create different visual effects. My final choice was one that seemed closest to the newspaper, in terms of colour and texture. The ultimate effect is rendered as a really long but „fake“ newspaper through applying digital print techniques (Fig. 31). The chronological order in the project is important: from my beginning in the United Kingdom to the present. As my English improved the black redacted blocks become less frequent.



Figure 31.  
*Intermittent Aphasia*, Work in process photo

I used digital printing to reproduce the newspaper front pages. Within this way of working some text might bleed due to the problems of ink in the printer or the registration of sheets. Also during the production, the machine itself lost some digital information as files might have become corrupted during the transfer from one digital source to another. Such loss of information is inherent in any process, be it handmade, mechanical or digital, but it produces effects which can be used aesthetically as the transfer of digital information seems at times to be imbued with its own version of human foibles.

As I was greatly influenced by Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky*, I chose to work on a large scale - 25 meters in length for each roll of artwork (Fig. 32 & Fig. 33). If I unfold each screen scroll, the entire length would be seven stories high.



Figure 32.  
 Xiaolong Fang, *Intermittent Aphasia*, Installation, Digital Print,  
 Installation view from the UEL Fine Art Professional Doctorate Showcase, 2019



Figure 33.  
 Xiaolong Fang, *Intermittent Aphasia*, Installation, Digital Print, Detail, 2019

During the doctorate seminars, feedback focused on the fact that it was difficult to see where I had started redacting the newspapers and when I finished. So which words I did not know and which I did know was unclear. This is one of the largest projects I have attempted and with that came the realisation that I had not been able to fully think through the project, as I spent so much time on the production of it. My peers responded to the ambition of the piece in terms of scale but wanted more from the work after the initial engagement with it. I decided to rethink the piece for my Viva exhibition and began to look at Chinese scrolls as a researcher had said they thought the work referenced them. In any major Chinese exhibition or the Shanghai Museum, scrolls are usually presented either flat on table-tops or hanging from a support in the ceiling. Historically the content of the scrolls depicts the daily life of a city or village and the viewers walk along the length of the scroll, which could be up to 25 meters long. I started to think that to involve the audience in a short walk would work as they could follow my journey of learning English from the redacted newspaper headlines. It seems the more ambitious I become with scale, then its presentation will be a major consideration with my work.

When I was in Shanghai in December 2018, I saw Voluspa Jarpa's artwork *Monumental* (Fig. 34). I believed it was the most visually striking piece of art at the Shanghai Biennial. I felt an affinity with the form of this artist's work, although we had totally different ideas concerning the content of the piece. She focused on the surveillance which the FBI conducted on the citizens of Chile. She put all leaked and decoded documents from the FBI together on sheets of acetate and made them into 30 meter-long hanging scrolls. In the exhibition catalogue her work is described as *...rooted in the meticulous analysis of declassified archives and leaked documents of foreign interventions happening mainly in Chile and other Latin American countries (but also in Europe) during the Cold War. By working with the materiality of the defaced archives, Jarpa unearths painful truths about these often brutal interventions, reflecting simultaneously on the nature of the archive, on memory and the cultural notion of trauma.* (<http://www.shanghaibiennale.org/en/artist/detail/418/95.html>)



This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 34.

Voluspa Jarpa, *Monumental*, Installation,  
Installation View from the 12<sup>th</sup> Shanghai Biennial, Shanghai, 2018-2019

Voluspa Jarpa's reflection on the chaotic political conditions in today's world also connected to my own growing interest in taking a political stance. We are all involved in an information overload era in which large amounts of information and text appears every moment around us. As much of the text and information on the newspaper could be regarded as having already been „translated“ by a human, or a publishing system, in some circumstances being translated could be interpreted as being „censored.“ Censorship is another kind of translation, especially in contemporary China.

Reflecting on the work of Ai Weiwei and Voluspa Jarpa I started to think about how young Chinese and Western people are taken hostage by their phones and other digital applications. It is this information explosion age that started to make me think of the issue of privacy. Have all of the texts we send and receive already been censored or monitored? No doubt that the answer is yes. In China we can always see a stream of texts: *404 NOT FOUND* when we used WeChat or other websites. It is actually a

stream of standard response codes to stop or block users when they attempt to request the information from the website. In China, when information appears which involves political sensitivity, it is deleted. People say: this information has already been „404“:

In China, however, especially within the context of such a rapidly developing society, the meaning „404“ is always translated in another Chinese caption – „此内容因违规而无法查看.“ Its English version is „This content cannot be viewed because of irregularities.“ Whenever we post or re-post something on the censored list, this warning will pop out. I made a screenshot of this sentence as shown in the figure (Fig. 35).



此内容因违规无法查看

接相关投诉，此内容违反《即时通信工具公众  
信息服务发展管理暂行规定》，查看详细内容

Figure 35.

The so-called censorship here is firmly associated with politics. Nevertheless, such political censorship is not at this point my primary concern within my practice. In my current art practice, I regard censorship as a related idea rather than my central concern. I want it in the work but not the dominate element you first encounter. as it is in some of Ai Weiwei“s work which I will talk about below.

Whenever I see the text inscribed „此内容因违规而无法查看“- I always feel a sense of powerlessness. To put such censorship in a social context, in China, a propaganda word is frequently used - He Xie (和谐, „harmony“ in English) in media and social networks to satirise the falsely harmonious facade of the government. Ai Weiwei has used the term He Xie in his work *He Xie* (河蟹). The word He Xie (河蟹), literally meaning river crab, has the same pronunciation as He Xie (和谐). Visually, Ai Weiwei’s installation work *He Xie* (2011) (Fig. 36) assembled thousands of ceramic red and black river crabs in the gallery. He took this opportunity to protest against the destruction of his Shanghai studio by the government, calling for netizens to attend a „River Crab Dinner.“ By intentionally using such translation from the text to the installation, as well the transformation from the sound of the phrase to the literal meaning, Ai Weiwei suggested an ironic and coded way of referring to censorship.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

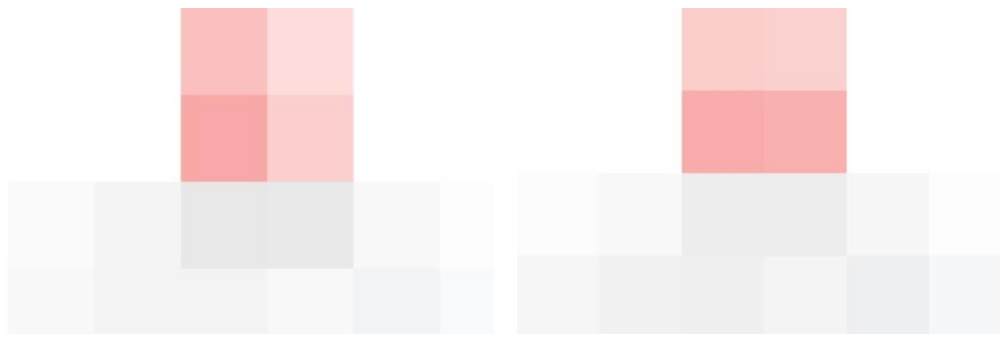
Figure 36.  
Ai Weiwei, „*He Xie*“; Installation, Ceramics, 2011

A number of rhetorical approaches have been adopted by Ai Weiwei, including metaphor, metonym, synecdoche, and irony, often as language games to avoid political censorship. Due to Internet censorship in China, we cannot type some words that have a direct relationship with the government; we call these „sensitive words.“

Even Ai Weiwei's name has become a sensitive word in Chinese Internet censorship. To get around this, a word might be used that is linked to the forbidden word by similarity (metaphor) or by sound (homonym). Sometimes completely new words are created by netizens to avoid censorship. Ai Weiwei uses humour and irony to confront censorship - strategies I also wish to develop in my own work.

### ***Content Restricted***

In my project titled *Content Restricted* I aim to combine both the idea of censorship and the idea of translation in the broader terms of how I negotiate cultural obstacles and boundaries that I encounter. Formally, the entire project consists of two hundred pieces arranged in a large scale on the wall. Each image has the same content, but in different visual forms. I used the screenshot (Fig. 35) for my reference. I used the mosaic filter in Photoshop to obscure the words and gradually zoom out as a means to „He Xie“ (censor) the content. The figures below show my progress by beginning with an enlargement of the 404 page in the form of a mosaic. This image is made by zooming in with a software programme that distills the original image into its most basic form, from the clearest words to the blurred words. I am considering the possibility of including all two hundred images in the final piece for the Viva examination. Twenty are illustrated here (Fig. 37).



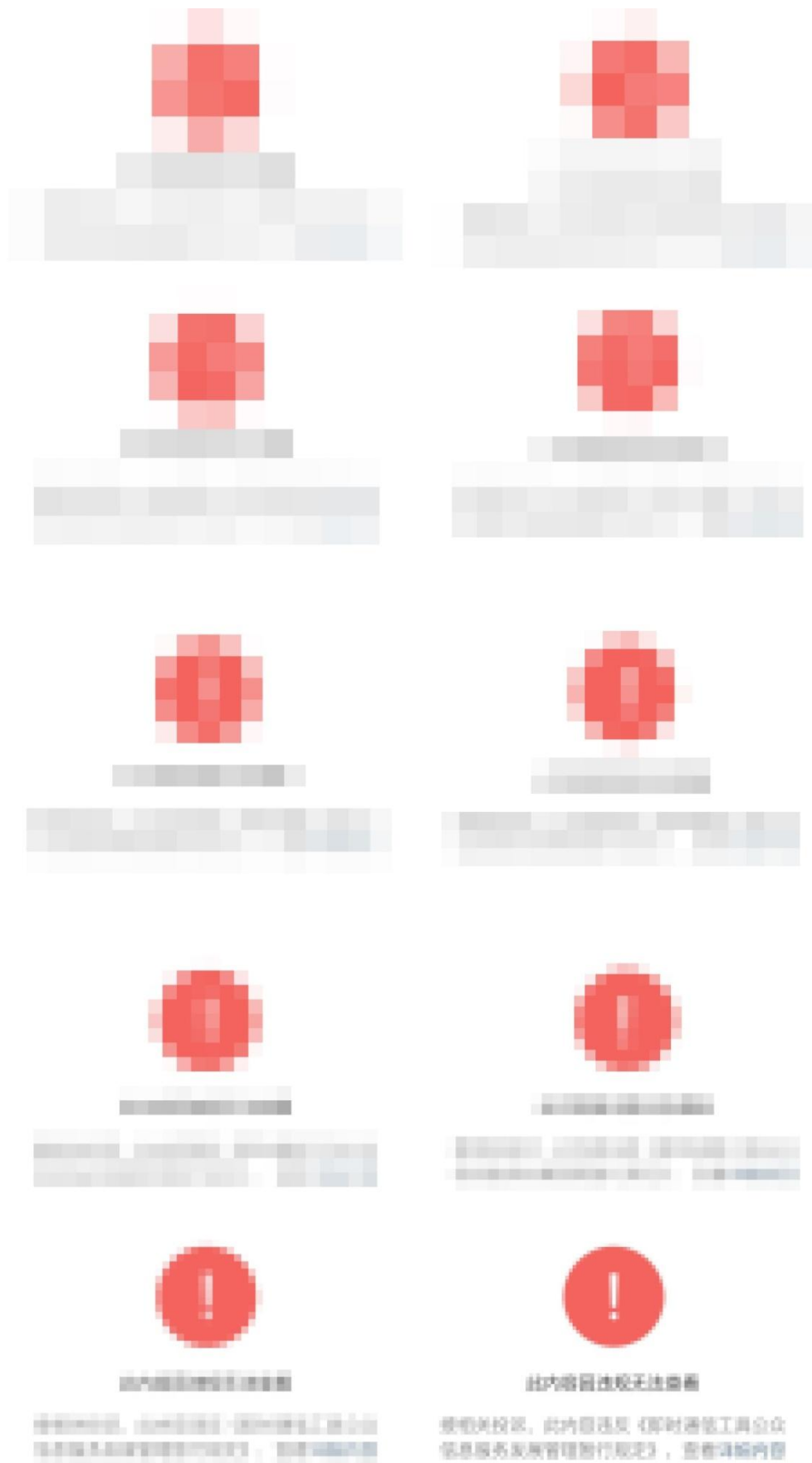


Figure 37.

