Interweaving Identity: An exploratory investigation of the relationship between fibre art and the social position of women in China from 2010 to the present

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Abstract

This research investigates the relationship between female identity and contemporary fibre art in China from 2010 to the present. It explores the impact of the wider social, economic and political environment on female gender, identity and status and how this is reflected by Chinese female fibre artists and contemporary fibre art in China. It examines how the work of Chinese female fibre artists can be understood through Butler's theory of gender performativity. This practice-based research then builds on personal contexts and experiences to explore the nature of Chinese female identity and contemporary Chinese fibre art more broadly, through textile practice. It addresses the following research questions:

- To what extent is the work of Chinese female fibre artists concerned with the performance of gender?
- What specific experiences concerning the performance of gender — educational, personal and social — do Chinese female fibre artists interrogate in their work and how do they do this?
- How can I, as a female artist, build on these foundations to further explore gender performativity in fibre art?

The research adopts a qualitative and creative research methodology, with literature reviews, case studies, and practice research as the research methods. The literature surveyed covers contemporary Chinese fibre art, with a focus on the most important exhibitions of Chinese fibre art. I have adopted six representative Chinese female fibre artists from different generations as case studies to explore the identity and potential meaning of Chinese female fibre artists' artworks. These artists are Wu Fan, Liang Kai, Xu Jia, Zhang Yifan, Wang Yangzi and Yue Mingyue, and interviewing them and examining their art practice allows this study to uncover their different interpretations and

visualisations of gender performativity in contemporary fibre art in China.

My own practice takes the form of fibre artworks and workshops that revolve around the kitchen and the connection between my grandmother, my mother and me, exploring how Chinese women balance the family, society and the individual. These works explore gender performativity through repeated performances and personal values, what Butler calls ‘sustained acts’.

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Introduction

Fibre art is considered as both a new and an old form of art. Given its origins in textiles and tapestry art, it can be interpreted as a traditional art practice. However, due to its recent conceptual and contextual development, it can also be categorised as a contemporary art practice that addresses social, political and environmental issues. It uses fibre as its primary medium of communication (Koplos, 1986, p.20). This research explores the relationship between the nature of fibre art and the social position of women in China from 2010 to the present. It does this by analysing the personal background and experiences of Chinese fibre artists, as well as their fibre art practices. It applies Butler's theory of gender performativity as a conceptual tool to investigate whether and how Chinese female fibre artists' work is influenced by their gendered experiences. As Salih says:

> Butler has collapsed the sex/gender distinction in order to argue that there is no sex that is not always already gender. All bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and there is no existence that is not social), which means that there is no "natural body" that pre-exists its cultural inscription (Salih, 2007, p.55).

The research gap this study seeks to address is in understanding the connection between the creation of fibre artworks and gender performativity by female fibre artists in contemporary China. I argue that this issue is underexplored.

There are several reasons for choosing 2010 as the starting point in this study. Firstly, 2010 marked the sixth International Fibre Art Biennale, 'From Lausanne to Beijing'. The theme of that year changed, from continuing the 'Lausanne spirit'

and making a new stage for international fibre art in Beijing, to focusing on the connection between the hand and the heart in the creation of fibre art. For the first time, the number of works exhibited exceeded 300, and there were more than 30 participating countries (see Appendix 1), marking a new stage of maturity in the Fibre Art Biennale in China. Just three years later, in 2013, the first Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art was held, further symbolising the development of fibre art in China. From this point on, China not only hosted the International Fibre Art Biennale 'From Lausanne to Beijing', but also had another exhibition platform that represented Chinese fibre art and fibre artists (see Appendix 3).

Origins of fibre art: from 'women's craft' to high art

In the West, fibre art is no longer categorised as a craft but has emerged as a form of high art, which is closely linked to the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Bazerman, 2004, p.193). Weaving made a public debut in a fine art context in Lenore Tawney's 1961 solo exhibition (see Fig.1). Tawney was a seminal artist who pushed the conventions of weaving into a fine art context. She departed from weaving as decorative wall hanging by displaying her work away from the wall, bringing in elements of space and installation art. She radically pushed the boundaries of scale, and invented open-warp weaving techniques that allowed for off-loom work (Tawney, 2016). This type of off-loom work is considerably less gendered and more readily accepted as 'high art' due to the departure from traditional weaving techniques (Cazzola, 2016, p.6).

