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Lin Tao December 2007

University of
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To Ying

Neither Presenting nor Non-Presenting:

Constructing a Methodological Framework to Re-Present Chinese Calligraphy - an Art Burdened with Tradition

By Lin Tao

Submitted to the Research Office of the UCCA/UoK on December 2007, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Art

ABSTRACT

The research aims to provide an alternative working methodology from the perspective of a contemporary Chinese artist, not a calligrapher, to answer the research question: how does one create new works of calligraphy an art so burdened with historical tradition? This is practice based research; the designed pattern of study aims to test and to exemplify the relationship between theory and practice. As a consequence of understanding the relationship, and also most importantly based on the nature of the investigation and practical necessity, the strategy of the research project is implemented in a dialectical construction, as the title of the thesis suggests.

The thesis is accordingly comprised of two parts. Part I is an historical review of the Chinese language, a contextual analysis of the philosophical significance of Chinese calligraphy from an historical perspective, and reflections on those conceptions and theories that have informed the development of the research practice. Part II is a detailed description on the series of research practice, which is presented in two chapters: Chapter 1 describes the daily practice of calligraphy by studying the originals (selected masterpieces of Chinese calligraphy) so as to attain a thorough understanding of the calligraphy – to obtain firsthand knowledge is regarded as vital to the research outcome. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, Chapter 2 features four subsequent, sometimes parallel, individual projects: the painting project, collage project, photography project and video project, which seek to examine key characteristics embodied by Chinese calligraphy and through the descriptions to demonstrate the potential and possibilities within each individual practice in order to re-present this burdened art form through diverse available media (available to the practitioner).

The integration of the two (contradictory) methods of practice into one construction is one of the essential features of this research. The benefit of this methodology as it has been experienced/presented is not losing the depth of the investigation on the one hand, but also covering a broader field of knowledge (ways of presentation) related to the subject on the other hand; as a result, more new works will be generated in the course of the engaged practice.

Supervisors: Judith Rugg, Laurence Wood, initially Jane Lee

When he was in Ch'i the Master heard the Succession, and for three months did not know the taste of meat. He said I did not picture to myself that any music existed which could reach such perfection as this.

The Analects 7, 13

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Lin Tao

July & December, 2007

Hangzhou, China & Canterbury, UK

INTRODUCTION

‘Visiting in turn all, or most, of the positions one takes to constitute the filed ... [covering] descriptively as much of terrain as possible, exploring it on foot rather than looking down at it from an airplane’
(Mathy, 1993:15)

The structural pattern of the title of the thesis is derived from Chi-Tsang (+549-+623 A.D.) and his *Er Ti Chang/Essay on the theory of the Double Truth*, in which the highest level of truth was to be reached only through a succession of negations of negations until nothing remained to be either affirmed or denied. (Fung, 1983) The incorporation (historically) of contradictions (identification of those obvious and concealed) and successive interrelated units of examinations (practices) are one of the basic characteristics of this practice based research project.

Chinese scholars in the past have asked ‘how does one write well?’, a question that is not taken up in the present; presently contemporary Chinese artists and calligraphers are asking ‘how does one create new works of calligraphy an art so burdened with historical tradition?’¹ This is the dominant question at present and it remains in the present only. There is an evident difference between the two sets of questioning, and this reflects the true development and evolution of Chinese calligraphy. The change of questioning reflects the actual scope of Chinese calligraphy, which is limited by its own increasing refinement. In a wider sense, the increasingly narrow scope of calligraphy corresponds to all the other disciplines in our modern time, largely pressured by the invention of new technologies and tools. Therefore, we may say that the pressured refinement of the traditional high art form is naturally running its due course. However, there is another factor we must take into account. One indisputable fact is that China is a nation that has a particular consciousness of history and historical record². It is, therefore, no surprising that China has a long uninterrupted recorded history, and one of the major means to record the history is calligraphy. Being a partaker of the grand narrative³, calligraphy has also been used by the imperial court for assessing a man’s

¹ So far, no documentations can be directly referenced as to who or when the question was being asked, because of a lack of proper documentation at the time. What we can say now is this question is part of joint appeal of contemporary practitioners, is an immediate reflection from the 85 New Wave Movement and the 89 Modern Art exhibition held in Hangzhou and Beijing respectively. In a way, it is not just a question of a single discipline, to a large extent; it is a question of all Chinese artists in this particular historical context.

² Hegel in his *The Philosophy of History* states that: ‘No people has a so strictly continuous series of Writers of History as the Chinese. Others Asiatic peoples also have ancient traditions, but no History. The Vedas of the Indians are not such. The traditions of the Arabs are very old, but are not attached to a political constitution and its development. But such a constitution exists in China, and in a distinct and prominent form.’ (1991:116)

³ The use of ‘grand narrative’ here is simply an alternative expression of the telling of a great history; the meaning is confined before it has been semantic broadened/philosophized by Jean-François Lyotard in his classic 1979 work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.

character and fitness for government office; the writing of calligraphy was seen as an outward manifestation of inner character. Thus, the role calligraphy played in China and in history has greatly transcended a means of writing or a way of artistic expression, but become closely intertwined with politics and beyond. The Big Character Poster of the Cultural Revolution in 1960s-70s is not a very distant memory of the contemporary practice of the art. Such a long history in terms of the history itself is a great heritage and contribution to the civilization, but, it is also a great burden to the artists who inherited the essential consciousness while dealing with a subject like calligraphy, and especially in the present context when China is undertaking a phenomenal social-economic transformation and striving towards a renaissance – a revival of glory in the past. Unlike the above mentioned refinement exerted from the outside, this burden (psychological) is in fact from deep inside⁴. Inasmuch, creating new work has become the central concern of contemporary Chinese artists and calligraphers. A different strategy and approach will need to be employed to investigate, examine and experiment with this traditional art form.

It is hard to have any insightful understanding of Chinese calligraphy with no reference to the Chinese language, which is the content of calligraphy. Therefore, the thesis starts from there. As Chinese calligraphy is an art of character writing, it is thus focused primarily on the development of written scripts rather than on its phonetic evolution. After giving the basic review, the thesis moves onto contextually analyze the philosophical significance of Chinese calligraphy from an historical perspective. In this section, a contemporary Chinese philosopher Fung Yu-lan and his book *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (1983) has been strategically appropriated both for the knowledge but also for his period categorization of the historical development of Chinese philosophy – the structure pattern, which bear great similarity to the development of Chinese script styles. Accordingly two periods forged in the statement: the period of Script Styles and the period of Style Learning, correspond to Fung's the period of the Philosopher and the period of Classical Learning. Seven script styles have been chronologically reviewed one after another; an historical context is discussed on the emergence of Wang Xizhi (303-361 A.D., other version as 321-379 A.D.) the calligrapher-sage. Due to the pragmatic nature of Chinese philosophy that attaches great emphasis to the implementation of ideas into practice, Taoism and its historical significance became singled out from the other two philosophical streams – Confucianism, Buddhism – becoming the crucial contributor towards the development of Chinese calligraphy, and shaping the highest criteria for aesthetic evaluation – the value of the quality Yin, an elegant feminine quality. A comparative study between Yan Zhenqin's *Ji Zhi Wengao/Draft of the Eulogy for Nephew Jingming* (785 A.D.) and Wang Xizhi's *Lan Ting Xu/Orchid Pavilion Preface* (353 A.D.) is made to exemplify the choice of this aesthetic taste. The feminine low-profile quality is further investigated in the Chinese language, the essential core of the calligraphic practice, and the argument is put that this femininity is exactly because of the nature of the language.

Although not a fully accepted terminology, in this thesis, Xiandai Shufa/modern

⁴ The inner desire to revive the Chinese culture and individual disciplines goes back as early as in 1917 the 'New Culture Movement' and the 'New Thought'. Further detail please refers Hu Shi (2002) *The Chinese Renaissance*.

Chinese calligraphy is still a convenient term to describe the contemporary practice of calligraphy, and my research, to a large extent, is part of this contemporary practice. As a movement it first emerged in the mid-1980s, the time immediately after China's opening-up to the outside world. A group of artists launched a show mainly featuring beautified and recomposed archaic characters and in mainly painterly approaches.⁵ Since then, more artists have joined in, the practice of calligraphy becoming increasingly diversified by artists who have adopted modern conceptions from the West and taken immediate reference from the Japanese modern calligraphy. In the course of experiment pairs of contradictions have revealed themselves gradually; they are (traditional) Chinese calligraphy versus modern Chinese calligraphy, Chinese character versus false or destructed⁶ Chinese character, characteristics of writing versus characteristics of painting, handwriting (brushwork) versus printing typeface and font, Chinese calligraphy versus non-Chinese calligraphy and so on. Among these pairs of contradictions, the Chinese character versus false or destructed Chinese character is the most contested and most experimented pair, because it implies the matter of legibility and non-legibility of character, and the legibility of character or the meaning of character is exactly the distinguishing mark comparing with other visual art forms. Although the aesthetic quality of a calligraphic work isn't fully determined by the legibility of characters, for instance in some works of wild cursive script, it is largely manifested by the strong visual power of complex structured and variously rendered continuous brushstrokes; excellent work (traditional definition of calligraphy) always unites the forms of the characters with their meanings. Destructing the fixed stroke structure of character so as to negate the meaning or mislead the reading of characters is an attempt adopted by many contemporary Chinese artists and calligraphers to divert the accustomed mind-set from a combination of reading and looking at calligraphy back to its visual simplicity, to emphasize its visual strength embedded in the very structure. It is really an adventure to expand the visual manifestation of Chinese calligraphy. Artist Xu Bing's monumental installation *Book from the Sky* (1988) is a perfect example of the play of the legibility and non-legibility of characters. In this research, the same contradictions are also being investigated by, respectively, a series of collage and painting projects.

Modern Chinese calligraphy, after twenty years experimentation, is still struggling to define itself. Alongside the unsettled terminology there are also no general agreeable definitions when it comes to critical analysis and communication. Meanwhile, it is still trying hard to distinguish its relation to modern art, Western art in particular, and Japanese modern calligraphy; still seeking ways to cope with the impact of global consumer culture and searching for strategies to adapt in a world that has been transformed by information and image spaces in which boundaries have become progressively narrowed, increasingly undefined and unstable and, most importantly finding practical strategies to retain the original identity. My research, being part of this

⁵ The Modern Chinese Calligraphy exhibition held in China National Art Gallery, Beijing, in 1985. This event is regarded as an inauguration of China's 'modern Chinese calligraphy'.

⁶ The word 'destruct' and its affiliated variations here and in this thesis are intended in direct opposition to 'construct' and its associations.

contemporary practice, is certainly no exception and has to face/encounter similar difficulties and dilemmas. This research is initiated in direct response towards the above mentioned matters and circumstances. Rather unlike other artists who focus their practice on specific aspects and characteristics of calligraphy, in this research I concentrate on building up a working methodology. Hopefully, the demonstration (as a reference to other disciplines or example to other practitioners) of the process of the working methodology could generate or spark some fruitful result out of practice and finally find a breakthrough. Based on this understanding, the strategic positioning of this research is not focused on one individual practice or a refinement of the individual practice but rather on adopting an interdisciplinary approach and looking at Chinese calligraphy as a whole. This includes its traditional and modern practice, past and present all in one, bringing in all available means and strategies, treating its historical achievements as rich resources, elements of material for practice and a pool of inspirations rather than a burden.

As far as building up a methodology is concerned in this research, some philosophical conceptions and theories have significantly influenced the construction of the basic structure of the working pattern, both on setting up the theoretical ground and also the actual practice. These theories and conceptions are from different philosophers, schools of thoughts and different periods of time in history. If simply looked at by their terminology - primitive dialectic, the concept of Harmony/he of pre-Qing philosophy, scientific dialectic represented by Hegel and Marx and Postmodernist attitudes in general, it is perhaps very likely to lead to a reading of juxtaposed thoughts of ideas in a 'collage manner'. I must say it is beatifying to see such an effect from the eyes of a practicing artist, although it wasn't originally intended. As a matter of fact, the bringing together of these different thoughts to inform the building up of the research structure is solely based on practical necessity for the course of the research. On the other hand, the seemingly 'fragmented' 'unarticulated' gathering of these theories in a way resonates with the present 'post-modern' condition, and also to the productive 'Harmony' argued in the pre-Qin philosophy. Though holding different theoretical positions oriented by different perspectives, these theories converge or overlap their emphasis in some areas, which are the dialectic, accommodation and celebration of (the work of) contradictions, a synthesized harmony/unity of identity and differences, and rejection of (Modernist's) ideological artificiality and unitary sameness. In terms of the working structure, besides other touches, it is the dialectic that the positioning of the research is based on. The title of the thesis has clearly indicated that the key methodology applied in this research is a dialectical one.

The dialectical contradiction presented in research practice is the structure of the working methodology. Simply put, the research practice can be characterized by employment of two opposite ways of practice. One was titled the Daily Practice of Calligraphy – an inward looking disciplinary practice; the other was the Multiple Examinations and Diverse Experiments – an outward looking multiply interrelated examination of various key characteristics embedded and represented in Chinese calligraphy. The combination of two different approaches in practice has a multiple purpose. One aims at attaining a complete view and understanding of Chinese

calligraphy, both its traditional methods (vertical, in depth) and also the contemporary strategies (horizontal, on broadness). The other, the direct opposition of two distinct ways of working is expected to generate mutual reflections that could provide vivid examples to cross-examine the each other and to have the practice exercised in a mutually informative manner in order to yield more possible ways of presentation and more alternative strategies to guide the forthcoming practice. This is a practice based research, together with a contextual review and theoretical analysis, the actual engaged studio practice constitutes the greater part of the research, and the process of the actual practice is the very essence of the research project. Therefore, in Part II of the Studio Practice, there is a detailed description of each individual project, hopefully providing such a detailed narrative to portray a complete view of the research and most importantly to offer a clear example to indicate the multiple possibilities implied within each project. The reading may turn out not to be an easy ride due to its very detailed close-up from describing material preparation to completion in each practice. However, in consideration of this, the thesis has attached selected illustrations as visual references at the end of the book to help to understand the text. Moreover, there are some terms particularly endorsed in this research. They present themselves in their due ways (either obvious or underlying) for the course of the research, bearing them in mind would one way or another help the reading of the thesis and the understanding of some of the characteristics presented in the practical works. These terms are: contradiction, appropriation, fragmentation, disconnectedness, briefness, suggestiveness, similar, synthesis, primitivity, simplicity, return, and harmony.

In sum, then, this research seeks stage by stage through practice to examine those key characteristics embodied by Chinese calligraphy and to demonstrate the possibilities of re-presenting the burdened art form through diverse available media (available to a practitioner) so as to work out an alternative methodology, and by this very structured methodology to answer the question asked at the beginning.

PART I

CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

A Brief Survey of the Chinese Language

Chinese calligraphy is a general term for an art of character writing, its central subject is Chinese characters or scripts. Being a visual presentation of Chinese language and a practical means for daily communication, the history of Chinese calligraphy went along inseparably with the history of the Chinese. As demonstrated by history and witnessed by linguistics, 'Chinese is only one of a very few contemporary languages whose history is documented in an unbroken tradition extending back to the second millennium BC. At the same time, in its numerous dialectal forms, it has more speakers than any languages spoken in the modern world. This vast extension in time and space has imparted to the study of Chinese a complexity hardly equaled elsewhere.' (Norman, 1991:ix)

The Chinese script or character appears as a fully developed writing system in the late Shang dynasty (14th to 11th centuries B.C.), based on the up-to-date evidence of archeological excavation and recent study. There are copious examples of the script from this period inscribed on ox shoulder blade bones and tortoise shells or written on clay potteries. For the most part they are short forms of records of divinatory texts. Within the same period there also exist a number of inscriptions on bronze vessels (Ding) or various sorts of plates (Pan). The former type of graphic record is commonly referred to as the oracle bone script (Jiaguwen) while the latter is commonly known as the bronze script (Jinwen or Zhouwen⁷). The script of this period is (from the linguistic aspect) already a fully developed writing system that is capable of recording the contemporary Chinese language in a complete and unambiguous manner. The earliest Chinese writing had a fundamentally pictographic origin. At the earliest stages of its development, it is quite clear that the major device for creating graphs was to draw a picture of what was to be represented. The more truly representational a graph is the more difficult and time-consuming it is to depict. Along the course of evolution, there is a natural tendency for such graphs to become progressively simplified and stylized as a writing system matures and becomes more widely used. As a result, pictographs tend to gradually lose their obvious pictorial quality (i.e., the emergence of Lishu/clerical script after the unification of China by the First Emperor (around 3rd century B.C.)). Another device for character formation was developed during the Zhou dynasty (11th to 3rd centuries B.C.) which in subsequent centuries was to become progressively more important: this was the device of phonetic compounding (or as determinative-phonetics). A character of this type consists of a semantic element combined with a second element used to indicate the pronunciation of the new graph. 'But unfortunately, as the language evolved further phonetically, sound combinations which started almost identically and so could be fairly represented by the same phonetic became entirely unlike.' (Needham, 1975:32) In terms of formation of Chinese characters in history, there are six classes to describe it. They were called the Liu Shu/six writings:

⁷ They belong to the style of Dazhuan/large seal script.

- 1) Xiang Xing/pictographs (image shapes)
- 2) Xing Sheng/phonetic compounding or determinative-phonetics (picture and sound)
- 3) Zhi Shi/indirect symbols (pointing to situations)
- 4) Hui Yi/associative compounds (meeting of ideas)
- 5) Zhuan Zhu/mutually interpretive symbols (transferable meaning)
- 6) Jia Jie/phonetic loan characters (borrowing)⁸

Sometimes, the notion that is encountered that Chinese characters in some platonic fashion directly represent ideas rather than specific Chinese words is obviously nonsense, and leads to rough misunderstandings concerning both the Chinese script and the nature of writing in general⁹. Also, the term ideograph, which has often been used to refer to Chinese characters, is better avoided.¹⁰

It is obvious that the script, as it matured, became simpler in form, and progressively began to lose some of its pictographic quality. This was due to the growing importance and use of writing as society became more complex, and to a need to simplify and rationalize the linear structure of the graphs as their use became ever more prevalent (i.e., again exemplified by Lishu/clerical script). In general, a tendency to straighten out the strokes and to convert earlier long, round strokes to sharper angles can also be clearly observed (i.e., the example of Kaishu/standard script). The Chinese script has been transforming throughout the history; in some periods like the Qin and Han dynasties (between 221 B.C.-220 A.D.) it underwent large-scale revision, which gave it a wholly new outlook. From the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.) down to the beginning of the twentieth century, on the other hand, the script changed very little. There have been several movements in China in the twentieth century especially after the 1949 the founding of the People's Republic, which have advocated by some officials and scholars the total abandonment of the traditional Chinese script and its replacement with some sort of alphabetic writing. Although some steps have been taken in this direction, the position of Chinese characters in Chinese society seems hardly to have been shaken. Perhaps the Chinese characters play such an important role in Chinese history and cultural identity that it would take an almost superhuman effort to dislodge them after several thousand years of hegemony. (Norman, 1991)

⁸ The corresponding English terminologies of the 'six writings' in this thesis have taken references to Needham, J. (1975). *Science & Civilisation in China*. Vol. I. p.32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Among the six classes of Chinese characters Jia Jie and Xing Sheng are both phonetic. Taking Xing Sheng character as an example, about 20 percent oracle bone script are Xing Sheng, 80 percent in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (100 A.D. Han dynasty), 90 percent in contemporary Chinese dictionary. From the above comparison we can see that the increasing phonetic elements joining in the formation of contemporary Chinese language. To say Chinese character is 'ideographic' may be partially right when it is being placed in contrast with an alphabetic language system. It is also partially right when the discussion was focused on the archaic characters before entering the modern writing.

¹⁰ The point made here is open for discussion, as observed by Needham: 'Chinese is the only language which has remained faithful to ideographic, as opposed to alphabetic, writing.' (Ibid:27)

A Contextual Analysis of the Philosophical Significance of Chinese Calligraphy from an Historical Perspective

One would hardly grasp the essence nor have an insightful view of Chinese calligraphy without taking references from ancient Chinese philosophy. Therefore, in parallel to Fung Yu-lan's periodic categorization of the history of Chinese philosophy in his well-read *A History of Chinese Philosophy*: the period of the Philosophers (from the beginnings to circa 100 B.C.), and the period of Classical Learning (from about 100 B.C. until recent times), in this thesis, for the convenience of analysis, there had also to be constructed, in a manner of 'appropriation', two periods to illustrate the basic development of the calligraphy. These are: the period of Script Styles and the period of Style Learning. Few explanations at this point are necessary, for a better understanding of this exemplary 'appropriation' from a master's work. In the meantime, the copying of Fung Yu-lan's categorical division of philosophical periods proved to have offered a better understanding of the Chinese culture as a whole and especially the interconnection between individual disciplines in particular.

The period of the Philosophers refers to the period starting from Confucius (551-479 B.C.) down to the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) around 100 B.C., 400 years in which ancient China experienced 'the age of one of philosophical activity such as has perhaps been unparalleled elsewhere in the world, save in classical Greece. Literally thousands of scholars, belonging to every school of thought, travelled about from state to state offering their services to the different rulers.' (Fung, 1983:xxxii) More specifically, six schools of original thought were singled out from 'Hundreds' other teachings, and profoundly in their own right shaped the Chinese mind ever since. They are: 1) the Confucian school. 2) the Mohist school. 3) the School of Names. 4) the Legalist school. 5) the Yin-Yang school. 6) the Taoist school. With the political and social unification of China, the Han dynasty naturally encouraged the revival of scholarship seriously crippled by the Burning of the Books (213 B.C.) by the First Emperor Qin Shihuang/Ch'in Shih-huang-ti (246-209 B.C.). Yet for various reasons this scholarship was encouraged to move along specified lines which were predominantly Confucian.

The period of Classical Learning is 'from the Han dynasty down to the present day, China's political and economic institutions and social organization ... underwent no fundamental modifications; and, therefore, the unique qualities of thought that had characterized the period of the Philosophers did not reappear.' (Fung, 1983:19) This does not mean that since then no other genuine philosophers or original thinkers were influential, just that almost all major philosophers from then on had somehow dedicated themselves to reinterpreting and to revising the ancient classics and to finding ways to put into practice those individually interpreted previous thoughts, not least the thoughts of the period of the Philosophers, and by such a practice hoped to reach the 'Inner Sage and Outer King.'¹¹ With the introduction of Buddhism from India in the succeeding

¹¹ 'The Inner Sage is a person who has established virtue in himself; the Outer King is one who has accomplished

centuries, the contribution of following philosophers from a methodological point of view was more or less doing a work of synthesis, synthesizing basically the three major thoughts, namely: Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Consequently a school of Neo-Confucian philosophy became the leading philosophical fashion, emerging in the Song dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), whose influence continued down to the very last dynasty, Qing (1616-1911 A.D.). A very brief account, the appropriation of Fung Yu-lan's periodic categorization is not just for the structural similarity to the calligraphic issue discussed immediately after but also for the truth revealed in the content bearing great resemblance in its very essence, not least in terms of the originality in thoughts, styles and synthesis in the matter of methodology.

In Chinese calligraphy/Shufa, the period of Script Styles is from Jiaguwen/oracle bone script of the Shang dynasty (1600-1300 B.C.) to Kaishu/standard, regular or model script of the Tang dynasty; the period of Style Learning is from the Tang dynasty down to the present times. Within the period of Script Styles, the evolution of scripts archaeologically identified as that of Jiaguwen/oracle bone script is the earliest existing Chinese scripts found so far, a writing system fully developed in the late Shang dynasty (around the 12th century). From the later research investigations of those archaic scripts (late 19th and early 20th centuries) are for the most part recordings and texts of divination performances. At the same period there also existed a number of inscriptions on ritual bronze vessels of various sorts – Jinwen/bronze script. The later type of bronze inscriptions developed into so called Dazhuan/large seal script or Zhouwen script that can be found on seals, bronze vessels or other bronze items like mirrors, plates and on potteries, jade, weapons, coins and stones. With the unification of China by the First Emperor Ch'in Shih-huang-ti, who organized the standardization of scripts from six separated different kingdoms into a single uniform one, namely Xiaozhuan/small seal script. The small seal script was later largely used for ceremonial and official purposes and in particular was also widely used in the art of seal engraving down to this very present time – a major component of calligraphy as a discipline. The unification of China and the administration of this vast empire meant a quicker writing style became needed to cope with the increasing demand of bureaucratic documentation. Then there came Lishu/clerical script or official script. Alongside the clerical script of the Han dynasty, a very cursive draft script was developed called Caoshu/cursive script, literally translated as grass script came upon the scene, in later generations it has evolved and beloved by artists subsequently becoming a most direct way of emotional expression. Towards the end of the Han dynasty, a rather rigid straight and square form of characters developed – the term square word/Fang Kuai Zi sometimes is used to describe Chinese characters, which is the forerunner of the modern standard characters and hence is called Kaishu/standard script or regular script or model script. The standard script reaches its climax at the time of the Tang dynasty. That is now the standard style for beginners to learn Chinese calligraphy for it has all the merits of accumulations of the previous scripts, it is therefore a fully accomplished fully

great deeds in the world. The highest ideal for a man is at once to possess the virtue of a Sage and the accomplishment of a ruler, and so become what is called a Sage-king, or what Plato would term the Philosopher-king.' (Fung, 1983:2)

developed stylized script. Another style of script is Xingshu/running script that was also believed to be invented in the Han dynasty. It is a cursive type of the standard script, connecting or eliminating brush strokes and thereby enabling the calligrapher to exert a more continuous movement of his or her writing instrument. It is employed by almost all well-known calligraphers. The calligrapher-sage Wang Xizhi of the East Jin dynasty (317-420 A.D.) contributed profoundly to the popularity of this writing style.

The above briefly reviewed scripts are fully accomplished mature styles in their own right. After the ending of the evolution of stylized scripts around the Tang dynasty, aesthetically speaking the formal development of the styles in various Chinese scripts had been completed, yet the linguistic aspect still underwent transformation in correspondence to the social-economic changes. These original styles of scripts become rich sources for generations after to learn to practice. From there onwards there were no further significant inventions of other types of scripts ever recorded in the grand narratives of Chinese calligraphy. The time for the individual calligrapher's personal commitment to practice one or two or more particular styles of script became the major characteristics of the period of Script Learning. The term 'originality' now shifts from one category of style type of script to a personal commitment to 'original style of self expression'. Summing up these styles all together and especially their 'originality' endowed in each style - the very original 'models' for copying practice and imitation of various styles - they are in fact rather similar to those happening in the world of philosophy by comparative analysis.

With the Han dynasty, repeatedly mentioned so frequently in previous descriptions, the obvious significance is evident. But there were not really many historically liable names of calligraphers recorded before the Han dynasty, the Han dynasty includes the Western Han (206 B.C.-25 A.D.), the Eastern Han (25-220 A.D.) and the Three Kingdoms (220-280 A.D.) and was in fact a period of great social transformation internally and externally. Nevertheless, it was exactly such a period that contributed profoundly towards the shaping of the Chinese civilization, i.e. the invention of paper, the discovery of printing techniques, the recollection and recompilation of the pre-Qin classics especially those teachings of Confucius, the introduction of Buddhism from India, the systemization of Taoism religiously and socially, and most importantly from the perspective of Chinese calligraphy the evolution of various styles of scripts of the classical period coming to an end, and a new phase - the modern writing - about to emerge also, a cluster of extraordinary calligraphers such as Wang Xizhi the calligrapher-sage, emerged immediately after the Han dynasties' comprehensive intellectual accumulation; in all, the aesthetic evaluation, an appreciation of the highest standard came into shape. Precisely because of its cultural contribution towards China as a nation and as a land of civilization, therefore, the Chinese are later called the Han, and the Chinese character is the Han Zi/Han character or Han script.

The essential nature of Chinese philosophy is pragmatic, which emphasizes personal attachment to the implementation of ideas into social practices - out-worldliness and self-cultivation - in-worldliness. It, therefore, has a close relation to the development of art, literature, even to military warfare¹², and covers almost all

¹² Example of Sun Zi's (535-? B.C.) dialectical view and interpretation of warfare in his celebrated book *the Art of*

aspects of Chinese social life. Chinese calligraphy by all means is no exception. To the mind of the Chinese, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are commonly accepted as three major streams of the civilization of China, in which Taoism is unsurprisingly very close to art in general and to calligraphy in particular. Methodologically speaking, to make the matter clearer, the application of the dualistic pattern for analysis, as Taoism exemplified, would be helpful. Also, in a broader sense, and to bear such a dialectical analysis pattern in mind to look at the cultural, philosophical, social-economic issues of China would never be a mistake. In other words that is common sense for virtually all Chinese.

The dualistic view pattern of observing the social and natural world goes back to *Yi Jing/the Book of Changes*, Lau Tzu (around 600-500 B.C.), and Chuang Tzu (369-286 B.C.). With a dialectical framework introduced, a dual contradiction has to be teased out to the matter discussed. Here we are looking solely at Chinese thoughts; hence Buddhism is unfortunately being excluded. It has been historically evidenced that the Confucian way of life is more positive, while the Taoist way is rather more negative. Lin Yutang (2002) once argued that 'Taoism is the Great Negation, as Confucianism is the Great Affirmation. Confucianism, through its doctrine of propriety and social status, stands for human culture and restraint, while Taoism, with its emphasis on going back to nature, disbelieves in human restraint and culture.' (Lin, 2002:113-114) As far as the artistic creation is concerned, Confucianism concerned itself with too much realism and left too little or no room for fancy and imagination. Taoism, therefore, accounts for a side of the Chinese character which Confucianism cannot satisfy. There is a natural romanticism and a natural classicism in a nation, as in an individual. Taoism is the romantic school of Chinese thought, as Confucianism is the classic school. Actually, Taoism is romantic throughout. Firstly, it stands for the return to nature and the romantic escape from the world, and revolt against the artificiality and responsibility of Confucian culture. Secondly, it stands for the rural ideal of life, art and literature, and the worship of primitive simplicity. And thirdly, it stands for the world of fancy and wonder, coupled with a childish naïve cosmogony. The romantic escape from the world – leaving the world of Taoists in contrast with the Confucian attitude of entering the world, prevailed as greatly as to completely overshadow Confucianism in the Wei and Jin dynasties (between 220 to 420 A.D.), in which the calligrapher-sage Wang Xizhi lived.

The active Confucianism, that encourages involvement in social affairs, and a positive attitude towards life in its very essence is very much equivalent to the Yang, while the negative Taoism, that emphasizes retreat back to the nature, quietly observing the myriad evolving of the world, is much more equivalent to the Yin. To further investigate Taoism, it is evident that the rural ideal of life, art and literature that is such an important feature of the Chinese civilization, owes a large amount to this Taoistic feeling for nature. Thus, the association of Taoism with art is no arbitrary comparison. The reading of *Tao Te Ching* empowered by its dialectical language tells:

'They are called shapeless shapes; Forms without form; Are called vague semblances. Go towards them, and you can see no front; go after them and you see no rear.' (Lau Tzu, 1998:29)

'The largest square has no corners, the greatest vessel takes the longest to finish, Great music has the faintest notes, the Great Form is without shape.'
(Ibid:89)

Due to the contradicting dualistic nature of the language, this indicates facets of potential possible interpretations of the original meaning. Yet they have in particular been read historically as aesthetical, as the highest ideal of artistic practice, in traditional Chinese aesthetics, which obviously portray an ambiguous boundless space for free imagination, which is vital for creative art making.

Again, the application of the dualistic pattern of analysis to further close-up the contradictions in the field of Chinese calligraphy, a pair of contradicted calligraphers who in their very distinctive styles represent a vivid example of the Yin and Yang. The two distinguished calligraphers are respectively: Wang xizhi the calligrapher-sage of the Eastern Jin dynasty who refers to the Yin school and Yan Zhenqing (714-787 A.D.) of the Tang dynasty who refers to the Yang school. The natural selection and preference of different types of artist and different types of style by history has its own criteria. The further the investigation of the criteria goes in the subjects, the deeper the understanding of reason reaches – nothing arbitrary but is destined. As briefly mentioned above, in the time when Wang Xizhi lived, China was being divided by the barbaric nomads controlling the north and the elite Chinese controlling the south, creating great social instability. Taoism apparently overrode Confucianism in the south becoming a general thought and social practice, which was endorsed especially by scholars and 'wild-individuals' of the time, and the Taoistic ideal way of rural life that retreats from reality offered a wider space for the making of creative art works, not least for calligraphic practice in particular. Bearing the essential understanding of Taoism in mind, Wang Xizhi's calligraphy presents a visual display of such a quality – the quality of being receptive Yin. He was accomplished in almost every style of script writing of his time. One of his most celebrated works is the *Lan Ting Xu*/*Orchid Pavilion Preface*. The work presents a solid structure, smooth writing, elegant style, the whole piece is permeated by an overwhelming atmosphere of great joy and happiness. *Lan Ting Xu* opens a vast visionary space for views and conveys the subtle correlation between man and nature, emotion and context as well as destiny and luck. Thus, *Lan Ting Xu* is later credited as an unprecedented 'No. 1 Xingshu/running script' in the history of Chinese calligraphy.

Yan Zhenqing whose style is also like that of Wang Xizhi's, is still taught today as a standard model for practice. (There has been a thorough description of his writing style and him as a man of integrity in Part II Chapter 1 Daily Practice of Calligraphy, so here it will be omitted.) However, his passionate work *Ji Zhi Wengao*/*Draft of the Eulogy for Nephew Jingming* was later credited as 'No. 2 Xingshu/running script' in the history of Chinese calligraphy. His work presents not a least sense of grace or beauty rather like

an armoured warrior ready to take any challenge. As apparently, as far as the style was concerned, the history of Chinese calligraphy has chosen the style of elegant feminine¹³ features as a leading style, based on, to a large extent, the Taoism romantic escape portrayed in the philosophy. Both Wang Xizhi and Yan Zhenqing by their distinctive original calligraphic styles set two opposite examples for later generations, which heavily influenced the style development of Chinese calligraphy. And also most importantly set the highest criteria for aesthetic evaluation and appreciation of Chinese calligraphy. The praise of the value of Yin as a major cultural characteristic has its very root in Taoism, it reads:

‘When he is born, man is soft and weak; in death he becomes stiff and hard. The ten thousand creatures and all plants and trees while they are alive are supple and soft, but when they are dead they become brittle and dry. Truly, what is stiff and hard is a ‘companion of death’; what is soft and weak is a ‘companion of life’. Therefore ‘the weapon that is too hard will be broken, the tree that has the hardest wood will be cut down’. Truly, the hard and mighty are cast down; the soft and weak set on high.’ (Lau Tzu, 1998:161)

To investigate the rather feminine low-profile qualities even further, down to the basic media of communication – the language. As analyzed by Lin Yutang (2002) ‘the Chinese language and grammar show this femininity exactly because the language, in its form, syntax and vocabulary, reveals an extreme simplicity of thinking, concreteness of imagery and economy of syntactical relationships.’ (Lin, 2002:80) Because of a lack of analytic thinking in its very nature, the prevalence of proverbs and metaphoric expressions being resorted to illustrate the Chinese concrete way of thinking, and concrete imagery always takes the place of abstract terminology. ‘This profuseness of imagery and paucity of abstract terminology has an influence on the style of writing and consequently on the style of thought.’ (Ibid:83) The pictographic genesis of Chinese character and its monosyllabic character ‘has profoundly changed the character and position of learning in China. By this very nature the Chinese characters are not subject to changes in the spoken tongue.’ (Ibid:214) In the mean time, the independence of character from sound greatly accelerated the monosyllabic quality of the language, in a way as well accelerated the pictographic and visual quality of the character, and in turn changed profoundly the whole organization of Chinese society and the whole complexion of Chinese culture.