Above is the selected progress of my *Content Restricted* project (Fig. 38 & Fig. 39). When the audience sees this project from the very beginning, they might have no sense of what is actually going on by only seeing initially colourful blocks of a muted colour, a polite and subtle colour palette with no hidden agenda. However, when they continue looking through these pieces, the words or content would become much clearer, with the smaller mosaic blocks starting to form words. The larger the mosaic blocks, the more meanings the words have lost. Conversely, the smaller the mosaic blocks, the more clarified the meaning becomes. Ultimately, the content which is „He Xie“ by the mosaic would gradually become unambiguous, revealing its own meaning and significance. Although all two hundred images share the same content message, the size of the mosaic blocks makes them lose the form of the words. Neither native Chinese speakers nor speakers of other languages can find any meaning behind this group of images until the final image is revealed.



Figure 38.

Xiaolong Fang, *Content Restricted*, Metope artwork,  
View from the UEL Fine Art Professional Doctorate Showcase, 2019

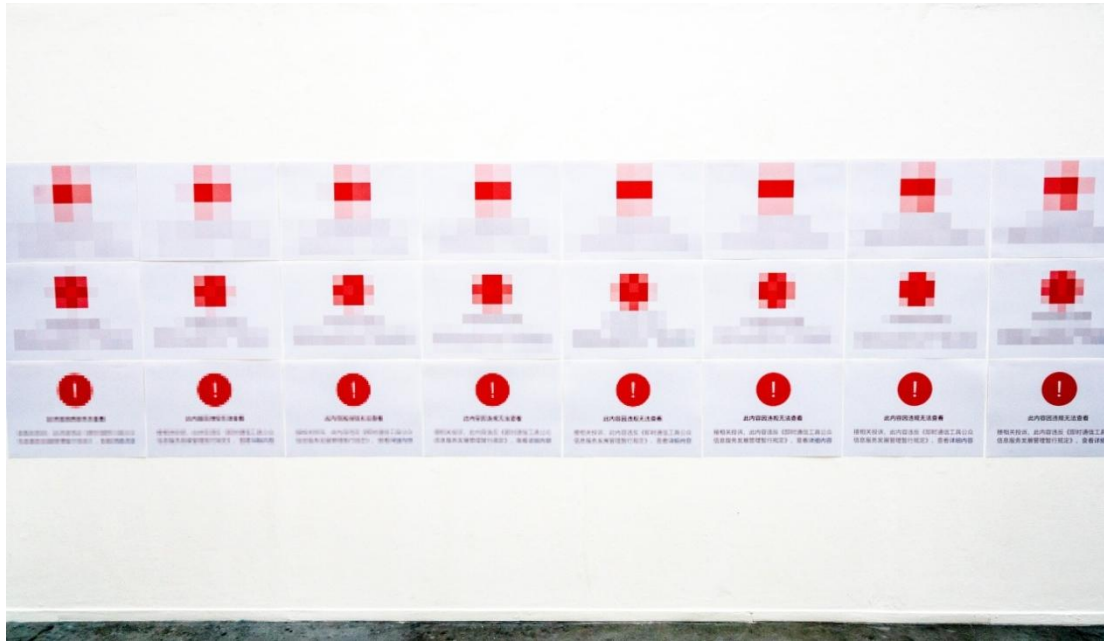


Figure 39.  
 Xiaolong Fang, *Content Restricted*, Metope artwork, Detail,  
 View from the UEL Fine Art Professional Doctorate Showcase, 2019

After I presented this work for my doctorate showcase exhibition in 2019, I started to think about how I could develop the piece. Fellow doctorate researchers and the seminar leader gave me feedback about the order of the works and how I had presented them. I had chosen to present the piece over three walls. I thought the light within the space would help the overall look of the work but in fact the most important element that I did not think about at the time was how it would be read by the audience. Some people started from the beginning instead of the end. Someone said was it written from right to left or left to right! I realised that I needed to rethink how to present the piece.

During 2019/20 I started to edit the work into the computer to make an animation. I felt this would give me the option of projecting the work large and would also control the beginning and end. I have also wanted to expand my practice into sound after researching Tan Dun's work *Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women* (2013) which I will talk about in depth later in the report. The essence of Tan Dun's work is about a group of women who created a spoken language from sounds that only they could



understand. It was a spoken language just for women and one of the oldest languages in China.

For my experiment of introducing sound into the work I started with the title of the piece which is *Content Restricted*. I have become intrigued by the sound of different words when spoken in different accents. I wanted to see if I could somehow make the sound of „content restricted“ work within the animation. I recorded myself saying „content restricted“ and then I slowed it down and speeded it up to distort the recording. At times the words are clear and at times it becomes a blur of sound. I wanted the viewer to find it difficult to understand directly the content of the words. I wanted the animation and the sound to work alongside each other, play off one another and create the feeling of frustration while searching for visual and audio clues of what is going on. I wanted to create a piece that intrigues the viewer, which in the end reveals no specific information except that I have made a work from what is restricted, what is not accessible or what you cannot see.

Most Western audiences cannot understand Chinese, thus having no specific sense of the meaning in my piece until they read „Content Restricted“ on the label describing the work. But they are able to guess the meaning of the red exclamation mark in the image which is from the common language of icons.

## **Xu Bing**

I started to think of the artist Xu Bing’s *Book from the Ground* (2003-ongoing) (Fig. 40 & Fig. 41) in which the entire book was written by icons. The *Book from the Ground* is an experimental work that draws upon the increasingly universal language of icons. Xu Bing uses only icons already in the public domain worldwide, which he collected for seven years. „It is a book that even on its copyright page does not use a single traditional word and can be published anywhere in the world without translation.“(Xu Bing, 2014, p. 176)

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 40.

Xu Bing, *Book from the Ground: From Point to Point*, 2003-Ongoing

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 41.

Xu Bing, *Book from the Ground*, Detail, 2003-Ongoing

An icon like an emoji is commonly used across the world, as an understandable and accessible language system. Based on that perspective, people from any culture might have an identical understanding of the contents and the meaning of the artwork.

One of my favourite works is Xu Bing's *Square Word Calligraphy* (1993-ongoing) (Fig. 42). *Square Word Calligraphy* was started in 1993, using Chinese ink and brush to write English words. The text can be read, and it has content as well as narrative. In fact, the „translated“ text also can express thought. As Xu Bing wrote: „Through this work, I am interested in promoting people with a new cognitive perspective, in changing our fixed ways of thinking.“ (Xu Bing, 2014, p. 92) It made me think that all the Chinese artists in the 1980s who had relocated to New York must have had their ways of thinking challenged while attempting to balance their new lives in the West so they looked for new ways to combine their experiences into artworks.

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Figure 42.

Xu Bing, *Square Word Calligraphy*, Ink on paper, 1993-ongoing  
Installation View at “徐冰: *Xu Bing*”,  
United Art Museum, Wuhan, China, 2017

In the summer of 2019, I was greatly honoured to be invited by Xu Bing to attend his largest retrospective exhibition *Xu Bing: Thought and Method* in Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing. The exhibition contained major work from his forty-year long artistic career including *Book from the Sky* in the 1980s; the

installation work after he came to the United States, *Where does the dust itself collect?* (2004) (Fig. 43); and the newest film work *Dragonfly Eyes*.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 43.

Xu Bing, *Where does the dust itself collect?* Dust, 2004

Installation View at “徐冰: *Xu Bing*”, United Art Museum, Wuhan, China, 2017

I also attended the international symposium in August 2019, which was hosted by the well-known Chinese art historian Wu Hung, who invited about ten global contemporary art curators and art historians to discuss Xu Bing’s artistic career and his artwork. Wu Hung spoke about the approach to study Xu Bing by discussing how he connected texts with artistic ideas. Alexandra Munroe, the curator of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, talked about the topic *A case study of Transference: Lost in Translation*. What impressed me the most of what she addressed in her talk was the claim that Xu Bing tried to redefine Chinese ink not only as a medium but also as an attitude in his Metropolitan Museum of Art presentation in 2012. She thought that Xu Bing re-examined contemporary Chinese art within the context of traditional academic Chinese scholarship by putting his art work in the Chinese art gallery at the MET surrounded by other ancient traditional paintings. Munroe interpreted that „Xu Bing’s masterpiece, the *Book from the Sky* is widely recognized as being about the deconstruction of language and deconstruction of any fixed culture meaning.“

There is an interesting little-known artwork of Xu Bing which he described in his book *Wo de Zhen Wen Zi* (我的真文字, „My True Words“ in English translation). The work can be traced to the time when Xu Bing was invited to attend the First Biennale held in Singapore where he made an artwork called *Magic Carpet* (2006). The major theme of that Biennale was „Belief,“ and the exhibition was held in Kwan-Im Temple which is the largest Buddhist Temple in Singapore. He then planned to make a huge hand-woven carpet for the Temple. The design of the carpet is similar to the form of Su Hui’s *Xuanji Tu* (Fig. 44) from the early Qin dynasty in 1620. Su Hui created a grid of 841 characters that can be read in any number of directions and combinations. From this single grid, one can discern nearly 4,000 separate poems.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure. 44.

Su Hui, *Star Gauge* (Chinese: 璇玑图; pinyin: *xuánjī tú*), also known as *Xuanji Tu*.

Xu Bing selected passages from four significant faith-based texts including one Buddhist, one Gnostic, one Jewish, and one passage from Marx which were all in an English translation. He then transcribed them as his *Square Word Calligraphy* and combined them into one text. Since he could not use black, grey and white colours to illustrate Buddhism, as they are forbidden within images by Buddhist belief systems, as they reference life and death, Xu Bing picked a traditional Chinese red. Xu Bing

finished his first version (Fig. 45) of this piece in the factory. He then encountered a serious issue as Buddhist texts are not supposed to be in a place where they can be walked on. The result is this carpet could not be used in the temple exhibition. The curator suggested that this carpet can be exhibited in a gallery, and Xu Bing made another piece for the temple to exhibit.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 45.

Xu Bing, *Magic Carpet*, Handweaved Carpet, 595 × 595 cm, 2006

Xu Bing remade the second one (Fig. 46) with the same content and same size. He pixelated the texts, attempting to hide the meaning. Interestingly, when he finished the draft of the second version and sent it to the curator, the curator said „this version cannot be shown in the temple. If they saw this version, they might think your work and your concept was censored by them. So could you think about remaking another version, again?“

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 46.

Xu Bing, *Magic Carpet*, Hand-woven Carpet, 595 × 595 cm, 2006

Ultimately, Xu Bing made a third version (Fig. 47) of this piece. He used his *Square Word Calligraphy* to write down the relationship between „belief“ and „life.“ The entire word shows the shape of „belief,“ while the yellow part shows „life.“ This piece was finally presented in the middle of the Temple. He talked about this piece in a lecture where he said „Art, is also a type of belief. Contemporary art keeps its revolting mask on, and continue its so-called revolution against conventional beliefs with unchanging stubbornness... this petty vision presents an attitude of conservatism.“ (Xu Bing, 2015, p.173)

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 47.

Xu Bing, *Magic Carpet*, Hand-woven Carpet, 595 × 595 cm, 2006

## Tan Dun

During a period of time between my MFA and starting the Professional Doctorate programme at UEL, I worked as a curator with a number of artists from different fields. I had the opportunity to work with Tan Dun. I felt privileged and honoured to work with him. He is described by Eric Hung as „one of today’s most sought-after composers and conductors.“ He is known for his musical scores of films including *Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon* directed by Ang Lee in 2000. Contemporary art has very open boundaries between different forms - visual, verbal, textual, aural and physical. Tan Dun explores the fusions between East and West; Classical and Contemporary Music; the Traditional and the Pioneering; the Musical and the Visual.

Tan Dun spent five years composing a visual symphony work, *Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women* (2013) (Fig. 48). The work was commissioned for the 15<sup>th</sup> Shanghai International Art Festival. *Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women* (2013) is a work about women and language, the Nu Shu being the only existing female text and language in the world, based in Jiangyong, Hunan province. „The language of Nu Shu is a syllabic script once used exclusively by women in Jiangyong County, Hunan for communicating with female family members and “sworn sisters.” It has between 1,800 and 2,500 characters - sometimes called “mosquito writing” because of their wispy, elongated quality.”(Sheila, 2014, p. 8)



This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 48.  
Tan Dun, *Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women*,  
Manuscripts, 2011

Women invented the spoken (sung) language and the text, which is written on the surface of fans and letters. The language is only spoken and spread between women. The written characters describe feelings, sufferings, marriages, and sisterhoods; they are written in five-character or seven-character octaves. The characters can be sung, similar to the sentences in the ancient Chinese *Book of Songs*, which is the first anthology of poetry in China. Tan Dun found a relationship between the Nu Shu written language and the music he created for his symphony. He collected two hundred hours of video data during field research, where he recorded the women singing the language. From this research, he created the large-scale musical work. *The Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women* is divided into thirteen sections, which correspond to the themes of Mother, Marriage, and Sisterhood. Part of the film uses the visual video elements of local indigenes, using the same concept as Tan Dun's past aural-visual work, *The Map: Concerto for Cello, Video and Orchestra* (2002) (Fig. 49). In that work also, visual elements are „translated“ into music. There are multidimensional relationships in this work: the voice of ancient Nu Shu language

representing the past, and the symphony orchestra representing the future; the correspondences between music and video; the correspondences between Eastern and Western culture, and even the correspondences between males and females.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 49.

Tan Dun, *The Map: Concerto for Cello, Video and Orchestra*, 2002

Duration: 55 Minutes.

Instrumentation: Solo: Cello

World Premiere: February 20, 2003. Boston, MA. Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Tan Dun, conductor. Yo-Yo Ma, cello.

At the start of my doctorate, I was researching the artists Xu Bing, Tan Dun and Ai Weiwei. Most of this generation were seeking freedom of thought and expression. Some went to the United States in the 1980s, mainly New York, and some went to Europe. I became interested in the history of Chinese artists abroad since the period of the Republic of China.

The first generation of Chinese artists studying abroad was led by Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿). They were government - sponsored to learn techniques of Western paintings and the idea of aesthetic education in the West around the 1920s. This group of Chinese artists went on to return to the motherland and established fine arts academies in order

to enhance the artistic education in China. In contrast with the first generation, the second generation of Xu Bing, Tan Dun and Ai Weiwei were more likely to pursue the freedom of expression and artistic creation, especially after the group exhibition titled *China/Avant-Garde* in Beijing in 1989. In this exhibition, the female artist Xiao Lu's (肖鲁) work (Fig. 50), which included a sudden performance with live bullets to shoot a gun at the installation of her telephone boxes signified a „No U-turn“ in Chinese contemporary art, which was the logo on the poster (Fig. 51). The performance was improvised, as the original piece was concerned with the break-up of her relationship with her boyfriend. Her shooting the installation piece coincided with the protests of Tiananmen Square and was interpreted by critics as the impending possible breakdown and challenge to the Chinese political system.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 50.  
Xiao Lu, *Dialogue*, Installation, 1989

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 51.

Exhibition poster for the *China/Avant-Garde*, featuring the „No U-turn“ logo, 1989

The most well-known Chinese art historian Wu Hung writes:

*The generalizing approach was partly due to an idealistic self-perception of Chinese artists and art critics (particularly strong in the 1980s), and partly due to Western introductions to this art through general exhibitions and descriptions (which often paid little attention to the specific social context of contemporary Chinese Art). Several events in 2000, however, indicated an unmistakable shift within Chinese experimental art toward a pluralistic self-conception and definition, as artists and art critics have now increasingly begun to focus on their internal differences (as well as their differences from Western curators and critics) and to articulate their own positions and approaches. (Wu Hung, 2001, p.9)*

## Chinese Contemporary Artists – Second and third generation

Led by Ai Weiwei, the group of Chinese artists choosing New York City shared a common memory as they all lived in a basement in the eastern part of the city. Since China was undergoing an economic downturn at that time, those who studied abroad did not get enough financial aid for them to live in the United States. These artists thus gathered together to take care of each other and they learned from each other. No one could have imagined that many years later, they would gain such acclaim in the art world. Artists like Ai Weiwei (艾未未), Xu Bing (徐冰), Xie Deqing (谢德庆), Liu Xiaodong (刘小东), and Yu Hong (喻红) became the leading figures of Chinese contemporary art; musicians such as Tan Dun (谭盾) and Hu Yongyan (胡咏言); film directors like Feng Xiaogang (冯小刚), Chen Kaige (陈凯歌), and Gu Changwei (顾长卫). They all had close connections with each other when they lived together in New York. Ai Weiwei used his camera to record the ten years (1983-1993) he lived with other artists in New York (Fig. 52).

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 52.

Ai Weiwei, *New York 1983-1993*, Photography, 1983-1993

Nowadays, more and more Chinese students study abroad, especially those who were born in the 1990s and 2000s. These make up the third generation of Chinese artists. During the forty years under the reform and opening-up policy, China itself experienced a great cultural, political and social transformation. In contrast to the first generation led by Xu Beihong, and the second generation led by Ai Weiwei and Xu Bing, the third generation of Chinese artists abroad mostly grew up in relatively wealthy families. Their parents are more willing for them to receive a Western education, and to broaden their views, whether they choose to return to their motherland or stay in the West.

Furthermore, the 90s and 00s generation are all growing up in an era when China is rapidly developing, especially in social media. They are much more familiar with online texts and the slang in the internet. They have gradually established their own language systems among their generations: „886“ means „goodbye,“ „3Q“ means „thank you,“ „520“ means „I love you, and so on. Their ways of expression are simpler and more direct. Information is now much more accessible and transparent and global culture means that there are closer links between „Eastern“ and „Western“ countries. There appears to be a younger-age trend for studying abroad in contemporary China, as their identities are seen in a global context. They are good at applying multiple techniques and multi-dimensional artistic vocabularies to express their ideas. They use social networks and software, they merge sound and vision, and create interactive and cross-media artworks with audio, light, and electricity.

Another form of translation could be seen as the translation from one culture to another. What third generation Chinese artists have possibly „lost“ in their Chinese identity, they have „found“ in a new art language through the process of identity translation. Chinese artists Yang Yuanyuan (杨圆圆) and Liu Yefu (刘野夫) as the representative figures, become my reference for this third generation. Even though neither of them focus on text or the translation of language, their concern about negotiating between China and Western culture is relevant to my work as my

interpretation of the idea of translation has broadened.

Yang Yuanyuan was born in 1989, in Beijing. She graduated from the London College of Communications, University of the Arts, London, with a BA (Hons) in photography. She currently lives and works in Beijing, San Francisco and New York. Yang does visual storytelling through film, photography, artist books and performance. By creating narratives where facts and fiction coexist, she challenges the rigid and conventional interpretation of history and gives voices to subjects that have been forgotten, silenced, and misinterpreted. Yang Yuanyuan's current film in progress, *Esther* (2018-ongoing) (Fig. 53 & Fig. 54), is based on research of Chinese women who participated in Cantonese operas or could be seen in movies and nightclubs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 53.

Yang Yuanyuan, *Esther*, Feature film, 2018-ongoing,  
Director of Photography: Carlo Nasisse, Yang Yuanyuan.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 54.

Yang Yuanyuan, *Esther*, Feature film, 2018-ongoing,  
Director of Photography: Carlo Nasisse, Yang Yuanyuan.

I have seen Yang's latest work *Theater of Crossed Roads: A Night at Forbidden City Nightclub* (2019) (Fig. 55) in Shanghai Rockbund Art Museum in the summer of 2019. Throughout this video installation and performance, I was surprised by her perspective toward the issue of Chinese migrant identities in U.S. society. Her *Theater of Crossed Roads* is a special spin-off project which developed during the making of the film. In September of 2018, Yang brought ten foreign-born Chinese women to Havana, Cuba, to perform *Theatre of Crossed Roads* for the first time on the site of Havana's former Chinatown, as well as in the building of what used to be the New Chinese Theatre (a martial arts school stands in its place now). By virtue of examining those female performers who retired from Chinatown nightclubs in the twentieth century, it provides an insightful exploration on the time when Asian Americans pushed against racism and exploitation among white Americans. They were young Chinese Americans „dreamers“ who established the first Chinatown in San Francisco in the U.S. and created the Forbidden City nightclub. They are now considered to be the predecessors who broke Western stereotypes of Chinese culture from a historical point of view. Yang documented what happens on the stage and what happens outside of it, becoming ever entangled as the two merge to portray the



realities of life and the performance. Done without words, it was an impressive spectacle for the audience to witness as it seemed to create a charged atmosphere through silence.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 55.

Yang Yuanyuan, *Theater of Crossed Roads: A Night at Forbidden City Nightclub*, Video installation and performance, 2019

Liu Yefu (刘野夫) was born in 1986, and has similar studying experiences to myself. Combining his traditional academic practice in oil painting at Capital Normal University in Beijing and his further study of digital media at Maryland Institute College of Art in the United States, Liu Yefu has his own perspective on the communication between China and the West. Liu's artistic creations explicitly deliver the message that the centre of the world is about to shift or has shifted to the east, prefigured by Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism*. Yefu threw out a bold question, "Is the West completely defeated?" His video installation presented commercial advertisements consisting of five fictional items filled with black humour, which express Liu's teasing speculations on aesthetic consciousness, ideological form and human desire (Fig. 56). Through presenting his friends and himself, Liu investigates themes about the civilian class and the elite class and asking whether there will be a much newer, softer nationalism. The themes and messages show his concern for the

global excesses that lurk in western audiovisual culture. Liu explored its vast organisational structure and behavioural characteristics and trends, using materials from a variety of sources. Facial expressions, body language, even phrases and intonation used by foreigners are his subjects.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 56.