It was said that Picasso once expressed that if he were born a Chinese, he would have been a calligrapher, not a painter. Here, what I would like to express is: as I am Chinese, I wanted to be both a calligrapher and a painter. Xiandai Shufa/modern Chinese calligraphy isn’t a fully established, fully accepted terminology for every practitioner in the artistic circle. Its direct opposition is Chinese calligraphy or the traditional way of practicing calligraphy. Some artists do believe modern Chinese calligraphy is just an accustomed term purely for the convenience of communication;

¹³ There is an awareness here of a possible misreading of the word ‘feminine’ and such associated words as feminism and feminist. However, the word is used according to a typical Chinese way of expression, which tends to use common figurative words to represent abstract ideas and terminologies.

therefore it is a provisional term for the time being. Though the debate on the 'correct' naming has not yet settled on the ground, it has never really bothered the actual practice of calligraphy, especially in a way very much international or correctly speaking very Western styles oriented. To answer this, we must leave it in an open space as an open concept. Modern Chinese calligraphy in a general sense can be defined in the following two senses: 1. present Chinese calligraphy, contemporary practice of Chinese calligraphy in terms of its chronological order especially after 1980s; 2. practising with a modern concept, oriented with the spirit of the Modernist's experimentation, focusing on the yet to be fully explored field of diversified creativity¹⁴ and ways of presentation.

Modern Chinese calligraphy as a movement starts in the mid-1980s¹⁵. China was opening-up and there was increasing excitement for an unknown bright future. Artists were driven by a complex mixture of frustration at the immediate past and aspiration for the immediate future, hoping through art to carry themselves to a free land of creativity and the free hand of expression. At this time, the experimental works of calligraphy featured mainly painterly beautified or recomposed Chinese characters – especially those of oracle bone script, seal scripts and the like, using these archaic scripts as a starting point and the major features for their 'painterly' experiment wasn't truly difficult to understand looking back from now, because of the pictographic nature of those stylized characters. These archaic characters were treated in a way not just for their significance of endowed meaning yet and mainly for their rather mythical visual structure. To many Chinese without an essential training and a dictionary at hand, they are basically non-legible. Legibility versus non-legibility, the dialectical relation revealed here is just one of a group of dialectical contradicted pairs working in this research. Some artists at the early time in terms of modern Chinese calligraphy and even the present do prefer the intriguing play between legibility and non-legibility of the characters and styles of script. One thing interestingly to have been noticed that those artists at the time didn't really like to regard their work as painting though the media they adopted were in fact very much a painting approach. The categorical term medium had been cautiously skipped and largely overlooked because of some acute concerns of the time. On the contrary, they would rather argue and willingly to name their works as a modern practice of the Chinese calligraphy. Calligrapher-painter is perhaps the proper way to speak of them; their sentiment on that medium categorization looking back from the present is easy to understand. For what concerned them at that time was the initiation and promotion of a radical beginning for the transformation of the century-old traditional art form rather than getting entangled in an argument regarding the clarification of medium category, which was a minor issue to be concerned with at the time compared to the very existing loud presence. Following continuous experimentations, pairs of dialectical contradictions successively appeared

¹⁴ To echo this line knowledge of contemporary Chinese politic is necessary, namely – the Cultural Revolution, Chinese calligraphy has never as simple as a pure art form as it should be; as a matter of fact it has intertwined with every strains of the social life in China. To further investigate the matter a book: *Brushes with Power - Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* by Kraus R. Curt is recommended.

¹⁵ Though calligraphy plays such a significant role in China, the journals exclusively dedicated to it appeared not until the 1970s after the Cultural Revolution. *Calligraphy* journal founded in 1977 Shanghai, *Calligraphy Research* journal founded in 1979 Shanghai, *Chinese Calligraphy* journal founded in 1982 Beijing.

in the debate and were presented in the practice. These are: (traditional) Chinese calligraphy versus Xiandai Shufa/modern Chinese calligraphy, Chinese character versus false or destructed Chinese character which implies the matter of legibility and non-legibility, a focus point of the contemporary practice, characteristics of writing versus characteristics of painting, handwriting (brushwork) versus printing typeface and font, Chinese calligraphy versus non-Chinese calligraphy and so on.

In late 1980s and early 1990s, a subtle change was noticed by some of the practitioners that 'the art of Chinese character' was being used to categorize their work instead of previously 'modern Chinese calligraphy'. As apparent that the Chinese calligraphy is an art about character 'writing', Chinese character is the essential core of the art and the very remaining bunker to be tackled from the beginning to the end, if there is any end at all. In terms of the new naming it is obvious that the range of the practice covered has been widely expanded – literally pronounced that a departure from the limitation of the very characteristic of the 'handwritten' that calligraphy traditionally upheld; it endorsed every practice related with the character from handwritten to computer font. The strategically suspended matter of avoiding medium categorizing no longer had any practical value to be answered after years of dedicated experimentations, together with the permeated ideas of Postmodernism. Multiple media has opened for everyone to pick up to realise their projects. The faces of the works presented are becoming positive and diverse. Alongside the increasingly free choices of media, some basic contradictions exist still under passionate experimentations, such as: the play of legibility and non-legibility of the characters. And the concern of display – the possible methods of presentation, for example the artist Xu Bing¹⁶, whose installation project *Book from the Sky* produced a large number of self composed, self carved and traditionally printed 'characters' that at first glance from a distance looked readable, yet when close-up were all in fact unintelligible and were all false fabricated characters. The expressed rejection of linguistics communication between the artwork and viewers generated greater heat on visual effect, and in a way brought back the attention of art to its very original – an art of perception.

Some other artists also produced works deliberately devoid of the meaning of the characters and their related literary connotation in the hope of challenging popular assumptions on the very nature of Chinese calligraphy and the way it is being used in society. Heated debate was generated subsequently as to whether it was possible for Chinese calligraphy to be an art in which the characters for the sake of visual impact were non-legible. By asserting the argument, Artist Zhang Qiang argued that if a painting without a representational image could still be a painting, then calligraphy without legible characters could therefore still be calligraphy. While the others argued that a person's calligraphy is regarded as able to reveal one's innermost qualities, as stated by Yang Xiong (53-18 B.C.) *Shu Xi Hua Ye*/writing is the delineation of mind; and the theory of characterology was also brought in as their support. For them to give up the legibility of characters would be to abandon the vital part of cultural identity, and

¹⁶ Xu Bing is one of the active international Chinese artists who now based in New York. Whose work concerned the relation of language to experience and the nature of the character/word writing. More about him can be referred to his website: <http://www.xubing.com>

consequently fail to establish oneself in the increasingly globalized consumer society.

The debate on the issue of legibility and non-legibility of a calligraphic work, and whether to use character or simply abandon it are two key focusing points. The significance of the debate reflected the intention of these artists who wanted to break through the bondage of tradition, to expand the possibility of various self-expressions, to be freely engaged in the process of creation. In particular, these artists wanted to shake off the literary (representational) bondage of the calligraphic work and return it to its original visual pictographic concept, through encouraging a purely formal yet intuitive reading of the visual matter. Two frequently referred to exemplary models for such artists were modern Japanese calligraphy and American Abstract Expressionism respectively. Together, the appeal for a new aesthetics and proper documentation became increasingly urgent. Whereas, the other group of artists¹⁷ advocated returning to the very tradition and the very original way of character writing, deliberately avoiding the influence from modern painting, promoting the combination of traditional skill of ink and brush with contemporary concepts of dimension. They are a group of calligraphers and artists who regarded themselves as the true heirs of Chinese calligraphy and they carried on the duty or mission to keep the successive transformation of this very art. Works presented by these artists were in a quite 'modern' style sometimes, by producing this kind/look of work in order to purposefully demonstrate that they were capable of making a calligraphic work in a 'Modernistic' style, however, they never really wanted to take off their 'intellectual gown'¹⁸. In this sense modern Chinese calligraphy became a sheer demonstration of ability or an open attitude, a mere way of expression or as simple as a free style to them.

The term modern Chinese calligraphy though after twenty more years of experimentation is still like a seemingly gigantic sand dune, which hardly holds and is hard to define under the light of critical analysis. In the area of the practice, so far no general agreeable definition has been reached as to what exactly modern Chinese calligraphy is, which for the first few years puzzled artists greatly (now, not many artists really care about this issue as passionately as previously, what really concerns them is the very concentrated practice and its outcome rather than being entangled with ideas, conceptions and various sorts of -isms) and what relation it has to modern art and to Western art and Japanese modern calligraphy in particular. Meanwhile what position should it take regarding the impact of global consumer culture, and how much should it retain its original identity? In the area of theory, the present situation is that most of the contributors of articles, proportionally speaking, are practitioners themselves, therefore it is no surprise that most of the critiques given on contemporary calligraphic practice are mostly reflections from their position of engaged actual practice – reflections of empirical experiences rather than from an analyzed logical

¹⁷ Such a categorization might not be so accurate, might lead to possible misunderstanding or tend to be oversimplified the issue to certain extent. Nevertheless, it somehow did in a holistic view reflect the basic truth of the situation.

¹⁸ Chinese calligraphy historically an art of scholar, a high art enjoyed by generations. The Modernistic idea of anti-traditional and Post-Modernistic idea of de-centralization seriously endangers the very authority of those scholarly-minded elite artists.

reasoning. The book *Zhongguo Xiandai Shufa Lunwenxuan*¹⁹ is a vivid example of this type of critique. Within 32 contributors only 5 or 6 are known art historians, critics and professional theorists; the rest, who form the larger content of the book are all calligraphers and artists themselves. The modern Chinese calligraphy indicates both generically and chronologically a connection with the Chinese calligraphy (traditional), yet, it's been viewed not directly as a successive development of the traditional Chinese calligraphy, but rather a new independent art form under the modern condition. The attitude towards Chinese calligraphy, in this thesis, both its traditional and modern variations are: treating it as a whole combination of rich sources, materials, elements and a pool of inspirations, a collection of styles of practice and a way of living.

A 'Fragmented' Account of Concepts and Theories that Have Informed the Research Practice

The theoretical positioning of this research is based on the 'dialectic', positively believing in the work of dialectical contradiction as the real progressive force; and the research also adopts Postmodernism as a basic attitude to inform the practice. The following units of descriptions of concepts and theories may 'visually' appear 'fragmented', yet they are as a matter of fact intended to be unarticulated. Because such a structural assembly is oriented by the concept of harmony in pre-Qin philosophy, which incorporates the harmonious accommodation of various contradictions, this may result in production of things.

Primitive dialectic: referring to the primitive dialectic, I come across an interesting allegorical story on 'Primitivity' told by Chuang Tzu in the book of *Chuang Tzu* at chapter seven, we are told about the ruler of the Center, who was called Primitivity, and his two friends, Change the Lord of the Southern Sea and Uncertainty the Lord of the Northern Sea. These two had often been well treated by Primitivity, and so decided to repay his kindness, saying: 'All men have seven holes for seeing, hearing, eating and breathing. Primitivity alone has none of these. Let us try to bore some for him. So every day they bored one hole; but on the seventh day Primitivity died.' (Fung, 1998:17) The Primitivity or the state of the primitive cherished by Chuang Tzu is clearly an indication of opposition to the piece-meal Modernist's ideological artificiality, or "the Modernist tyranny of sameness" as the modern French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas called it.' (McEvelley, 2007) To a certain extent, the current condition of post-modern culture, its diversified pluralistic attitude of tolerating a variety of peoples, opinions,

¹⁹ *Zhongguo Xiandai Shufa Lunwenxuan*, the book, edited by Wang Dongling an accomplished calligrapher and professor, published by China Academy of Art Press in 2004.

etc., in a society much equivalent to the 'Primitivity' portrayed in the book of *Chuang Tzu*. Some Western scholars²⁰ categorically portray Chinese ancient thoughts on dialectics as primitive dialectics opposing Materialist dialectics and other formal scientific dialectics. The reason for such a claim 'is that it does not fully recognize the 'particularity of contradiction', which shows itself in Chinese philosophy for example in the attempt to force all contradictions into the Yin/Yang mold.' (Scott, 1998) It might be true in the context of the scientific-oriented condition, in terms of its rather scientific resolution produced after step by step logical reasoning; yet, it does not reflect the whole truth in the context of intuitive-oriented mind of ancient Chinese philosophers, and to individual Chinese even down to the present time. For the matter - the primitive dialectic or holistic way of dialectical reasoning - to be comprehended, from a wider scope, there are fundamentally two major 'obstacles' standing there that need explanation: one, of course, is the language barrier as stated in the previous section; the other is the peculiar way (to a westerner) Chinese philosophers have expressed themselves. The necessary extension of the point discussed above simply because it relates to the characteristics of Chinese language and also in a way to the practice of Chinese calligraphy is what the research is about. Someone who is accustomed to elaborate reasoning and detailed argument would be more likely at a loss to understand Chinese philosophical works at the beginning (Hegel as an example), for its characteristics of briefness and disconnectedness of the sayings and writings of their authors. The following quotations may exemplify the point, from *the Analects*:

'The Master said, To learn and at due times to repeat what one has learn, is that not after all a pleasure? That friends should come to one from afar, is this not after all delightful? To remain unsoured even though one's merits are unrecognized by others, is that not after all what is expected of a gentleman?' (Confucius, 2003:3)

And also at book three:

'The Master said, The painting comes after the plain groundwork. Tzu-hsia said, Then ritual comes afterwards? The Master said, Shang it is who bears me up. At last I have someone with whom I can discuss the Songs!' (Ibid:29)

Moreover, the philosophy of Lau Tzu is contained in a book of only around five thousand words, about the size of an essay. The apparent briefness and seeming disconnectedness reveals the deep truth that the sayings and writings of the Chinese philosophers are not for the sake of philosophy as a profession, but according to the tradition it is to enable a man as a man and to be a man - a morally established man, not some particular kind of man of profession. These lively apparently 'fragmented' pieces of sayings and recorded writings are exactly disconnected documentations of the living fragments of these philosophers. Due to precisely the result of these fragmented documentations, almost all writings of Chinese philosophy are less articulated

²⁰ Scott H. Moore as an example.

compared to its Western counterparts.

Another significant feature of Chinese philosophic language expression is suggestiveness, in the form of aphorisms, apothegms, or allusions and illustrations. To look at this characteristic from a distance is truly the Chinese literary way of language expression. Posing articulateness and suggestiveness as opposite as a pair, we can see that they are obviously incompatible, yet it is agreed that the more an expression is articulated, the less it is suggestive, exactly as the more an expression is prosaic, the less it is poetic. Because the nature of the Chinese language expression that is so inarticulate in its form, this, on the other hand, offered boundless space for imagination in its content. Truly to say, that the suggestiveness, not the articulateness, which to a certain extent is equivalent to the Primitivity or a primitive natural state portrayed by Chuang Tzu, it is this that is the ideal of almost all Chinese art. Inspired by imaginative suggestiveness, oriented by the strategy of 'it doesn't matter if the cat is white or black, so long as it catches mice,'²¹ the measure of 'appropriation' and 'collage' have largely been deployed according to the necessity of both theory and practice. And the apparent visually 'fragmented' appearance of such a practice is positively welcomed and willingly cherished.

Harmony/ho/he: A major theme of pre-Qin philosophy, and also fundamental throughout East Asia, in Confucianism it is captured in the phrase from *the Analects* 13.23, that the exemplary person/Junzi pursues harmony/he, not sameness. This concept of 'harmony' is explained in several classics: in the *Kuo Yu*, for example, 'under a section that refers to Duke Huan of Cheng (806-771), records an historian as saying: Harmony (ho) results in the production of things, but identity (tung) does not. When the one equalizes the other there comes what is called harmony, so that then there can be a luxurious growth in which new things are produced. But identity is added to identity, all that is new is finished. Therefore, the early kings mixed the element earth with the elements metal, wood, water and fire, so as to bring various things to completion. The five tastes were thereby harmonized so as to become blended in the mouth; the four limbs were strengthened to protect the body; the six pitch-pipes were harmonized so as to make sound for the ear; the seven 'bodies' (i.e., seven orifices: the two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, and the mouth.) were put into proper adjustment so as to regulate the mind; the eight 'rules' (Those regulating the head, stomach, feet, things, eyes, mouth, ears and hands.) were regulated so as to make man complete; the nine 'laws' (Those governing the nine internal organs: the heart, liver, spleen, kidneys, lungs, stomach, groin, intestines and gall²².) were established for the setting up of pure virtue; the ten ranks (of feudalistic society) were harmonized so as to lead the various organizations into orderliness; the thousand kinds of things were produced, the ten

²¹ This saying is attributed originally to Mao Zedong, but it was Deng Xiaoping who has it become a famous line in the early year's economic reform of China.

²² Gall is original text. This book was translated by Mr. Bodde and published by Henri Vetch in 1937 from its Chinese version. After double checking the Chinese version the 'gall' here is gall bladder.

thousand roads were completed, the hundred thousand things were calculated, the hundred million creatures were established, and the billion sources of income were received, this being carried out to the last extreme, reaching an infinite number. When it is said that 'when the one equalizes the other, there is what called harmony,' this means that if something salty, for example, is added to something sour, the resulting flavor will differ from its two constituents and be entirely new. What is salty is the 'other' of what is sour, and vice versa. This explains the opening words: 'Harmony results in the production of things.' But if what is salty is added to what is already salty, or, as the quotation says, 'If identity is added to identity,' then there can be no production of anything new.' (Fung, 1983:34-35)

Scientific dialectic: moreover, to the concern of productive outcome and belief in the productive force of contradiction, not only are the 'primitive dialectic' employed in this research, but (its opposition) a scientific one, notably Hegelian and Marxist dialectics in general, is also being referred to so as to facilitate the research practice. Hegel had pointed out: 'Wherever there is movement, wherever there is life, wherever anything is carried into effect in the actual world, there dialectic is at work. It is also the soul of all knowledge which is truly scientific.' (Hegel, 1892, cited in Sayers, 2007:1) Meanwhile, as he put it: 'Contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity.' (Ibid:5) Mao Zedong/Mao Ts-tung (1966) said: 'Marxist philosophy holds that the law of the unity of opposites is the fundamental law of the universe. This law operates universally, whether in the natural world, in the human society, or in man's thinking. Between the opposites in a contradiction there is at once unity and struggle, and it is this that impels things to move and change.' According to Lenin, dialectic is the doctrine of development in its fullest, deepest and most comprehensive form, the doctrine of the relativity of the human knowledge that provides us with a reflection of eternally developing matter. This relativity of knowledge about the world means that we understand the world as a process of the 'unity of differences' that are simultaneously connected and opposite. Any brief account of the dialectic is unsatisfactory in many respects. Those not familiar with dialectic are likely to find the above comparison too obscure; and those who are already familiar with it will surely find it too brief and oversimplified. However, the goal here is not to provide a complete view of dialects of West and East and of primitive and scientific, but rather to present as simply as possible those (essential) aspects of these philosophies of dialectics that are of most importance to the working process of the research. This simplicity though, reflects the essence of the theories endorsed in this research. Introducing the dialectic pattern in this research is not an accident but a necessity. Down to the theoretical structure formed in this research, the very basic initiative was to form a coexisting working structure of the primitive dialectic of ancient Chinese philosophy and the scientific dialectic of Marxism, or to form a 'unity of identity and differences' out of the two thoughts, or to reach a state of colorful 'harmony' rather than unitary 'sameness'. From this

contradiction a new hybrid entity could be formed that keeps both the primitive suggestiveness – leaving more space for creative practice and the scientific articulateness – a critical mind for theoretical analysis. And, with such a structure, facilitate the mutual reference and cross-examination towards targeted contradictions involved in this research, then by such engaged process of negation and negation of the negations, to reach that ‘destined’ synthesis – a comprehensive synthesized ‘harmony’. In a practical sense – to reach a presentation of re-presented Chinese calligraphy in the context of Chinese contemporary art practice

Postmodernism an attitude: adopting Postmodernism as a basic attitude to inform the research practice in this project is one of the basic features of the research. Postmodernism is an ongoing ‘ISM’, different scholars, critics and artists from their different social perspectives and academic backgrounds, have offered a wide range of different analyses and interpretations of it. Temporarily suspended those various reflections in mind, in this research, I would rather focus on its general characteristics for purely a practical reason. Postmodernism here is regarded basically ‘as a phase of knowing and practice, abandoning the assumptions, prejudices, and constraints of Modernism to embrace the contradictions, irony, and profusion of pop and mass culture.’ (Martin, 2003) Such an attitude is a critical reflection expressed through the commitment to the examination of the dominant constructs and ways of presentation towards Chinese calligraphy, in which this academic endeavour is engaged. As an attitude, it enables me to entertain a variety of ideas on those specific characteristics represented by Chinese calligraphy. Compared to other critics on Postmodernism, Craig’s analyses of diverse strategies characterize much of the art of the present and distinguish themselves from its Modernist predecessors and are naturally endorsed in this research. The summary of the diverse strategies are: Appropriation, site-specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, and hybridization. (Owens, 1980) I shall selectively (re-)interpret these strategies according to the emphasis of this research practice.

1. Appropriation: (The principle strategy adopted in this research, essentially the use of appropriation as a major means or say the clearly identification of appropriation as a principle measure in this research is due to the natural development of the research program, rather than the influence or information from the theory; the theoretical positioning of the strategy in practice and the identification of its theoretical significance is the result of later reflection. On the other hand, it exemplified the dialectical relation between theory and practice.) This research strategy incorporates the use of reproductive imagery mostly current circulation iconic images either in single or multiple repetitive ways so as either to examine/challenge the so-called uniqueness of the art image and its specific ‘aura’ or simply for playful unarticulated juxtaposing – for making a visual manifestation of contradictions. 2. Agglomeration or accumulation: Use of the logic of repetitive, piling-up of fragments in the composition of a work, normally in a series the ‘projection of structure as sequence ...’ (Owens, 1980), so as to

produce the effect of transforming mundane and banal visual information into something symbolic. 3. Discursivity: Positively presenting a visual interaction in a work between the sensuous appeal of imagery and the discursive reflection of written commentary or any texts, phrases, words at my disposal, in the hope of making the silent art work articulate or disconnected and argumentative or contradicted, whatever it signified or presented at the time of making. Such a practice generates a 'reciprocity ... between the visual and the verbal: words are often treated as purely visual phenomena, while visual images are offered as script to be deciphered'. (Ibid:1980) 4. Hybridization: Combining of materials from different genres and historical references so as to produce singular eclectic constructions both in form and content; meanwhile contravening the purity of the art object presented. 5. Transience or impermanence: Building of works from perishable materials – either in their contents or in their actual physical substances (the sculptural transformation of the calligraphic paper work, for example.) 6. Site-specificity: Within a defined context, create work out of sophisticated environments, installations and sites, apparently impermanent that in a way affirms the arbitrariness and transience of the status by resisting recuperation by the institution of museums and galleries. (Woods, 1999)

Adopting Postmodernism as an attitude does not mean an acceptance of the whole-set of ideas without any sense of critical questioning and any sense of analytical selection. In a practical sense, the sense of intuitive response is naturally functioning, such as immediate favour or dislike which would determine which part of the theory is in agreement with the practice and which part is not; furthermore, the adoption of the attitude is apparently a result of natural selection according to the reality of the research. Everyone would have one's reading of Postmodernism in a certain selective way, dependent on the knowledge and experience and, the condition of reality. A Postmodernism attitude is adopted to inform the research practice intuitively based on the followings: accommodation of diversified varieties, positively identifying and accepting those previous negative terms as contradiction, ambiguity, incoherence, inconsistency, awkwardness and the like, free appropriation of previous or existing materials in a celebratory rather than repentant way, instead of lamenting the loss of the past but of a joyful playing with it. An attitude of welcoming the given situation, the negation of high and low culture provides great spaces and opportunities for everyone to practice art – to be an artist in their own right, a positive demonstration of equality and fraternity, for example the free publication of ideas or art works in Blog space on the World Wide Web. The situation characterized by the overlapping of Modernism and Postmodernism, interesting to me that it resembles the historical conception of 'harmony' pursued in the pre-Qin philosophy of ancient China and, the 'Primitivity' portrayed by Chuang Tzu, a state of living with less artificiality, a less spear-headed search for universality, instead a natural harmonious free style and free living. On the other hand, simply be part of the play of this grand 'superstructure' which is determined by the present 'economic-base.'

PART II

STUDIO PRACTICE

CHAPTER 1

Daily Practice of Calligraphy

The daily practice of calligraphy, compared to the diverse experiments of chapter 2, began at the very beginning of the research project; which subsequently produced a substantial volume of written calligraphic works later taken and utilized as vital materials in collage experiments and also in other extended practices. It was never imagined that the utilizing of calligraphic works would have played such a crucial role in any one of the later actual experiments. The fact was it had been for quite a while treated as just a side-product. The daily calligraphic practice had been planned initially as purely this: through the actual engaged practice so as to reach a thorough understanding of the Chinese calligraphy. The thorough understanding, as well as some parts that can hardly be put into verbal descriptions, includes both the fundamental elements of the language, ways of expression and the visual power of being an art form, and also its limitations and the dilemma encountered historically and presently. It is believed that such understanding is vital – intellectually and practically – but it cannot be achieved through any superficial assessment of words, images or actions – the indirect knowledge and impression, which are often unrevealing or possibly even misleading, because no second-hand explanation or interpretation or reproduction can hope to touch the real essence of the subject targeted for investigation. The thorough understanding can only be achieved through the studying of the original, through the actual engaged practice, through the direct knowledge received and also the reflected experience; in addition, supplemented with indirect knowledge.

The strategy of this practice is grounded primarily in Taoism philosophy. Lau Tzu (1998) stated that:

'In Tao the only motion is returning;' (Lau Tzu, 1998:87)

Also,

'Its true name we do not know; 'Way' is the by-name that we give it. Were I forced to say to what class things it belongs I should call it Great (ta). Now ta also means passing on, and passing on means going Far Away, and going far away means returning.' (Ibid:53)

Yet, in this research 'returning' to where? The answer is: returning to what was there in the beginning. Returning to the original, in getting at this Chinese calligraphy, the only procedure available to grasp the essence is to study the original calligraphic masterpieces as a whole and the only way to reach the thorough understanding is through (copying) practice.

Among the essential practicing materials, four have been pronounced out and are regarded historically as the "Four Scholarly Treasures". They are the brush, ink (stick), paper and ink stone/slab. Besides these four primary indispensable materials, there are in fact some others that have played important roles in calligraphy practice, yet to a certain extent; they could be replaced by other similar things that function as the same. They are the desk pad/felt, paper weight, water basin, brush rest/rack and so on. Among all these mentioned materials the ink stick has been used largely by traditional practitioners only. Nowadays more and more practitioners of calligraphy prefer using the bottled liquid ink instead of the ink stick that is usually time consuming in terms of preparation. Sometimes the ink powders are mixed with adhesive agents and then with some water depending on the scale of the work; using the ink powder has frequently been adopted by contemporary artists as a convenient and economic way for making large scale calligraphic work. In this practice, bottled liquid ink was used for its straightforwardness. The paper used was the standard Xuanzhi²³ (commonly known as rice paper) - the single layered unsized paper. The normal size of it is 138 by 69 cm. The brushes were just brushes of medium sizes, yet in two types in terms of the make-up of the brush tips. One kind of brush had pig/hog bristles or synthetic materials like nylon inserted in the center of the tip so as to enhance the elasticity of the brush; the other kinds were made of pure lamb or rabbit fur for its sheer softness.

As the focused part of the investigation, the choice of the masterpieces²⁴ for copying practice was considered vital to the research outcome. Because Chinese

²³ Xuanzhi is a fine white bamboo-pulp laid paper; it is so named because the best quality such paper produced from Xuancheng of Anhui province China. Rice paper is another popular circulated name of it in English.

²⁴ Quite unlike the understanding of the word in English context, in which even a kid can claim his/her playful art work a masterpiece. Masterpiece, in the context Chinese calligraphy and in traditional Chinese art criticism, is a word must be carefully handled. It has few criteria to a masterpiece. First, works tested by time, reputed in history and frequently referred. Second, works created by great masters of calligraphy or other art. Third, rarely being applied to works by contemporary calligraphers and artists.

calligraphy is an historical entity, any attempted insightful analysis of it must be maintained in an historical perspective. Chronologically speaking, there are basically seven stylized script writings in the historic evolution of Chinese calligraphy. Of the seven script styles, the Lishu/clerical script was finally chosen as the first script style to launch the daily practice of calligraphy. The reason for choosing it was because historically the coming of Lishu marked a phenomenal change (departure) from the numerous original pictographic features to the symbolic, a transitional revolution in the history of the development of Chinese script and calligraphy, a great change pronounced the beginning of the modern writing; It is thus known as the Libian/the Li revolution. Another reason for making Lishu as the starting model type was because in terms of the modern writing and its associated 'dogmatic' rules and principles, these had not yet fully developed at the time of Lishu, and the style represented was full of youthful spirit and robust vitality.

The first chosen copying piece was *Wuwei Wangzhang Zhaoshu Lingce/Emperor's Imperial Edict of Wuwei* (plate C1-1). It belongs to a particular group of (script) style named Hanjian/Han wood or bamboo strips. This piece together with others excavated in Wuwei Gansu province China in 1981, are presently in the collection of the Gansu Provincial Museum. 26 wood strips all together, each strip 23.5 cm long and 1 cm wide, around 27 characters on a strip, the average size of the character is about 1 cm, truly small compared to the characters engraved on stone tablets. Study of the content revealed that it had been made during the reign of Emperor Cheng (32-7 B.C.) of the Western Han dynasty. There was no record of the writer, not just for this piece but all those previously and later excavated works of wood or bamboo strips, which also have no indication of the writers. The reasons are not difficult to understand. Firstly, taking this *Emperor's Imperial Edict of Wuwei* as an example, it clearly shows that this wood strip work was in fact a government document, and had been written by a clerk with responsibility; hence no name of scribe is reasonable. Secondly, the polished and processed wood and bamboo strips were the most commonly used materials for writing before the invention of paper. They functioned as indispensable materials for writing, purely for practical purposes rather than artistic pursuit, so in this case anonymity is easy to understand. And thirdly, the later definition of being a calligrapher and the sense of authorship at the time of the Qin and Han dynasty (between 221 B.C.-220 A.D.) had not yet been clearly defined and consciously realized as it was later and is now understood.

The earliest known 'calligrapher' was Li Si (?-208 B.C.), the prime minister of the First Emperor. After the unification of China, he based his calligraphy on the Qin empire (xiao) Zhuan/Qin (small) seal script to modify the diverse script styles of those six kingdoms, and then standardized them into a single uniformed script style – Xiaozhuan/small seal script. In this regard though cliff engravings on top of Mount Tai and elsewhere have been attributed to him, yet Li Si and his contributions largely existed in the form of historical records rather than works of evidence.

This very characteristic of no authorship or being anonymous for practical reasons in fact on the other hand presented a greater visual quality of being 'original'. Meanwhile, these works in general also presented a graceful and elegant style, a style of 'will as one's pleases', that truly revealed a pleasant natural hand writing done by a swift decisive hand. This particular exquisite style and beautiful outlook was later developed naturally into a school called Tie Xue/the study of calligraphy on paper, silk and other soft flexible materials, in contrast to Bei Xue/the study of ink rubbing inscriptions of stone tablets and stone cliffs, that had dominated the calligraphic practice for nearly two thousand years.

The second masterpiece chosen for practice was *Zhang Qian Bei/Zhang Qian Tablet* (plate C1-2). The original stone tablet presently still stands in the Daimiao (temple) of Mount Tai Shandong Province China. Erected in 186 A.D. of the Eastern Han dynasty, the inscriptions on the tablet extol the Governor Zhang Qian's outstanding merits and achievements and express best wishes to his promotion. It is a typical tablet praising merits and virtues. Handed down records say, shortly after the completion of the engraving and erection, the tablet was buried (for certain unclear reasons, possibly the custom at the time?) Not until the early Ming dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.), was it dug out and removed to the Ming Lun Tang (a Confucian school) of Tongping; after several changes of locations, in 1983 it finally settled in the Daimiao, the present location.

The original *Zhang Qian Bei* is 317 cm high and 107 cm wide respectively. The inscriptions on the frontal side are 15 rows of vertically aligned characters, each row contains an average 42 characters, all together 567 characters. The individual dimension of the character is 3.5 cm. *Zhang Qian Bei* had been written and engraved in the Eastern Han dynasty at the time when the development of the Lishu had reached its prime. The present best available ink rubbing inscription of it recorded it being made in the Ming dynasty. And exactly this version is used in the copying practice. The daily copying practice of it had lasted a year and produced a substantial amount of written works, which later were extensively used in the collage experiments.

The third important model piece for copying practice was the ink rubbing copy of the *Dongfang Shuo Hua Zan Bei/Encomium on a Portrait of Dongfang Shuo* (plate C1-3) by Yan Zhenqing; one of the greatest calligraphers in the history of Chinese calligraphy and beyond. The tablet had been written, engraved and erected in 754 A.D. of the Tang dynasty. Presently it is kept in the Lingxian Museum Shandong Province. The monumental stone tablet is 340 cm high and 151 cm wide, with characters vertically aligned in total all together (front surface, two sides and backside) 36 lines, every line containing 30 characters (few lines are less than that), the average dimension of individual character is 5 cm. The major content of inscriptions is written in Kaishu/standard script or regular script, except the top part of the tablet both front and

backside in respectively Xiaozhuan and Lishu as they normally appeared.