Liu Yefu, *Ad Proposal II*, Single channel HD video still, 2017

This young generation of Chinese artists have started to make bold experiments with multiple mediums to discuss cultural differences and raise their own voices within a contemporary art context. This third generation chooses a more global perspective to express their concept and responsibility as „citizens of the world.“ Their identity moves from a Chinese person or artist to a global artist. It is worth noting that one cannot see from the artwork itself whether the artist is Chinese or not, since the use of materials and medium, as well as their way of presentation are no longer perceived as specifically „Chinese.“ For me, my research into language and text have developed into an attempt to negotiate my Chinese identity in a global context. How do I manage my Chinese culture and history while also attempting to understand and negotiate my western influences? Through trial and error, misunderstanding, engagement and

humility I want to understand how to navigate through the histories of misconceptions, my own and others", which include national beliefs and attitudes.

### **Jenny Holzer**

As well as my interest in second/third generation Chinese artists, I am also interested in artists who use text within their practice. Jenny Holzer is an American conceptual artist best known for her text-based public art projects that work with ideas concerning social issues such as female identity, artistic value, government censorship of information, fairness, and justice (Fig. 57 & Fig. 58). Her works use projection technology, in public places or in art galleries, projecting slogans onto the sides of buildings. Her choice of words is at times for me so chaotic that it's almost like gibberish and the grammar is so surprising that I have to read it very carefully for clues to the meaning behind it.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 57.

Jenny Holzer, Projections, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, 2008

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 58.  
Jenny Holzer, *Projections*, Chicago, 2008

Holzer's work had an impact on my own work, especially the *Content Restricted* project, concerning the relationship between art and political censorship. Jenny Holzer uses a variety of technologies to realise the power of words. Since 2004, she has been exploring the use of text in declassified and other government documents. *Softer Targets*, her major solo exhibition (12 July to 1 Nov. 2015), refers to a „revised drawing“ of an encrypted FBI report titled „The Terrorist Threat to the U.S Homeland: An FBI Assessment.“ Only a few pages of the 45-page report have been declassified, and the text was redacted before it was released to the public. It is faithfully presented in this exhibition, only enlarged and shown as a „palette“ of white, grey, transparent red and black. Its title comes from page 26 of the report „Shifting to Softer Targets“ (Fig. 59). Holzer has always seen herself as a public artist. Although public art once only included a few categories, such as sculptures and murals, profound changes have taken place in the contemporary art world - video, new media, performance art, and other art forms have long been involved in the field of public art.

Simon Morley writes:

*With the emergence of electronic and digital media, many of the radical experiments of the avant-garde have been greatly extended, and as we have seen, artists have been quick to respond to the new possibilities offered by such technological innovations, in the process crafting wholly new kinds of spaces, new kinds of sign systems, and new kinds of relationships. (Morley, 2003, p. 207)*

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 59.  
Jenny Holzer, *Shifting to Softer Targets*, 2014-2015

## **Jens Haaning**

Born in 1965, Jens Haaning in the 1990s began to focus on outsiders in Danish society. He has produced a series of works that „confront the viewer with realities that can potentially change his perception of his cultural and social environment, and make him question his own prejudices, his perceptual habits and thought patterns.“ (Pecoil, 2003, p.9). His artworks re-examine the intervention and conflict of complex cultures in the West, using different languages to create such tensions and distinction such as *Foreigners Free* (1997-2001) (Fig. 60).

Aimee Selby writes:

*While Haaning's works seem to focus on the social encounters that they produce, it is important to note that the turning points of the pieces are very often linguistic or textual. Foreigners Free (1997-2001), also calls attention to a politically inscribed otherness by permitting foreign visitors free entry to the gallery for the duration of the exhibition. Whether this work functions primarily in terms of the contractual agreement that the artist negotiates with the gallery, or simply through the sign that appears at the entrance, its politics is enacted in a primarily linguistic manner. (Selby, 2009, p. 33)*

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 60.

Jens Haaning, *Foreigners Free*, 1997-2001  
Free entrance for foreigners at an art institution,  
*My Home is Yours-Your Home Is Mine*, Rodin Gallery,  
Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea

The starting point of many of Haaning's works is to study social tolerance and the situation of outsiders. Haaning focuses on the inheritance of meaning and visual communication in the language. He also uses simple and precise design to express complex situations. *The Copenhagen Declaration* (Fig. 61) is a massive installation co-created by Jens Haaning and Santiago Sierra. In line with the themes of Haaning's and Sierra's other works, this work also takes social, economic and political events as its starting point, between formal ritualistic declarations and public statements. Its meaning is interpreted by the audience depending on its own different contexts and cultural backgrounds. The works of Haaning and Sierra both address the origin of the state, national boundaries and cultural differences, and both contain strong demands for reflection on the state of the world.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 61.

Jens Haaning, Santiago Sierra, *The Copenhagen Declaration*, Installation, 2014

What attracts me the most about Haaning's work is his focus on the structural analysis of modern society and showing how different forms of power use the same structures to clarify and express themselves. In his artistic practice, immigration, class, racism, dialogue between different cultures and the exchange of global capitalism and local economy are the decisive themes he plays with, using different historical contexts and different languages.

Dave Beech, in *Turning the Whole Thing Around: Text Art Today*, explores contemporary practices and their approach to language, firmly connecting philosophical approaches with methodologies. Even though it is difficult to fully understand the philosophical logic in the linguistic turn, the key features of the linguistic turn are the approach of contemporary text art to „meaning, interpretation, things and systems.“ (Beech, 2009, p. 26)



In my artworks, I probe into translations and mistranslations between Chinese and English and I explore facets of both language and text which could possibly highlight the cultural differences of the East and the West. I am guided by the question: how can I find a balance between an inclusive and exclusive language system when facing different cultural environments? What does language aim for? The answers could be nationality, personal identity, cultural background as well as racial ethnicity. How do I translate those signifiers of language into my work of art? For me, language embodies many functions that are embedded not only in our linguistic systems, but also in the social context of each culture through our individual and collective beliefs.

## **Professional Practice (2017-2020)**

### **Joint Exhibitions**

2020, *The 35<sup>th</sup> Annual International Exhibition*,

Meadows Gallery, University of Texas, Tyler, TX, United States.

2019, *Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair*,

Royal Arsenal, London, United Kingdom.

2019, *Fine Art Professional Doctorate Research Space*,

Way Out East Gallery, London, United Kingdom.

2019, *Sounding the horn to a new March, 1<sup>st</sup> celebrated Printmaking Artist of Invitational Exhibition*, Shanghai YangPu Library, Shanghai, China.

2019, *National Original Print Exhibition 2019*,

Bankside Gallery, London, United Kingdom.

2019, *On the Mountain We Stay*,

Unnamed Mountain, Shandong Province, China.

2019, *Brilliant 70<sup>th</sup> Year-Shanghai Printmaking Invited Exhibition*,

Hongqiao Contemporary Art Institution, Shanghai, China.

2019, *2019 Art Nova 100*,

Guardian Art Center, Beijing, China.

2019, *Professional Doctorate Summer Showcase*,

A.V.A. Studios, London, United Kingdom.

2019, *“Romantic Four-seasons, Listening Chopin” the 1<sup>st</sup> Shanghai Changning International Piano Music Festival*, Shanghai Zhongshan Park, Shanghai, China.

2019, *YESTERDAY*,

Hongqiao Contemporary Art Institution, Shanghai, China.

2018, *EXPO CHICAGO 2018*,

Navy Pier, Chicago, IL, United States.

2018, *Professional Doctorate Summer Showcase*,

A.V.A. Studios, London, United Kingdom.

2018, *Status Quo 2018 SURGE Art POP-UP*,

Red Gate Gallery, Beijing, China.

2017, *Shanghai Freelance Artists" Group Exhibition,*

China Art Museum, Shanghai, China.

2017, *The 19<sup>th</sup> "Jiangnan Spring" of Shanghai Fine Arts Exhibition,*

JingAn Cultural Center, Shanghai, China.

2017, *Meet A Different Team Jackie,*

Shanghai World Financial Center, Shanghai, China.

### **Curation Projects**

2019, *CIRCLE Illustration Festival 2019,*

Shanghai Raffles City, Shanghai, China.

2018, *CIRCLE Illustration Festival 2018,*

FOR Art Space, Shanghai, China.

2017, *"A Prayer, A Wish, A Spell" Individual and Collaborative Exhibition by Courtney Kessel and Danielle C. Wyckoff (Shanghai),*

FOR Art Space, Shanghai, China.

### **Conferences**

2019, *"MuKeJinShi" - SAFA International Printmaking Summit Forum,*

Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, Shanghai, China.

2018, *Xu Bing: Thought and Method - An International Conference,*

Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China.

2018, *Oxford China Forum of A New China,*

University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom.

### **Lectures and Presentations**

2019, *Art is a Language, Chinese Printmaking in the World of Contemporary Art,*

Lecture by Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair, Royal Arsenal, London, United Kingdom.

2017, *In the Cross-culture Identity, Art is a Language,*

Presentation by TED × XinJieKou, Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China.

## **A Written Reflection on Professional Practice**

### **Joint exhibitions 2017-2020**

During my three-year doctoral programme, I have participated in a number of group exhibitions in the U.K. and China with works made using more traditional printmaking techniques such as woodcut or screen-printing. Some of the artworks were created in China and the U.S. before I studied in the United Kingdom and some were small experiments with printmaking mediums while on the programme in the U.K. The main purpose was to exhibit in national competitions so that I could retain some kind of profile in Chinese Printmaking circles and so that on my return to China I would not be an outsider but be remembered. I have spoken earlier about my investigations into digital printmaking, and larger installation works containing printed media within them. These works might be viewed with suspicion on my return to China as they do not conform to the traditional view of printmaking. My hope of completing the doctorate is so that I can teach within the Chinese educational system in the future and I felt that exhibiting in these large group exhibitions would enhance my reputation.

## 2018 Professional Doctorate Summer Showcase

A.V.A. Studios, UEL, London, United Kingdom, 2018.

*More than Blue* (Fig. 62) consists of six photographs I had taken of Lake Michigan in the United States during my MFA, along with text. When I lived in Michigan, the lake was a huge part of my everyday landscape. I was amazed how large it was; it seemed more like a sea, as no land was visible on the horizon. My first year studying in London was spent searching for a feeling of security, I was very anxious, uneasy and lonely. These new circumstances and experiences reminded me of my first time in the United States. As Lake Michigan was a constant, broad but peaceful, and it became a visual anchor of security for me, I chose to use it in this first exhibition at UEL. I aimed to transform the entire exhibition into a space to convey the peaceful calm that I remembered when looking at the lake. When I think of the lake, or any large body of water, it emanates calm but sometimes it is turbulent just like a human being's emotions or their inner thoughts.

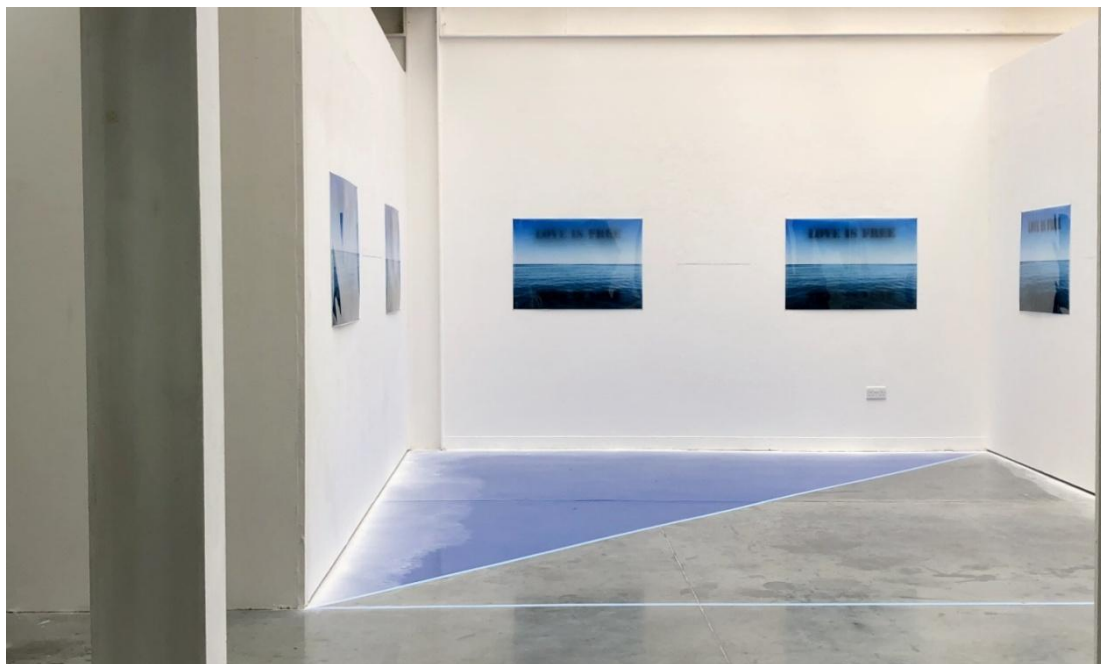


Figure 62.

Xiaolong Fang, *More than Blue*, Photography and Digital Print on acetate sheets, View from the Professional Doctorate Summer Showcase, A.V.A. Studios, UEL, London, United Kingdom, 2018.

I chose a quote from John Lennon's song *Imagine*: „Love is free, free is love.“ The experience of living overseas made me realise that although people come from all over the world speaking different languages and with different cultural backgrounds, human emotions are similar. The quote was faint and difficult to read in the first photograph but gradually became denser until it was clear (Fig. 63).



Figure 63.

Xiaolong Fang, *More than Blue*, Photography and Digital Print on acetate sheets, View from the Professional Doctorate Summer Showcase, A.V.A. Studios, UEL, London, United Kingdom, 2018.

I also divided the space with markings on the floor (Fig. 64). The meaning I hoped to convey with this grid is that there still remain invisible walls, that all cultures cannot be completely integrated. When I was viewing the exhibition, I observed that some people seemed afraid to cross the line on the floor to look more closely at the photographs on the wall. Interestingly, they just stood outside the line and observed from afar. It made me think that my original intention had been partially successful, as it created a psychological obstacle. When facing a new culture do we have the courage to go beyond this psychological line and try to accept a new life and new culture?



Figure 64.

Xiaolong Fang, *More than Blue*, Photography and Digital Print on acetate sheets, View from the Professional Doctorate Summer Showcase, A.V.A. Studios, London, United Kingdom, 2018

When other researchers and artists came to critique the work, some people said that standing in this space made them feel very calm, but is also aroused an uneasy and nervous feeling. I was very relieved after hearing their comments because it was exactly what I was feeling and my intention for the audience. It has also been suggested that this piece of artwork is visually beautiful, but it does not show much connection with my research from a conceptual position. I had struggled with settling in the U.K and also to understand how I needed to develop and how I thought about my practice and what was driving it forward.

This critique helped me further understand my research direction in the next two years. It was from this exhibition/seminar and the annual review feedback that my supervisors and I clarified the topic *Lost and Found in Translation* together.

## **EXPO CHICAGO 2018**

**Navy Pier, Chicago, IL, United States, 2018.**

During the second year of the DFA, I was selected by the 2018 EXPO Chicago Sound programme to exhibit a work. The work I exhibited is called *Mind the Gap*, the first sound work that I created during my time on the doctorate, but had not exhibited. EXPO Sound 2018 was curated by DAATA EDITIONS which is an online platform for the sale of commissioned artist video, sound, and web art editions - launching new artworks by select international artists. The publicity states: „As a global exhibition to excavate those talented experimental artists, the event aims to carry the responsibility of exploration...Powered by the rise of artificial intelligence and a growing aspiration for human embodiment, the role of voice requires us to shift perspective. To go beyond the human. Acknowledging the role of speech as it exists from new perspectives, from that of the machine.“

I have worked with the musician Tan Dun since 2016 and his practice has influenced my interest in attempting to combine visual art and sound art in my own work. The commission of EXPO Sound 2018 thus offered a great chance for me to experiment with the possible success and failures I would encounter making a sound work.

This work was prompted by my early experience on the London underground. The alert „Mind the Gap“ is designed to prevent passengers from falling into the gap between the train track and the platform (Fig. 65). This warning is both verbal, repeated over the tannoy system and printed as text on the platform. It was one of the first experiences that impacted on me when I came to London. Because the underground in London is one of the oldest in the world, the gap between its platform and the carriage is, in places, quite large. Every time I get on or off the train, I felt scared of falling into the gap. I started to think what else was I scared of? Was it just the physical gap or the gap in my language or the fact I was in a new country trying to find my feet? This can be asked in a simpler way: How do I deal with the transition



between identities, or even between different cultures? More importantly, how do I/we have our own voices in these situations?



Figure 65.

The signs of „Mind the Gap“ in London metro and Shanghai metro, Photo.

It felt like a simple idea; in fact it felt too ordinary as it did not contain any sophisticated technical content. However, when I told my friend, who is a film director, he gave me great encouragement and suggestions. He felt that the sound work was like a noisy documentary photography. His words inspired me because it was exactly what I hope to achieve by linking visuals and audio together. This 33-second sound work served as a starting point. In the final year of the DFA I added more visual elements to the sound and created a combination of English and Chinese audio, finally completing the piece as a video work.

**2019 Fine Art Professional Doctorate Research Space,  
Way Out East Gallery, UEL, London, United Kingdom, 2019.**

In November 2019, several doctorate researchers organised a Work in Progress show entitled *Research Space*. This exhibition aimed to help us to reflect on our work during this period. Its aim was to be different from the Annual Showcase and instead of displaying completed works, this show exhibited our work in progress in order to reflect the results of our recent research and the thinking behind our choices.

During this time, I had been reading two important books for my research. One was *Chinese Propaganda Posters* and the other was *The Art of Influence Asian Propaganda*. Growing up in China, my living environment from childhood was filled with propaganda and slogans of communism or socialist realism. Propaganda has a long history in Asian society which will still continue existing for a longer time into the future in various guises. Propaganda is a refined and concise phrase to express a kind of dictatorship or control that the government wants the citizen to obey.

In the long history of Chinese propaganda posters, all posters are composed of an image and a sentence on the side or below the image. I started to think what if I removed all the images in the poster but only left the text? When removing the image, the viewer may imagine a picture related to this text in their mind, but such a picture may be inconsistent with the picture in the original poster. So I chose a poster (Fig. 66) from the book *Chinese Propaganda Posters*, which read „The people’s desire is a weapon of the revolution.”(Chinese: “人民的心愿 革命的武器”)



Figure 66.

Poster, „The people’s desire is a weapon of the revolution,” 1977

I chose this sentence and then put it into Google Translation directly (Fig. 67). The

computer told me the translation is „People’s wishes revolutionary weapons“ which is totally different from the precise translation in the poster.

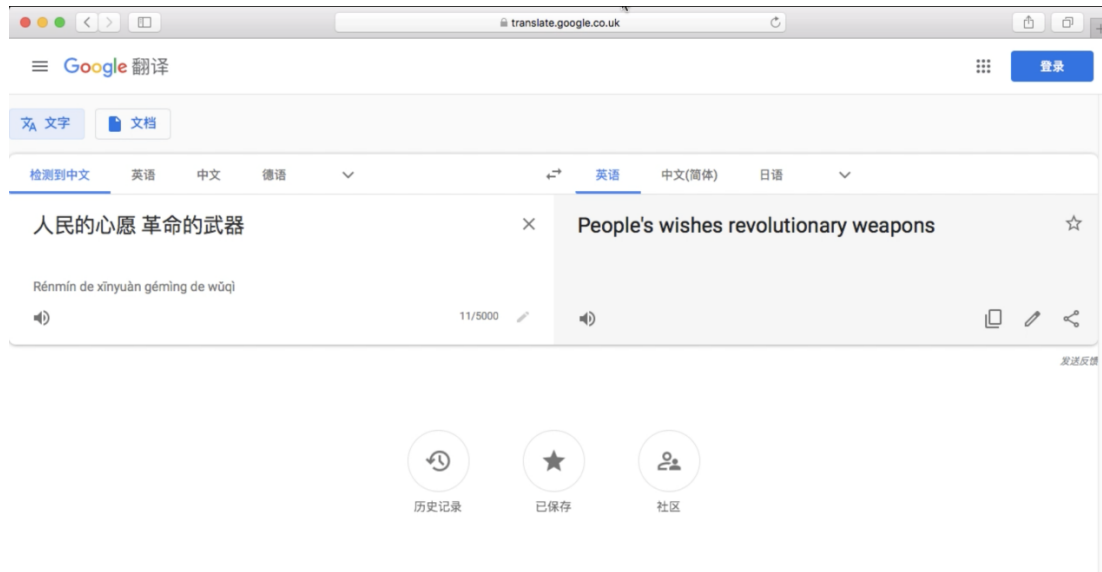


Figure 67.  
Google Translation 1, Screenshot

Such a translation would make native English speakers confused and not be able to understand the original caption. Later I found that even putting a punctuation mark in alters the text translated by Google (Fig. 68).