Unlike the previous practice of Lishu which was regarded as the beginning stage of the modern writing, the Kaishu as its name clearly indicates, is a model standard form of script in terms of the evolution of the Chinese character/script and especially the writing style; after the Kaishu script no further new styles of script appeared and there were few changes. It is still practiced as it was even today after thousands of years. The Tang dynasty is a time when the Kaishu reaches its maturity and Yan Zhenqing is proudly speaking one of the most remarkable representatives of his time. In practice, the best available ink rubbing copy of the *Dongfang Shuo Hua Zan Bei* used was believed to have been produced between the Song and Yuan dynasties (10th to 14th centuries A.D.). There were not many rubbing copies of it recorded in history; this model piece is now collected in the Palace Museum of Beijing, the other intact (un-cropped. For the convenience of studying, usually a whole rubbing copy of the tablet would be cut into proportional pieces then mounted onto a scroll) ink rubbing copy is presently in the collection of the Beijing Library. Two reasons basically influenced the choice of Yan Zhenqing and his *Dongfang Shuo Hua Zan Bei* in the practice of Kaishu rather than others. One was because Yan Zhenqing was a man of integrity. His profound influence has transcended the category of calligraphy and become a vivid example of the equation of the calligraphic style and one's personality, an ever-lasting role model for such a powerful integration. However, Yan Zhenqing's style, in a conventional sense, hardly can be said to be attractive, usually terms like manliness, unyielding integrity, upright, correct, severe and forceful are applied to his style from his time down to the present day. His style is rarely associated with any sophisticated terminologies such as beautiful, exquisite and the like.

In terms of choosing a model in the arts and particularly in calligraphy, the influential Song scholar official Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072 A.D.) (1986) once explicitly expressed that the choice of one's models should be determined on the basis of their individual character. He especially praised the calligraphy of Yan Zhenqing for what it had manifested of Yan's powerful character. It reads:

‘This man's loyalty and righteousness emanated from his heaven-sent nature. Thus his brush strokes are firm, strong, and individual, and do not follow in earlier footsteps. Outstanding, unusual, and imposing, they resemble his personality.’²⁵ (McNair, 1998)

The other reason to an extent was purely personal. In 2004, with the assistance of Shandong Provincial Museum, I went to Lingxian (called Pingyuan in Yan Zhenqing's time, Yan also being referred sometimes by Pingyuan) and visited the original stone tablet of the *Dongfang Shuo Hua Zan Bei*, now being housed in a pavilion in the courtyard of the Lingxian Museum. The impression was overwhelming and totally beyond description. In addition to that personal experience, the praise of Su Shi (1037-1101 A.D.) for this tablet was also influential in making it the piece for my

²⁵ The translation of the same lines has taken reference from Amy McNair's *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing and Song Literati Politics*.

copying practice. Su Shi is one of my most inspiring literati artists, who once compared Yan Zhenqing's *Dongfang Shuo Hua Zan Bei* with the piece done by legendary Wang Xizhi the calligrapher-sage. He said, even though the size of the two pieces was very different (Yan's writing is Dakai/large standard script, so the size of the character is much larger than Wang's Xiaokai/small standard script) the spirit resonance to its essence was very similar. He further described Yan's style presented in the work as Qingxiong (清雄) literally a combination of lucid, upright, noble and vigorous, grand, firm, forceful, majestic and spirited. The spirited Qingxiong thus became a life long pursuit of Su Shi himself. Deeply inspired by such a quality together with a characterized Confucian noble personality, Su Shi even claimed Yan Zhenqing and his calligraphy 'peerless' throughout the history. (Ding, 1986 and Yu, 1990)

The copying practice of Yan Zhenqing's *Dongfang Shuo Hua Zan Bei* and related self-composed calligraphic practice using Yan's style has occupied nearly two years' time (2004-2005). Spending so long on studying Yan Zhenqing and only one of his many masterpieces, besides the above mentioned, and searching for the motivation, also another two reasons were responsible. The first was purely as a visual, the sheer strength of the individual character and the awesome intact piece of the ink rubbing copy that generates a powerful gravitational force attracting the frequent returning practice. The second was a bit away from the research subject, but an extended serious concern of the traditional definition of 'Xiushen'/self-cultivation, which through the actual practice, the association with such a role model so as to shape both the style of the calligraphy and the individual personality.

The fourth model piece can hardly be categorized as calligraphy if using the traditional definition; it however can be termed under the title - the art of character, in which the calligraphy itself is also being a part. The genuine categorization of the practice is in typography, to be exact, the fourth model piece was a late Qing dynasty printing typeface from a wood block print of *Yi Jing/the Book of Changes* of a Qing dynasty version. (Plate C1-4)

The original formation of the typeface style has a close relation to the styles of the script and calligrapher not least the Tang dynasty Kaishu/standard script style. In handed down Song dynasty printing publications, the style of Ouyang Xun (557-641 A.D.), Yan Zhenqing and Liu Gongquan (778-865 A.D.) had been clearly identified. These three distinguished calligraphers who had been modeled in fact covering the pre-Tang, mid-Tang and later-Tang basically the whole Tang dynasty's Kaishu achievement. Their styles had been taken as models for typeface construction and widely trans-copied by regional printing publications. Notably, publications in Zhejiang province copying the style of Ouyang Xun; Yan Zhenqing's style being modeled by Sichuan province and the style of Liu Gongquan was the style adopted by publication studios of Fujian Province. The Song dynasty, as far as the making of the typeface was concerned, especially the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279 A.D.) was a period that produced the most commonly used printing typeface – Song Ti/Song type named after

the dynasty. That was followed by Fang Song Ti/imitation of Song type in the Ming dynasty; gradually the Song Ti and its affiliated types became the mostly used types in printed materials.

In the nineteenth century, together with the introduction of modern printing technology, Hei Ti a black character type was designed with the invention of the printing press. Chronologically, the Kai Ti, Song Ti, Fang Song Ti and Hei Ti become the four basic printing typefaces appearing in everyday Chinese publications. Among them the Kai Ti, due to its direct relation with calligraphy, is used mainly for printing educational books of elementary level; the Song Ti is widely used for printing the main body of articles in broad areas; the Fang Song Ti is more used for official documents, it is also the chosen typeface practiced in the painting practice of sentence of characters, simply for its sheer visual clarity and high readability; and the Hei Ti commonly appears as newspaper headlines, titles and the like demanding greater attention.

The style of the typeface practiced in this phase was a variation of the Song Ti. Simply looking at it from the appearance, the style type is already far away from the influence of calligraphy in terms of the shape of individual strokes and the construction of characters; it also drew a great distance with the modern day Song Ti, partly due to the classical language/Wenyan used that results in rather an obvious difference in character construction – more complex strokes than the presently simplified version. The choice of this particular version of typeface style was purely because of its visual pleasure (of the way it constructs the characters). Though regularity and rigidity of the printing typeface characterized in general not least comparing with the handwritten calligraphic works, some characters and their elongated strokes and seemingly discrete construction of two characters into one occasionally presents surprisingly a sense of randomizing and liveliness. In addition, the combination of characters engraved in relief and in intaglio also provides an interesting visual contrast on the page.

From a different perspective (of a contemporary Chinese artist rather than a calligrapher), to look at Chinese calligraphy was one of the major concerns of the practice. It is also willing through the actual practice to challenge/examine the traditional aesthetic criticism of calligraphy that upholds the asymmetry and equilibrium in construction and brushwork, especially the emphasis on the brushwork. The criticism by Wang Xizhi (the calligrapher-sage) on the even application of brushwork and the square and regular construction of characters regards it not as calligraphy but merely an assembly of brushstrokes. The critique is so influential and is wholly accepted as doctrine and common understanding of the art. In this phase of practice, I deliberately copy the printed typeface, yet meanwhile consciously study the unique way of character construction and experience the different kind of brushwork rendering, hoping through the practice (apparently from a side angle) to bring something fresh on the calligraphic practice and to develop a style of my own.

Exactly towards the concern of possible development of a new personal writing style, immediately after the periodic study of printing typeface the daily practice of calligraphy was followed by a practice a free writing. In a way it can be seen as a release after years of copying practice in a disciplinary manner. The free writing basically comprised of self-composed lines, reflections, or quotations from classics,

poems, idioms, proverbs, auspicious sayings that often appeared in festival seasons, or anything at hand or that came to mind. The style practiced in its essence is a (un)conscious combination of previously studied styles, yet the construction outlook rested on the printing typeface just investigated with slight borrowing from the Lishu – *Zhang Qian Bei* in particular, the brushwork unmistakable from Yan Zhenqing's upright manner. Frankly, the making of an individual writing style couldn't be achieved by determination of an idea or conception, in the very essence of the practice as long as calligraphy is still a practicing art that demands long term dedications of diligent practice. Yes, bearing in mind that the research practice as a whole is, on the other hand, taken as a process of self-cultivation, a journey of both pursuit of knowledge and no-knowledge, the apparently dialectical tone of contradiction can be clarified by Lau Tzu (1998) in chapter forty eight of *Tao Te Ching*, which reads:

'Learning consists in adding to one's stock day by day; the practice of Tao consists in 'subtracting day by day, subtracting and yet again subtracting till one has reached inactivity. But by this very inactivity everything can be achieved.' Those who of old won the adherence of all who live under heaven all did so by not interfering. Had they interfered, they would never have won this adherence.' (Lau Tzu, 1998:103)

CHAPTER 2

Multiple Examinations and Diverse Experiments

A. Painting Project

The ubiquity of the photographic image and the breakdown of Modernism as a sustaining paradigm, and most importantly the melting down of the barriers between art and life led to a wide variety of explorations and alternative artistic practices. Painting being a traditional, established, main stream 'high art', once an outstanding discipline has been posed an ever greater challenge, not least the announcement of 'abandonment of painting' by Marcel Duchamp and various attempts by the historical avant-garde. Yet, the reason for adopting painting in this research is not intended to answer such a 'historical and critical' argument, but as a matter of fact simply to take it purely as a medium that directly opposes the language expression of Chinese calligraphy, regardless of its loss of contemporary influence and the shrinking of its territory. A Chinese saying tells that a rock found from another mountain may be capable to carve the jade found locally. Nevertheless, if by the end of the project after a series of diversified schematic experiments, the final outcome could in some certain sense produce something 'new' towards those challenges, it would be grateful in terms of its side-produced contribution though it is not the main specified focus in this research. This painting project is divided by three stages, each stage concentrates on examining one or two particular aspects and qualities represented by Chinese calligraphy as an art form and ways of artistic expression, and also as resources for further extensive possible transformative expressions.

STAGE 1

Gesture Painting

Calligraphic brushwork is created by hand gesture, the rhythmic movement by hand and brush directly corresponds to the construction of characters and styles adopted, therefore, in stage 1 the painting project starts from examining the quality of movement, the visual manifestation of the brushstroke and the impulsive spontaneity, which are vividly exemplified in the style of running script and especially in wild cursive script. Two phases of experiments are involved in this stage. Phase 1, reproduction of the masterpieces, methodologically speaking, is an indirect examination, a reflective identification, yet the resulting experience is the same. Here the masterpiece of painting corresponds to the calligraphic masterpieces as a whole; the representational figurative elements correspond to the meaning and literary content of character; the 'wild' interpretation of the representational features corresponds to the aspiration of breaking the bond imposed by the character. Any artist who is working in a realistic or representational style of painting would not disagree with me (honestly speaking) that in many cases the working process is in fact a process of managing the control of the unyielding contradiction between the representational elements of the subject and the freedom of self-expression. Also from a methodological point of view the strategy of reproduction of master pieces is one of the most effective means in terms of immediate engagement with the subject and its method, and has been widely adopted in practice based art education; also the very act of reproduction in its very essence paralleled the essence of the research that is the re-presentation of Chinese calligraphy which in other words could be seen as a presentation of reproduction. The painting practice in Phases 2 is from sketches, drawings and selected photographs of landscape and still life.

PHASE 1

Reproduction of Masterpieces – a Reflective Identification

Painting as a categorical term includes: oil based as oil and enamel paint, water based as tempera, acrylic, watercolor, poster color, emulsion paint and the like; the supports normally are canvas, linen, synthetic fabrics, paper, panel, glass and so on with primed or unprimed surface up to the actual necessity. In this section, experiments are mainly carried out on primed canvases and unprimed papers by oil paint, acrylic, poster color and emulsion paint.

Reproduction of masterpieces: the first such piece was a reproduction of Caravaggio's *the Supper at Emmaus*. The reproduction of the painting had been worked out by oil paint on an unprimed heavy duty paper, size 151 by 134 cm not exactly to the size of its original. The paper was intended to be unprimed for an absorbent surface was required, which is also the quality of rice paper embedded. For making continuous lines

and brushstrokes on a matt unprimed surface especially rendered by brush loaded with oil paints, a medium thinner to help the flow was required. Because the proportional mixed linseed oil within the commercially produced tube of oil paint doesn't necessarily qualify to perform such a task as far as a quick sweeping of brushstroke was concerned, certain technical preparations were necessary before moving onto the actual painting, which was primarily dominated by active gestural movement.

For the thinner, nowadays turpentine is widely employed; however there is a danger of lack of adhesive capacity on the supporting surface and weakening the binding quality of the grains of pigment, if overly thinned or mixed with oil paints. To avoid this, a proportion of 4:6 mixtures were made, 4 portions of turpentine mixed with 6 portions of refined linseed oil (the ratio is from personal experience, subject to variations and to individual preference). Additionally, another type of thinner had been prepared for the possible building up of details after layers of layers brushworks overlapped on top of each other; meanwhile for the purpose of quick drying was needed. The mixture ratio was 3:7, 3 portions of liquin original mixed with 7 portions of turpentine, both mixtures shaken vigorously afterwards in a lid tightly screwed container simply for a thorough mixing. Then, for the oil paints especially those very basic colors like white, black, red, yellow, blue and some secondary hues (the color used on palette at this stage were basic colors on the color wheel, yet along the development especially at stage 2 the use of color became very selective and simplified) were also prepared in advance for individual purposes. Among them the white and black were specially made to meet the alternative thick and thin applications. For instance, if a liquid form of paint was needed, it could be made by simply squeezing the paints into a container then pouring in the mixture of linseed oil and turpentine prepared previously, screwing up the lid then shaking vigorously as for the mixing of thinners before. The proportion of paint and thinner varies according to the degree of fluidity expected. There was also another way of making such quality paint, which was to use the pigment power grind mixing with proportionally dropped linseed oil or a mixture of oil media. The process was relatively traditional and tedious, yet the result proved to be worthy. If a thick slab of paint was needed, which for its opacity, capable of coating or building up of details and textures, that could be made by squeezing required paints on top of used newspapers or other similar absorbent surfaces, leaving it overnight then until the majority of the linseed oil in the paint had been extracted. As for the brush, there was no particular requirement for it except mainly being round tipped instead of flat. But the choice of round tipped brush was only at this stage, because in stage 2 only broad flat brushes were selected for their easy coverage of large flat tonal area and production of desired geometric shapes.

Once all necessary materials for painting were ready, tucking the unprimed paper on a wood panel simply for a solid hard back support was necessary. Randomly picked paints together with thinner quickly mixed on palette, then applied on paper, swiftly outlined the composition and individual characters' basic features, followed by the thinly applied patches of tonal colors to distinguish from one another. (The whole process was completed within minutes; it was one of the major reasons why I made my choice to choose this painting as my first engagement, simply because this Caravaggio

painting is one of my most familiar paintings. The effective engagement and immediate leave taking have been regarded as crucial for the subject examined at this stage.)

The following was the process of modeling that was the true process of examination of the practice. Retaining the basic features of characters of the painting, the manifestation of lines was vigorously tested by bold, passionate gestures with sweeping brushstrokes. The contrast of lines and brushstrokes were consciously rendered at the beginning, such as long and short, large and small, heavy and light, dense and sparse, straight and cursive, wide and thin, bold and weak, continuous and broken and so on. Along the process of building up details and further refinement, layers and layers of paint accumulated on the surface of paper. As a consequence, drawing lines on thick already existing layers of paints demands even quicker application of brush, with the load of paint on brush tip becoming more and more; the uncertainty of such an application tended to be obvious, for the still freshly built layers of paint on the very surface will automatically mix with any foreign paints applied on top of or immediately adjacent to it, creating something interesting or surprising if looking from an open-minded positive view and as well disappointing from another view.

Soon the controlled consciousness of rendering was overtaken by the increasing swift moving of the hand across the surface. The further building up of figural details, the more complex the structure of the brushworks revealed, and increasingly appeared a struggle between the subjects (representational features of the characters of the painting) and the constructing or in other words apparently destructing brushstrokes. The two forces were trying equally to overcome the other and pulling towards each other. It became very interesting to shift the eyes between the original and the reproduction. The quiet mellow scene portrayed by Caravaggio, the intensive eager listening to Jesus' calm preaching bodily presented by his disciples and host, the fine clear-cut detailed modeling suddenly being transformed into a 'violent scene', a 'violent' interpretation by the work of speedy hand gestures and by apparently disordered clashes of brushstrokes (plate C2A-1). The variously constructed speedy brushstrokes on the surface of the paper clearly manifested their very intention by trying to be independent, having their own say and being totally abstract.

There is an obvious major difference between the two media – the medium used by the Chinese calligraphic practice (water based) and the medium used in the practice of the oil painting (oil based). For Chinese calligraphy the whole process of making is a process of adding things up. Once the brush and ink or paints deposit on the surface of paper, it becomes permanent; there are not many possible solutions to get rid of those marks except to abandon or destroy the work itself or simply accept the very fact then try to make use of it. However the making of oil painting in other words is very much like the process of traditional sculpture. The modeling process is not only adding up details but also chiseling away unwilling parts. On oil painting as a medium those unwilling parts can be also either scraped off by palette knife or any other materials at your disposal. Taking this characteristic into account, the oil painting provides greater possibilities than Chinese calligraphy to achieve a desirable/anticipated final effect, and as a result of such an on and off process creates better textures on the surface; whereas, in Chinese calligraphy that is complete flatness.

From the surface level the finished reproduction of Caravaggio's *the Supper at Emmaus* may resemble in some sense William de Kooning's action painting of Abstract Expressionism, not least the 'Woman' series from the early 1950s, of which *Woman and Bicycle* is typical. It is no surprise to connect the similarity and in fact De Kooning's action painting was indeed being taken as a lively reference in this part of the examination. The reason is apparent it having been widely accepted that 'Abstract Expressionism had many sources – Surrealism, Cubism, the early works of Kandinsky; and in some cases even Eastern art'. (Gilbert, 1995:473) This Eastern art in particular as being witnessed by art historians is calligraphy, determined by its historical significance Eastern calligraphy in particular is Chinese calligraphy as a whole and Japanese calligraphy respectively. Comparing to De Kooning's action painting, the major difference between his works and the experimental paintings carried out in the research lies in the difference on the focusing point. Put simply, De Kooning and his action painting is action for the action's sake, yet the reproductive painting in this stage is action for the sake of brushstroke, a purely formal investigation of the manifestation of brushstroke, the very basic elements of art – line (Plate C2A-2).

There might be questions asked as far as brushstroke – line is concerned; why not simply experiment with the very brushstroke itself? Why should I still attach the experiment by keeping the figural elements? To the first question, there is in fact a planned examination of that abstraction of brushstroke, yet it does not necessarily need to be answered in this section. Here I would like to answer the second question first, for it is more immediate than the first question at this stage. The reason for launching the experiment by keeping the representational figurative elements in this part of the investigation, by deploying a totally different medium to calligraphic practice, is to attest to the existing tension and bondage within the contemporary practice of Chinese calligraphy between the use of Chinese character, its literary content or meaning of characters and freedom of formal expression, its sheer abstract quality of visual manifestation. Deliberately avoiding the total abstraction in this painting practice is to attempt to experience the limitation of freedom of expression, the tension between the inward pulling force of representational (semantic aspect in Chinese calligraphy) and outward dragging force of abstraction – the existing contradiction of the dual party. Whether to retain the literary content, meaning of character, the use of characters as major elements in contemporary calligraphic practice or simply abandon it is a dilemma, a dividing line between traditional calligrapher and contemporary calligraphic practitioner who is influenced by modern Western ideas. As Zhang Yiguo (1998) has expressed in his *Brushed Voices*:

'Abandoning the use of characters raises an important question concerning not only the practice but the essence of calligraphy. Calligraphy is an independent genre of art that combines certain general and specific characteristics. General characteristics include the manifestation of lines - continuous and broken, fast and slow, heavy and light - similar to the rhythm of music, the movement of dancing, and the structure of architecture. The particular characteristics involve characters, which introduce a textual dimension of meaning and

thought, marking calligraphy different from other visual arts. Although the aesthetic effect of a work of calligraphy is not determined by the meaning of the characters, excellent work always unites the forms of the characters with their meanings. The main distinguishing factor of calligraphy is its origin in text. Because of this, calligraphy can express feeling more directly and with more precision than other visual arts.' (Zhang, 1998:21)

Many contemporary calligraphic practitioners attempt to transcend the limitations imposed by traditional aesthetics of calligraphic practice. Among these limitations, whether or not to keep or how to deal with the meaning of characters and literary content is notably the major concern which has generated controversy and increasingly become a dividing line between traditional and modern practice. It is believed, on the one hand, that to stick to the emphasis on the meaning of characters, the contemporary practice under the heading of modern Chinese calligraphy would be restrained from being able to claim an aesthetic status of its own to being verbally determined, that results in a consequence of 'old wine remains in an old bottle'. Yet, on the other hand, if the distinctiveness of character's form is abandoned, modern Chinese calligraphy would be no different from Western abstract art. Identification of the existing controversy within the calligraphic practice doesn't mean I will make a decision and take a side between the two above mentioned stances because the position of the research stands outside the calligraphic practice, and the essence of the research is on experimenting with various methodological possibilities for re-presenting Chinese calligraphy as a whole. Notwithstanding, the purposeful reproductive painting experiment at this stage did stick to a certain side, neither right nor left, which might be understood as right in the middle on 'a middle path', simultaneously engaging with two active forces in the hope of working out a synthesis of the two contradictions - representational figurative elements and total abstraction, in calligraphy, they are literary content, meaning of characters and total freedom of formal expression (abstraction).

Long before embarking upon the actual implementation of the reproductive painting experiment, a consciously planned gesture drawing of free hand style had begun. The purpose of the practice was manifold, yet first and foremost to completely free the hand from conscious aesthetic judgment in the process of drawing, later in painting and writing (here the writing refers to calligraphic writing practice, not literary writing); also to capture the feeling of motion. From a methodological point of view it was taken as an accumulation of knowledge and experiences both psychological and physical. Other concerns of the gesture drawing were to destruct the representational forms, to randomly recompose lines, hatchings, non-representational organic and geometric forms, together with group combination of characters either readable or non-readable. The whole process could be characterized as hand goes before mind.

PHASE 2

Painting from Sketches, Drawings and Selected Photos of Landscape and Still Life

The painting practice in this phase was a continuous examination of the contradictory existing tension between the representational/use of characters and the total abstraction/the total freedom of formal expression. Unlike the phase 1 the reproduction of figurative master pieces, the practice could be considered as standing right in 'the middle path' between the tensioned two, in this phase the emphasis of the practice was shifted onto the side of the freedom of formal expression slightly – the abstraction of the brushstroke. The painting from sketches, drawings and selected photos of landscape and still life, technically speaking, wasn't so demanding on the representational matters meanwhile offering much room for alternative expressions compared to that previous practice. Therefore the practice was carried out in a relatively relaxed (comparative) condition.

The painting supports employed were mainly canvas and linen, primed by acrylic gesso, and some uniform colored surface (for use of the colored background in the painting) were purposefully primed by mixing drops of acrylic paints with gesso primer. Though intended to work positively, later practices proved that those colored canvases were not really playing a part in the composition, in fact rather in a sense distracting the attention. The dimensions of the canvas were basically as follows: 89 by 69 cm, 86 by 86 cm and 100 by 81 cm. Also unlike the previous practice where the media was predominately oil painting, in this phase, in order to quickly realize a painting, to shorten the process of making it, to satisfy the increasing eagerness of seeing the final effect, the choice of acrylic had been naturally employed; acrylic and its quality of being quick drying, easily applied and with its semi-glossy final surface and texture all being perfect qualities for the practice. The brush used mainly those broad tipped brushes, capable of loading more paints during application. A palette knife was also used for some destructive purposes to create unexpected scraping off, mixing and textures. The painting started either from taking compositions from the previous sketches and drawings or from those newly finished. Some of them while sketching had already been visualized to possible further development. The pre-warming up exercise of gesture drawings described previously was not just a psychological preparation but also produced a body of works. Meanwhile the media envisaged was painting only. Due to its active nature and less representational bondage on the subject, the painting may turn out to be a total unexpected final effect, the possibilities of changing original plan especially represented at color schemes and compositional structures were very much likely to happen along the course of development.

For instance, in the painting of a Chinese Buddhist temple, (plate C2A-3, 4) initially the overall color scheme was that of basically analogous warm colors of various yellows and reds²⁶ spiced by some limited portions of complementary colors. Comparing the sketch and painting, there still can be recognized that the basic structure of the compositional lines were not completely altered, the changes were only some rather 'arbitrary' details, such as: a little figure/walking out of the front gate, the curly

²⁶ Yellow and red are two primal colors of the Chinese Buddhist architecture.

cloud hovering on the roof of the temple (the similar scene very often appeared, a symbolic auspicious associate, with the Buddhist temple.), the groupings of circular lines gathered at the left hand corner reminiscent of vegetation, also at the right hand corner seemingly a character Tan (壇)²⁷. These details apparently were not found on the painting. I did wonder if I simply put the background information aside, how diverse a reading of the painting would come out. However, on the other hand, in terms of an independent painting, does it really need to be informed by such extra information? It was not absolutely necessary unless someone really wanted to investigate more contextual relations about a painting. As far as a painting is concerned the absolute visual quality is the whole story. In stark contrast to the originally preconceived color scheme the completed painting turned out to be a total opposite color arrangement – a blue greenish color dominated composition with contrasted various reds, whites and black lines. The fact should be positively identified that the painting evolves along the development. The evolution is believed natural and is a further development of the originally preconceived ideas. The dis-encouraging thing is to resist such a change, to be willing to be confined in the so-called ‘original ideas’ and thus become a transformative tool as simple as a work of representation. This is by no means acceptable in this research. To embrace and accordingly adapt, to modify the strategy and means to incorporate the changes that occurred along the research is one of the key characteristics performed throughout the research project.

The painting just described above had undergone two separate steps, the step of compositional study by various sketches, and the step of painting itself. From the methodological point of view, this process of making a painting isn’t a direct engagement and is somewhat rather conservative if referring to some contemporary means of practices. By realizing this, seeking multiple possibilities, I carried out some other experiments in a direct manner, a manner similar to those paintings of automaticism, except still sticking to the fundamental elements of representation. Those paintings were directly working on canvas, with no preconceived ideas of how a composition would be structured and what kind of painting would be produced. Excluding those examples provided by artists of American Abstract Expressionism, here I borrowed Francis Bacon’s ways of dealing with canvas and his directness of painting method (plate C2A-5).

The primed canvas was stretched in reverse, and then I painted directly on the cotton fabric, the reverse side of the canvas. Unless the brush was heavily loaded with paints or the paints had been mixed with substantial thinner, the brushstroke tended hardly to be applied. The unprimed raw cotton surface was simply too absorbent, too resistant to easy play of the brush. However, once the surface had been covered by a thick or thin layer of paints, the following applications tended to be smoother. With the mind virtually blank before starting the painting, together with the encountered material freshness, though the application of brushstrokes and colors were quite free in the manner, there was in fact a looming uncertainty immediately before. The uncertainty of detachment and its possible step towards purely formal – a practice that was for the sake of the brushstroke only. From the position of the practice this possible detachment

²⁷ The Tan/壇, an altar usually built of earth or masonry, on which enacts religious preaching or opening ceremonies.

represented not just the gradual elimination of representational references but also the possible abandonment of the very content in calligraphy – the characters. But the thing is no matter how abstract the brushstroke appears individually in calligraphy no single brushstroke is meaningless.

After some experiments on the same approach, the practice switched back to the two-step working process. The divided working process methodologically distributed the share of the focus. The first step of sketch study was concentrated on the various structures of composition, contrasts of all sorts of lines, details, envisaging possible final effects, and also a preparation of psychological accumulation for later actual painting. Having all the necessary preparations accomplished in the first step the painting process needed only to concern the matter of painting in the second step. This two-step working process proved by later actual practice is both effective and productive.

STAGE 2

Painting of Image and Characters & Words

Stage 2 painting of image and characters & words.²⁸ I attempt to examine the very visual relationship between image and characters & words through painting. Reflecting the idea that calligraphy and painting are derived from the same generic origin, and the 'literati painting' exercised by traditional Chinese scholars and literati-artists where image and text share the same emphasis in composition. I also attempt to create a lively example of the incorporation of image and characters in one picture plane through painting with the adoption of the Postmodernism attitude in general, as in the context of contemporary art practice. Meanwhile, I examine the appropriation of words and syntax from mass media especially graphic design and advertisement and at the same time identify the critical pressure from the mass media up onto the traditional 'high art form' - painting. This stage is comprised of two sequential phases.

PHASE 1

Construction of an Integrated Painting Surface

Phase 1 was intended to construct an integrated painting surface with certain limited depth, on which the image and characters & words were arranged equally compatible in their visual textural quality. To be equal in compositional proportion, to be equal in plasticity, to be equal in visual impact, and by such efforts to finally achieve the negation of the hierarchic relationship represented by many practicing arts as illustration, graphic design, commercial advertising and so on by means of painting. In the process of making image and characters & words into an integrated picture plane, work had to be done by compressing the depth and roundness of image and at the same time enhancing the thickness, depth and plasticity of characters & words.

The whole experiment started from sketching a compositional study, arranging the images, characters, words, phrases and dates and the like into a visually balanced composition. Images in composition normally taking its traditional central position as the focal point; characters and words arranged either superimposed on top of the image or on each other or overlapped by it, which resulted in several layers of picture plane. The free hand style drawing was employed here solely for the purpose of working out of a lively composition and freely applying lines that were exemplified by roughly outlined image and characters & words, and while deliberately avoiding any skillful refinement both in the structure of composition and individual details. The detailed works were left to be refined on canvas after the draft composition was decided. From a technical and practical point of view, it would be better to have these forms plastically

²⁸ Characters here refer exclusively to Chinese characters, texts; words refer only to English words and letters.

settled than leave them to be tackled afterwards on canvas. Such a decision if speaking positively would lead to an openness, an opportunity of new forms of variation along the course of painting, whereas if speaking negatively it would step in to field of uncertainty and a great degree of possible delay of processing due to the very nature of the medium chosen for the experiment – oil painting. Nevertheless, standing from the position of the research it is as a matter of fact intended to do so. Moreover, the transfer of such compositional sketch (plate C2A-6) onto canvas was also done by free hand drawing, deliberately embracing the possible variations during the process of transfer especially the size matter – the enlargement of small scale sketchy lines into occupying large areas on canvas, which normally demands more details and accuracy to fill those empty spaces. Among the series of paintings in this phase, the characters & words were all drawn by hand with no particular reference to any specific type of typefaces or styles of scripts, avoiding influence by their indicative styles. The free hand construction of characters & words was both for their compositional function and for their visual quality of plasticity as apparently challenged and contrasted by image.

As mentioned above it was canvas that was used for the painting in this section. The canvas was conventionally processed – stretched on a beveled stretcher and primed by three layers of handmade fishbone glue (jelly form) and two layers of gesso, sanded occasionally between each section of priming for the required smooth surface. The brush wasn't strictly selected as at phase 1, yet use of a broad and flat tipped brush became obvious in the development of the experiments. The medium oil used was the mixture of liquin original and turpentine, the ratio varied compared to the previous one at stage 1, where 4 portion of liquin original were mixed with 6 portions of turpentine, the increasing volume of liquin was for its capacity of even quicker drying and easy building up details and textures.

The color scheme at first few paintings presented by two systems of expressions, which the images were basically representational rely heavily on the materials referred; whereas the characters & words were more arbitrary, applied simply according to the overall tonal color and compositional necessity, in other words quite spontaneous. Not very long after, the two systems of expression were unified by the natural abandoning of representational color elements from the image. As a consequence of quantitative accumulation of experiments, the unification of the language of expression both in plasticity and in color scheme became gradually obvious in the following practice. The actual encounters after entering the process of painting on canvas were beyond anticipation, notably the uncertainty and repeated articulation and correction of those 'missing' parts and details. Indeed, the deliberate planned situation created vast opportunities for doing repeated works, owing to the repeated clarification and modification of details in particular and the composition as a whole; the physical building up of layers of paints (too) created an interesting (natural) texture across the painting surface, and also realized the envisaged plastic quality of the characters & words both physically and visually.

The actual techniques of enhancing the plasticity and visual thickness of characters & words in painting (plate C2A-7) were implemented as such: a) Building up texture. b) Continuous modification and repeated refinement. c) Repetition of outlines/contours. d)

Choice of colors. On the color chart, most of the earthen colors are relatively more stable than the rest, on the color value scales the shades are more stable than the tints, also the less saturated colors are more stable than those of highly saturated, in fact there is a very useful and effective way to make color visually stable and 'thick' that is simply to mix with a neutral color like gray. At stage 3 the use of a wide range of grayish colors was largely implemented. e) Style of typefaces, though the composition and details outlined by free hand drawing were intended to avoid the influence of any particular styles of script and typeface, yet there were actually some styles that had been taken as reference. Such as: Heiti/bold black, Weibei/Wei stele script, clerical script, Gill Sans, Impact, Lucida Sans Unicode, Arial Black, Franklin Gothic Medium and the like.

Compared to the plasticity of characters & words, the reduction of the depth of image (plate C2A-8) was relatively less difficult because of great volumes of master pieces could be taken as references, from both East and West, main stream and folk or aboriginal arts, finished or unfinished pieces. The implemented measures were as follows: a) Choice of broad and flat tipped brush. b) Application of thoroughly blended or mixed paints in order to create a neutralized muted tone. c) Bringing in the elements and especially the color schemes from decorative art, folk art and contemporary commercial art so as to draw certain distance from the representational elements. d) Elimination of fine details and extraneous parts by flat areas of uniform color application. e) Incorporation of angular geometric shapes and forms to replace those of organic naturalistic forms and shapes.

PHASE 2

Lin's Visual Documentation File

Phase 2 was working on the achievements attained in phase 1 though the emphasis of concentrated problems varied. It was in fact a sequential continuous further development of phase 1. In phase 1 the painting experiment had been naturally very much attached itself to consciously retain and utilize the characteristics and qualities of painting – the fully developed outstanding medium. Whereas by arriving at phase 2 the consciousness of the medium apparently receded to the back stage, and the increasing concern was handed over to the overall color schemes, the sleekness of final finish, the easy relation between images and characters & words, and most importantly the willingly planned direct association with contemporary stylized iconic poster designs and magazine covers, such as *ELLE* (here the Chinese version is referred to greatly) – the vivid example of play of image and characters & words. The willing association with *ELLE* was regarded and implemented as a methodological examination for the sake of the research rather than a simple surface representation. It was by all means intentional. In phase 2, it was attempted to identify the very contemporaneity represented by the interplay of image and characters & words on a flat surface. Appropriation and randomizing were employed as media devices in this section (the

same approaches were later greatly manifested in collage practices). Unlike phase 1, in phase 2 the practice of compositional sketch and anything as such had eliminated. The abandonment of any mechanical preparation at an early stage of individual experiment was intended to avoid any interference possibly projected by a fixed directive idea – a pre-conditioned blueprint, which would as believed compromise one of the crucial medium devices deployed – randomizing.