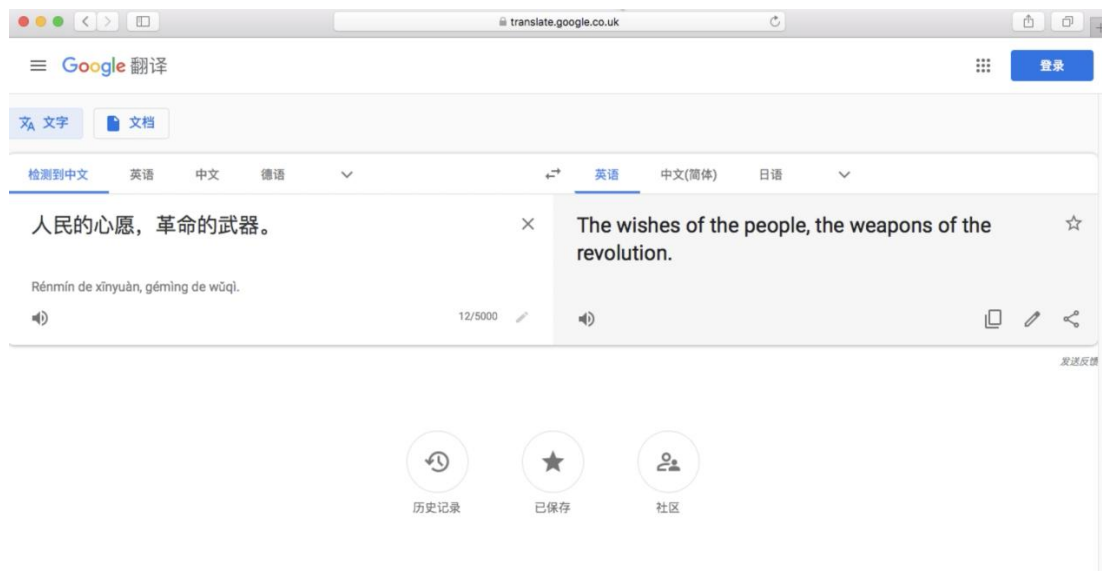


Figure 68.  
Google Translation 2, Screenshot

I then printed out the words onto a red cotton banner to imitate what you might see in China. During the exhibition, I also put the screen recording of Google translation on a display screen, and the experimental banner was placed next to the display (Fig. 69). Some people thought it had a really strong visual punch but they were not clear about how it related to „lost and found in translation.“ My fellow researchers asked me to continue researching ideas of propaganda with careful consideration and to think about its relationship with my research. It was an experimental piece and a good exhibition to be part of, as all researchers showed work which was forming and needed to be re-evaluated before being shown again publicly. What I learnt was that this kind of experience can quicken my questioning of a piece in production and benefit the thought process when making work.



Figure 69.

Xiaolong Fang, *Lost in Translation*, Red cotton banner,  
View from the 2019 Fine Art Professional Doctorate Research Space,  
Way Out East Gallery, London, United Kingdom, 2019

When I hung this eight-metre-long banner piece on the wall of my studio, I deliberately hung the work upside down, which achieved an unexpected consequence.

When the text (in capitals, in this font) is reversed, the English text itself surprisingly almost looked like Russian text (Fig. 70). I am not sure what I will do with this surprise but it is a good route to explore in the future.



Figure 70.

Xiaolong Fang, *Lost in Translation*, red cotton banner, 2019

## Conferences

**2019, *MuKeJinShi - SAFA International Printmaking Summit Forum*,  
Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, Shanghai, China.**

As an artist who majored in printmaking for almost seven years during both my undergraduate and graduate studies, printmaking is the technique which I have always used and experiment with. The motivation for continuing to study printmaking is to develop the idea of traditional printmaking techniques and explore the boundary between other mediums such as the digital, sound and moving image. I am always guided by the question: how to use printmaking as a technique to expand my artistic ideas and language?

During the Christmas break in 2019, I was invited to attend *MuKeJinShi - SAFA International Printmaking Exhibition and Summit Forum* in Shanghai, held by the Printmaking Department of Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts. At this International Academic Forum of Printmaking, there were many well-known printmaking artists

and art professors from major academies in China, the United States, and Belgium. They gathered together to discuss what they considered the plight of contemporary printmaking and the future of printmaking as an artistic language. Two of the main concerns were about whether digital prints should be included in printmaking, and whether Ph.D. programmes help a professional artist's career development.

What affected me the most from this forum was a speech from a professor, Zhang Yuanfan, from the Printmaking Department of the China Academy of Art. He proposed that we can use the definitions and nuances of words to explain this controversy. He said that „prints“ in Chinese is „版画“, which foregrounds the materials they are made from. In this context, the importance of „plate-making“ is highlighted. In English, however, the word is „printmaking“, which puts emphasis on the concept of print, focusing more on the process than the results of printmaking.

At this point, the printmakers could not reach a consensus about the meaning of printmaking, whether it's only a tool to help artists express their ideas or it actually can become an important medium in the contemporary world. My experience is that Chinese art education concentrates more on the sense of craftsmanship and technology, while Western art education puts more emphasis on concepts. The forum was split on if a digital print is part of printmaking as a medium, and the question of „Did Ph.D. programmes help a professional artist's career development?“ was never answered. My own thoughts are that the Ph.D. or Professional Doctorate experience is an advantage if you want to develop your research and academic career path but not necessarily an advantage if you chose a commercial art path. The market seems to me is not so concerned with academia and research but more concerned with product.

In the three years of doctoral works, I have mostly used digital prints for artistic creation. When my works were exhibited in China, especially the time I participated in a print exhibition focusing on traditional prints works, a lot of controversy and opposition was voiced, because my work was seen to deviate from the mainstream of

the Chinese printmaking field. However, I can understand such controversy as the „Lost and Found in Translation“ which exists between Western educational ideas and the context of Chinese contemporary art.

**2018, *Xu Bing: Thought and Method - An International Conference*,  
Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China.**

*Xu Bing: Thought and Method* was held in Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing in 2018. As the largest retrospective exhibition of Xu Bing's works, *Xu Bing: Thought and Method* not only summarised Xu Bing's process of creation over the past 40 years, but also clearly pointed out the history of Chinese contemporary art for younger generations to study. This opportunity was also the first time I could closely observe some of Xu Bing's artworks in this exhibition in person. For me, the reasons I keep researching on Xu Bing is that he is an artist using predominantly printmaking. More importantly, Xu Bing is always exploring the context of text and language in visual culture. Xu Bing is also the Chinese artist who had lived outside of China for almost twenty years while learning how to assimilate a contemporary art language from the West and express his Eastern cultural philosophy within his work.

This two-day academic seminar invited ten important scholars, art critics and curators from all over the world to discuss Xu Bing and his creations. The conference was chaired by Wu Hung, who is the Harrie A. Vanderstappen Distinguished Service Professor of Art History at the University of Chicago. On the first day of the seminar, the theme of Wu Hung's session was *Artistic Thinking and Experimentation*. He posed a simple but insightful question to uncover his point of view: How do we study Xu Bing? He believes that Xu Bing's works always challenge people who have already studied Xu Bing's art. The reason being might be Xu Bing always challenges himself, and also constantly challenges the boundaries of art and the definition of the contemporary art world.

Wu Hung's point of view is that technology is important and also enhances Xu Bing's artistry. This statement had an impact on me, and I thought of my own works and using digital technology in my printmaking, which is now always present in the production values of my practice. When creating a work, the first thing that comes to my mind is what kind of material and mediums can present my ideas most coherently? This conference will be a reminder when I am making a work about the potential of using the technology to support my ideas and concepts.

**2018, Oxford China Forum of A New China,  
University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom.**

In March 2018, I attended the annual Oxford China Forum held at the University of Oxford. The forum is a student-run annual conference aiming to provide insight into the shifting economic, political and cultural landscapes in modern China. In the Art & Culture panel, they invited Xu Bing as a guest to discuss with other artists on the theme of *Reinvention and Revival* in art and culture.

After this forum, Xu Bing had a conversation with Professor Peter D. McDonald. McDonald is the Professor of English and Related Literature and fellow in St Hugh's College at the University of Oxford. In 2017 he published a book entitled: *Artefacts of Writing: Ideas of the State and Communities of Letters from Matthew Arnold to Xu Bing*. In the forum I introduced myself to Professor McDonald and he was very interested in my research topic. After writing the Annual Review for my doctorate for the second year, I sent him my review via email and got his feedback. He also made a list of rich sources I can use for my research including articles on Xu Bing by the scholar Neville Alexander and the English poet Sarah Howe.

He was really excited by the way I set up language and translation as problems, and then linked it to censorship. The work of Neville Alexander is relevant to this. The conversation centered on the ideas of language that have a close connection to



colonial linguistics. Here, language represents the national character or national soul, referring to the specific culture.

Secondly, it is very important to make a distinction between speech (or all the sound aspects of language we access through our ears) and writing (all the visual aspects we see with our eyes). As Prof. McDonald argues in the introduction to *Artefacts of Writing*, these are very different things, which exist in complex relations with each other depending on the writing system involved. As a consequence, there really is not such abstract thing as „language“ - or at least it is not something we can ever experience. What we experience are worlds of sound and worlds of script, each of which shapes our brains in powerful ways, again depending on the sounds and marks we encounter. The contemporary British poet Sarah Howe has written about this wonderfully, when writing about Xu Bing. In her article „To China: Books from the Sky“, she states:

*A viewer who does not know Chinese would not even necessarily realize without being told that the book is unreadable. For the literate native speaker the effect is quite different, while also kind of the same, implanting in them the niggling feeling that there is meaning to be had here, but that it is always just around the corner. Perhaps it transports them back to the portion of childhood before they learned to read.* ([https://blog.bestamericanpoetry.com/the\\_best\\_american\\_poetry/2013/08/v-to-china-books-from-the-sky-by-sarah-howe.html](https://blog.bestamericanpoetry.com/the_best_american_poetry/2013/08/v-to-china-books-from-the-sky-by-sarah-howe.html))

## Lectures and Presentations

2017, *In the Cross-culture Identity, Art is a Language*,

Presentation by TED × XinJieKou, Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China.



Figure 71.

Xiaolong Fang, Presentation by TED × XinJieKou,  
Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China, 2017

In 2017, I was fortunate enough to deliver a keynote speech on the topic of *In the Cross-culture Identity, Art is a language* for TED × XinJieKou as a guest speaker (Fig. 71). The core theme in this presentation is „catalyst“. As an artist, we should know how to understand the notion of „catalyst“. I recounted my experience of living and studying in the West as a Chinese artist and the way in which such cross-cultural identities and experiences directly influenced my artwork. Since my language skills are not very good I seem to look at everything from an outsider’s viewpoint. I have become more and more aware of the power of art and its role as a common language for all human beings. In art, I am communicating through many mediums and although I may insert text in a particular language, the text takes its place in a form which is predominately visual. No matter our own verbal languages, I feel there is an appreciation and recognition of art as a universal tool of communication.

What impressed me the most and made me reflect on this experience is that the TED × Talks coordinators are all young people who were born in the late 1990s. (Fig. 72) They have strong organisational skills, coordination skills and maturity that do not match their age. All of these volunteers are Chinese high school graduates who were going to study in the United States and United Kingdom in the future.



Figure 72.  
Photo of Guest Speakers with the TED × XinJieKou talk coordinators, volunteers.  
Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China, 2017

These young people are now officially a group of the third generation of students who will have studied abroad, leaving their parents and exploring a whole new world. I was born in the early 1990s, while they were born around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I was so impressed with their abilities that I feel more passionate about China as it is now facing tremendous change and development. Especially the young generation of this time period, who are now studying overseas in various professional fields, when some of them return to China in the next 10 years, language may no longer be an obstacle for them, and they would embrace both Chinese and Western cultural backgrounds with a rich international perspective. They will definitely bring the breakthrough reformation to China in the future. Involvement in this lecture brings me hope for change and progress in the future for China and Chinese people.

## Summary

In my elaboration of the idea of „lost and found in translation,“ the languages of Chinese and English, through cultural translation, are separated from their original contexts and re-created in another context. The artist Xu Bing played with the awkward reality of cultural exchanges by making the work *Square Word Calligraphy*, using Chinese ink and brush to write English words within a Chinese stylist convention. This artwork exemplifies a new hybridized practice and a new way of thinking. The Western system and culture I have been immersed in helped me focus on self-identity while I also negotiated my historical Chinese background with its traditional educational systems and beliefs. During the doctorate I have become more aware of the hidden controls and propaganda of the system I grew up in, and in the future I wish to challenge this with my artworks. My struggles with English over the three years have been intense, and coming to terms with my historical belief systems has made me challenge myself like never before. I know that this experience on the doctoral programme has helped me develop my practice beyond anything I imagined three years ago, and I look forward to moving back to China and facing the new challenges that await. I will use as a guide what Vincent Pecoil writes about Jan Haaning’s artwork, that it has the ability to „confront the viewer with realities that can potentially change his perception of his cultural and social environment, and make him question his own prejudices, his perceptual habits and thought patterns.“ (Pecoil, 2003, p.9)

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## Appendices

### Exhibitions

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Exhibition Poster, *The 35<sup>th</sup> Annual International Exhibition*,  
Meadows Gallery, University of Texas, Tyler, TX, United States, 2019



Exhibition View at the *Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair*,  
Royal Arsenal, London, United Kingdom, 2019



This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Private View Card, *National Original Print Exhibition 2019*,  
Bankside Gallery, London, United Kingdom, 2019

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Exhibition Poster, *On the Mountain We Stay*,  
Unnamed Mountain, Shandong Province, China, 2019

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Exhibition Poster, *2019 Art Nova 100*,  
Guardian Art Center, Beijing, China, 2019

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Private View Card, "*Romantic Four-seasons, Listening Chopin*" the 1<sup>st</sup> Shanghai  
*Changning International Piano Music Festival*,  
Shanghai Zhongshan Park, Shanghai, China, 2019



Exhibition View from the *YESTERDAY* exhibition,  
Hongqiao Contemporary Art Institution, Shanghai, China, 2019

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Private View Card, *EXPO CHICAGO 2018*,  
Navy Pier, Chicago, IL, United States, 2018

## Conferences



Conference View at the “MuKeJinShi” - SAFA International Printmaking Summit Forum, Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, Shanghai, China, 2019



Conference View at the *Xu Bing: Thought and Method - An International Conference*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China, 2018



Conference View at the *Xu Bing: Thought and Method - An International Conference*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China, 2018



Conference View at the *Oxford China Forum of A New China*, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2018



Conversation View at the Professor Peter McDonald's New Book Launch, St Hugh's College, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2018

## Lectures and Presentations



Xiaolong Fang, Presentation by the *Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair*, Royal Arsenal, London, United Kingdom, 2019

## **Addendum and Guide to Viva Presentation**

[https://youtu.be/eZgZSEe\\_RAw](https://youtu.be/eZgZSEe_RAw)

Please click the YouTube link to watch my remote Viva presentation.

I have written this addendum so that I can make you aware of two art works that are in this presentation but are not written about in my report. These works are *A Healthy Society Shouldn't Only Have One Voice* and *Whistler - Coronavirus Code*. The piece, *A Healthy Society Shouldn't Only Have One Voice* was in progress before lockdown and was envisioned as a physical gallery piece while *Whistler - Coronavirus Code* was made during lockdown and for me feels like an artwork that is influenced by working online and would exist in a digital rather than a physical environment as it is a collection of information from the internet which has been a lifeline for me while in lockdown. As the campus at the University had closed and I did not have access to my studio as all the buildings in Art and Design were locked after March 20<sup>th</sup> it meant I had to live on campus in the halls of residence with access only to my laptop and the internet. Although I had limited resources at hand, I thought I could be inventive and aimed to put my Viva together for a remote presentation. I chose the remote option as my visa expires in the summer and I feared not being able to extend it and plus the fear of incurring possible extra fees/living costs if I delayed my viva until next year.

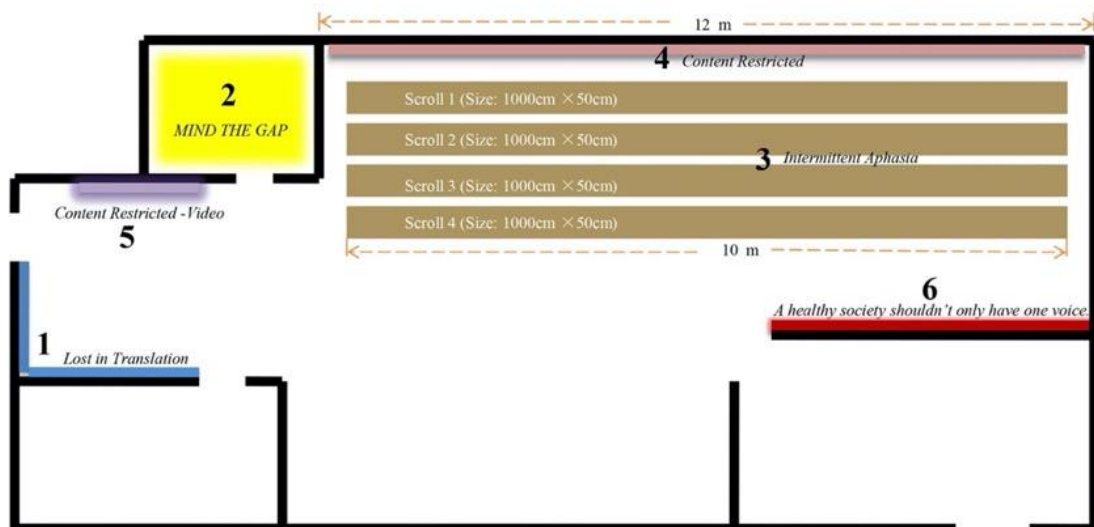
The outcome of this lockdown period is that I have made a Viva presentation that is not a physical exhibition while attempting to describe my work as a potential gallery exhibition. Also, where possible I have experimented with the possibility of adding digital enhancements to previous works which the time in lockdown allowed me to explore.

I see this addendum as also a guide to explaining the 20mins online YouTube presentation. I will begin with the contents page and work through it, describing each title page and what it contains. I have also attached to this document a gallery

layout/diagram of the exhibition before lockdown so you can see what the exhibition layout might have possibly been. The space I had to exhibit my works in was the first Fine Art studio that you come to when entering the Art and Design building and I would have shared this large segmented space with another Doctorate Researcher (hence why the left hand side of the space is empty). I chose to make an online video (MP4) presentation for a number of reasons. I thought that it could be accessed easily for you as examiners but also for access in the future as it could be included in the appendix of my report as a direct link. Also, the size of the file was approaching 500MB, and I did not want the presentation crashing or being difficult to view because of any technical problems on the day of the Viva. It has been a steep learning curve for me, but I hope you enjoy this presentation.

### Proposed Location of Art works before Covid-19 Lockdown

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1 <i>Lost in Translation</i>      | 2 <i>Mind the Gap</i>                                     |
| 3 <i>Intermittent Aphasia</i>     | 4 <i>Content Restricted</i>                               |
| 5 <i>Content Restricted-Video</i> | 6 <i>A Healthy Society Shouldn't Only Have One Voice.</i> |





## Presentation Contents

### 1. *Lost in Translation*

Digital-print, Varied Dimensions, 2017-2020

I had originally thought of having the digital prints of the signs grouped together as an introduction to my early work on the Professional Doctorate (Fig. 1). This piece had not been shown in its entirety at UEL in an exhibition but had been shown in the work in progress seminars. The feedback was that the humour was a good way to proceed but also to think about how written information could also manipulate people with „Fake News“ as this was a prominent subject in the news and on social media during this time. I feel these works were my starting point of my investigation into *Lost and Found in Translation* on the Doctorate programme and so I wanted to include them in the final Viva exhibition.



Figure 1.

Xiaolong Fang, *Lost in Translation*, Digital-print, Varied Dimensions, 2017-2020

With the doctorate Viva moving to an online version I decided to experiment with them as I found a free virtual exhibition app called *Artsteps* which I used to make the walk through of this work. It allowed me to create a virtual gallery and make the works smaller or larger. The App is free, so it does not have great definition but as a solution to thinking through how to present my works it was a good starting point. The problem I found later was that you cannot put artworks on the floor, only on the walls. I also thought about putting the signs within a context/background, so I also

pasted them into photographic backgrounds from the internet. The original signs had come either from photographs I had taken in China or that I had taken from the internet. I see these pieces as a fun way to introduce my project while using it as a way to think through how to present a remote Viva of physical works that had been already made for an exhibition.

## **2. *MIND THE GAP***

Video, 1 min-35seconds, .MP4, 2018-2020

This piece was originally developed and shown at the *EXPO Chicago 2018* and over the year I developed the piece to incorporate the sound of voices repeating the words „Mind the Gap“ in both English and Chinese. The sound has been speeded up and slowed down and this work gave me a chance to test out the possibilities of incorporating sound in future works. I have found that interpreting what is said when accents are very different in the U.K, even though everyone is speaking English, adds another layer of difficulty and misunderstanding.

## **3. *Intermittent Aphasia***

Installation, Digital Print on Rice Paper, Varied Dimensions, 2017-2020

I have included images of the 2019 showcase exhibition to give you an idea of what I did and how I displayed this artwork. I remember thinking that the 2019 version was the most ambitious artwork I had made in terms of size, but I later realised during feedback that my intention was unclear to the some of the audience. I remade this piece and attempted to address the issues I have described in my report from page 24 onwards. The proposed Viva exhibition piece, at 10 meters long, is the largest I have ever made. I wanted to echo the scrolls in Chinese museums, which mainly illustrate stories of life in China with the story of a third-generation Chinese artist exploring a new culture. While attempting to embrace a traditional Chinese pictorial device, I am holding onto my experience of a western arts education.

#### **4. *Content Restricted***

Varied Dimensions, Digital Print on 200 Panels, 2019

I have included some of the photographic documentation of my 2019 showcase exhibition at UEL to give an idea of how this artwork has developed. It was during feedback from seminars that I realised that the piece did not deliver the intention I originally set out to achieve (page 40 in my report). One of the biggest pieces of learning I will take away with me from the doctorate is to push my ideas both conceptually and materially so that I can get closer to my original intention. Before the doctorate, I would probably have moved on to another artwork, having thought the piece was finished. But the intensity of being questioned has brought a new dimension to my practice, encouraging me to be more rigorous with developing the ideas behind the artwork into something the audience can connect with.

After the images of the 2019 showcase, I have inserted a still image of how I wanted the proposed Viva exhibition to look, with all 200 digital prints on the wall in lines that can be read left to right. I had managed to secure one of the largest walls in the Fine Art studios and I wanted the audience to be able to read it as one piece of work rather than in the 2019 version where the audience found it hard to locate where the beginning or the end was. This large work does not translate well to a small image on screen, so I have made a virtual walk through. The virtual walk through software has a very limited resolution but I hope it helps to visualise the possibility of this artwork in its entirety.

#### **5. *Content Restricted – Video***

Video & Sound, Length: 1 min, Original Format: .MP4, 2020

I also started to think about making this piece with all 200 images into a projection. I thought I could experiment with sound again and I started to use the words “content restricted” speeded up and slowed down. I became aware that I could possibly project

this piece much bigger as at one point I was unsure which space I could use for the 200 digital printed sheets. I feel sound is something for me to develop further in the future after UEL as it is so new to me as a medium but excites me about the possibilities.