The major painting experiments carried out in this section stick to oil painting, for the sake of keeping a rational continuity of the research. The series of paintings were practiced under a single theme titled – *Lin's Visual Documentation File*. Images and characters & words appropriated in this series were in fact all taken from a resources file that has been consciously accumulated since the beginning of the research. The consciously built imagery and character & words bank was mainly from everyday circulated mass media including newspapers, magazines, posters, book covers, illustrations, comic books, TV programs and from snapshots of street advertisements, sign posts, propaganda slogans, graffiti and many other banal entities that bore exciting images and characters & words. Materials were kept in diverse forms ranging from physical materials as such: cut out newspapers, magazines covers, pages of books, rolls of posters, commercial promotion leaflets, entertainment adverts, photographs both collected and self-made (this part of the collection had placed great support on 2D collage experiment not least at its early stage), to virtual materials such as: scanned, digitized photographic images and characters & words of the above mentioned and snapshots of anything related. These virtual materials, because they were all digitized and kept in hard and portable disks, therefore became much more easily available. This easy access later increasingly functioned as the major resource bank for the painting project and especially for digillage practice.

Two series of canvases were prepared and used in this section. They were 80 by 100 cm and 89 by 116 cm, which was intended to roughly match the *ELLE* magazine's standard proportional size: 21.4 by 27.4 cm. This rough match was intentional, for exactly to such a slightly miss of the correct proportion in its larger format so as to literally avoid a possible criticism of enlarged copy or reproduction of its original – a representational trap unwillingly to fall, therefore the proportional enlarged canvas is 'similar' to its original but not the 'same' though slightly. The choice of range of color was very selective in this phase. A limited palette was employed, predominately neutral colors not least wide range of grayish hues. Unlike the previous phase which was a transition from representational impressionistic color to local color, this section basically employed an interpretive color together with monochromatic and analogous color schemes (plate C2A-9). By adopting such a kind of color scheme, a subdued, tranquil atmosphere was attempted, in a way to represent the currently harmonized relationship between images and characters & words. It was also a practical concern to create contrast to textured paintings in phase 1 and also to violent gestural application of brushstrokes characterized in stage 1.

For a clear identification of the series, a large word FILE was placed at the top of each composition (plate C2A-10), intended, making great resemblance and sometimes generating confusion at first glance, because it was very easy to read FILE into *ELLE*,

normally caused by the partial overlapping of frontal images. Oriented by the medium device – randomizing, the choice of images and characters & words were purely determined by the mood at the time, working along the consciousness stream. Nevertheless the underlying informational relationships between image and characters & words were intertwined, no contradiction and conflict both from its verbal and visual elements, but only complementary to each other especially intended visually. As mentioned above no pre-compositional sketches were undertaken in this phase, hence, after certain selection of compositional components, these image and characters & words were tracing copied by permanent water-proof marker onto sized transparencies, sizes varying from piece to piece for easy manipulation of positions on the projector plain; then piece by piece projected onto distanced vertically positioned canvas. The final composition as a process worked out through continuous changing of positions of individual pieces by tracing copy on projector plain, also the distance between the projector and canvas, for a proper size was required. The whole working process only stopped when the intuitive aesthetic judgment (partly from the training received previously and partly from the practical knowledge accumulated, and also most importantly from the intended application of the law of chance, which normally would produce something surprising) reached its visual satisfaction.

Owing to the structural nature of the outlined transparencies of image and characters & words, along the development of the transfer onto canvas, increasingly, complex structure of lines appeared which sometimes kept shifting position across the projected canvas, and by juxtaposition overlapped on top of each others, which simply created lines of matrix. Following the settlement of composition both on projector plain and on the surface of canvas, using pencil, charcoal or brush loaded with thinned oil paints to outline the detailed components – web of interlaced lines. Purely from the concern of formulating an effective working process, using Photoshop to manipulate those compositional components (images and characters & words from the resource bank), working out a complete composition ready for transferring onto canvas would be in many cases much easier and much effective. But in practice why leave this apparent effective method aside instead of a tedious mechanical processing, which in a way was very much like the studio practice before introducing computer technology and its related means of contemporary practice. In fact, the reason for employing such a relatively old studio technique in this section's experiment was simply to subvert the obvious fullness in form and color represented by individual compositional parts and the whole. The logic wasn't difficult to understand, that if using such 'finished digital images' as the 'original', then reproduced on canvas, the whole process would by all means be reduced down to simply a process of representation. Whereas, the physically involved series of tracing and outlining the images and characters & words, besides the degree of variations and alterations naturally developed along the transfer, the emptiness within the enclosed structure of contours in fact provided suggestive spaces for various possible interpretive 'reproductions' or say 'presentations' or 'manipulations' instead of a simple act of 'representation', which I was unwilling to incorporate.

Though a limited palette and choice of monochromatic and analogous color

schemes were characterized in this section, yet there were actually no particular selective choices on type of canvases (coarse or smooth, primed or unprimed, primed with color or not), brushes and medium oils. They were all determined by actual necessity at the time and availability prepared previously. Unlike phase 1, focused experiments on compressing the depth of the images and simultaneously on enhancing the visual plasticity of characters & words (which have been achieved); the focus was shifted to the harmonious relationships between image and characters & words on the very painting surface, which realized by controlled neutralized color schemes and a relatively linear approach. The characters & words simply retain their generic nature of flatness with no additional manipulations on textural enrichment, only the work of reducing the depth of the images was continued, yet not painstakingly as in the previous phase, but rather engaged in a kind of natural rendering. It is the continuous quantitative accumulation of painting practices on the same focusing point that was regarded as the key benefit of the experiencing of the psychological and physical compatibility of hand and mind.

STAGE 3

Painting of Characters

Stage 3 painting of characters was to examine the visual structural quality of character/s and sentence of characters by means of painting. One of the major motivations of this research is inspired by the strong visual impact manifested by Chinese calligraphy as a whole and the structural complexity represented by Chinese characters in particular. The medium for this stage's painting practice decided upon was oil painting instead of other water based media. The reasons were manifold, basically: flexibility of the oil medium, the extensive collections of techniques that were capable of creating a wide range of special effects on a surface, direct contrast with the Chinese calligraphy both culturally (Eastern and Western) and technically (water based and oil based), the knowledge and experience of handling the oil medium, and so on.

Throughout the whole of stage 3, one principle was upheld and consciously implemented that no matter what a complex structure of those brushstrokes might be and no matter how complicated the surface texture and effects were created, the possible readability of the characters should be retained. Three sequential phases can be conveniently marked out to describe the practice. Working on basically just one character was the major characteristic of phase 1; in phase 2, using two or more characters in the style of wild cursive script was the obvious feature of the work; painting sentences of characters in a selected typeface style usually quotations from *the Analects*, *Tao Te Ching*, enlightening popular proverbs and some self-composed lines was the experiment in phase 3.

Painting supports were standard processed and primed canvas and linen. The canvas dimension included 40 by 40 cm, 71 by 56 cm, 120 by 60 cm, 120 by 100 cm. Brushes used were all relatively larger brushes with flat broad tips, which I purposefully chose for the glazing application executed especially in phase 1 and phase 2. A limited palette was employed in the practice with only primal colors used; they were red, yellow, blue, black and white. The narrowing down of the choice of colors was not totally deliberate, but rather as a matter of the development of a natural convergence to the focusing point after other stages' extensive colorful experiments. The focusing point was the characteristic quality of Chinese calligraphy – simplicity. Besides other techniques, the glazing technique had been greatly applied in the practice of phase 1 and 2. To ensure a proper glazing a medium mixture had to be prepared in advance to handle the task. Not just to keep the capability to flow freely and the characteristic of transparency but also the capability of quick drying and a strong binding quality to hold the thin layer of glazing with the painted surface underneath.

The medium mixture was a proportional mixing of purified turpentine, refined linseed oil and Wingel of Winsor & Newton (a gel form quick drying glazing medium). Among the three the quality of the turpentine chosen was crucial for it occupied the largest portion in the medium mixture. (I must say that this medium mixture itself and the following ratio proportion were made exclusively for this particular practice based

on personal experience, it was in a way rather specific and personal. The proportion may vary from person to person depending on the actual situation and personal preference.) The ratio proportion was as such: 6:3:1, it was 6 portions of turpentine mixed with 3 portions of Wingel and 1 portion of linseed oil (adding linseed oil was for the consideration of its elasticity and thickness, it may cause a certain delay of the drying time, yet it was deliberately added to balance the percentage of quantity of the turpentine.) Then as in previous stages, tighten the lid and shake vigorously so as to reach a thorough mixing. As far as the quick drying was concerned, another medium was also used to make impasto brushstrokes and textured surface. It was Oleopasto of Winsor & Newton, the gel form medium used rather freely, simply mixing with wanted paints then applied. All canvases were prepared primed white – pure white for achieving a better glazing effect. Alongside those materialistic preparations, sketches were made partly for making sure of the composition, partly and most importantly for the structure of the characters. Meanwhile photocopies and tracing copies of selected sentences of characters were also prepared for the practice in phase 3.

PHASE 1

Painting of Character

Phase 1 painting of character was focused on the (visual) structural quality of a single character. Those characters were randomly picked from commonly circulated auspicious expressions that especially appeared at the seasons of festival like the Spring Festival, such as: Fu (福)/luck, happiness, blessing and good fortune (plate C2A-11), and Chun (春)/spring, liveliness and the like. Based on the sketches, the painting was directly working on the canvas. Yet, contrary to the direct manner characterized by many artists of Abstract Expressionism and some other European painters whose painting subjects were calligraphic configuration related, the painting process here was an indirect and classical one. The mixed paints were thinly applied on the white surface; the whiteness of the background surface was the guarantee for the expected glazing effect on its top. Therefore the white paint mixed with a large portion of Oleopasto was extensively applied as under-painting for partial correction of unwanted details and for partial yet rather important whitening of the negative background. Besides that technical consideration, the work rested heavily on the formal structure of the single character and its visual impact. To avoid tedious repetition and lack of variation, the strategy of overlapping had been employed. For example, in painting Chun (plate C2A-12), the final structure of the character now presented was in fact from a series of overlapping three script writing styles, notably the standard, clerical and wild cursive. Due to the figurative concern of the painting as a whole, some detailed parts of these stylized scripts had been modified again and again so to build up an integrated new structure of the same character. Though there were changes in details, the complex structure of the same character produced by overlapping of its various selves in different writing styles has been manifested impressively enough.

The background of the painting had been repeatedly under-painted by thick white paint mixed with Oleopasto, and repeatedly glazed by another layer of evenly mixed thin red color on the top. The repetition of the same process was at the time hoping to achieve a bright, semi-transparent red color with subtle variations on the painting surface, and also as a whole to create an even greater contrast with the black brushstrokes. In addition, as a consequence of the repeated whitening under-painting and glazing, a subtle gradation of tones had been produced, which appeared not only on the background, but also on some parts of the strokes that had been deliberately coated by a thin layer of glazing paints. The black colored character thus became apparently interlocked with the background, rather than simply as a startling contrast of a solid black against a uniform red. If so this would be more similar to those Big Character Posters practiced in the Cultural Revolution and presented in commercial advertising. As far as the painting medium was concerned, it had been intended to positively present the characteristic features of painting rather than anything else. The color combination in this painting used only two fundamental colors – red and black (in fact, there was also great involvement of the impasto white during the process of under-painting, only being fully covered later.) I say fundamental because the two colors are the colors used customarily in the seasons of the festival of China which appeared especially on antithetical couplets.

PHASE 2

Painting of Characters

In phase 2, the number of characters in a composition had been increased; manipulation of two or more characters became a common feature of the practice. The style of the character writing was predominantly the style of wild cursive script. Compared individually with the way 'writing' (in fact painting) the characters on canvas in phase 1, the present phase was more direct and straightforward. However, looking at the whole process of execution, the two phases still share a lot in common. Furthermore, the examinations carried out in stage 1 gesture painting were also continued, except the previous execution was of the figurative reproductions and the present practice was of 'abstract' characters. Though oriented by the spontaneous movement, the final finish of the painting was still expected to be actually textured and visually thick; the rich and strong visual thickness was particularly focused, and hoping to be achieved. Common experience suggests that in actual painting practice it is hard to achieve both a tangible surface texture and a visual thickness by quick brush application without repeated work and re-work on the subject. The oriented examination and the final effect of the practice was an obvious contradiction. As far as the textured surface was concerned, it wasn't practically difficult to obtain; it could be made as early as at the time of preparing the canvas by simply using a coarse primer or adding things available like sand or sawdust. A similar technique had been used in some other experiments, but not in this practice. The texture created in this phase was intended to be a natural result of the repeated

working process. It was the spontaneous way of quick writing/painting on the canvas that challenged the production of the rich and strong visual thickness.

Taking the work plate C2A-13 as an example, it started from randomly picking up characters from previous preparations, (sometimes, using the dictionaries of calligraphy to decide the characters and particular script style) then quickly writing them onto the canvas with brush heavily loaded with paints. Because of the quick drying medium used in the practice, not very long, after normally a day or two, the paints would dry solid. A thick layer of glazing paints would be evenly applied on its surface, the written characters hence being coated underneath with only a blurred structure of brushstrokes showing through. I waited for it to dry then as in the beginning, wrote quickly again on the already layered canvas. The way I got the brush to write was basically to follow the one line drawing that the brush remained drawing on the surface from the start to the end, the characters literally connected by this undulating brushing line.²⁹ Yet, along the drawing of the brush, corresponding to the meaning of the characters and their individual structures, the brush had been consciously running in a rhythmic way, represented by holding and pressing hard or light on the brush so as to create firm, solid, stable lines and lines of light, soft and loose. Though the word 'consciously' is stressed in the description, the fact was everything happened in a matter of seconds, totally a work of intuitive natural response. The work might go on or simply stop here if I was satisfied with the linear quality produced and the textures underneath. However, in the actual practice, the process normally would be repeated again and again until the factual texture and the visual thickness finally matured. Together with the painting of the characters that kept the basic readability of characters, there were some painting experiments that used those cursive elements to portray a calligraphic configuration reminiscent to those natural scenes. An example is shown in plate C2A-14, a scene of a fire in the open wilderness, with two flames jumping up in a lively way against the thickly textured dark blue sky.

PHASE 3

Painting of Sentence of Characters

Along the sequential development of the painting of characters, one of the characteristic features of the practice was the obvious increasing number of characters involved. In this phase the selected quotations from ancient Chinese classics and proverbs became major representative subjects and materials. The classics were notably, *the Analects*, *Tao Te Ching* and fables of ancient Chinese. Besides the numeric increase, unlike the previous two phases that emphasized the calligraphic brushworks, the characters practiced in this phase were focused on the printing typefaces, in particular on their characteristic regularity, uniformity and standardization, yet using a total painterly

²⁹ The technique once adopted and practiced by the Chan Buddhists as one of the means for concentration and enlightenment, later being elevated by some Japanese practitioners of the Zen sect to a ritualistic practice.

approach. To intentionally retain the painterly approach and its basic feature, the concern was not only to give a full play to the painting medium but also to draw a certain distance from some contemporary artists and their practices on texts, which in short bore too many conceptual indications and commercial qualities, and also distance from those Big Character Posters which proliferated in the Cultural Revolution of China.³⁰

Further from the previous phases' already limited palette, the color scheme was monochromatic and only black and white. There was no specific preference on the choice of the kinds of white on the oil paint; however, there was a conscious selection of the kinds of black oil paints used in the practice. Among the three basic black oil paints, only the ivory black and the mars black were used in the painting. The reason was purely visual; with these two blacks their color tendency is basically warm in general, and their mixing with white produces a pleasing shade of warmish grey. On the contrary, the lamp black was consequently excluded from the choice for its visual coolness especially after mixing with white.³¹ Taking the painting plate C2A-15 as an example, the canvas dimension is 120 by 60 cm, the actual work started first from the selection of the sentences for the composition. There were, as described earlier, already collections of enlarged photocopies of quotations from *the Analects*, *Tao Te Ching* and fable stories, whose contents are all in short and concise form. The one used in this painting is from the thirteenth paragraph of book seven of *the Analects*. It reads as this: 子在齐闻韶，三月不知肉味，曰：不图为乐之至于斯也。（When he was in Ch'i the Master heard the Succession, and for three months did not know the taste of meat. He said I did not picture to myself that any music existed which could reach such perfection as this.) The collections of these quotations were not simply photocopied from the original lines, yet in fact were re-typed in a chosen typeface style named 新宋体/Xin Song Ti/new Song style (one of the most popular typeface styles used in Chinese publications, it is, to a certain extent, very similar to the Times New Roman in English typography.) They were then printed out and photocopied in the due proper enlarged size ready to be used. After being chosen for painting, they were tracing copied on transparency by black water-proof marker and later projected onto the canvas. Contrary to this rather mechanical process, there were a few attempts to directly write and paint the chosen sentence of characters with the choice of typeface style on the canvas. But the work turned out not just to be the excessive extending of the working process, but also hardly the required visual regularity, uniformity and standardization were to be achieved, which tended to be unexpected series after series over-paintings so as to have them in an aligned outlook. Back to the original predetermined working process, these projected characters were outlined by pencil or by charcoal stick or by brush depending on the size of the characters and the complexity of the structure of strokes.

In opposition to the accepted visual mind-set, which were the normally positive

³⁰ The similar approaches, i.e., the presenting manner of the Big Character Poster, had been extensively practiced by some artists in 1980s. One of the outstanding figures was Wu Shanzhuan and his *Red Hummer – Big Character Poster*, made and installed in 1986, Hangzhou, China.

³¹ The oil paints used in this practice are a long established Chinese brand called Marie's. It has been noticed that the naming of individual oil paint varies from manufacturer to manufacturer.

black-colored printed characters or words against the negative white blank background, the relation between accustomed positive characters and negative spaces had been reversed in this painting; an intentional attempt reminiscent of the effect of the ink rubbing inscriptions of stone tablets. The actual engaged painting began from the negative background with brush loaded with thin wash of black oil paint. The usually conceived background was no longer treated in the conventional sense, hence became as much painted 'figure' as the positive subject. It was very much unlike the previous two phases that could be characterized as a series of under-paintings and over-paintings together with thickly textured surface. The present painting practice was carried out by the repeated building up of layer after layer of thinly diluted black and white paints. Hardly any factual textures accumulated on the surface, though the process of adding up was repeated countless times. Such a repeated glazing like application was deliberately intended to achieve an overall translucent appearance, and to create and to experience the direct contrast with previous experiments, to avoid the solid uniform even application of paint, which the finished work might present too clear-cut in details and as simply as an enlarged printed page. Above all, the quality of being painterly and related characteristic features of the painting had been consciously retained in this practice, the same quality also upheld running throughout the painting experiment in this research.

B. Collage Project

The collage project was carried out by three interrelated sequential stages. Incorporating various materials and different approaches, stage 1 was mainly working on two dimensional supports, such as: canvas, wood panel and glass pane and the like. Stage 2 was working on diverse objects, for example: plaster figure, plate, bottle, box, stool, plastic mask, fruit and many other easily found ordinary objects. Digillage was the 'word' used to characterize stage 3 when the collage project was carried out by using computer techniques. The digillage is a hybrid word of digitalization and collage that is especially created to describe the experiments in this stage.

STAGE 1

Collage on Canvases, Wood Panels and Glass Panes

Stage 1 collage on canvases, wood panels and glass panes characterized by two distinctive yet interrelated processes: one was the process of additive³²; the other was a combination of the process of additive and subtractive.

The Process of Additive

PHASE 1

Multiple Incorporations

Phase 1 was to examine the visual relationship between broken calligraphic written pieces and diverse two dimensional materials, using a comprehensive technique that was basically a combination of techniques of painting, of collage and partly of furniture varnishing. Incorporation of painting and its associated techniques into collage experiments at first wasn't purposefully intentional. It started, to be frank, from utilizing some 'unsuccessful' painting experiments. As far as a support surface for pasting pieces was concerned, the use of abandoned 'unsuccessful' paintings immediately involved in collage practice was a matter of availability. However, the actual utilization of painting as support didn't mean a wholesale acceptance; in fact, a selection had been made especially on the medium used. Working on an already painted surface, the chances of possible integration or rejection of different materials was a matter considered in advance, not least working on stretched canvases, which would be very much affected by water based adhesive agents applied over the top of (the continuous expansion while being soaked and contraction after becoming dry would result in a compromise of the quality of adhesion and the integration between the supporting surface and fragmented layers building up on its top or adjacent, especially if the medium used were different, notably oil based and water based). Hence, and above all, only those paintings done by water based acrylic, poster color or emulsion paint were chosen to take this new round of transformation. Moreover, in actual selection only those of relatively smoother surfaces were qualified.

Being a crucial mediator to hold pasted pieces and ground support together, the adhesive agent used was emulsified adhesives, widely available at college stores and at any DIY section of most supermarkets. It has a simple name – white glue, named after its whitish color. The original condition of white glue is too cloggy to be applied directly; therefore it is proportionally diluted with water as necessary. The actual ratio

³² The appropriation of the terminology of additive and subtractive process from photography might cause some degrees of confusion, yet the use of the two expressions were purely for their basic meaning/denotation of 'characterized or produced by addition' and 'able or tending to remove' respectively, nothing else.

proportion is subject to personal preference and also to the materials ready to be pasted, for instance, the thick glossy surface and those of less absorbent prints would demand more proportions of glue. Yet in this experiment, the major materials were calligraphic works written on 'rice paper' that is very flexible, thin even to the normal standard and very absorbent to its nature. Meanwhile, taking into account other incorporative materials, a ratio mixture of 4:6 was formulated and mostly used in the practice, which was 4 portions of white glue mixed with 6 portions of water, and then shaken vigorously for a thorough mixing. A recommended shake before using it every time, for some branded glues would separate between glue and water, the glue normally resting at the bottom whereas the water staying on the top.

For the collage experiment, the materials used for pasting were from various sources: first and foremost from the works out of the daily calligraphic practice; secondly from a gradually collected wide range of two dimensional materials, such as: handwritten notes, photocopies of calligraphic master pieces and related materials such as library withdrawals, free promotion leaflets, supermarket catalogues, used newspapers, magazines, posters, letters and anything bearing interesting images and characters & words and suitable to be pasted on painted canvas and thirdly, materials that had been consciously preserved and processed from time to time along the studio practice. For instance, having those randomly selected paper materials to be soaked in a container, to be dyed by adding drops of color, or by carelessly dripping ink or various paints, which was normally carried out during the break of working on other things; on those large quantity of calligraphic written pieces and some other paper works (i.e., photocopies and prints) simply had them twisted and scattered on the studio floor in order to collect foot prints, dusts, splashes of inks and spills of paints. Working on a painted canvas (plate C2B-1), the overall tonal color, looking positively, provides a suggestive color scheme and an interactive background to work with. Yet if looking negatively at the colored background that distracts the initial concentration, in other words, it restrains or preconditions the free application. Notwithstanding, in all, along the course of experiments the experience of the role played by the colored canvas has been positive, and in many cases brought more interesting inspirations and variations.

With the readiness of all necessary physical materials, the psychological preparation for getting engaged when the painted canvas was lying on the center of the studio floor, unlike preparing all kinds of physical materials that were characterized as a process of accumulation – adding things up, the psychological preparation of pacing around the flatly-rested canvas was in fact an attempt to detach, to ignore any direct information, to simply empty any preconceived ideas before actual engagement, which could also be characterized as a process of detachment – giving things out. By such a rather contemplative or say meditative preparation I hoped to react purely by intuitive response, to reach and experience a spontaneous working process and finally produce work equivalent to those works out of the law of chance, and represent purely the time of making – a localness rather than an internationally agreeable one. The actual pasting of torn pieces onto canvas was simply one after another led by the development of fragmented composition. Even though effort was made to empty the mind at the very beginning of the practice, yet the previous training, knowledge on principles of design

and many other long accumulated forces of inertia did surprisingly present themselves in one way or another. Following the further development of the actual practice, interestingly I noticed that the conscious trying of giving out those 'long established things' had gradually been replaced or correctly speaking been forgotten totally. Consciously doing things changed into unconscious passionate engagement from which the free expression naturally developed.

In terms of composition, at first, the painted canvas played a part of it, which contributed both variations of patches of color and the overall development of the color scheme. However, along the course of development, the functioning 'influence' of the painted canvas became increasingly less significant and finally was reduced to being as simple as a textured colorful surface only. Spanning the whole collage experiments in phase 1, a technique used frequently by oil painting of classical style, ceramic and furniture varnishing was employed in the working process, which is glazing. The glazing was carried out once or twice in the middle of the process, other execution dependent upon the factual necessity but normally at the final stage that performed both as unification of tonal color and also as a protecting varnish. The application of glazing especially the one in the middle of the collage was in fact a series of applications, rarely just one layer. Usually, a very thinly diluted mixture of brownish acrylic color was evenly spread on the surface. One of the significant results was a relatively uniform appearance, and a look of an aging surface (plate C2B-2), with no intention to make it in any sense a new look. It was exactly to this latter result that the glazing was attempted. So far, this hardly gives a full explanation of that motivated intentionality at that time. Notwithstanding, the 'artificially' attained aging appearance after a series of glazing at different levels did create a visible subtle variation of superimposed layers of juxtaposed fragmented surface.

Due to the fragmentation of individual torn pieces, the compositional layout usually tended very much to be disconnected. As a matter of building up connections between randomly scattered pieces across the surface and creating possible variations on visual effect, measures such as splashing, dripping, pouring inks and liquid paints were extensively manipulated (plate C2B-3), which was quite similar in its very action to Jackson Pollock's ways of application, yet on a relatively smaller scale. The choice of color for such a structural linkage was either determined by the dominance of background color that performed as a link between the bottom layer to the top layer, or by simply creating an interesting contrast. The pasting continued working on a newly interconnected surface by configurative marks created after splashing inks and choice of paints until finally it reached a state of visual and psychological satisfaction. Sometimes, a hairdryer was employed to help to increase the drying time in order to satisfy the impatience. But in many cases I simply left the wet canvas on the floor and let it dry in the open air naturally, because the sudden contraction and expansion by external foreign measures would not contribute to the binding capacity of the glue especially to that of unevenly overlapped layers of individual fragments. Luckily, the rice paper on which the calligraphy practice used is very flexible, thin and absorbent, even though the pasting tended to be many layers atop another; it apparently still produced a consistently coherent surface. The further the collage develops especially

the thick building up of pasting pieces; the strict choice of pasting materials was revealed. The qualities of flexibility, absorbency, thinness and acid free are best, whereas, those of thick, heavy duty, glossy and hard rigid papers or similar materials are better to avoid. The above described working process can be worked on and on to the supporting limit of the canvas, meanwhile the sequential processes can be reversed either way as long as some fundamental principles followed. The final finished collage, after leaving it thoroughly dried a coat or two of light yellowish colored - beech wood - furniture varnish was applied on the surface of the work, partly for protection purposes, partly as glaze for that aging appearance desired at the time.

Incorporation of diversified two dimensional materials and of combined approaches were two basic features in this section. There are still many other characteristics represented and gradually revealed along the development of experimentation. For instance, there was apparently a gradual evolvement from loosely scattered irregular torn pieces to vertically aligned adjacent piling of strips – from equilibrium to mechanical repetition, from accommodation of diverse materials to solely hand written calligraphic works, manuscripts and notes (plate C2B-4). Narrowing down the range of materials to simply those of hand gesture indicated the natural transition to the next phase of the collage, carried out basically only by using the works out of daily calligraphic practice. Also, in the color scheme, as a consequence of the natural selection of materials, the reduction from a multiple color arrangements became black and white and various shades of grey created by overlapping. Gradually, the recycled painted canvas lost its play being part of the composition, and finally being fully covered.

PHASE 2

A Visual Hybridization of Fragmented Characters

Phase 2 was an attempt to carry out a formal investigation on the very structured quality of Chinese characters after being randomly torn, broken down into fragmented pieces, then spontaneously arranged, pasted on chosen support; by doing so, to actually examine the visual quality exemplified by reformation of parts of brushstrokes and to investigate its visual manifestation by such a work of hybridization that presented at the cost of losing its verbal significance. The narrowing down of the concentration point at the same time limited the material selection. Unlike the incorporation of a wide range of materials at phase 1, here in phase 2, the materials were employed basically in two types: one was those done by hand, including pieces from daily calligraphic practice both on traditional rice paper and on collected newspapers (recycled from library withdrawals), and collections of manuscripts or any found scribbles made by pencil, ball point, pen, charcoal and the like; two were photocopies of legendary calligraphers' master pieces, such as: Huang Tingjian's (1045-1105 A.D.)³³ *Zhu Shang Zuo Tie* in

³³ Huang Tingjian, one of the four legendary calligraphers (literati-artists) of the Northern Song dynasty. He belongs to a group of scholar officials who advocate an amateur aesthetic to challenge the court style that represented by the

particular.

As a direct consequence of selected materials, the color schemes were predominately monochromatic, notably black and white, and various shades of grey produced by application of light ink wash, by overlapping of broken pieces and by the natural color of the newspaper (plate C2B-5). Among the above mentioned various grays, there was one unexpected (at least to this practice) interesting grayish shade created by application of diluted glue mixture on some calligraphic practices written on newspapers. Due to the inconsistency (oil based ink versus water based ink and glue) of the two materials, the solid ink marks being washed away partly while brushing glue on its top that produced an effect similar to that of Chinese (literati) landscape painting/(Wenren) Shuimo Shanshui – a somber atmosphere of various combinations of light and dark ink washes. Or, using the back side of written newspaper, the permeation of ink washes produced irregular broken light marks. Nevertheless, there were few colors incorporated in the composition, namely red (plate C2B-6), having a red hue and its immediate analogous variations placed among the apparently overwhelming black and white, partly for the purpose of creating certain visual contrast, that functioned as sprinkles of spices in the cooking. Also mostly for its symbolic connotation with black especially placed with or against those of black ink written characters – a fundamental color combination of China associated with celebration, enjoyment, peace and harmony. As a further development of phase 1, the transitional interconnection between the two phases was obvious and especially represented in the structure of composition, from which three basic structures can be summarized. First was an experiment on torn pieces laid horizontally on top of each other like a cross section of a stratum. Second was a repeated building up of large irregular square pieces. Third was a tightly arranged uneven vertical repetition of torn strips, which unintentionally produced a visual tension both from left and right compressing towards the center, and in the meantime a resistance force to expand to both ends. Contrary to phase 1, in this phase large numbers of collage works have been done on wood panels. The hard solid support exemplified great tolerance of repeated layers of building up. Their sizes varied ranging from 20 by 20 cm to 100 by 81 cm respectively, however, the majority of works were carried out on relatively smaller sizes compared to those of works in phase 1 (plate C2B-7). If say the collage experiments in phase 1 were a process of identification of the interrelationships between calligraphy with its associates, the collage practices carried out in phase 2 were purely focused on calligraphy itself not least on reassemblage of its very structured parts – the brushstrokes³⁴. As the works are presented the reassemblage of broken strokes barely signifies any verbal quality unless deliberately intended to make it readable. The overall process was in fact a process of destruction plus a process of presenting such a result of the destruction. Looking from another angle it could be said as well to be a process of construction, a construction presented by the manifestation of variously recomposed brushstrokes, lines, patches of ink washes and negative spaces. This destroyed the character's meaning, its readability, its generic function for verbal communication, and also the formal structural order of character and

style of Wang Xizhi the calligrapher-sage.

³⁴ Twelve basic strokes, written follow strict order.

brushstrokes. The purposeful destruction in other words was an intended negation, by negating the character's very verbal capability (the meaningfulness) and its formal structure so as on the other hand to enhance its structural quality and visual impact.

The Process of a Combination of Additive and Subtractive

In this section the practice attempted to identify the 'casual' relationships between mechanical printed typefaces and handwritten calligraphic pieces, and also painterly applied lines, strokes and patches of color field; to examine the quality and contrast created by two different forms of communication and expression – printed and hand manipulated, in the hope of achieving an apparent naturalness through the very intuitive act of pouring, dripping, pasting on and ripping off. The previous section's experiments could be characterized as a process of additive which was carried out by continuously adding up bits and pieces on top of or juxtaposed to each other, so that those of unwilling parts or pieces were simply overlapped by other pieces, nothing, in fact, literally being taken off from the surface. Whereas in the present section, the evident difference to previous practice lies in an accommodation of both an additive and a subtractive process, meanwhile, attaining a combination of painterly approaches and two-way collage techniques.

The materials used in this experiment were even selective compared to previous attempts, which were works from daily calligraphic practice and newspapers without any surface 'make-up'. In terms of using the above materials, proportionally speaking, it was exactly the newspaper that was a significant feature of this section's practice. The printed typefaces from a historical point of view are an extension and transformation of the calligraphic art in general,³⁵ and also an independent genre in its own right. Its characterized standardization, regularity, strictly aligned formation, rigid uniformity and massive almost unlimited amount of exact reproduction placed itself interestingly against the linear marks created by hand gesture of the calligraphic and painterly practices, which any insignificant move or unnoticed hesitation would result in a totally different outcome. Paints employed here were as usual mainly water based acrylic, poster color, and emulsion paints. For making a large area application, a large amount of liquid form of paint was needed; the white emulsion paints particularly those used in house decoration were greatly employed. Throughout the experiments there had been no experience of any particular preference towards any color combinations. The choice of color or paints were in most cases rather arbitrary, and simply up to the reach of the availability. Moreover, also there had been no employment of any adhesive agents, instead simply exploiting the very paint as glue to bind the pieces on the supporting surface and between each pasting piece.

The making up of the composition was in a way quite similar to the choice of color

³⁵ Which is exactly the case in China; various typefaces used on publication and mass media and on computer word processing are in fact copy, modification, and standardization of chosen script styles.

and paints, more or less arbitrary, much less deliberation than in any previous stages. Nevertheless, to say there was no orientation or intentional formation of composition were simply not a factual reflection of the actual practice. The strategy adopted for making a fully equipped composition was a holistic one, an all-over covering up, with no intention of creating any focal points, preferably having eyes and hands moving around and across the surface from all directions, evenly spreading the strength and effort. Yet, a consciousness of making a certain distance with that of the 'all-over' composition was deliberately made. Especially distance from those used aging notice boards or street advertising panels that are too natural to attract any further attention. Therefore, an uneven margin around the edge of each canvas was consciously left in order to remind me that beyond the unpainted and un-pasted area towards the center of the canvas from all directions, a defined space within which the freely manipulated 'natural' collage was positioned. And the seemingly anonymous contribution of 'vandalism' (a strategy) was in fact a work of art – a collage by series of pouring, painting, pasting on and ripping off. Only canvas was used for this section's practice, whose sizes varied from 50 by 100 cm to 130 by 330cm (plate C2B-8, 9) respectively. For a better consistent reception between supporting surface and painting and collage on its top, the canvas was primed by acrylic gesso and emulsion paint three or four times respectively depending on the thickness of the fabric.

The actual process normally started from dripping or pouring any prepared liquid form paints onto a (sheet of) canvas on the floor. It in some way was very much like that of Jackson Pollock's way of making his gigantic canvases, yet the crucial differences between Pollock's way of painting and the way carried out here in this research lies in the intentionality and the motivation of representation. I presume that at the time when Pollock engaged with his all-over action painting he must have had and was very likely to have been motivated by some abstract ideas, psychic impulse, or visualizing of some particular ambient scenes in his memory. This could be identified by some of the titles of his work, such as: *Eyes in the Heat*, 1946, *Mural on Indian Red Ground*, 1950, *Blue Poles*, 1952, *One (number 31, 1950)*, 1950, most of which are figurative related, though the formal means are abstract yet the very intentionality is still representational. Introducing the seemingly similar movement and technique as it normally does might generate some confusion simply observing it from a distance. As stated, the very intentionality, the motivation and most importantly the inspiration are from totally different sources. The practice here was in fact to experience a way of 'writing' wild cursive scripts with no recourse to brush, the very movement and its consequential outcome was an exemplification of calligraphic quality by different means and method. It was also, from a developmental point of view, a sequential stop and a viable technique of a whole process; therefore it was more a methodological concern and a concern of presentation itself than Pollock's all-over Abstract Expressionism.

On the other hand, broad brushes fully loaded with liquid form of paints were also used hoping to create more variations both on linear quality and on textural effect. Due to the abandonment of glue, instead using paints to perform the adhesion, the paints were all in liquid form. That was exactly the reason why large amounts of emulsion

paint were employed, because its perfect consistency proportionally mixed between pigments, water and binding agents precisely met the criteria of necessity. Immediately after dripping and painting, with the paints still wet, I pressed those written calligraphic pieces, usually torn large sheets and newspapers, on to the newly painted surface until the whole canvas was fully covered, after that leaving it to dry in the open air with no recourse to any boosters to help shorten the drying time. It normally took half a day or a day to become completely dry, and then I ripped off all those un-attached areas. Sometimes, for an intended special effect or deliberate setting up of an unexpected troublesome situation to tackle, with the satisfaction of impatience and surprise, I ripped off those pasted sheets of pieces and canvas yet to be fully adhered. If further improvement was needed, then I reworked painterly approaches on top of the collage again. The process could go on again and again until it pleased the intuitive aesthetic visual judgment. Some works stopped at very early stages after a few attempted layers, yet to many others I repeated the process round and round till the final satisfaction had been achieved eventually.

Experiments on Glass Panes

Experiments on glass panes were also part of the practice; however it was not extensively explored as with other supporting materials, such as canvas and wood panel. The reason for giving up this briefly experienced practice was because of its materialistic limitation, and most importantly the limitation imposed on the advocated natural free application in this research. It was the characterized total transparency that attracted and initiated subsequent experiments on it. For monitoring the steps of the working process, a mirror was placed directly facing the back of the pasted glass so as to monitor each move of adding up within the composition. Very distinctively, the glass pane I was working on had to be placed vertically in certain parallel to the mirror; unlike many previous attempts laying canvas or panel on the floor. This changing from horizontal to vertical had set up a lot of unexpected encounters along the process of working. Not to mention the dripping of lines of glue mixture and the difficulty of positioning of pasting materials, yet, among them all the most troublesome was that they couldn't continuously freely build up on top of each other on a transparent space, once unsatisfying pieces were accidentally placed unless removed immediately while still wet, they would remain there as it were and block the space for any further moves. The direct consequence was only one layer of pasting work could be pasted on that transparent surface. The enjoyable process of free application was suddenly restrained by constant consciousness of each move and its direct outcome, therefore, as a matter of fact, the contradiction was unbearable as far as a spontaneous application was concerned, and naturally I gave up any further practice. Nevertheless, the identification of the encountered limits didn't stop the experiment with other glass materials, notably various shapes of bottles in the following stage, but presented in a different form.

STAGE 2

Collage on Objects and Sculptural Transformation of Calligraphic Paper Works

Stage 2 targeted the collage experiments on three dimensional objects and the sculptural transformation of paper works produced by daily calligraphic practice. The whole practice according to its nature, characteristics and approaches could be conveniently divided into two phases by two series of experiments. Even though using the term phase to define the differences in focus, yet here there is no suggestion of any sequential order followed one after another. The two series of experiments were in many cases running parallel and sometimes intertwined, mutually informed by each other. The research in this section was concentrated on examining the possible variations of two dimensional calligraphy on diverse three dimensional objects by means of collage; to physically identify the transformed two dimensional natured calligraphy in three dimensional perspective spaces – its existential objectivity, with the help of natural forms of various objects so as to attest to the very physicality manifested by the dressing up with a calligraphic outfit; meanwhile, on the other hand, by utilizing the products from the daily calligraphic practice, to experiment on possible variations of sculptural transformation.

To see and literally touch, hold and appreciate an object with its surface covered by calligraphic written characters had long been anticipated ever since the very beginning of the research. It was also one of the major motivations to launch such a complex structured research program. Together with the gradual development of the research both on studio practice and literature review, collage on three dimensional objects was increasingly defined and properly positioned, and finally became an independent yet interrelated section of the whole collage experiment. Before entering into this research, through the long years individual studio practice, there has gradually formed a recognition that there is always a period of psychological accumulation, a period of 'brewing' of what should be collected, where to look for inspiration and how to realize it in material, the particular period that has been regarded as a period of gathering momentum before launching the decisive engagement. Therefore, consciously accumulating collections of various objects went along with the psychological anticipation.

Those objects collected were mainly easily found everyday objects. The stress on the characteristic of banality was cherished for its ordinariness, easy accessibility, and close relation with daily life. Building up the material collections proved to have been a long term undertaking. To simply look at those things once kept in several boxes stacked around the corners of the campus studio or just read through the list of them that immediately follows this, I should think many would not be impressed by any one of them; the reason for making such a reckoning was simply because they were indeed just ordinary things. They were types of glasses, such as: wine glasses, beer mugs, beer

glasses, and tumblers; kitchen utensils, such as: sets of plates, sets of bowls, mugs, cups and the like; various bottles, such as: white and red wine bottles of various shapes, colors and country of origins, also bottles of numbers of branded beers, lagers and ales; interesting shapes of flower vases; empty jars, such as: those for keeping various Indian ready made cooking pastes, of English pickles, jams and of different shapes of jars for coffee beans and instant powder; electronic products disposed at the dumping grounds around the college campus, such as: TV, tape recorder, radio receiver, (only the radio receiver was still working,) also chairs, stools; empty paper containers for keeping fresh milk, fruit juices, and various shapes and sizes of cardboard boxes and so on. The above mentioned collections were either bought from Sunday boot markets or found at the dumping ground or given by friends or recycled from daily consumption. They were not new; some were even third or fourth hand already before reaching me and became part of the collection. Yet there were some brand new things I bought and handmade especially for this experiment. They were: plastic masks of ghosts of those played with by kids; a plaster figure of Homer; fresh fruit such as apples, plums and oranges, and some handmade fruit of apples, lemons and oranges that were all carved out of wood in the college wood workshop. Even making a very simple shaped wooden orange of ordinary size, the work of carving (although working on machine) proved to be too laborious to continue producing more and, not long after that I realized the attempt had taken too much time and effort, so shortly after making three of them the carving was halted completely, and I turned to finding wax molded fruit instead.

The pasting material for collage on three dimensional objects at this stage was reduced into only products of daily calligraphic practice and only those written on rice paper. Besides the increasingly focused target, the reason for only using those written on rice paper was basically from a practical point of view. Unlike pasting on flat two dimensional surfaces, working on three dimensional objects require the that the pasting material must bear the quality of being thin, flexible, easily attached on various concave and convex surfaces and also could be easily adjusted while wet. Rice paper has exactly the above qualities. In addition, putting aside the issue of delicate round forms, proportionally speaking, except the chairs, stools, some cardboard boxes and the plaster figure of Homer, most of those collected things were relatively small in size. Therefore, the scale of work especially the container for glue mixture and pasting brush had been consequently reduced in accordance to their scales (plate C2B-10). The mixing ratio between white glue and water varied according to the surface texture being worked on. The ratio of 3:7 or 4:6 that 3 or 4 portions of white glue mixed with 7 or 6 portions of water, their mixtures were used on those smooth, shining surfaces like: glass, ceramic, plastic and heavily varnished wood work. Whereas, the ratio proportion of 5:5 that 5 portions of white glue mixed with 5 portions of water and its mixture was prepared for those of rough, textured, absorbent surfaces, especially on the surface of plaster figures. The pasting process technically speaking was not much different to the previous attempts, but the key difference lies in the change of surface form – from flat to round. The delicate details, the constant changing of forms from concave to convex then vice versa, and the irregularity of some objects were really complicated compared to working on a flat surface. Of all encountered difficulties, to achieve a consistent flat

adhesion with no pleats, swellings, hollowness, and air bubbles had presented the most difficult task.

After a series of practices on glass, bottles, stools and chairs, though bearing those above mentioned difficulties in mind, an ambitious attempt was still planned. The challenge was a content related collage on the plaster figure of Homer. That original idea was to paste calligraphic written backgrounds of Homer on the plaster figure of himself, as faithfully as possible to keep all those descriptive characters readable so as to create an interesting visual effect of the phenomenal existence – the plaster figure of Homer coated with written interpretation of him – Homer explicitly in the form of language description. It had proved to be an ambitious undertaking; however, finally it turned out to be unsuccessful as far as the realization of the original preconceived idea was concerned. The work started from writing the related biography of Homer onto large sheets of rice paper (the standard size used was 69 by 137 cm). They were written in several script styles, notably as the standard, clerical and cursive script respectively. Those individual characters were written also in various different sizes so as to create diversities in the forthcoming experiment, the proportional arrangement on paper was also of concerned though it proved to be no any practical necessity later. I had been faithfully working on preparing every detail, Even though during the process of writing a flash thought of all these carefully recorded descriptions of Homer would very likely face a similar fate as being torn into unarticulated broken pieces out of its original interrelated context, becoming literally the collage material in its own right. Yet, the manner carried out still faithfully towards every single character, every line, every paragraph and finally the composition. One of the reasons to do as such was in this way to express the respect to Homer and his phenomenal contribution in human history, and particular in the West.

However, as soon as the material preparation was ready and the pasting process began, there immediately arose a strong impulse to destruct those already prepared carefully written materials, and an undeniable sense of unwillingness to paste faithfully and correctly those lines of readable descriptions of Homer on the very surface of his plaster figure. The unexpected sentiment was overwhelming. As a consequence of this puzzlement, the pasting work therefore was temporarily halted. Two practical difficulties were greatly underestimated before entering the actual engagement. These two difficulties were sequential and interrelated. Firstly were those of intricate details of facial features, these irregular natural organic forms were impossible to cooperate, and to have all those lines of characters properly adhered on their uneven surfaces and at the mean time still remain readable. Technically speaking, it was hard to keep every character, lines intact without them being destructed into unarticulated pieces. Secondly, providing the cost of destruction of integrity of characters was accepted, the meticulous work of pasting on such an irregular form of surface was still problematic, those problems of serious pleats, bubbles and the like proved hard to avoid. As far as a proper visual presentation was concerned, the material used and objects chosen were not in a compatible working relation. The feasibility of realizing the originally preconceived imagination had been denied.

The lesson learned from this ‘unexpected detour’ was to carefully study the relation

between the chosen materials and its feasibility of realization before putting into practice. By realizing this, the carefully prepared linguistic content described at the beginning and its envisaged possible presentation had been practically abandoned. As a single experiment, the content related interpretative collage on plaster figure and its actual practice led to an overlooked encounter and unexpected reflection. Although it didn't work out at this particular stage, the similar idea had opened a new vision for further development through other media, especially later in two experiments: one in digital collage and the other in still image video project both using computer programs, which turned out to be more compatible in their method and language of expression. The further experiment on the plaster figure of Homer was continued (plate C2B-11) although the initial preconception was not realized. For a fresh new start, those meticulously pasted lines of characters were washed away, and a light coat of liquid plaster painted on the surface so as to cover those stains previously left. As soon as being freed from the semantic bondage, the spontaneous play of automatism immediately returned to the material and the subject, and the way of expression in particular. It was more or less like a return, returning back to the original track on which the research experiment continues focusing on the visual re-presentation in a natural spontaneous manner. Prior to the practice on the plaster figure, I had already created collage on a wide variety of objects, notable on chairs, stools, a TV screen, designed columns, empty fruit juice containers, cardboard boxes, fruit both natural and hand carved, plastic masks, various bottles, plates, bowls, cups and mugs.³⁶ (Plate C2B-12, 13, 14) Here I present a series of photos that show the working process of pasting pieces of calligraphic works on apples and mugs.

The Experiments on Sculptural Transformation of Calligraphic Paper Works

Parallel to the collage practice on the three dimensional objects, there were extensive experimentations on sculptural transformation simply using the paper products from the daily calligraphic practice. The experiment wasn't part of an original plan; it was in fact inspired by the substantial volume of those written papers carelessly gathered around the corner of the studio (plate C2B-15). Though they were just 'weightless' paper works, yet the actual space they occupied and the interesting forms of twists and turns they presented were really impressive not least the seemingly anarchic black and white contrast produced by such a random piling together. Due to such a grouping, the original readable characters became simply massive gatherings of black brushstrokes towards all directions, only from particular angles could some characters could be

³⁶ Within the year 2003 and first few months of the year 2004, the Canterbury campus had undergone an all-over construction project. There apparently had a crisis on studio spaces. Due to the PhD studio spaces were managed together by the MA office, therefore, being organized and attached together with those of MA studios. I was forced constantly moving from here to there, together with the college holidays, breaks and all other days, until finally moved into the space now used by the finance office of the college administration. Those of my gradually accumulated collects and works of experiments left only few, most of them were either damaged or lost along the constant moving or simply treated as useless objects being cleared away, apparently very easy to be regarded as that.

recognized, the rest were just massive black brushstrokes against the irregularly divided white paper background.

The experiments on sculptural transformation of these paper works began from a single piece manipulation on the panel (plate C2B-16). To study the structural forms, randomly picked paper work was freely twisted, folded, stretched then followed by placing it against the white panel or sometimes resting it on the floor; if the final form was decided upon then it was tacked on the panel. From a single piece experiment there followed a group assembly, from experimenting on white panel followed by placing against walls covered by all-over calligraphic works (plate C2B-17). By doing this an effect of camouflage came into the scene, and hence led to a further exploitation. Other materials were also tested, notably cotton, synthetic fibers and plastic sheets. Writing on cotton materials, the cotton absorbed too much ink and I had to dip and refill the brush frequently, and as a consequence I was forced to move the brush as slowly as possible in a controlled manner in order to complete a solid stroke loaded with proper ink, otherwise there were no other significant differences compared with writing on rice paper. Yet, it was apparently not the case on synthetic fabrics and plastic sheet. On these materials, the ink simply floats on the surface and is simply incapable of depositing on the surface; hence acrylic paints and especially enamel paints were used as writing ink. The change of materials further extended the experimentation and slightly jumped out of the categorical definition of collage.

Due to the material characteristics of the cotton, synthetic fibers and plastic sheets, which are more tolerant of stretches than paper, so the experiments moved out from inside the studio to an outside open space. A series of photos documented the experiment that had been carried out within the campus (plate C2B-18, 19). I wrapped up some selected tree trunks in those prepared cottons, synthetic fabrics and plastic sheets with written characters on them. I also experimented at other places. Moving the practice out in an open space in the mean time not just opened the eyes but also opened more possible ways of re-presentation of this very studio-based calligraphic practice. Along with the inside out practices, introducing the transparent bottles into the practice also gradually developed. (Plate C2B-20) A group show held at the Chromos Gallery, Canterbury, in the second half of 2003, with an artist of residence, a PhD candidate and a freelance artist. It was a selected group showcase of the series described above (plate C2B-21, 22). My exhibits comprised of a statement in which only *'Statement'*, *'That's all what I want to say'* and *'Lin Tao'* are comprehensible, the rest especially the main body of the 'statement' was in fact freely typed unarticulated words and letters – totally incomprehensible. Two glass framed collage works, two collages on wood panels, a table display of a group of bottles in which were contained various handwritten materials, among them of course predominantly written pieces from daily calligraphic practice. On the ground, three various sized columns were triangularly placed, height varying from 70 cm to 120 cm respectively, in between were spread out roughly folded large sheets of calligraphic works, some gathered together, a few loosely scattered. The group show, though on a relatively small scale due to the limited space available, was considered a rather conclusive collective exhibition of each individual attempt of that period of practice.

STAGE 3

Digillage and Digital Printing

Digillage, an intentionally created word for the purpose to describe the collage practice in this stage, is an obvious combination of digitalization plus collage. It is very much unlike all physical materialistic attempts of the previous two stages; here the collage experiment carried out uses computer and its installed software, notably Adobe Photoshop. After a series of manipulations, the completed digillage images were sent to digital ink jet or laser printer, and then finally presented in the form of a digital print, or in the form of projection. Overlooking the whole stage 3 digillage practices, it comprised of three sequential phases one after another, except the practice in phase 3. The phase 1 and phase 2 sometimes during the actual practice did overlap in certain areas on some certain points not least on the same material source taking and basic strategies adopted. The central theme investigated in phase 1 and phase 2 was similar to that which had been carried out at stage 2 painting project, but using digital means to continue examining the visual relationships between image and characters & words.

The experience informed from those practices undertaken previously is that the sufficient material preparation plays a crucial role in the achievement of the objective in practice. The material preparation, speaking from a broader range, including both the material used in the actual practice and the psychological deliberation; speaking from a narrower range, it designates only the materials used in the actual practice. The psychological deliberation varies from person to person, and hardly gives a conclusive or an agreeable explanation. Also because it is not a major issue to be discussed in this research compared to the material preparation, therefore the emphasis of the discussion here is on the actual preparation of materials. Compared to previous gatherings of tangible materials for actual practice, the digillage practice as the term designates uses only digitized imagery or images from other sources later being digitized.

The Building up of the Resources Bank

Since the beginning of the research, during the photo documentation of sections of practice, and also with the start of the collage experiments, a resources bank, that conscious collecting of materials, gradually came into existence. The collections at first due to the nature of the experiments were mainly factual materials like those objects used at the stage 2 collage project. They were tangible objects. The resources bank later, in order to meet the increasingly diverse 'materialistic' necessity characterized by each individual practice, had as a consequence of that been gradually expanded to accommodate diverse materials. The composition of the resources bank include: Firstly, snapshots of street advertising, warning signs, information panels and boards, graffiti, marks of vandalism, illegal adverts and also of TV programs. Before the incorporation

of the digital camera, all the above mentioned images were taken by traditional still image camera. Some of them later have been converted into digital images via scanner; some still remain as pictures and negative films or slides. Secondly, with the involvement of the digital camera, the working process was greatly shortened, especially after the start of digital practice. The image taken became even more focused on newspaper titles, headlines, magazines, illustrations, book covers, posters, exhibitions catalogues, supermarket promotion leaflets, CD, DVD covers, images of works by contemporary artists, everyday living scenes and anything that bears interesting images and characters & words. Thirdly, downloads from the Web. Many of those downloaded images, owing to their size limitation for easy upload, circulation and opening up for reading, are smaller files in low resolution, the direct result of that is lower clarity and smaller actual size. Fourth, scanned images especially those of master pieces had been done by great masters of Chinese calligraphy. Fifth, collections of those objects used at the stage 2 collage on three dimensional objects, and the like. In addition, besides those digitized image files and those collections of objects, in terms of drawing a complete picture of the resources bank, it is hard to neglect one crucial important material that has been participating, running through out the research practice, which are those works produced by the daily calligraphic practice. In many stages they had been as the actual practicing materials for extensive experimentations. As an example, the previous two stages of collage practice proved to have heavily relied on them.

PHASE 1

Digillage

Phase 1 digillage started while collage on three dimensional objects was still ongoing. It was the first stage of the whole digillage practice, the pasting materials used by Photoshop on computer were at the time mainly downloads from the Web. As stated the quality of those imagery files downloaded from the Web were not as good as expected at the time, because many of them had been compressed into jpeg files or other similar versions before uploading for Web publication. Due to that purposeful compressing to make those files easily circulated, opened up and downloaded if necessary while surfing, most of those image files, generally speaking, were in a very low resolution (there are some exceptions, to be frank), low clarity and also smaller in actual image size especially using those images and their reproductions for any attempted larger format printing. I bore those facts in mind together with the strategy of getting engaged first then to expand and deepen the subject later. The digillage experiment had thus begun working on those, though imperfect at the time, smaller sized low clarity characterized Web download images. By identifying these facts of limitation, there were few attempts to alter the pixels, sizes and effects of some selected images in order to improve the imagery quality to an acceptable degree, yet, compared to later phase 2, those attempts actually played no significant part in the whole practice in phase 1. The

choice of download images was rather arbitrary; in fact there was no specific preference at first. Soon after a period of confusion and disorganization, the downloads became specific and focused on iconic images of both historical and contemporary, starts of sport, entertainment and arts, photos of documentation, religious temperas and murals, calligraphic master pieces, well-known proverbs, phrases, characters, words, letters and so on.

Quite like those of collage practices on recycled painted canvases in stage 1, instead of opening a new file for a blank sized space/canvas, the digillage practice here was normally using those originally selected images without altering their size and others. Once a canvas image was chosen, the other image files were also selectively opened ready for picking up to be selected, cropped, dragged and pasted. In its essence, the digillage working process was not very much unlike that of collage practice on two dimensional canvases and on three dimensional objects. The only difference is instead of using glue mixture and various paper materials, here I used programmed tools on Photoshop and downloaded images to work on another chosen image/canvas. Tools like loop, marquee, were basic tools for making area selections on material images. Once a choice area was selected, I dragged the area of selection onto the canvas image, then adjusted its position till visually satisfied; if later the dragged piece proved not to be visually working on the canvas image as expected, it could be either got rid of by stepping backward or dragging the layer to the rubbish bin in the history column. Along with the building up of fragmented dragged layers, there was normally a layer or two interlaced of randomly free typing of letters, words and characters of non-sensible or sensible and totally unarticulated forms. Font size varies from lines and layers according to the compositional necessity at the time (plate C2B-23).

The pasting process and random typing could be repeated on and on until the very visual effect was intuitively satisfied. Yet, the work wasn't completed. A distinctive feature, compared to later phase 2 digillage, was the introduction of the style of street graffiti into the composition (plate C2B-24), especially those easily found on the walls, partitions and many other blank spaces along many Chinese city streets. This was a black colored spray of mobile numbers that advertise the illegal making of forged documents, which have been nicknamed by the public as city psoriasis. The reason for the introduction of such a similar approach as the final touch to be the surface layer of each individual digillage was simply an attempt to challenge those carefully ordered established strata of existences, to ridicule that by this very abrupt final surface marking produced by using a brush tool dragging/drawing across the top layer of the composition. In a narrow scope, to create a formal contrast between typed regularly aligned fonts with freely all-over application of lines/strokes. In the mean time to signify the very visual destructive quality manifested by the application of a group of lines. If the social realistic concern was suspended, and if simply looking at those street graffiti in the eyes of aesthetic judgment, those marks of lines (isolated) could be seen as 'beautiful' as contributory, as far as the digillage practice at this stage was concerned. As a matter of fact, it had proved to be exactly that by the experience of the actual practice. Among the series of digillage practices, there were few compositions created that were context oriented (plate C2B-25), in which the composition of those individual

components were deliberately selected in order to be complementary to each other, to be interrelated to form a contextualized unity. However, the majority of those attempted digillage works were undertaken by a mood of total randomization – a play of automatism, one of the extensively examined ways of expression running throughout the whole research.

PHASE 2

Digillage

Phase 2 digillage was a continuous examination of the relationship between image and characters & words. Unlike the works in phase 1 which were mostly in smaller sizes because I was using downloaded jpeg imagery files from the Web, the experiments carried out in phase 2 were primarily using photos reproduced by digital still camera together with certain numbers of scanned and downloaded better quality imageries. The incorporation of the digital camera boosted the efficiency and shortened the working process. Also by the controlled manipulation of size, format and resolution of the image taking, the quality of the photographed image sharply contrasted with the imagery generated in phase 1 of the research practice. Most importantly the selective manipulation at the stage of photo taking offers lots of alternative solutions to determine the quality of the image in the first place; as a consequence of the choice of resolution, the improved imagery clarity, size and various effects, the actual practicing size – the size of the canvas of the digillage experiment in this section had been largely improved. However, the choice of the working canvas size on the other hand was partly determined by the availability of the actual working size of the printer for the final presentation of the digillage will be in the form of digital print. The frequently printed compositional sizes were 52 by 110 cm, 100 by 110 cm, 110 by 200 cm, 120 by 220 cm and 150 by 300 cm. Among them all quite number of works had been done in the size of 52 by 110 cm and 100 by 110 cm respectively while working at the Canterbury studio, due to the size limitation of the printer.

Empowered by the digital camera, the choice of image matter for using in the digillage practice became increasingly selective and straightforward. They were images immediately around and related to the everyday life, they were images in current circulation, and presently happening, they were all, in short, pop images that have already transcended their original context of being looked at and being read, and simply as such, had become symbols or signs in their own right, yet at the same time was still related to the large swamp of contemporary popular culture. These imagery materials composed of reproductions of details of the calligraphic master pieces, iconic figures from history books, books for the general public, pop start of sport and entertainment, reproductions of magazine covers, posters, illustrations, postcards, DVD, CD covers, headlines of newspapers, interesting layout and imageries of supermarket promotion papers, snapshots of street advertising boards, panels, warning signs, daily stuff such as envelopes, air tickets, bank notes, personal photo albums, and the like. Up to the actual

necessity and personal preference of particular effects, some images collected would undergo a process of pre-edition on Photoshop, either changing color, altering the size, making special effects or working out various reproductions of the same image.

Bearing the compositional size of final printing in mind, the newly opened file was set exactly to match the size required for printing. The resolution adjusted from 72 to 300 dpi respectively up to the individual necessity of the work and its related technical concern. Normally, a white color background canvas was conveniently selected as a pasting surface; I rarely used a colored one for unlike phase 1 digillage the background color plays no further part in this section's experiment. The composition was vertically positioned in a way to resonate the vertically erected traditional stone tablet and their awesome ink rubbing inscriptions (plate C2B-26). The connection became even more obvious when approaching phase 3.

Making a piece of digillage was intended to be time specific, that is to say, the choice of materials from the resources bank, the possible compositional layout, the methods for achieving specific effects, the overall possible contextual perception were all determined at the time of opening up a new file ready for pasting work to begin. There were contextual concerns on differentiating individual works in between each other. Some works were centered on world affairs and politically related, dominated by newspaper headlines both in English and Chinese, images of world leaders, lines of provocative or breaking news and any hot issues related to the time. Some works were predominantly gatherings of academic, scholarly related, some works were juxtapositions of popular culture, and especially iconic faces of entertainment that undeniably have now dominated the substantial part of currently circulated publications. It was exactly this characteristic of massive coverage that provided greater choices on obtaining pasting materials. Some works were simply a series of collective display of those collected materials. If at the time there was no specific orientation on any contextual inclination, although the working process might not be always directed by a specific intentionality, just a spontaneous juxtaposition of those images of popular icons, historical figures, images of reproductions of calligraphic master pieces, of newspaper headlines and of snapshots of daily life related scenes and things were in fact a collective presentation of the encyclopedic scenario of current life. As a consequence of such a massive gathering, these attempts tended normally to be in large format and in large size.

Compared to phase 1, besides many other similar approaches, one of the characteristic features in phase 2 digillage was the employment of one of the basic organizing principles of design – repetition (plate C2B-27). The repeated use of some chosen images or some chosen characters and words were not totally out of the work of randomizing, but were out of a consciously intentional attempt to create a sense of sequential order in the hope of resembling that of the watching of film clips so as to bring in the concept of time to eventually spark the perceptual movement of a visual rhythm across the composition. Another important concern was the rather technical one, using such a series of repetitions to unify the complex structured fragmented composition. Among those repeated images and characters & words, some of them had been purposefully processed on Photoshop, a single image normally after processes of

adjustments gave birth to a series of different version copies. Another characteristic feature was no recourse to any additional typing of letters, words or characters either legible or non-legible, also no drawing of random lines of graffiti style on the very surface layer of the digillage, only the presentation of the play of those pasted images and characters & words on the two dimensional virtual surface. It is interesting to notice that the practice of painting and the practice of digillage bear certain similarities in terms of their natural path of development and especially on the methods and principles incorporated in their sequential series of experimentation. Working with technology, using programmed computer software as a media device to realize a work of art, the uncertainty always exists. Down to the digillage practice, the unpredicted uncertainty in many cases occurred at the final stage – the stage of printing, any mechanical faults or human errors would result in a totally different outcome.

PHASE 3

Digillage

Phase 3 of the digillage experiments was an attempt to produce reproductions of calligraphic master pieces, not least those related to this research; presenting in their original format and their original proportional size by means of digillage and digital printing. Those master pieces especially engraved on stone tablets then later preserved by the form of ink rubbing copies were concentrated on in this experimentation. The reason was simply visual, purely out of the sheer solid existential quality presented by the stone tablets and the awesome presence of those ink rubbing inscriptions.

The featured reproductive digillage practice retained deliberately the basic characteristics of the collage and intentionally to present such a quality throughout the working process and, in the final presentation. There was apparently no intention to reproduce an exact copy of the original – the same, but to reproduce simply a reproduction of it – similar, in other words, a new re-presentation. Compared to previous digillage attempts, here in phase 3, one major quality was greatly cherished and intensively examined, this quality also was one of the fundamental characteristic qualities of Chinese art and in particular the calligraphic art, that is – simplicity. In a practical sense, the simplicity was repeatedly examined and presented by means of mono in color – black and white and flat in form – absolute flatness. For the absolute flatness of the imagery quality was required in this section, therefore only those of scanned images were qualified instead of those obtained by other means especially those of images re-produced by camera. Because any lens-derived images are due to the generic nature of the lens – the convexo-convex lens surface would distort to a certain degree the flatness of the imagery required and somehow produce an uneven perspective surface (though many of us might not notice it without any preconceived information in advance, yet for the sake of the research, it has to be pointed out.) Though some of those chosen master pieces did have versions of scanning copies, also selected, printed, photocopied and used on a series of previous collage experiments,

they were not really treated as independently as now at this stage. In that case, those scanning versions previously were just for the sake of giving the impression of those arranged characters, not for the concern of the detailed scanning quality, such as the actual dimension of the original piece, the precise size of those individual characters, their ratio proportions to each other and the whole, possible reduction of clarity after being enlarged and the like. Before entering in the process of scanning, there usually was a thoroughly detailed survey (calculation) of individual master pieces that were ready to be scanned. I started first searching out all original size figures related to the master pieces including both original dimensions of the stone tablet and its ink rubbing inscriptions. (For easy preservation, and most importantly for easy study, those copies of ink rubbing inscriptions normally were cut off into pieces then rearranged in the form of a hand scroll; therefore, it was rare to have many intact rubbing copies handed down through the dynasty's history to the present time.)

In many cases, only those stone tablets and their dimensional details were recorded. For instance, one of the copying pieces practiced during the daily calligraphic practice is the *Encomium on a Portrait of Dongfang Shuo* by Yan Zhenqing (plate C2B-28). The dimensional detail reads: the tablet is 340 cm in height, 151.6 cm in width, characters are vertically aligned in 36 lines, and every line contains 30 characters, standard script. Whereas there are not many copies of the ink rubbing copies as far as we know, the present available one, the one used in this research, is one of the best copies made between the Song and Yuan dynasties, presently in the collection of the Beijing Palace Museum. The intact ink rubbing copy is now in the Beijing Library. (Yan, 1997) Large numbers of well-known pieces only remain in the form of a few copies of ink rubbing inscriptions; the original tablets had either been destroyed through generations or lost in the past. Their original dimensions, if any, mentioned only in the historical descriptions. Usually, the ink rubbing inscriptions were a copy of a pounding impression from the original stone tablet. It has been treated as the first contact copy from the original, the whole rubbing copy sheet was cut off into pieces then rearranged and mounted onto a hand scroll; through generations later being either tracing copied, re-engraved on wood panels or photographed, re-photographed or scanned for publication, consequently becoming available to the general public. From the first contact copy to the present material used in this research, it has undergone a series of copying processes. As far as the digillage practice is concerned, the process of such a 'transformation' is yet to be stopped; the selected copies of rubbing inscription will be scanned again according to the recorded dimensional figures of the stone tablet then to re-assemble it up in order to restore its original impression as an intact piece.

There might be questions asked about the final re-assembled piece having undergone such a series of transformations; how much original quality of the ink rubbing inscription has been retained? Even only from the level of description the possibility of alteration has already existed. Just indeed to say that, even the most claimed faithful reproduction would be somehow in a certain degree different from the previous model piece simply due to the mechanical process of transformation. Therefore any claimed seamless reproduction would be regarded as wishful thinking, though equipped with modern technology which tends to guarantee a precise

reproduction. It was precisely by this identification of the phenomenological similarity that had been sought after rather than that of the unattainable same. The true attempt was interested in the practice of presenting a solid integrated piece by means of digillage so as to resonate (in spirit) with its original form of existence, also to provide an alternative (integrative) view to look at those master pieces that had long been suspended through generations in a piecemeal fragmented form the form of basically a hand scroll and presently the form of printed books. Besides, the above mentioned rather disciplined practice, because of the involvement of mathematical calculation of dimensional ratio proportion, had also a series of experiments using those scanned images of master pieces from the resources bank. Contrary to those previous attempts that characterized working with figures, the experiments (plate C2B-29) were carried out by freely picking up any scanned master pieces then reassembling them in a designed space similar to the proportion of a stone tablet, regardless of the differences in style, size and many other obvious factors between those distinctive characters. A vivid contrast was willingly draw between the two experiments, one could be easily characterized as a restrained freedom that represented a conformity to rules and limitations, the other was characterized as a play of freedom presented indifferently, using anything available to make the difference.

Digital Printing

All these digillage experiments finally were presented in the form of digital print. There were two types of printing format employed in the practice, they were in fact conditioned by the actual availability of the digital printers. One printer type used was that widely deployed in graphic design and commercial advertisement based in China, which was available for large format printing works, technically speaking it could be blown up into any desired sizes but the most normally used was 150 cm in width to virtually unlimited length, together with a choice of a wide variety of printing materials, such as: papers, photo papers, plastics, canvases and some other synthetic fabrics. Some digillage works had been printed out in the size of 120 by 220 cm and 150 by 300 cm respectively. Whereas the other was available in the digital printing studio of Canterbury campus, its maximum printing width was 110 cm together with a wide range of papers available. The materialistic availability and limitations were both conditioned and contributed to the making of various printing experiments. As a result of that, those printing works experimented on in China were basically using plastics or synthetic fabrics of those used in commercial advertisement and graphic design in a relatively larger format; yet while in the Canterbury studio those printing experiments were mainly focused on various weighted papers, those used in academic purposes in a relatively smaller printing size.