### **Preface to Final Two Works**

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has not been completely stopped so far and is chaotically sweeping the world. During the lockdown, I watched the press conference of the White House, the news reports of China, as well as the COVID-19 news released by the United Kingdom every day. When facing the overwhelming news on the internet every day, I felt lost and frustrated. The truth of the news is that different people and countries use language and words to achieve a certain political purpose and often to mislead the masses. Language and text can easily become an invisible tool and propaganda weapon.

The following two works are my reactions, reflection and thoughts during this period of lockdown from COVID-19. I see my role as an artist is not to solve the political tensions between countries but to question what I experience. I have been wondering for a long time what kind of practical significance can art or artists bring to society? In my final report, I quoted from Xu Bing „Where you live, you face problems, and if there is a problem, there is art.“ I want to be as real as possible through my own creation of art. The response to a real historical event, the COVID-19 is the most important and unresolved problem that we are facing right now. Art or artists cannot solve problems like other professions such as Doctors and Nurses when facing this disaster, but they can put forward their own expressions on how it is being handled.

## 6. *“A Healthy Society Shouldn’t Only Have One Voice.”*

Installation, Laser Cutting on Wood, Photographic Print, 200cm × 30cm, 2020

Doctor Li Wenliang passed away on the evening of 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 and for the first time caused an unprecedented „earthquake“ on Chinese social media, which subsequently became a sensational event in the world. On the night of his death, it immediately became one of BBC & CNN Top three news stories.

Dr. Li Wenliang had communicated with his peers on WeChat on 30<sup>th</sup> December, 2019. He believed that the emergence of the novel unknown virus was SARS and he reminded peers to pay attention. He became one of the first medics to disclose the outbreak of the virus to the outside world and was called „the whistleblower.“ On 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2020, the police station issued a warning and admonishment to his „posting untrue statements on the social media.“ After the incident, he continued to work in the front line. His COVID-19 symptoms appeared around 10<sup>th</sup> January. He then became seriously ill and entered the intensive care unit for further observation. He was diagnosed with COVID-19 on 31<sup>st</sup> January (posted on 1<sup>st</sup> February through his Weibo). On 7<sup>th</sup> February, Li Wenliang officially died at 2:58 in the morning. He was only 34 years old.

A few days after his death, many places carried out commemorative activities for Dr. Li Wenliang (Fig. 2 & Fig. 3). People not only commemorated him, but also mourned a person who dared to speak the truth when facing the authorities, raising questions about freedom of speech in China.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 2.

Photo, Mourning the loss of Dr. Li Wenliang, UCLA campus in Los Angeles, California, U.S on 15<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2020.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 3.

Photo, Mourning the loss of Dr. Li Wenliang, Central Park, New York, U.S.

The reason why Dr. Li Wenliang's death caused public indignation was actually a revolt and anger against the Chinese government's freedom of speech. This is also related to the *Content Restricted* works I made earlier that aimed to highlight censorship. In an interview with China's *Caixin* media on the hospital bed six days before his death, Li Wenliang said, „A healthy society shouldn't only have one voice.“ On the night of his death, his name „Li Wenliang“ and this sentence immediately

became sensitive words and almost all the mainstream social media in China including WeChat and Weibo eliminated them. When the public reposted the article he published on the media on 1<sup>st</sup> February with grief and anger, the article that everyone shared eventually became „Content Restricted.“

It can be seen from the death of Dr. Li Wenliang that Chinese people are no longer the same as before, contemporary society in China is also no longer the same as before. As I mentioned in my final report, more and more of the younger generation have the experience of studying and living abroad. They are against their vision and their ideas being confined or controlled. For them, pursuing freedom and the truth is much more important. Through the death of Dr. Li Wenliang, everyone saw that under the development of such a modern society, freedom of speech and the control of human expressions in China as a whole are becoming more restricted, but everyone’s desire for free speech is getting stronger. Chinese people are seeking freedom in various ways, but the entire system only allows you to selectively and to a limited degree see the world outside. We are like a frog at the bottom of a well. We are looking forward to escaping from this „well“ and longing for freedom, but the high walls of the well still traps us in.

Although what Li Wenliang said „A healthy society shouldn’t only have one voice“ are only a few words, I consider it to be a very powerful statement. It is concise and straightforward and summarizes the current issues of freedom of speech in China. I then thought I could use this sentence to make an artwork, as my works are all about language and text. This statement is very important, as in China we are inundated with slogans in all aspects of our lives from birth to death. Before the lockdown, my original idea was to make this work into a wall installation at the final exhibition. I adopted the method of laser cutting (Fig. 4) to sculpt the Chinese words in this sentence. There are 15 characters in Chinese.



Figure 4.

Xiaolong Fang, *A healthy society shouldn't only have one voice*,  
Laser cutting on wood.

When doing laser cutting and engraving, Chinese characters will lose some strokes because the laser fire will burn into the wooden board. It will naturally produce some burning texture. The burning traces produced by laser cutting on the wooden board look like the texture of the COVID-19 or burns on the skin.

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 5.

Mao's portrait along with two placards was hung on the classroom wall in China of a common scenario.

Placards read “好好学习 天天向上” (English: *Study hard and make progress everyday.* )



When conceiving the entire artwork, I was always thinking about the environment of a classroom I grew up with. As Chinese, we have always been surrounded by propaganda, slogans and texts. Above the blackboard in the classroom, there was a portrait of Mao. In the past twenty years, most of Mao's portraiture has been replaced by the national flag of China. The left and right sides are symmetrical. „Study hard and make progress every day.“ (Fig. 5). Although this sentence does not indicate any political meaning, it is like a warning that surrounds us all the time.

When I started to think of other examples of slogans and text it reminded me of one of the most iconic building in the world, Tian'anmen (or „Forbidden City“) (Fig. 6), which some Westerners regard as a political symbol. Tian'anmen used to be the bedroom and offices of ancient Chinese emperors, just like Buckingham Palace in Britain is for the Queen. Obviously the most apparent difference between Tian'anmen and Buckingham Palace is the portrait of Mao hanging in the middle of the wall of the Tian'anmen and the text on both sides. The Chinese text on the left of Mao's portrait is „Long Live the People's Republic of China“, and on the right is „Long Live the Great Unity of the World.“

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 6.

Photo, Tian'anmen (or „Gate of Heavenly Peace“, or „Forbidden City“), Beijing, China

I borrowed the visual structure of Tian'anmen and then took a photo of Dr. Li Wenliang with a ventilator when he was in ICU. I then included his quote „A healthy society shouldn't only have one voice“ and cut the words with the laser cutter, burnt into wood panels. The picture shows how I adopted the form of Mao's portrait on the Tian'anmen to create my piece of alternative art (Fig. 7). The colour of the wall is the same red as the Tian'anmen. The photo of Li Wenliang mimics the portrait of Mao hanging over the Tian'anmen, surrounded by the golden wooden frames. The quotation is on the left and right. Because it consists of 15 Chinese characters, in order to visually create the unity of the left and the right as it is in the Mao reference, I took away a few unnecessary auxiliary words for achieving a visual balance without affecting the meaning. Although this work has the same arrangement as Mao in form, it does not aim to depersonalize Mao as a political icon, but to commemorate this „whistle-blower“ who was brave enough to tell the truth about COVID-19 in China.



Figure 7.

Xiaolong Fang, *A healthy society shouldn't only have one voice.*

Installation, Laser Cutting on Wood, Photographic Print, 200 cm × 30cm, 2020

Proposed Installation for Doctorate Viva Exhibition

## 7. *Whistler - Coronavirus Code*

Sound & Collected from the public on social media on the March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020

In February, Dr. Li Wenliang passed away when the COVID-19 became a global epidemic. On 11<sup>th</sup> March, a female doctor, Ai Fen, who was aware of the danger of COVID-19 earlier than the „whistleblower“ Dr. Li Wenliang, appeared in Chinese social media circles. She belongs to the same hospital as Li Wenliang and she was also one of the earliest medics to detect the highly contagious nature of COVID-19. When she and Li Wenliang realized that the virus had never been seen before and was very unusual, she immediately passed this information to his colleagues in order to alert everyone in her office. She also reported to her leader, and was immediately „unprecedentedly and severely reprimanded“ and was called a „professional rumor spreader.“ In the social media, she was called the „whistle distributor“.

Dr. Ai Fen accepted the interview of the Chinese magazine *RenWu* in March. The full text elaborates on the first time Dr. Ai Fen realized that COVID-19 could be passed from person to person in December 2019, and the reason why she was reprimanded. When the interview article was posted on Chinese social media in March, it immediately caused another re-post by Chinese people, and was immediately turned into a „Content Restricted“ article. On the day it was published on 11<sup>th</sup> March, this article was deleted in a large-scale elimination on all social media networks.

The interview article of Dr. Ai Fen released on the day of 11<sup>th</sup> March immediately became an article of „dissonance“ filled with „sensitive words.“ And this article was widely reposted by Chinese society which also attracted the attention of censorship and the „internet police“ which then caused the elimination of a lot of posts on the internet. This behaviour completely aroused the anger of Chinese people. That night, people from all walks of life and professions began to alter the form of the original article to avoid censorship inspections. Many people used their professions to translate this article and make it available in different languages on the internet as

soon as possible. The night then became a cyber war between censorship authorities and the public.

According to the statistics, in order to avoid censorship deletion, this article was translated into „QR Code Version“, „Egyptian Hieroglyphs Version“, „Mainland Chinese Braille“, „Telegraphy Code Version“, „English Language Version“, „Klingon Language“, and „Gesture Language“ and into 135 language versions. Although the article survived in translated forms, the original articles that were re-translated to avoid censorship were still found and deleted. That night, the multiple acts of translation by the „internet public“ became one of the largest collective versions of public „performance art“ in history, using „text“ and „translation“ to fight against the entire system of censorship and to keep the truth alive and circulating.

Although I noticed this phenomenon on the day I was writing my final report, I think this is a direct example of my theme „*Lost and Found in Translation*.“ That night, I quickly took a screenshot of each translated article in different languages, because everyone who has awareness would know that the censorship would happen quickly. Maybe when a new translated article was issued, this article would be deleted and labelled as „Content Restricted“.

During the lockdown period, I was unable to enter my studio. I could only be quarantined in the campus dormitory of UEL every day, facing my computer without any of my usual art materials. During this period I was always thinking about the best way to present my final Viva exhibition. I came up with the idea to use my computer to edit all the articles in the translated languages that I collected during this time, and I decided to put them into a video. I also found a related English report on the internet and used the software that can convert the text into speech, letting the computer itself read the core content of this English article.

When the computer reads it without emotion, it sounds very blunt like a robot, but it will let the English speaker quickly catch the core meaning of the incident within a few minutes of listening. When I heard this computerized voice it reminded me of listening to English conversation during the exams Chinese students took at school. During lessons and exams there was always a man and woman conversing in English. Students had to listen carefully to their communication in order to find the key information and choose the correct answer. I decided to use a female voice to make the background statement about the incident, and then I used a male voice for the ending of the statement, as if it were an English listening comprehension in school.

Although this work was made by me during the current epidemic, it was actually created by the public and all Chinese people collectively. In my first work *Lost in Translation*, when public signs were translated from Chinese to English, the wrong translation made a humorous interpretation. In my final work *Whistler - Coronavirus Code* the translation of 135 different versions of the censored article has become a collective participation through myself as an artist and the public to create something that promotes the wisdom and power of the Chinese people and something „Found in Translation“.