C. Photography Project

The project of photography as it naturally developed was also divided in two sequential phases. Besides the differences on the oriented thematic investigations of each phase, one of the characteristic differences of both phases lies in the employment of two types of cameras. In phase 1 and the early period of phase 2, I used a 'traditional' still camera – Nikon FM 2, (designed) manual, whereas in phase 2, I only used a digital still camera – Sony F117, (designed) automatic. The employment of two different types of camera was not just because of differences in their individual designed functions but also because of two different modes of working processes, change of contents and evolution of creative ideas. Initially, in phase 1, photography in general was treated solely as a tool for documenting those completed works and sections regarded necessary to be recorded as a record or as an illustrative example of the research journal. Then things had gradually changed during the reviewing of those developed negative films and the presenting of those positive slides. Intrigued by the very existential materialistic exhibition, the possibilities of finding ways to present those developed films and slides increasingly became an interesting subject. From then on, a subliminal transformation of shifting of attention from solely documentation to self-conscious presentation had been undertaken. To go even further, the following photographic experiments oriented by consciousness of the expressive language of photography developed gradually into a solid independent research project. It was later becoming the major theme practiced in phase 2. Thus, in phase 2 the photography and its related way of presentations no longer just functioned as a documentary tool but as a media for artistic expression.

PHASE 1

Photography as a Tool for Documentation

Phase 1 can be seen as a period of transformation in terms of the whole photographic project. If I had just photographed those finished works without extensively shooting the sectional working process and their related conditions, if there was no necessity to present those pictures and slides in their own destined ways, if I had not received the informative knowledge and experience on the potentiality of making creative presentations of those images, there would be no such project especially the themed project developed in phase 2 to be independently acclaimed. From a humble start, I noticed transformation began when the camera extended its lens range towards those apparently ordinary things, settings and scenes inside the studio. These ordinary shootings were at the beginning just a record of the progressive conditions of the works and their related material gatherings. With the development of those negative/positive films into printed pictures and slides, and especially when they were presented in their due ways, their vernacular appearances and their narrative nature of those images immediately reached a point of stark banality. The appreciation of everyday ordinary objects and their impressions also immediately resonated to the basic rhythm of the research. Gradually those rather random snapshots became self-consciously photographing, those enclosed ordinary things in the viewfinder were looked at as artifacts instead of just ordinary things. An extensive photographic experiment thus began.

Plate C2C-1 is an image just of the corners of an art studio. Close to the center of the picture stands a chair with a collaged surface, a carelessly dropped group of cotton with written calligraphic characters, piled on it a stack of folded calligraphic paper works. On the carpet a framed small collage work leaning against a cardboard box, on the box a thick book with a clear word '*PHILOSOPHY*' on it side, adjacent to the book is a newspaper and a supermarket shopping bag. Behind the chair there stands a role of white paper, further behind it is a rack and a white jacket. On the partition there are tucked photocopies of calligraphic master pieces and sketches, two baseball caps on the handle, and on the top right corner a half shown T-shirt. It might suggest a scene of a studio with casually placed something that I have worked with before, now grouped against the partition. Indeed, in this picture nothing has really been pre-arranged for photographing at the time of making. Nevertheless, attempts as such were gradually being overtaken by some kind of content manipulation. Namely, I added things in those apparently casual scenes to examine the visual relationship between those calligraphic works either written or printed and the living environment, and also to bring a visual contrast within the composition. This purposeful practice emerged from consciously putting calligraphic books and related works of calligraphy in as random as possible a way among those natural groupings within the studio. There were reflections on the critical relation between this kind of purposefulness and the natural way of making an art work, and its subsequent outcome; also I immediately realized that along with the pursuit of the naturalness of those added bits of things in a selected composition might only make sense to those who were informed by such a planned attempt. Therefore in

many cases those added things very much likely would be submerged or integrated with all those banal things without the least trace of significance, provided they were explicitly prioritized in position and proportion of those added bits in the composition, which was at the cost of losing that ordinary 'naturalness' being sought after.

By identifying with this a possible unwilling total integration – the loss of calligraphic identity, I moved the practice outside of the studio to the open space. Firstly, I had books of calligraphy normally placed open paged against or among or on top of grass, bushes, or on the ground, or on a piece of log near the fence, or against a transformer (plate C2C-2). The visual contrast between the black and white paged calligraphic book and the green natural surroundings was immediately brought about by such a placement. Unlike those that had been photographed inside the studio, the placement of a book among the wildness, the black and white – the usually regarded colorless against the lushly green, the apparently loneliness of a single book among the woods suddenly brought about a sense of nostalgia, a poetic mood permeated with a sense of self-pity. Secondly, there was a withdrawal from that alluring poetic mood, for I simply noticed the danger of being captivated by such a rather narcissistic romanticized beautification if the practice kept following on that path. Thus, the place changed from wildness to construction sites, having an opened calligraphic book or books on calligraphy placed on top of stacked clips of scaffolding, among dismantled rubble, ropes, rollers, metal bars, wood panels, rubbish bins and the like (plate C2C-3). Though the book appeared to be rather fragile among all those materials, the apparent roughness of those construction materials and seeming disordered positioning was in a way, successful, for they visually worked quite well together. Thirdly, instead of using books of calligraphy, this time I used those treated written calligraphic pieces experimenting again in the wild, to see if there would be something different (plate C2C-4, 5). There were two kinds of written work prepared one were those neatly folded as they normally appeared in studio; two were those that had been rolled, stretched, twisted and turned in total indifference to those ready to be disposed. The combination of the two were randomly scattered on the lawn, sports ground and on top of the grass against the trees. Quite unlike the still-life of the book, they were not easily settled on the ground because of their lightness, many of them were blown by an occasional gust of wind literally hovering, dancing in the open air against the lush green looking through the lens. Though they were in fact in a three dimensional open space, still, they were treated through the lens as simply components in a flat two dimensional composition. Compared to those books the enlarged proportional occupation in composition greatly enhanced the visual impact and not least the very identity of calligraphy as something strange to the wildness. With the precaution of not falling for the allure of the nostalgic mood and scene, the throwing of those paper works performed in a rather violent manner, however even prepared with caution the photographic works turned out, especially those slides, to bear a certain literary (poetic) quality.

Other experiments were carried out by using only those already treated calligraphic works (plate C2C-6, 7). I placed them among leaves, twigs, and branches and tendrils hoping to transplant them to being actually part of that organism, to a certain extent,

that apparently worked because of their being treated irregular forms. Yet, this does not deny that the characteristic quality of being as simple as black and white would never completely be compatible with its surroundings even though it appears to be working on the abstracted formal level.

PHASE 2

Photography as a Media

The strategies deployed in phase 2 of the photographic project were similar to that of performative documentary and staged photography, yet unlike their meticulous preparations on both the stage properties and the performers, the one carried out in this phase was intended to capture a casual, relaxed, and leisurely scene, a scene apparently and in fact not particularly staged, but specially encouraged and selected. The project was centralized on documenting the bodily presentation of Chinese idiom in an explicitly written form, meanwhile it attempted to demonstrate by bodily performance the contemporary reading and interpretation of those chosen idioms both historical and in current circulation. There were two Chinese idioms basically incorporated in this series of experiments.³⁷ The reason for choosing the Chinese idiom as the practicing theme was not by accident. Besides its close relationship with calligraphic practitioners, it is also a typical representation of one of the fundamental characteristics of the Chinese language, a condensed suggestive short form³⁸ with a profound content implied. The characterized feature of Chinese idiom is that it normally consists of four characters, only a few of them in short sentences. Great numbers of them have a historical origin and stories behind them; some others usually refer to particular events or situations that bear specific significance and are open for possible interpretations. Many idioms have been in long public usage especially popularly used in folk entertainments like: cross talk (Xiangsheng), and storytelling (Pingshu), and some other public domains. From that, the Chinese idioms have enjoyed wide recipients and apparently become one of the most concise straightforward ways of expression in vernacular language. Besides that, it also enjoyed being one of the frequently visited subjects by practitioners of Chinese calligraphy for its nature is concise in short phrases yet usually suggests rich content and interpretations behind. These two idioms worked with in this practice are: first, the *Jing Zhong Bao Guo* (精忠报国) usually translations of it are as such: Be utterly loyal to one's nation or serve one's country with unreserved loyalty respectively. Second, the *Yu Shi Ju Jin* (与时俱进) easily found translations of it

³⁷ There in fact had some other Chinese idioms also experimented together with the finally remained two. The reason for them being dropped out from the practice was solely because the final two bearing the quality to describe the basic sentiment among the Chinese peoples both in history and especially in present contemporary life. They are two very typical ones.

³⁸ A vivid example is the Taoism classic *Tao Te Ching* by Lau Tzu, an influential philosophic writing that only five thousand characters/words in all. However it had shaped profoundly the mind of Chinese especially on arts in general and the way of living – attachment to the nature and naturalness.

are as follows: Being contemporary in accordance with the contemporary rhythm or keep pace with the times or keep on developing and advancing with the passing of time. The first idiom *Jing Zhong Bao Guo* is an historical one. The story behind it is about a national hero, general Yue Fei (1103-1142 A.D.) of the Southern Song dynasty who had risen to resist the northern nomads invasion (the Jin dynasty 1115-1234 A.D.). Later being called back from the front and murdered by those ministers who wanted to negotiate a peace deal with the Jin without a war. The legend is told that when general Yue Fei was in his youth, his mother seeing the cruelty of those northern nomads, using a needle tattooed the four characters - *Jing Zhong Bao Guo* on his back in order to spur him to rise against the nomadic aggression. It is one of the most popular stories and idioms among Chinese, it is hard to find any one in China or beyond within the circle of Chinese culture who does not know this idiom and the story of Yue Fei. Whereas, the second idiom *Yu Shi Ju Jin* is a rather contemporary one, since the 1990s it could be heard frequently in government speeches and addressed in newspaper headlines and related articles, thus, subsequently becoming one of the most popular idioms currently circulating in contemporary China. These two four character idioms were written on white square cotton patches in the style of standard and clerical script – one of the most indispensable stage properties of the practice besides the performers. The writing on white square cotton patches was a work of deliberation. It was willingly connected directly to the Bu Zi ‘a patch of pattern marking the rank; a decorative plaque; a rank badge.’ (Wang and Yang, 2005:226) In dynastic history, especially in the Qing dynasty which the Bu Zi was one of the distinguished features on official costumes usually sewed in the center of the front chest and equally on the back. Ranked officials were patterned with decorative animals and birds respectively, the one with no decorative patterns but just written characters on the Bu Zi were worn only by soldiers, hard laborers and prisoners, in this case it functions the same as in the West. Obviously as it demonstrated, the white square patches with written characters in the style of the Bu Zi is in fact used only by those who have no official ranking, thus, in general especially in this practice it had been made as an indication of those mass peoples living at the bottom level of the social strata. Equally to the four-character idiom, the project needed four performers to wear the Bu Zi with written idiom on it. Besides me, the other three ‘performers’ are my friends. We grew up together, one is now a professional artist specializing in oil painting; the other is a freelance artist good at both graphic design and painting, and the last is an anesthetist working in the hospital. To realize the project together with close friends of mine was simply for the long built mutual understanding between us, which was regarded as crucial to the success of the actual performance. Indeed, the process of staging, shooting and the results later turned out to be exactly as it was preconceived. The staged performative project was basically presented in two versions, one staged in summer, the other performed in winter. Compare the photographed images of the two versions; one major difference was the facial expression. That difference in fact was dominated by the meaning and context the idiom portrayed. Those stern faces with serious looks (plate C2C-7) were the performance of the idiom *Jing Zhong Bao Guo/be utterly loyal to one’s nation*; whereas the relaxed smiling faces (plate C2C-8) together with casual scenes like that picnic

were the reproduction of the idiom of the *Yu Shi Ju Jin/being contemporary in accordance with the contemporary rhythm*. To understand this staged performative reproduction of the idioms, the context should be first clearly defined, which is defined in present contemporary China. The chosen idioms, the black and white Bu Zi with written idioms, the style of the character writing, the corresponding facial expressions and settings were all deliberately staged to produce a playful ironic performance. The playful irony was exactly produced by the contrast between the seriousness or relaxed faces of performers and the very meaning of the written idioms on their front chests. The playful mood is one of the typical moods of youth in contemporary China, also an easily found general sentiment of many who were born in the late 1960s and after. By witnessing China's opening up the door to the outside world, experiencing in person the fruitful returns of such openness and especially the results of the economic reforms – the substantial improvement of every one's living standard and wider choices on opportunities. Being happy to be born in this particular historical period – a period being characterized as China is rising, a period has been regarded by many as China now entering a renaissance.³⁹ As a consequence of that general realization, it is hard to resist the natural arriving of that rather self-contented, self-enjoyable, self-entertaining playful mood. The play of such a mood is usually oriented by everything interested, everything related to the current topics of both historical and contemporary. Generally speaking, the playful mood is an optimistic attitude towards the future, supported by increasing self-confidence, the future not just of the individual but by and large of the nation as a whole.

Had not the experience accumulated in digillage practice, had not the Photoshop effect enrichment equipped me, the project of photographic practice would have developed solely along the line of photography or would have approached a conclusion after those films being developed. However, the fact was that oriented by the spirit of constantly seeking after alternative experiments and the allurements of special effects provided by Photoshop, the further manipulation of those photographic images was continued. At first, it was just using the Photoshop tools to adjust the picture's brightness or darkness along the line of value, color contrasts and some other minor changes. Gradually, it expanded to cropping the details of those unnecessary within the composition, then the composition and, not long after those skills, techniques and methods once used in the digillage practice one by one taking part in the manipulative experiment. (Plate C2C-9, 10). The similar techniques used in phase 1 digillage here once again are rendered on the photographed image. The four performers were repeatedly overlapped by themselves somewhat reminiscent of Cubist paintings; also reminiscent of a mosaic of various shots taken from shaky hands and slightly different angles so accidentally or purposefully recorded the movement of the bodies. More than that the style of street graffiti (of the style commonly found along many Chinese city streets in particular) also sprayed across the picture plane after those fragmented overlappings had been compressed into a coherent surface. Over them telephone

³⁹ Chinese is one of the kind of peoples in the world who fond of History very much, conscious of History very much. The uninterrupted historical record through the ancient period down to the present time is a vivid example of that willingness attachment. Thus, many Chinese like to put their thinking in an historical context, and become habitual to reflect or project their thinking along the course of the historical development.

numbers (both home line and cell phone together with country code and area code), painted drippings, sprayed dots, random signatures and phrases in a way to mimic the illegal advertising, the making of forged documents, one of most hated yet commonly seen kinds of street graffiti in China. The same techniques had been revisited after a year's interruption, (plate C2C-11) unlike previous colorful compositions the new attempt was by and large to reduce the color to its minimum almost to the monochromatic. Instead of overlapping mosaic like fragments on top of performers, here a simple repetition of the vertically cropped images of individual performers into a horizontal line, then according to the reading of the idiom from top to the bottom I stacked them together. As a result of the composition the final printing size has been greatly enlarged. Meanwhile, although the similar graffiti style employed again together with the reminiscent of telephone numbers, but this time it was the handwritten translations of the idiom – *Being Contemporary in Accordance to Contemporary Rhythm* that was emphasized, and making direct correspondence to the idiom worn on the front chest of these performers and also to its typed version regularly aligned along the right hand side. To make this rather interpretive attempt, the basic thinking was because of the possible language barrier that might generate confusion or misreading on these themed projects which were predominantly oriented by the Chinese language and its artistic expression – calligraphy.

Bearing the interpretive corresponding translations in mind, further experiments on variety of special effects were carried out. Arriving at this stage with the increasing involvement of Photoshop manipulations, the photographic project had been somewhat transformed into that very similar to the digillage practice, and these themed photographic images apparently became images like those accumulated in the resources bank. The inter-overlapping certainly wasn't purposeful, yet it was also not intended to resist this natural merging that was characterized by sharing the same technique. From a broader view, as long as the final objectives could be achieved such a sharing should be by all means embraced or celebrated, because it arrived naturally beyond any forcible deliberation. If that was a matter, it was only a matter of terminological categorizing. Getting rid of those self-imposed categorical limitations, the practice went even further together in accompanying the playful mood permeating the performative project. As it progressed I noticed that the approaches on creating special effects became increasingly comprehensive, which some matters once concerned in painting practice also joint-forces. The present Photoshop manipulated photographic project as a matter of fact became a meeting point of diverse experiments in various media through different methods. For instance, one of the notable features examined in the painting practice was compressing the image depth in order for it to be visually compatible with the two dimensional natured characters & words. In this practice the attempted compression was focused on the overall conflation of the photography, in the hope of bringing about a coherent integration between the four performers and the negative space – the background, in order to achieve an integrated surface as had been attempted in the painting practice. Besides that, the formal destruction of characters & words in the collage project had also been incorporated in the practice though not as destructively as previously, which was achieved basically by cutting off sections of the Bu Zi again and

again from the breeding image⁴⁰ then pasted one after another on top of or adjacent to each other, variations brought about by using the blurring tools to create a contrasted sharp and blurred combination. Yet, one major difference with previous (visual) destructive attempts here was the readability of the characters had been consciously retained. Therefore for the sake of the themed idiomatic performative project, they all remained recognizable. Furthermore, the designing principle - repetition - significant in digillage practice was also employed here, not for its inherited unifying capability to the composition but rather for the sequential movement easily generated by the dislocation of those repeated fragments scattered across the picture plane.

If I really wanted to clarify or to logically analyze the comprehensive approaches incorporated in this final section of the photographic project, the explanation from the perspective of Marxist historical materialism could provide a good answer. The practical convergence of diverse ideas and methods and the permeated playful mood through the photographs to the actual practice are all the result of quantitative accumulation – the persistence in the actual practice; it is exactly this quantitative accumulation that brought about the qualitative leap – the self-entertaining playful mood together with freely incorporating anything related and anything constructive.

⁴⁰ The term 'breeding images' especially denotes to those images that have been pre-edited before the actual practice by Photoshop; usually a same image has a number of different versions with distinctive effects.

D. Video Project

Still Image Video Practice

Simply looking at the scale of the work encompassed by the video project, I tended not to treat it as an independent body of practice. However, owing to the fact that it had indeed picked out some interesting points and had experimented some issues related to the research, therefore even though it was not as physically large in scale as those previously described, it still deserves a space for its contribution. The practice of still image video in this section was attempted to visually present the verbal description in its written form, to be placed/appeared onto the very surface of the subject it interpreted, to visually demonstrate the possible danger of falling into a total confusion by ever increased extraneous interpretations on a formerly simple object. The initiation of the experiment was a corresponding reaction towards the ever increasingly propagated new products, new areas of study and the subsequent proliferation of new vocabularies that come along. For which it was needed to employ ever more new elements to forge new words and to borrow ever more 'foreign' expressions and additional descriptions to correctly define the precise limited boundaries – the need for language both verbal and visual. Such a crisis of language proliferation was partly caused by booming information technology, and partly by the increasingly narrowing scope of individually refined subjects of study (historically speaking). Therefore, the title of the themed project in this practice was named - *Lost in Interpretation*.

PHASE 1

The very first attempt was started from a series of photographs of my own body once posed imitating ancient Greek statues. Working on Photoshop, I typed in corresponding anatomical terms on the body to signify the exact positions of muscles, bone points or groups of muscles, later those typed in positioning terms naturally (as usually happens) extended to those acupuncture points that are practiced by the traditional Chinese acupuncture and moxibustion. Beyond expectation, this work turned out to be not a time based one, for it can not be played as sequential clips though originally it was intended to be. The fact was that it had been accidentally compressed while I was in the middle of adding further descriptive terms. As a consequence of that those previously typed terms were all locked together with the image thus becoming an integrated one. This first attempt couldn't be credited as anything successful by such a sudden accidental compression. Although the practice wasn't complete, the issue of the relation between image and characters & words again came across immediately along the practice. That is, at what stage can the work be regarded as necessary to stop the typing of interpretive characters on the surface of the subject? Or to say, to what proportional degree could the subject and the typing-in-characters reach a visually harmonized relation? Indeed, the typing in stopped at a certain stage at which the image and the typing-in-characters were visually in a state of proportional balance; and normally, the image and characters would appear mutually complementing, and integrated in a rather decorative way like someone's body being tattooed with meaningful characters. What the above issue was concerned with was the beautifully arranged images and characters & words on a surface. The similar methods and criteria have been widely used in commercial advertising. But, the thing is, in the nature of this practice although the implementation of the process is similar to each other, yet the issue being emphasized was utterly different and in fact in an opposite direction. The essential focus in this practice was to visually demonstrate how image can be gradually confused by bits and bits excessive adding up written interpretations of/on (literally) itself. It's not related to any ideas or attempts of a harmonious beautification.

The following practice could be divided into two phases. The differences mainly determined by the working media used. The first phase worked on Photoshop basically, later presented in a slide form by the installed play function of the Windows. The second phase worked on Mac's Final Cut Pro, rather complicated software yet more professional for video editing. The theme never changed (*lost in Interpretation*) only the language used. In the first phase it was in Chinese, the fonts used were Huawen Xinwei and Huawen Xingkai respectively⁴¹; whereas in second phase it was in English, the font used was Arial regular. One of the major experiments in the first phase was practiced on a picture of my own face, a frontal view of me bathing in a warm lamp light (plate C2D-1). The first clip was the original picture without any additional manipulation. The typing in interpretation started from the second clip from the center

⁴¹ Huawen Xinwei and Huawen Xingkai are two commonly used computer font types. Huawen Xinwei is derived from the Weibei script; and Huawen Xingkai is a combination of running script and standard script.

point between the two eyebrows. The point is one of the primal acupuncture points named Yintang Xue, the variation of the color of the Yintang Xue interpreted by practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine and fortune teller corresponds to good or bad health or fortune respectively. Apparently it's necessary to introduce the interpretive content before proceeding. The making-up of it was those names of facial features, names of anatomic points, names of acupuncture points of traditional Chinese medicine, names of micro astronomical points (these points are only used by those fortune tellers, incorporation of these names was basically to bring in more flavors and making an even more complex and in depth facial interpretation) and names of clothing and background. Once the corresponding terms were typed in correct position the image was immediately compressed and saved as an individually numbered clip. The following steps were simply repeated in the making of the second clip, only, accordingly, typing in those details of interpretive terms in their destined positions/points; then these were saved as sequential numbered clips. All together 108 clips had been made. It was believed that there were possibilities to find other terms, phrases to describe the facial features and related features. Yet, at the time that facial interpretive covering up was regarded as proper, otherwise I would run into descriptions of non-sense. A pure making-up apparently wouldn't be acceptable. Then the whole clip was reviewed. Shortly after, I noticed a critical limitation caused by the very way of making it, because every clip would be compressed and saved to being an integrated surface, and only by that then could the clip be worked on by the following. Exactly to the compressing and saving after each step that any later found mistakes or unsatisfactory parts would be hardly retrieved (not impossible). The final completed clips were presented in a slide form. Another attempt was carried out on an image of my left hand using the similar approach practiced in facial interpretation, yet it followed in an even smaller scale of work.

PHASE 2

The practice was temporarily halted after some attempts in phase 1, partly for loss of passion for such a laborious repeated work with less technical content, partly to give way to other major practices. As the research characterized by diverse experiments, some practices were in fact running parallel at a certain time, some, depending on the factual necessity, were prioritized, some as the one just mentioned was temporarily halted to give way to others. With the concern of relatively less technical content in previous practice and the subsequent limitation, disadvantage and imperfection revealed, upgrading the working method had become an urgent matter. After an interval, the Final Cut Pro of Mac was picked up for the new phase of practice. With the assistance of a technician in Mediatek, the basic editing skills have been mastered. Because the work was carried out in the Canterbury studio, the language accordingly used on the facial interpretation was English, for the convenience of working which was one of the considerations, the other and the most important factor was for a smooth

communication. There were apparently already things proved to be lost in interpretation, so in this phase the practice really didn't want to be yet again lost in translation. (The Chinese calligraphy and especially the Chinese language it expressed is already a barrier ...)

The whole process of making it turned out to be more complicated and time consuming than those previously attempted that were characterized as rigid repetition. This time the practice was worked on Jolie's close up image (plate C2D-2) (Hollywood actress, the image taken from the *ELLE* magazine cover in the library before the practice). Without any additional Photoshop making up, the image of Jolie was directly imported from the digital camera onto the working canvas. It began as usual from adding the direct names of the facial features, and then this expanded to include her hand, shoulder, arms and background. Suddenly appeared a line of *Jolie's looking to her right*, which started a two-person dialogue. The exchanged talks in short sentences or phrases were all related to Jolie, basically the mixing up of news and gossip about her circulating in all sorts of media. By realizing the increasing nonsense talk, together with the image being almost fully covered up by those lines of exchange, an exclamation of *come on* appeared in large size near the right hand corner to stop the talk from proceeding any further. Being fully overlapped by words, phrases and short sentences the image of Jolie gradually second by second receded into the black background, on the screen remained only those white lines of letters against the black background. Then in seconds these letters also disappeared in the total darkness. After editing of the main body of the clips had been completed, the work moved on to both ends, adding the title of the video clip, name of the author, acknowledgement, place of production and the end. The overall time duration of this still image video clip after being finally rendered was 4.08 minutes. This newly finished video clip if compared with the previously described attempts could be considered as a complete piece of work, because it has all the necessary components required to be a video work, except audio sound which apparently is not needed. Yet, to be realistic, although the work presents a sense of live freshness, the mastery of the editing technique is still a bit jerky, not smoothly rendered. It could be further developed and refined if the work was to be taken as an independent practice. However, in terms of the whole research project, this video project is just an extended practice from the photographic project. The use of the still image was clearly an indication of the natural extension. Characterized by experimenting on alternative possibilities, the practice of still image video has achieved its basic objective, and provided means, strategies, possibilities and experiences to develop it further. Thus, its role as an extension of the major practices has succeeded.

CONCLUSION

If a group of people were asked to successively look out of the same window then to give a description of what they saw, the description of the same view from the same window would vary from one to another. This is certainly the case in art practice. The difference would be even obvious if the act is artistically oriented, for the making of a new and creative art work is the prime objective in the practice. Therefore, in terms of the subject and issues investigated in this research project, I could reckon if it were carried out by some other researchers, a totally different outcome can be positively expected. As far as the practice based research was concerned, from the beginning of the project I never ever intended by the end of the research to claim that this demonstrated research practice is the only and best solution able to provide answer to the question asked in this research, nor am I claiming that the research practice is capable to provide a universal applicable strategy and methodology that could be used to deal with any situations similar to the one in this research - an art burdened with tradition - yet rather to offer an alternative, a way of thinking and an actual demonstration of the problem from a different perspective.

At the beginning of the research, it was hard to strike a balance with two sets of practice running parallel to each other. For instance, the Daily Practice of Calligraphy is a typical stereotype of traditional studio practice. Copying selected master pieces is the main activity, the practice requires the conformity to the rules and methods, the elimination and absence of individuality, the repeated repetition of the same routine ... all contradict to the contemporary approaches which one of the central themes is to give a full play to self-expression. Yet gradually the spark began to successively generate out of the interaction between the two contradictory practices. So active, that I have to from time to time temporarily stop to make certain judgments on the selection of those various approaching new ideas and strategies. That is exactly one of the reasons to explain why this research contains/has subsequently developed four projects (sub-projects): Painting Project, Collage Project, Photography Project and Video Project; and each project consists of several stages and phases featured by interrelated yet different emphases. The daily based calligraphic practice, though rather conservative and disciplinary, has accumulated a great deal of firsthand knowledge, in-depth understanding of the calligraphy as a traditional high art form encountered in the contemporary context, besides these, in practice, it has also directly influenced the development and making of the Painting Project as a whole and stage 3 Painting of Characters in particular. On the other hand, the works produced along the calligraphic practice have provided sufficient materials for the Collage Project and inspired extensive further experimentations by utilizing this by-product. It has largely widened the dimension of the collage practice. Due to the nature of the rice paper (so called) being soft, thin, flexible and absorbent, that proved to be the most suitable pasting material for examining the contradiction between Chinese characters and false and destructed Chinese characters, one of the most tested existing contradicted pair in the

contemporary practice of calligraphy.

As a return, the diversified experiments also offered reflections, not least on the issue of identity of Chinese calligraphy, which no matter how abstract a work is looked at or made, should avoid a total abandonment of the use of character and the legibility of character because that is the essential core of Chinese calligraphy and is the bottom line to be identified as Chinese calligraphy, particularly in this increasingly narrowed limited space which is stuffed by floating conflated images. As far as the calligraphic practice in contemporary context is concerned, the strategy for making a new calligraphic work can be shifted or concentrated on seeking alternative ways of presentation, simply put, to have the old wine outfitted in a new bottle – a re-presentation.

The integration of the two methods of practice in one go also provides a 'balanced' overarching view on historical traditions and contemporary achievements. It literally offers an opportunity to identify the relationship between the apparently contradicted pairs, meanwhile, to understand the present diversified differences are exactly evolved out of the pursuit of ideological sameness and identity; and helps to develop a rational objective view on history (past and present) and a way of thinking that is a less self-indulgent subjectivity. Having such a view and attitude is crucially important not least working on the contemporary practice of a traditional high art form like Chinese calligraphy. Furthermore, this structure once at work encourages the practitioner to focus on the subject on the one hand and to explore all available strategies and measures on the other hand (the availability of approaches varies from person to person). The result would be no loss of the depth of the investigation while covering a broad terrain of knowledge (ways of presentation in this research) that related with the subject. To a large extent, the Chinese calligraphy in a way represents many other traditional high art forms and disciplines that have encountered the similar situation in our present context, especially those nations that also have a long established historical tradition. In this sense, this research and the methodology constructed does offer a factual demonstration and an alternative plan to tackle the 'similar' problems. And it might possibly indeed work as the old Chinese saying tells: A rock found from another mountain may be capable to carve the jade found locally.

Certainly, as things usually turn out, advantage is often followed by limitation. In the practice, it is not unusual to see that some of the projects I halted and then moved on to another one as soon as the targeted issues had been examined and the objectives were realized by the chosen media. It is just to say that some of the works are rather experimental than complete. In terms of the series of works produced, they certainly have potentials that deserve further development. From my experience as a practicing artist, each series of work presented in this thesis can be further developed into a solid way of expression in their own right. What is needed is just the artist's persistent dedication. However, it is from seeing the potential in these works that the practice stopped. In the course of the research I have been constantly reminding myself that this research is not about a refinement of an individual practice, not about producing a complete work of art like those professional artists though I am capable to do so, but, it is about the making of a methodology – a comprehensive structure that is capable of

generating more new works in the practice. Benefiting from this working methodology, I have gone through an experience of gaining so many interesting ideas along the course of the research; I wish not only to share my findings with those who have similar concerns to me, but also from that to produce more new works on calligraphy to contribute my share to decorate the Garden of Creativity.

Furthermore, as expressed in previous chapters that this research to a large extent is part of the contemporary practice of calligraphy – modern Chinese calligraphy, thus, this practice based research will never be just a personal practice or personal testimony of proposed research. It, as the question answered in this research, has a wider application. Arriving at the stage/historical period of post-modern, (though the political system and economic base of China is different with major/dominant capitalist's nations; the World Wide Web and globalization bring them tightly connected to each others, especially the cultural exchange.) How can Chinese calligraphy keep itself 'in accordance with the contemporary rhythm'? How will Chinese calligraphy maintain its original quality as one of the most significant representatives of Eastern culture under the impact of consumer culture and globalization? How can Chinese calligraphy project its influence towards the world art? These questions are inevitably placed in front of this traditional art form. China is a nation deeply saturated in history, therefore, every issue, no matter how cultural, political, economic or social, must be considered within an historical perspective. The concern (immediate natural association) of 'history' is part of Chinese consciousness⁴². Besides education, one of major reasons for such an association should be attributed to Chinese calligraphy – an essential means to record the history in the past. The wide application of computer technology and word processing systems has cut off completely the traditional connection between history and calligraphy. But from another perspective (of artistic nature) the 'split' has further enhanced the tightly interconnected imagery relationship between the two 'arts' visually. Reflections collected during the research are in order to generate new work from this burdened art, to revitalize its creativity, to answer the above questions, we, as practitioners, simply could not rely on the 'professional calligrapher' only – the 'elite minority' who only represent part of the whole calligraphic tradition. Because 'calligraphy is not calligrapher's calligraphy; it should belong to everyone and anybody who wants to play with it.' We need to propose a 'return' back to its original state especially in education where calligraphy is as simple as picking up a brush and writing characters – everyone's calligraphy; to study the original masterpieces for an in depth understanding as did in this research – Daily Practice of Calligraphy. As the Postmodernism characterized, we should try to negate the prejudice between high and low, elite and mass art. We must be open-minded to identify the co-existence of differences and welcome the joint-forces of professional calligraphers (the insiders) and artists who use calligraphy as their resources, also those mass amateur practitioners (the outsiders). We should try to build an equal platform for exchange of fair criticism and presentation of research. We also need to encourage critics, art historians and scholars to help to facilitate the theoretical linkage, to help to teasing out rational ways of

⁴² But one of the side-effects of this kind of historical consciousness is a habitual linear mindset, which tends to reflect issues in a vertical pattern rather than a horizontal style.

interpretation and (re-)presentation of the (new) art, to help to build up proper documentations for theory and practice.

Economic development of a nation may have a determinative effect on the shaping of one's cultural characteristics and on further development. For example, the rise of American art, the spread of its (local) tastes and its universal position enjoyed in the contemporary art world, which is exactly in accordance with her historical achievements (economic, political and military) since 1945. China, although still a youthful nation in terms of modern economic development, has maintained over twenty-year's two-digit economic growth rate. It would be unwise to doubt or to be pessimistic towards the revival of China's cultural prosperity. Chinese calligraphy being an essential component of this grand tradition would for sure benefit from the economic development.

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Plate A1-1. MA final project (1). 2001. Installation, 200 m² . Canterbury, UK.

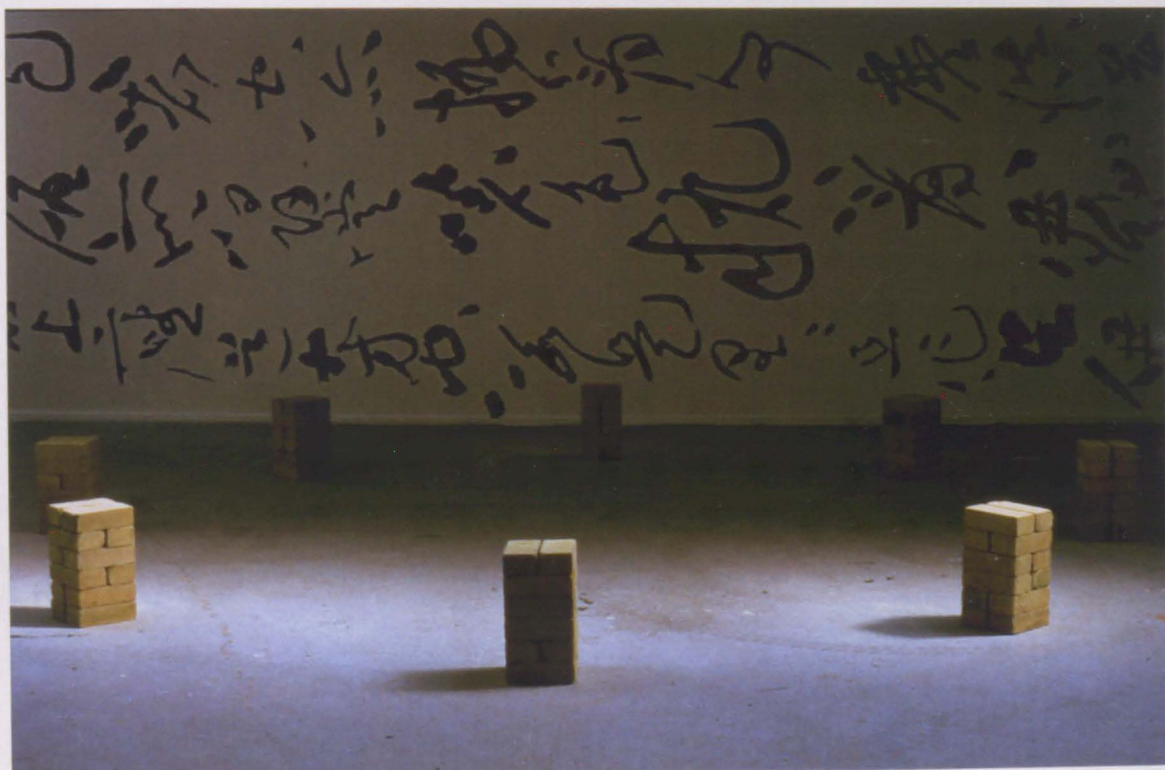


Plate A1-2. MA final project (2). 2001. Installation, 200 m² . Canterbury, UK.

皇帝陛下臣廣知陛下
聖人神聖上闕蓋萬已
禹民亦憐老幼又王封
受王杖承詔臣廣未

Plate C1-1. Wuwei Wangzhang Zhaoshu Lingce/Emperor's Imperial Edict of Wuwei, detail. 32-7 B.C. Wood strip, 23.5 by 1 cm. Wuwei city museum, Gangsu, China.

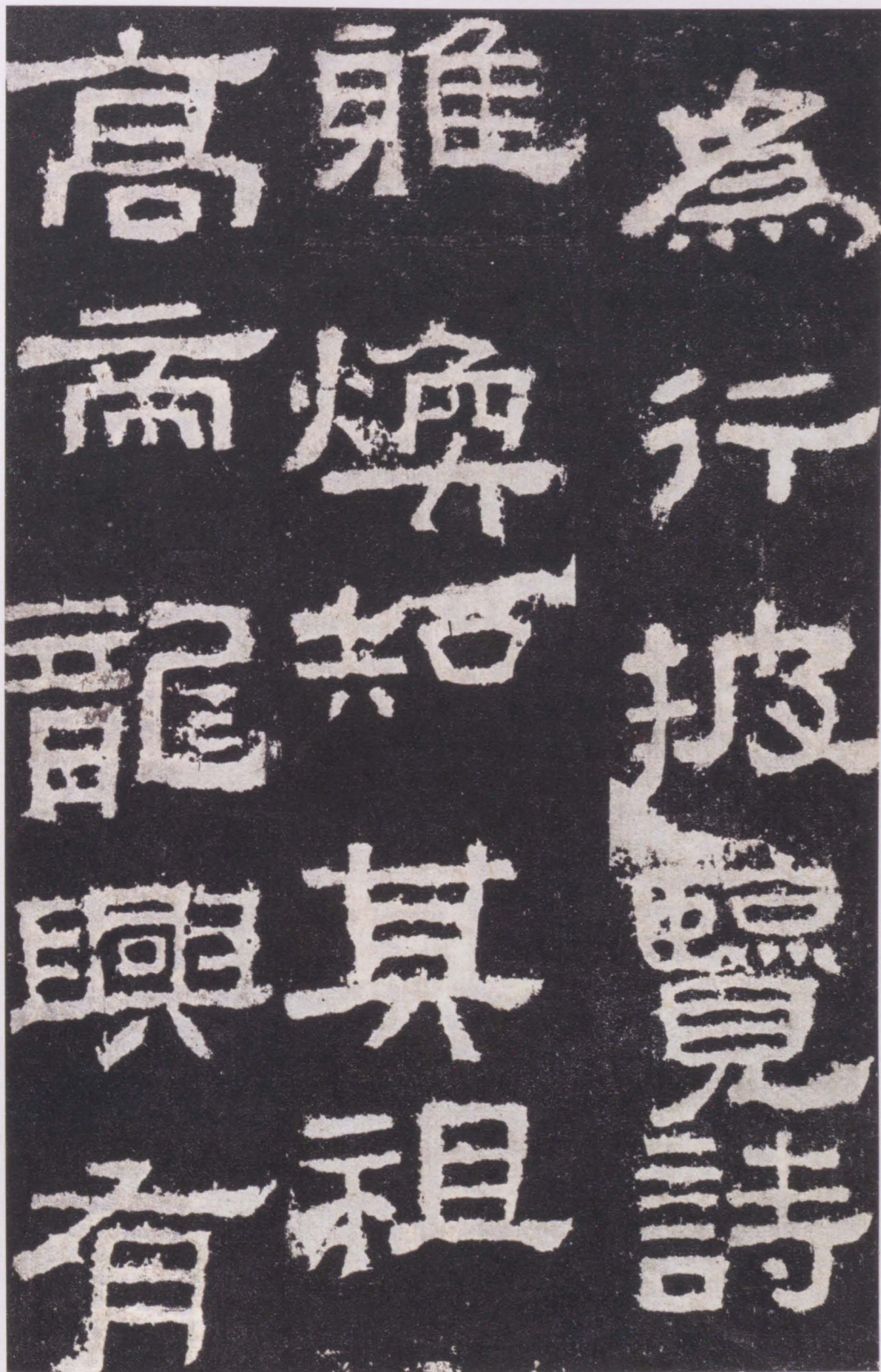


Plate C1-2. *Zhang Qian Bei/Zhang Qian Tablet*, detail. 186 A.D. Stone, 317 by 107 cm. Daimiao of Mount Tai, Shandong, China.

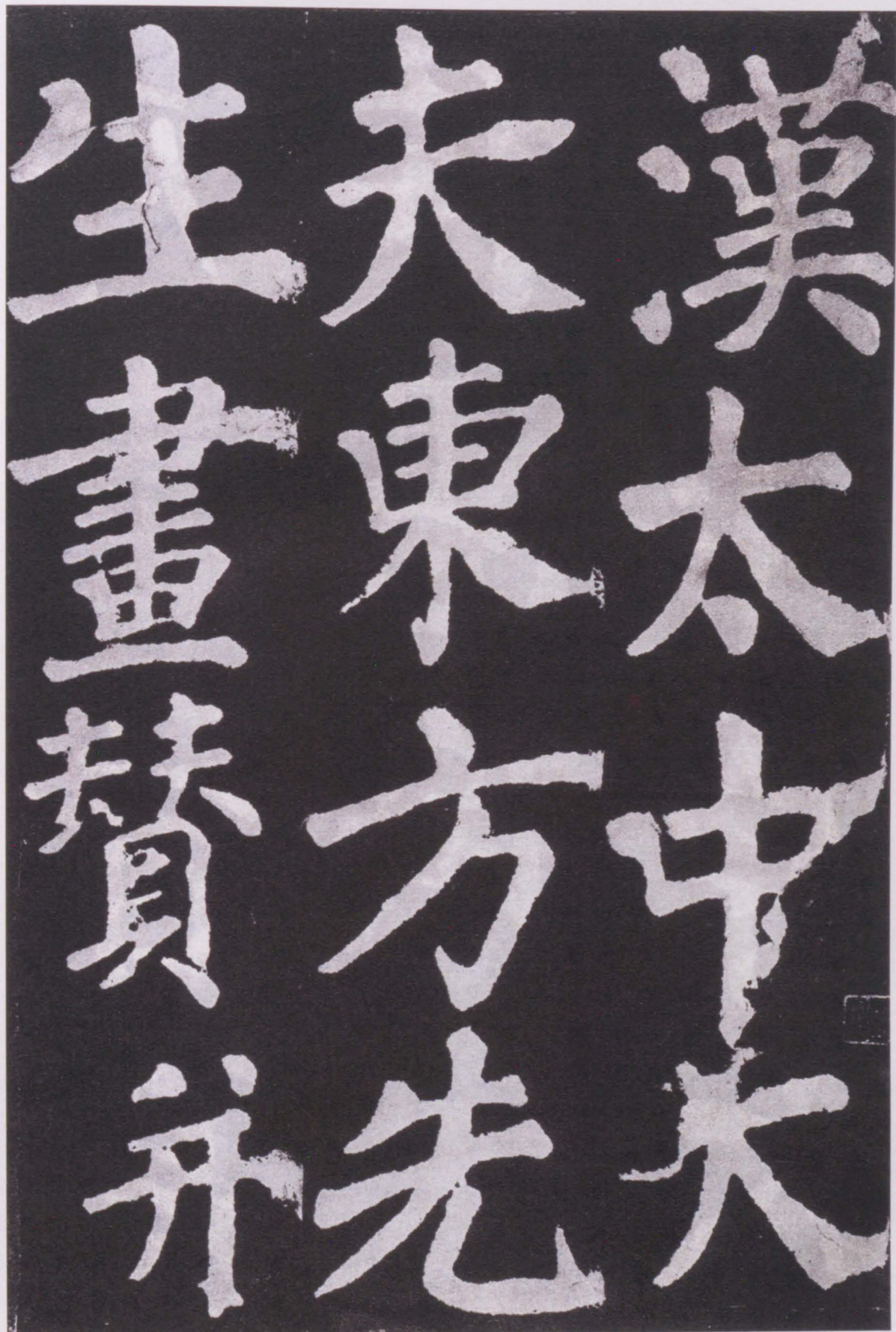


Plate C1-3. *Dongfang Shuo Hua Zan Bei/Encomium on a Portrait of Dongfang Shuo*, detail. 745 A.D. Stone, 340 by 151 cm. Lingxian museum, Shandong, China.

伏義八卦次序



太極

繫辭傳曰。易有太極。是生兩儀。兩儀生四象。四象生八卦。邵子曰。一分为二。二分为四。四分为八也。說卦傳曰。易逆數也。邵子曰。乾一。兌二。離三。震四。巽五。坎六。艮七。坤八。自乾至坤。皆得未生之卦。若逆推四時之比也。後六十四卦次序。放此。

Plate C1-4. Yi Jing/the Book of Changes of Qing dynasty version, detail. 1616-1911 A.D. Wood block print, 29 by 18 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2A-1. A reproduction of Caravaggio's *the Supper at Emmaus*. 2003. Oil on paper, 151 by 134 cm.
Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2A-2. A reproduction of Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas*, detail. 2003. Oil on paper, 151 by 134 cm.
Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

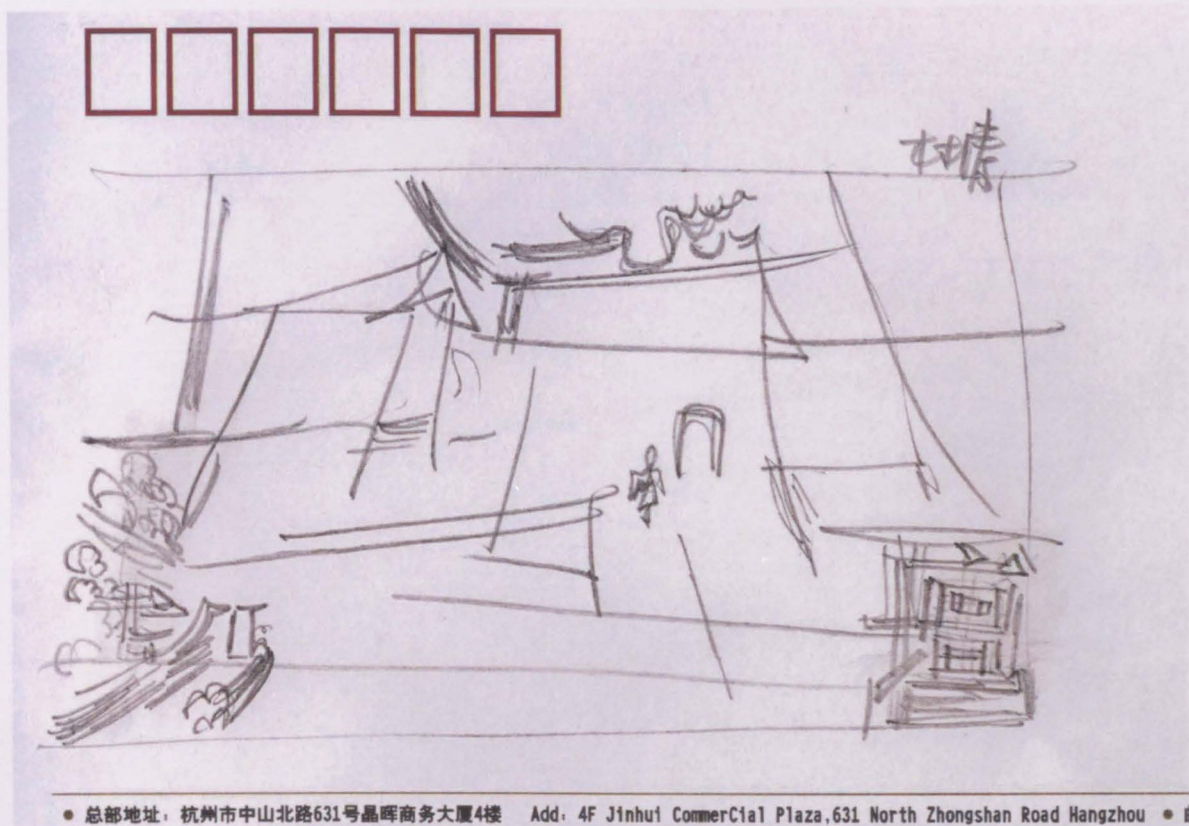


Plate C2A-3. Compositional study of a painting of a Chinese Buddhism temple. 2003. Pencil on paper, 22 by 11 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2A-4. Painting of a Chinese Buddhism temple. Acrylic on canvas, 89 by 69 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

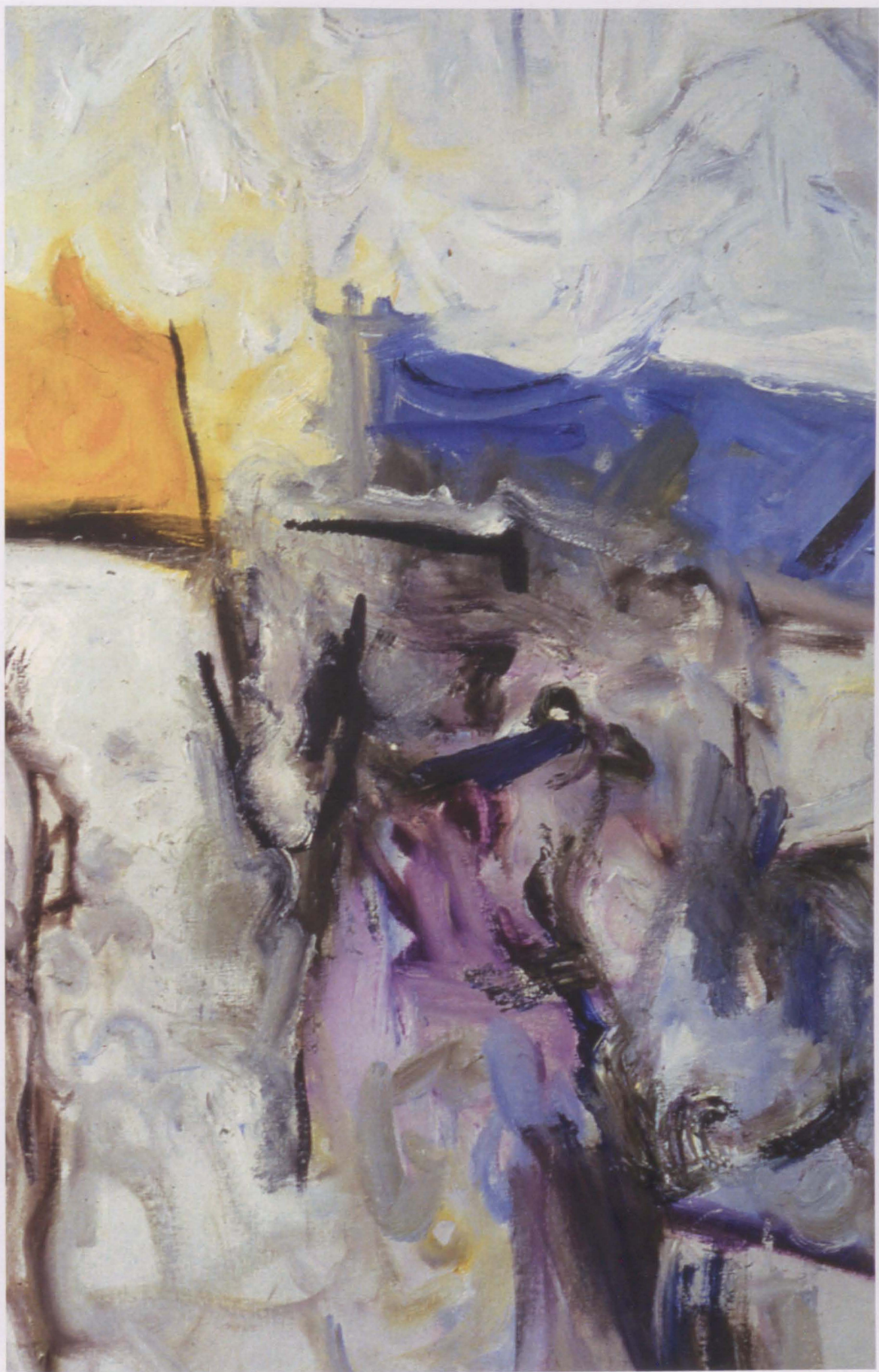


Plate C2A-5. Painting of a landscape. 2003. Oil on canvas, 230 by 150 cm. Destroyed.

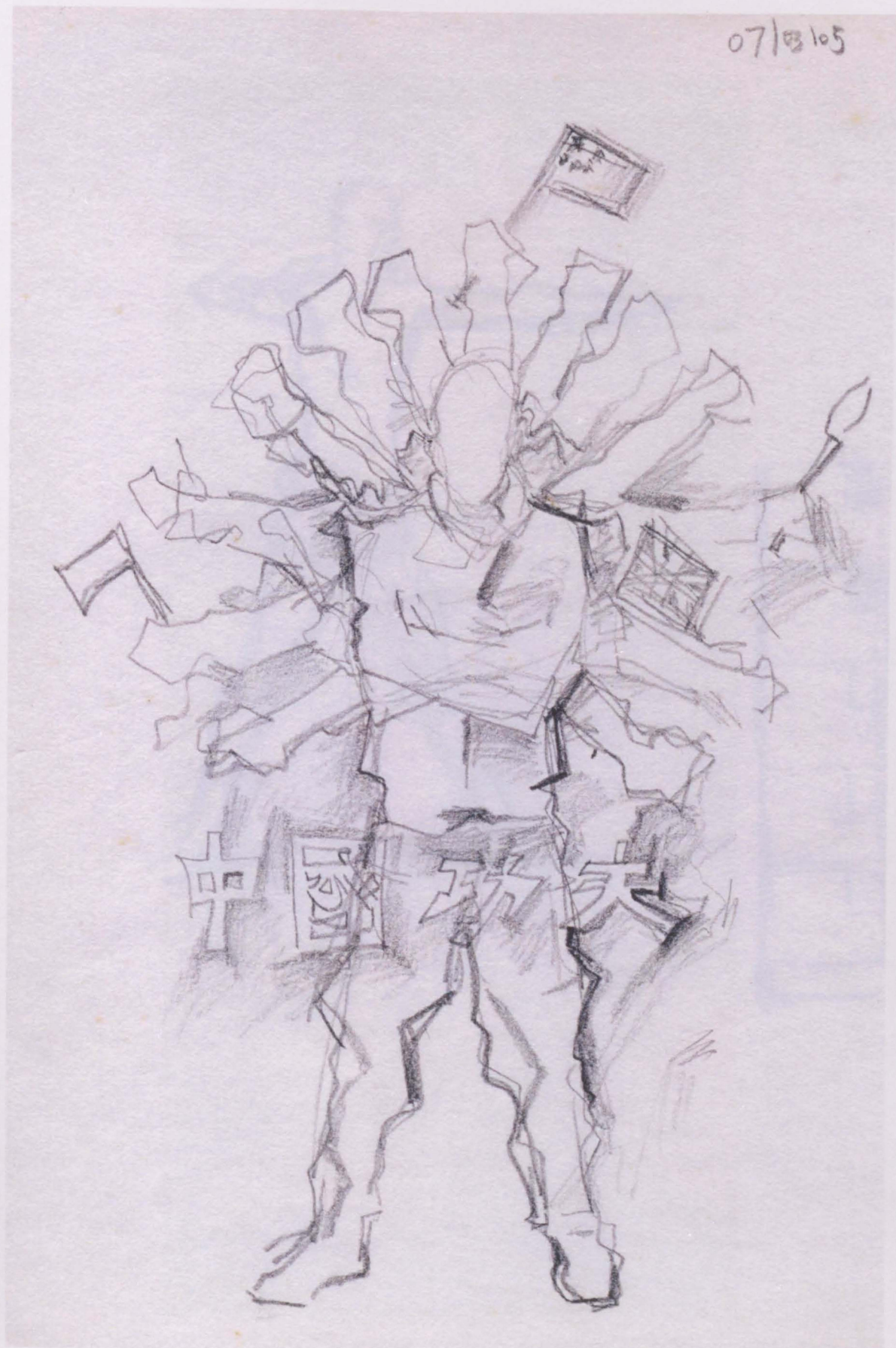


Plate C2A-6. Sketch of a compositional study of a painting. Pencil on paper, 26 by 18.5 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

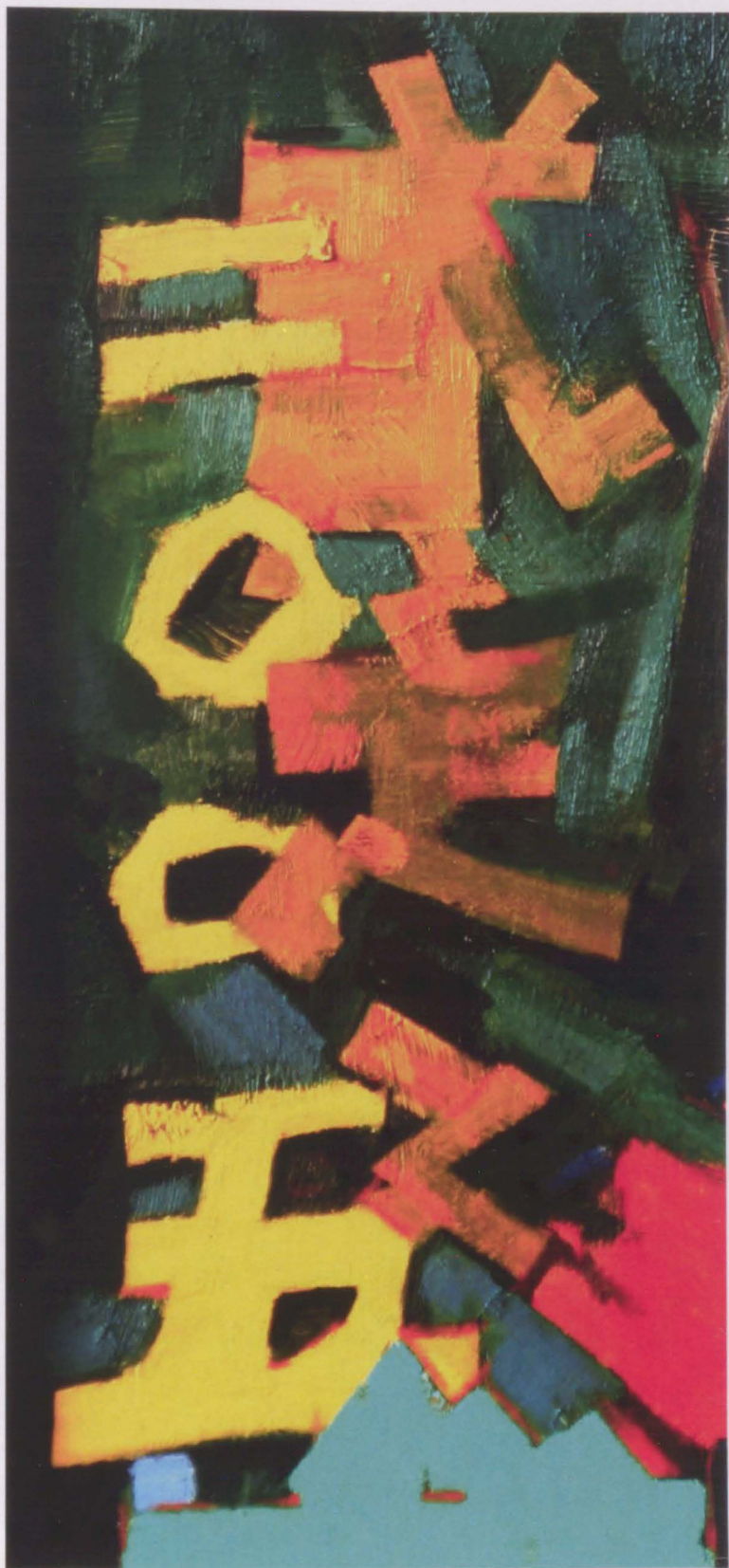


Plate C2A-7. Painting on enhancing the plasticity and visual thickness of characters & words, detail. 2005.
Oil on canvas, 80 by 60 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

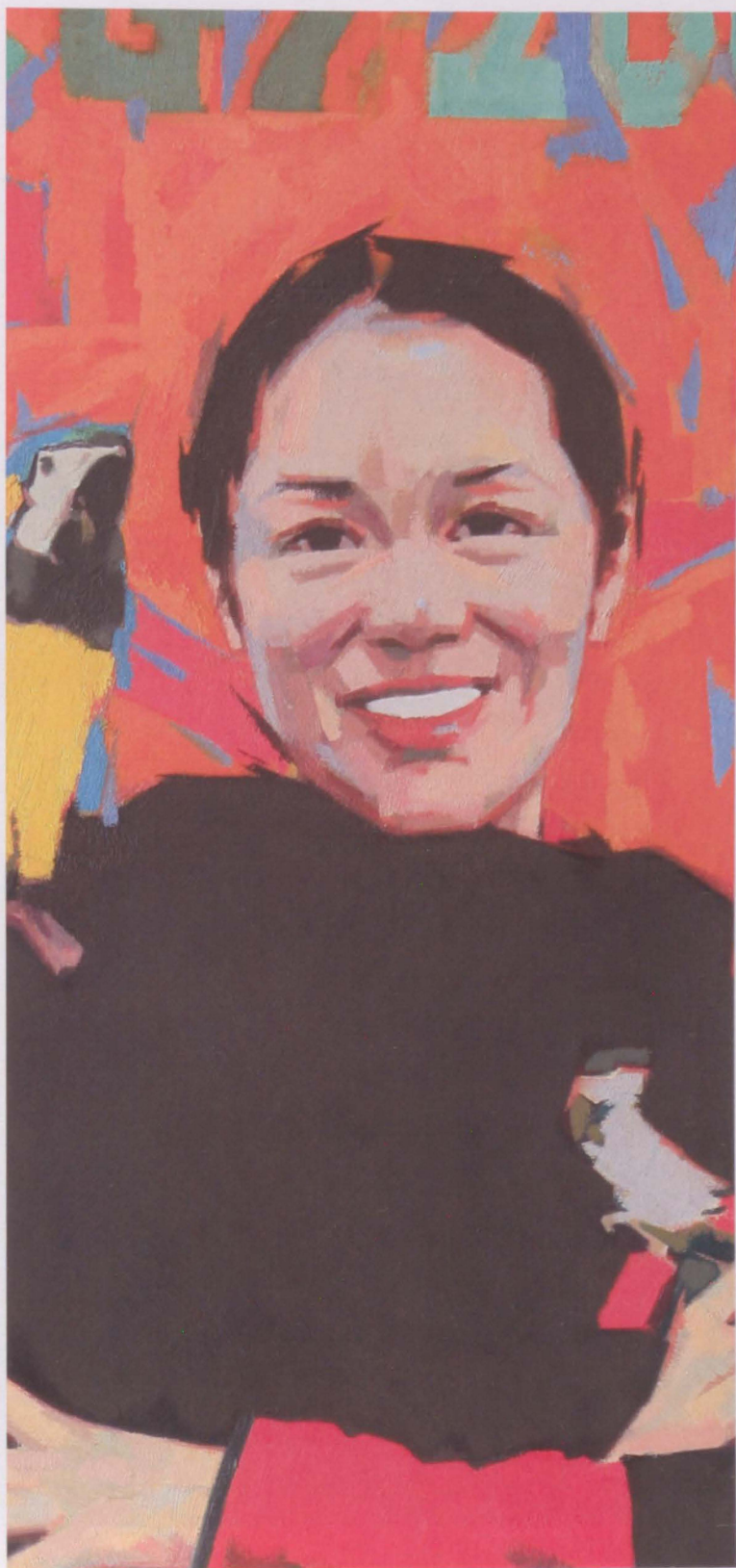


Plate C2A-8. Painting on reducing the depth of image, detail. 2005. Oil on canvas, 89.5 by 59.5 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2A-9. Painting of Lin's *Visual Documentation File*, LP-2. 2007. Oil on canvas, 100 by 81 cm.

Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2A-10. Painting of Lin's *Visual Documentation File*, LP-1. 2006. Oil on canvas, 100 by 81 cm.

Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2A-11. Painting of character *Fu*. 2005. Oil on canvas, 80 by 60 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2A-12. Painting of character *Chun*. 2005. Oil on canvas, 80 by 60 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2A-13. Painting of characters in Kuangcao/wild cursive script style. 2006. Oil on canvas, 40 by 40 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2A-14. Painting of calligraphic configurations. 2006. Oil on canvas, 40 by 40 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

第七子韶知曰为于
述而三齐闻不图至
十在三月味，不之也。
肉：乐斯也。

Plate C2A-15. Painting of sentence of characters, LPC-1. 2007. Oil on canvas, 120 by 60 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-1. Collage on painted canvas, LC-2, detail. 2003. Collage, 80 by 60 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-2. Collage on painted canvas, LC-3, detail. 2003. Collage, 121 by 63 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-3. Collage on painted canvas, LC-5. 2003. Collage, 69 by 69 cm.

Private collections, Hangzhou, China

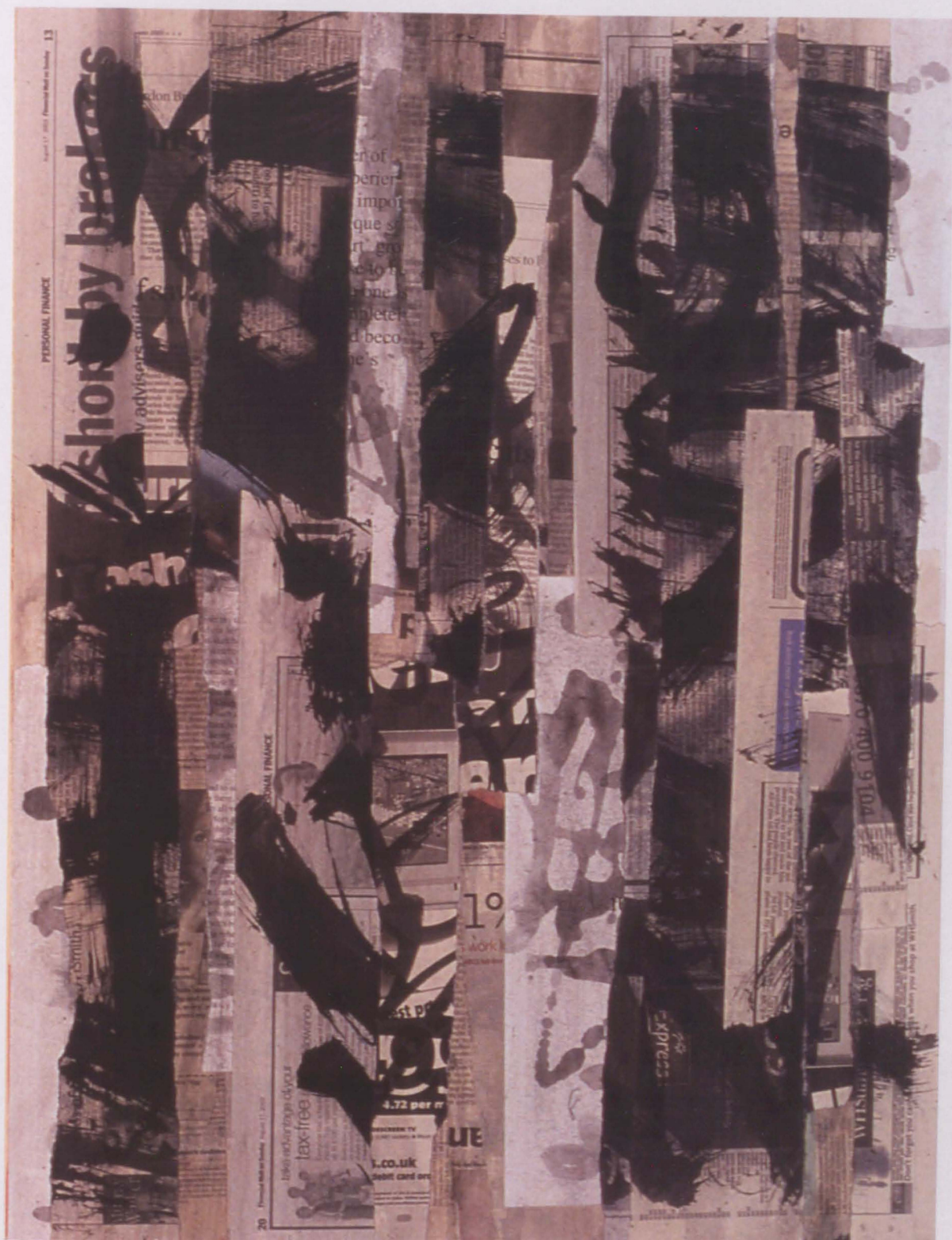


Plate C2B-5. Collage of written newspapers, LC-18. 2003. Collage, 70 by 50cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-6. Collage of printed papers, LC-20. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-7. Exhibition of collage works. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

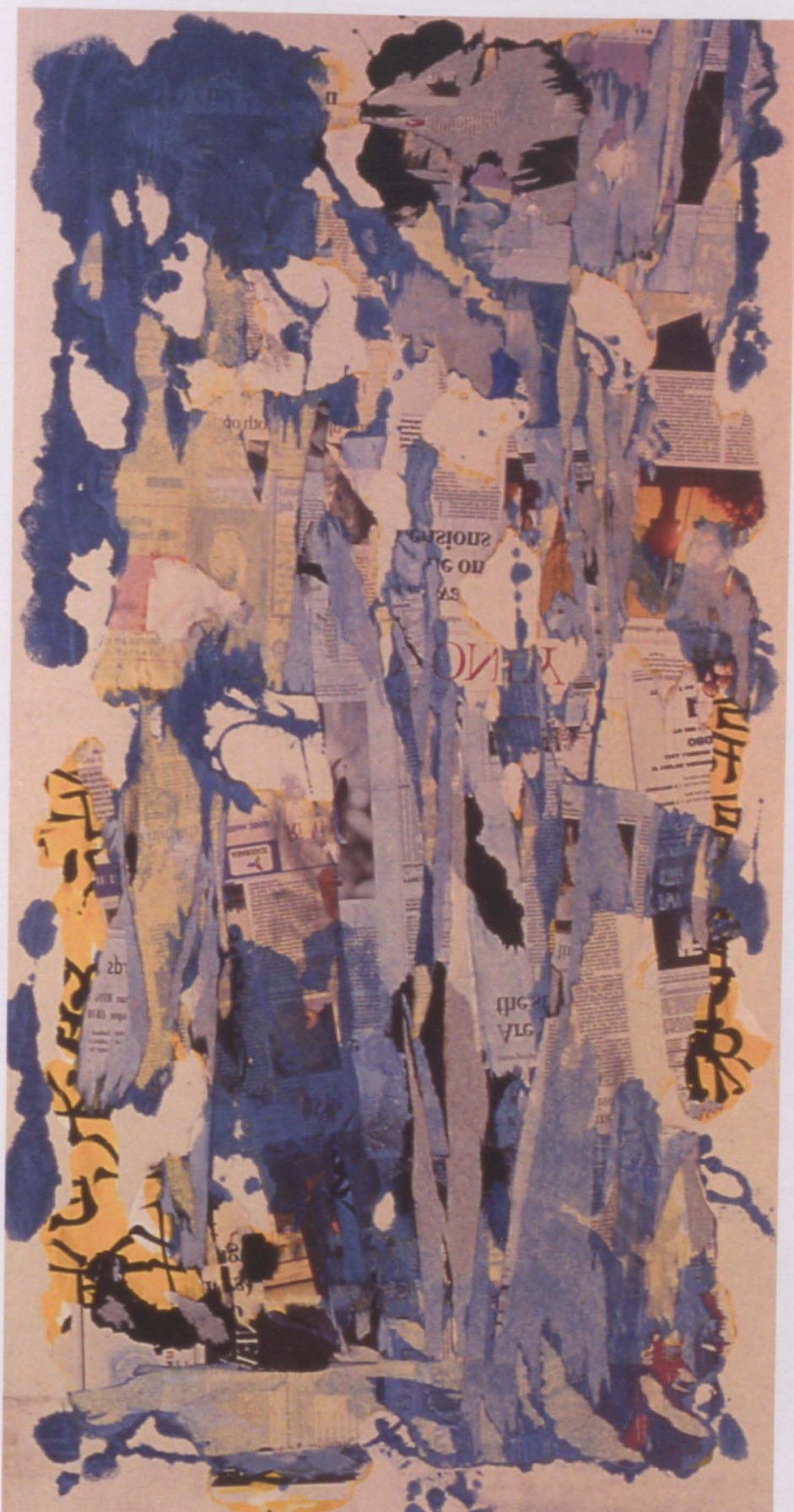


Plate C2B-8. Collage by combined process of additive and subtractive, LC-28. 2003. Collage, 121 by 63 cm.
Destroyed.



Plate C2B-9. Collage by combined process of additive and subtractive, LC-29, detail. 2003. 300 by 120 cm.
Destroyed.



Plate C2B-10. Collage on apples, mug and fruit juice cardboard container, LCO-6. 2003. 135 slide.
Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

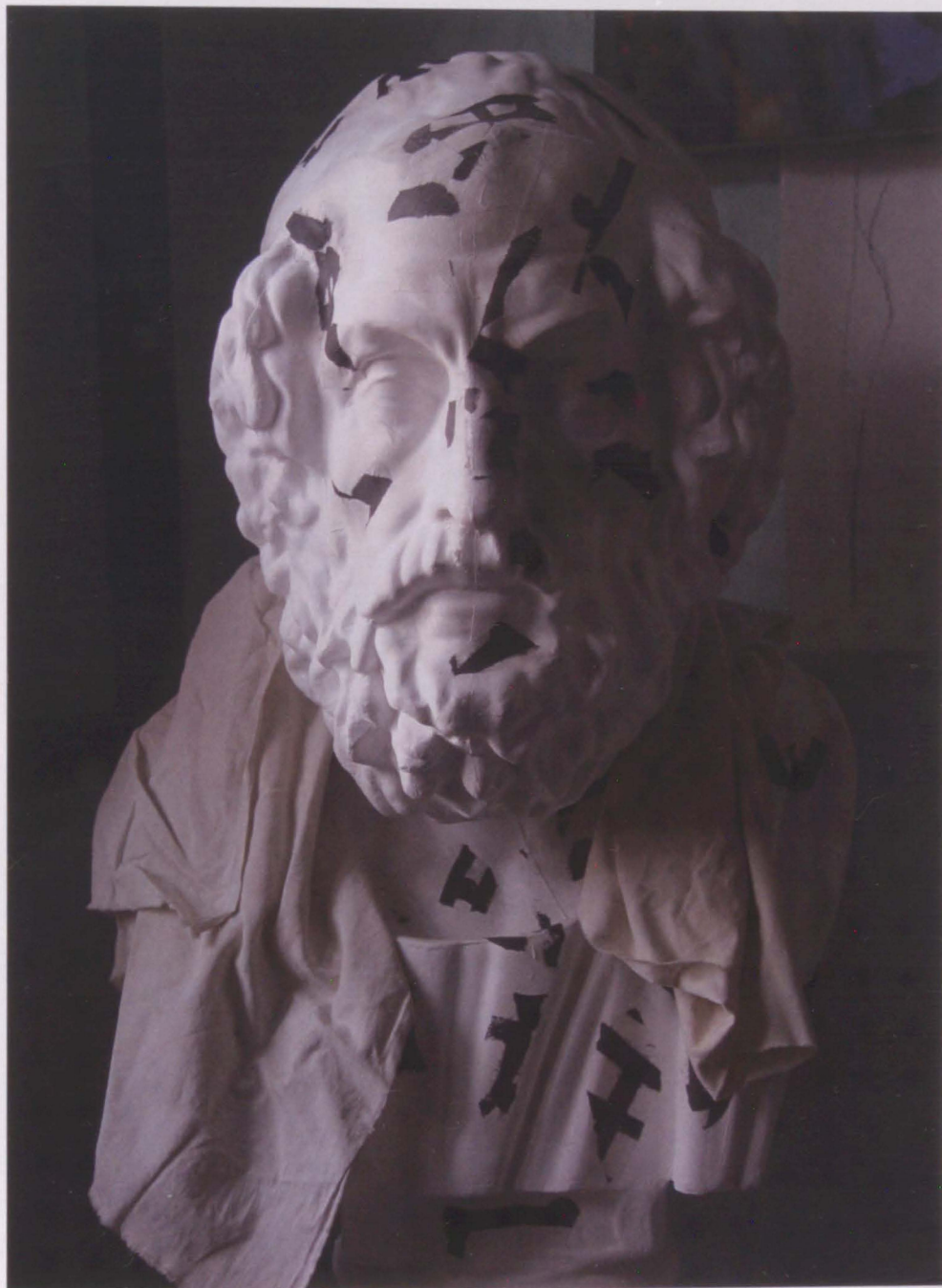


Plate C2B-11. Collage on plaster figure of Homer, LCO-11. 2004. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-12. Collage on apples and mug, series 1. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

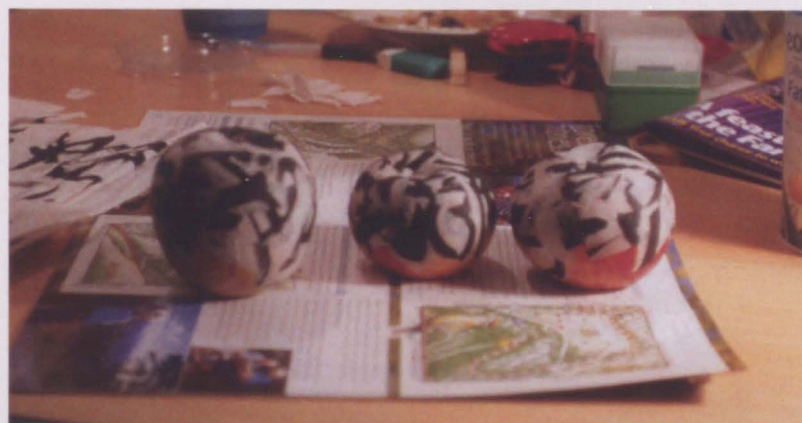


Plate C2B-13. Collage on apples and mug, series 2. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-14. Collage on apples and mug, series 3. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-15. Image of studio. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

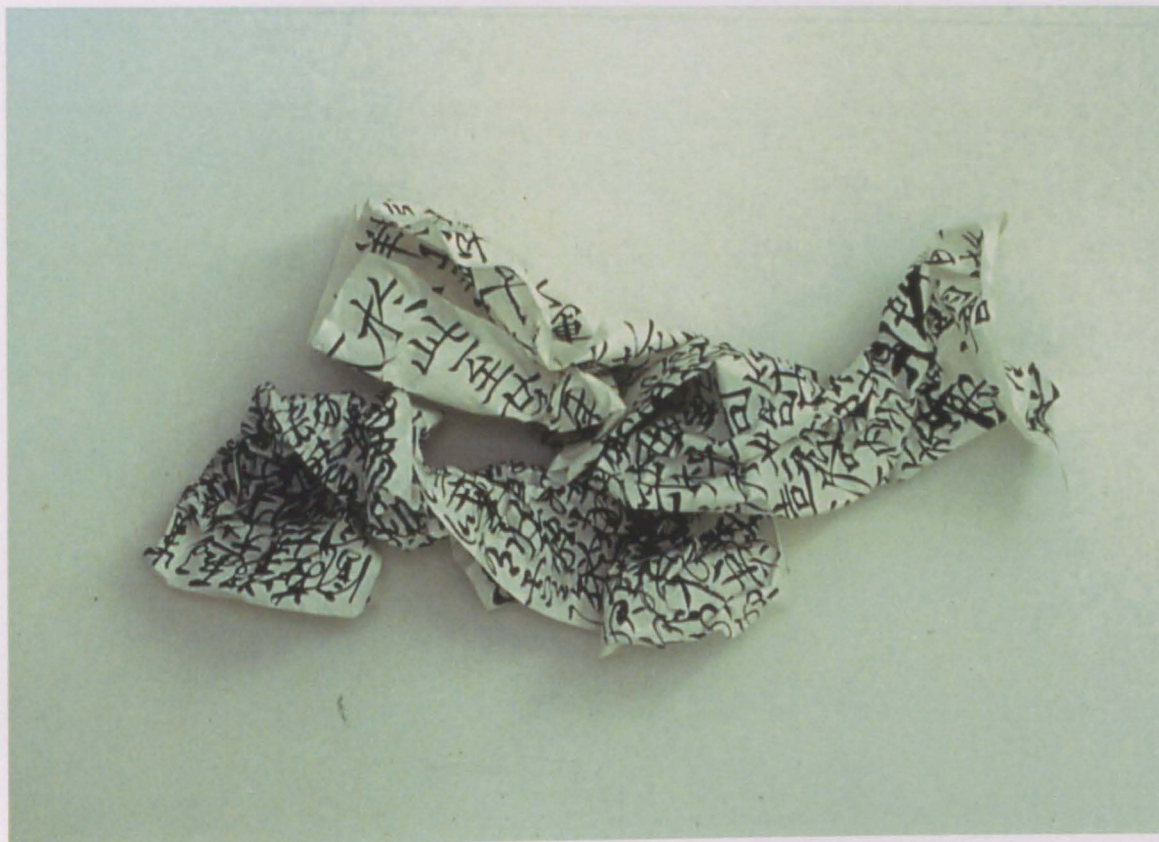


Plate C2B-16. Sculptural transformation of calligraphic paper works, LST 2. 2003. 135 slide.
Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

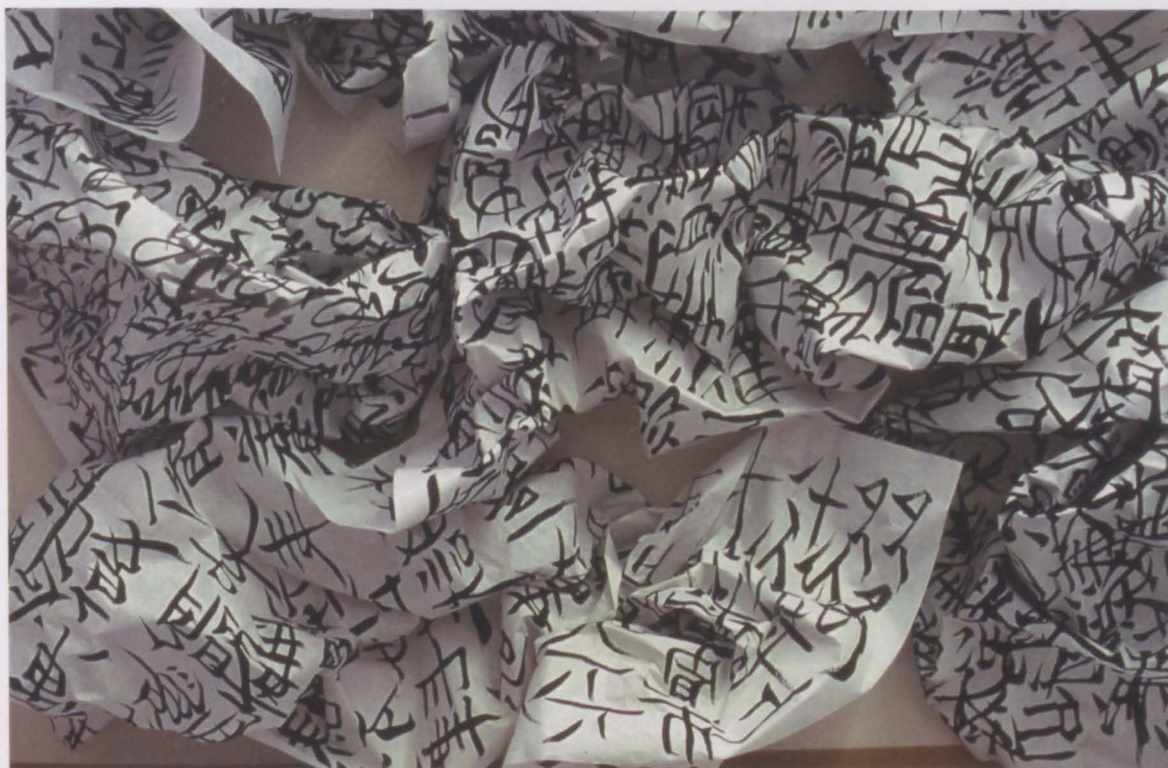


Plate C2B-17. Sculptural transformation of calligraphic paper works, LST 6. 2003. 135 slide.

Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-18. Wrapping calligraphic works on trees, series 1. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-19. Wrapping calligraphic works on trees, series 2. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-20. Bottled calligraphic works. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-21. Image of exhibition. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-22. Image of exhibition. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-23. Digillage phase 1, LDC-2. 2004. Digillage, 24 by 15 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-24. Digillage phase 1, LDC-5. 2004. Digillage, 28 by 21 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

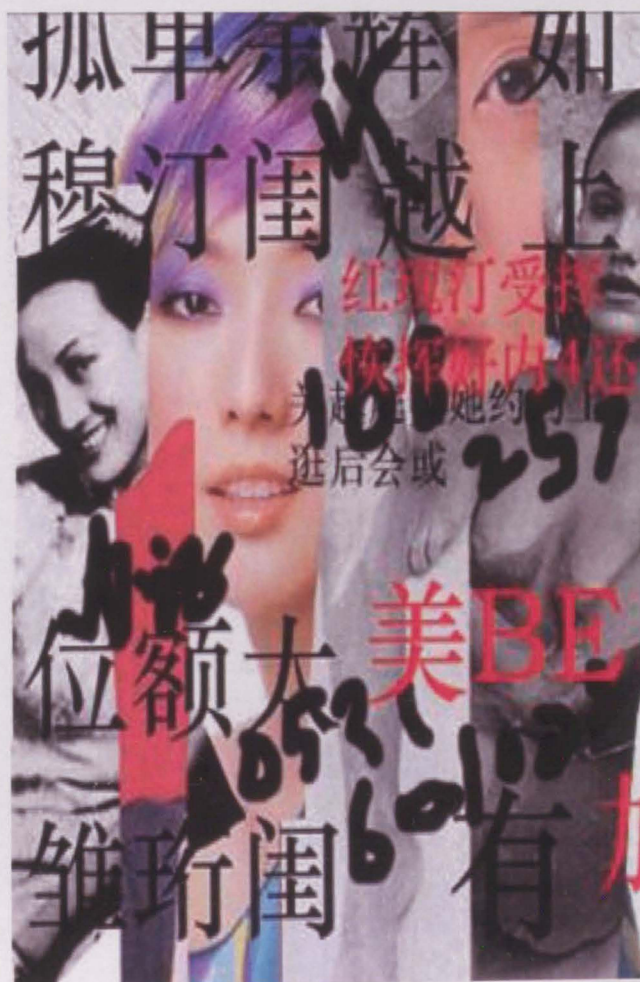


Plate C2B-25. Digillage phase 1, LDC-18. 2004. Digillage, 26 by 18 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2B-26. Digillage phase 2, LDC-26. 2006. Digital print, 200 by 120 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



看懂我的我的
裸露果露
Lin Tao, 30 Jan. 2007, UCCA, Canterbury, UK.

Plate C2B-27. Digillage phase 2, LDC-28. 2007. Digital print, 100 by 52 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou,

China.

漢中大夫東方先生畫像碑

漢中大夫東方先生畫像碑序 晉夏侯湛撰 唐平原太守顏真卿書

大夫諱珣字季平原散人也魏建安中分次為樂陵郡故又為郡人焉
 事漢武帝漢書具載其事先生環瑋博達思周變通以為濁世不可以富貴也
 故薄遊以取位苟出不可以直道也故頡頏以傲世傲世不可以垂訓也故正
 諫以明節明節不可以久安也故諒諧以取容累其道而穢其跡清其質而濁
 其文弛張而不為邪進退而不離羣若乃遠心曠度瞻智宏材調儻博物觸類
 多能含變以明算幽贊以知來自三墳五典八索九丘陰陽圖緯之學百家衆
 寡之論周給敏捷之辯支離覆逆之數經脈藥石之藝射御書計之術乃研精
 而究其理不習而盡其功經目而諷於口過耳而聞於心夫其明濟開豁包容
 弘太陵縣卿相朝西豪傑龍章靡前殆藉賢勢出不休顯賤不憂感戴萬乘若
 賓友視傳列如草芥雄節邁倫高氣蓋世可謂拔乎其萃遊方之外者也談者
 又以先生虛吸冲和吐故納新蟬蛻龍變棄世登仙神友造化靈為星辰此又
 奇怪忽恍不可備論者也大人來守此國僕自京都言歸定省觀先生之縣邑
 想先生之高風徘徊路寢見先生之遺像逍遙城郭觀先生之祠宇慨然有懷
 乃作頌焉其辭曰

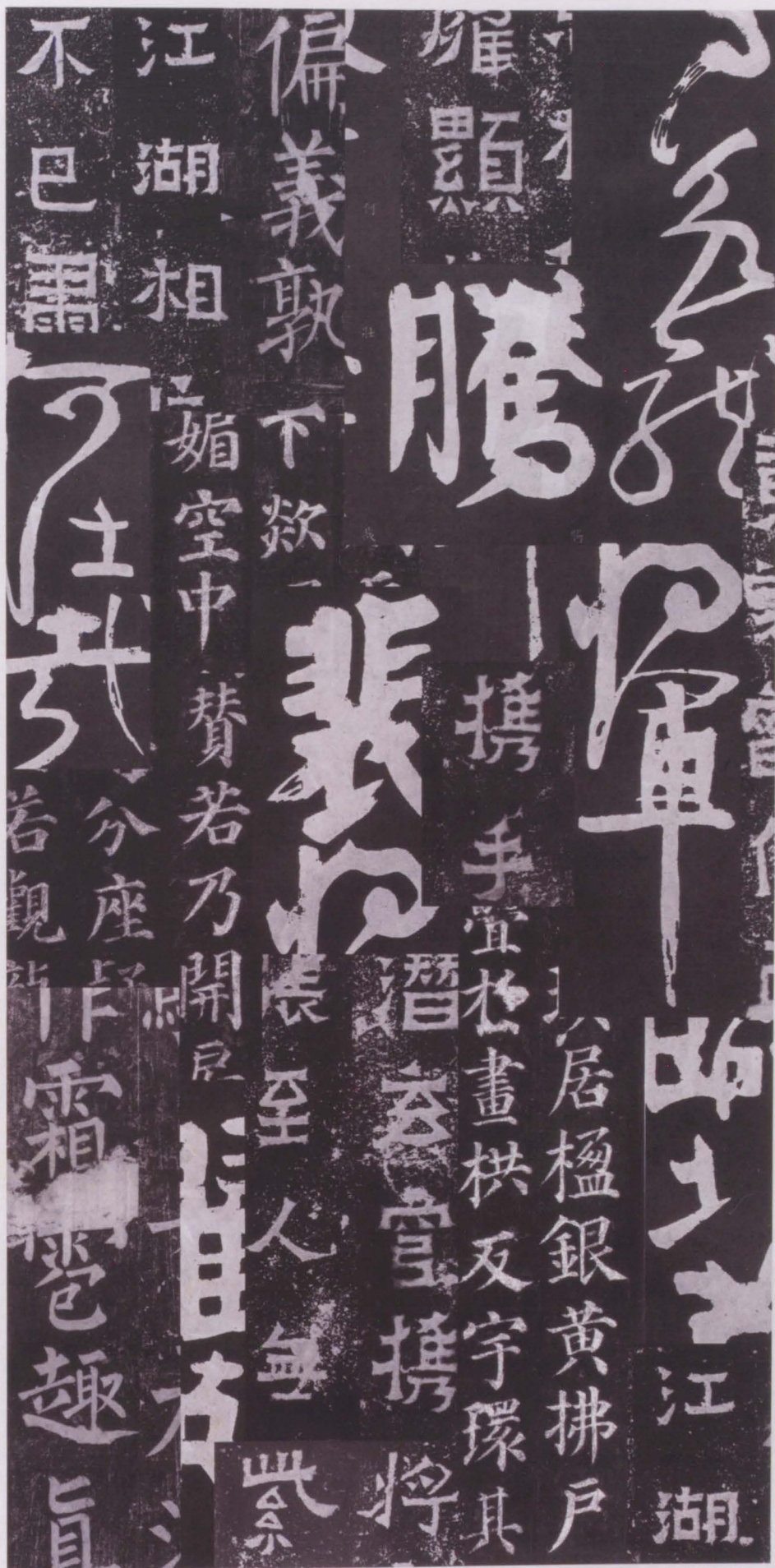


Plate C2B-29. Digillage phase 3, LDC-38. 2007. Digital print, 200 by 100 cm. Private collections,

Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2C-1. Image of the studio. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2C-2. Image of an open book among bushes. 2003. 135 slide. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2C-3. Image of an open book on top of stacked clips of scaffolding. 2003. 135 slide.
Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2C-4. Image of calligraphic written works in the open space, series 2. 2003. 135 slide.
Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2C-5. Image of calligraphic written works in the open space, series 5. 2003. 135 slide.
Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2C-6. Image of calligraphic written works among twigs and branches, series 9. 2003. 135 slide.
Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2C-7. Image of calligraphic written works among twigs and branches, series 10. 2003. 135 slide.
Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2C-8. *Jing Zhong Bao Guo/be utterly loyal to one's nation*, summer version. 2004. Laser print, 27.78 by 20 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2C-9. *Yu Shi Ju Jin/being contemporary in accordance with the contemporary rhythm*, summer version. 2004. Laser print, 27.78 by 22 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



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Plate C2C-10. Photoshop processed *Jing Zhong Bao Guo*, winter version, series 2. 2007. Laser print, 29 by 13 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



Plate C2C-11. Photoshop processed *Yu Shi Ju Jin*, winter version, series 3. 2007. Laser print, 29 by 13 cm. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

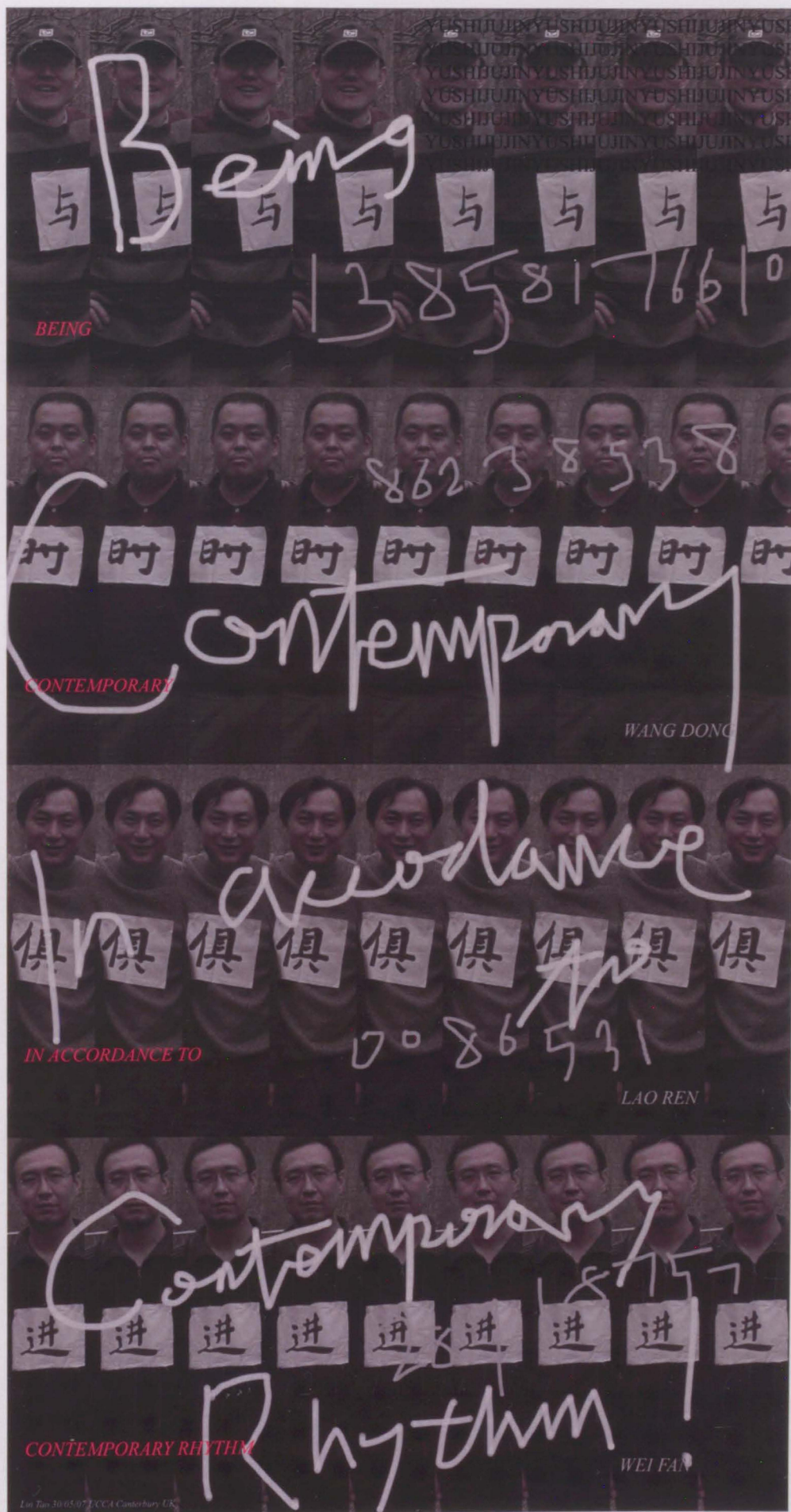


Plate C2C-12. Photoshop processed *Yu Shi Ju Jin*, series 11. 2007. Inkjet print, 200 by 100 cm.

Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

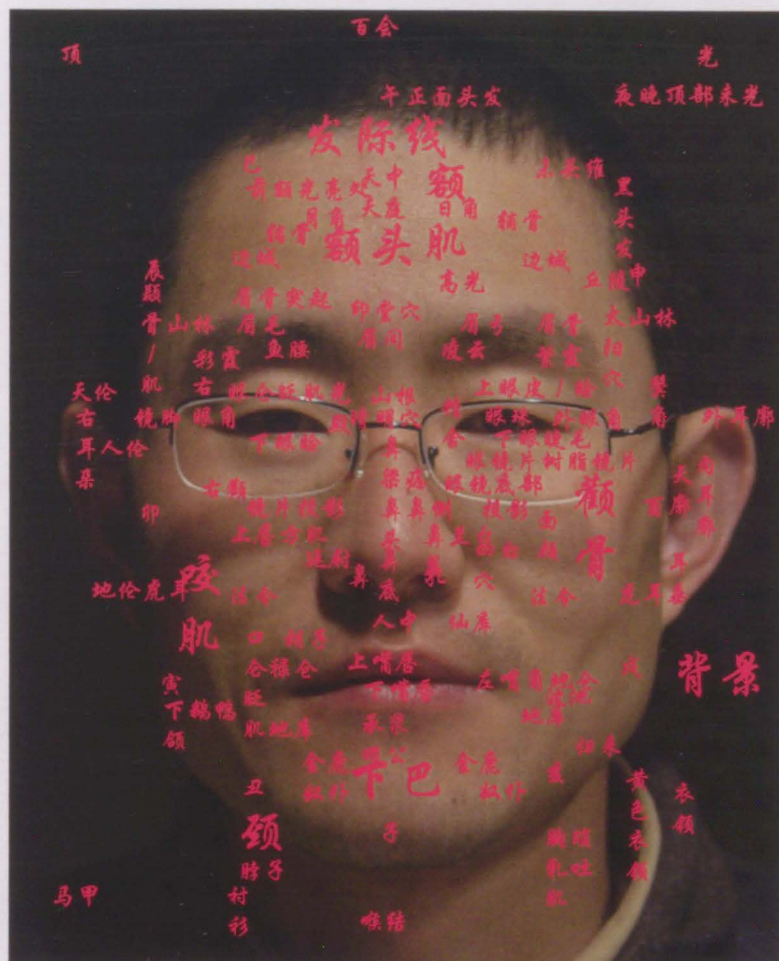


Plate C2D-1. *Lost in Interpretation* – Self. 2004. Still image video Private collections, Hangzhou, China.

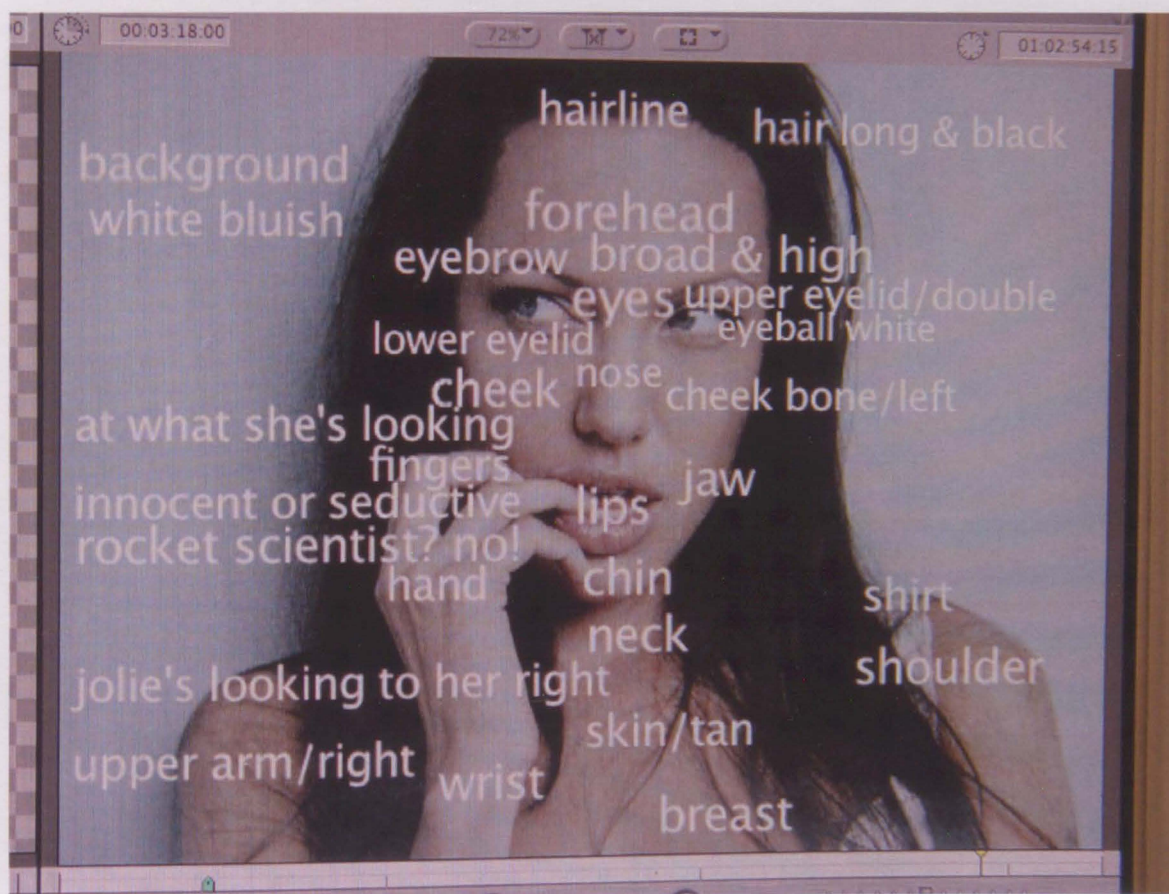


Plate C2D-2. *Lost in Interpretation* – Jolie. 2007. Still image video. Private collections, Hangzhou, China.