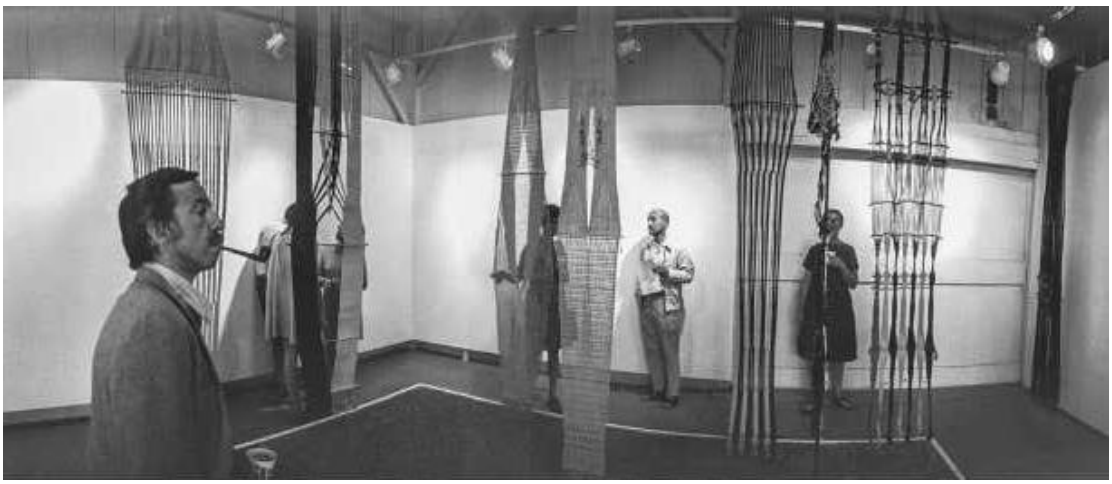


Figure 1. Tawney, L. (1967), *Solo show,* Benson Gallery. Bridgehampton, NY. Photo: Clayton J. Price

One of the most famous feminist art pieces of the 1970s is Judy Chicago's 'The Dinner Party' (1979). This work incorporates many materials and techniques that might have been thought of, stereotypically, as 'women's craft,' including ceramics, and specifically in the field of textiles, embroidery. Chicago devised a ceremonial banquet on a triangular table with 39 place settings, all celebrating an influential woman from history. Inscribed in gold beneath the table are the names of 999 women worthy of commemoration (see Fig.2). The embroidered runners on the place settings reflect the embroidery styles typical of the represented woman's culture and time period. Judy Chicago is a central artist of the feminist art movement in the 1960s-1970s, and is a useful starting point for examining how feminist artists express feminism through textiles and other crafts, repositioning them as art.



Figure 2. Judy Chicago, (1974-1979) *The Dinner Party*, Ceramic, porcelain, textile; triangular table. 1463 × 1463 cm

As it developed, fibre art was often dominated by women. Fibre and women are closely related, from the production of textiles to textile practitioners (Packer, 2010, p.3). In the twentieth century, notable Western female fibre artists, such as Lenore Tawney, Judy Chicago and Magdalena Abakanowicz, transformed traditional two-dimensional textile works into dynamic three-dimensional fibre art, elevating textiles from handcrafted traditions to the realm of 'high art'.

Fibre art in China

Fibre art has deep roots and a long heritage in China, but it has experienced unprecedented growth since 2000. This growth has been partly driven by the government-led cultural and creative industry initiatives, supported by favourable central and local policies, along with financial and political backing. The success and the influence of fibre art in China has been further accelerated since 2010 by the commencement and upscaling of the two major international exhibitions held in China, namely 'From Lausanne to Beijing Biennale' and the

‘Hangzhou Triennale of Fibre Art’ (Lin, 2022; Liang, 2018, and Shi, 2021). Hang Jian (2000, p.99) indicates that ‘From Lausanne to Beijing Biennale’ represents not only the commemoration of the ‘Lausanne Biennale’, but also the continuation and spread of fibre art from the West to China. For instance, the 9th Biennale received over 2000 participating applications from 54 countries, which made it the largest fibre art biennale in the world. According to my analysis of the proportion of female fibre artists who exhibited at these two exhibitions and the proportion of the awards received, the participation of female fibre artists has been increasing every year. I argue that Chinese fibre art holds a notable position within contemporary Chinese art more generally and, due to these two exhibitions, it also enjoys significant public recognition across the country. The two exhibitions provide a platform for Chinese female fibre artists, who have become more prominent compared to other female artists in the fine art field across the country.

In comparison to other fine art practices in China, such as oil painting, sculpture, watercolour painting, and calligraphy, among others, female fibre artists are particularly dynamic and are playing a relatively influential role in the field. They showcase their works at these two major exhibitions and win awards. In addition, some of these female fibre artists have taken up crucial roles as curators, for example, Shi Hui, has played an important role as the curator of the Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art since 2012. This study investigates literature on the context of the development of contemporary fibre art in China, based on pioneering contemporary Chinese fibre artists such as Lin Lechen.

In contemporary Chinese fibre art, there are several women artists who use silk as a material to spread the intangible cultural heritage of Chinese textiles, as inheritors of traditional Chinese textile materials and techniques. For example, Chinese fibre artist Liang Xuefang uses silk and combines contemporary art elements with traditional Suzhou embroidery. Her artwork Chan He Si Ying expresses the life cycle of the lotus with minimalist abstraction and guides

people to think about nature from its details. It also expresses the understanding of the life law and realises the infinite possibilities in limited life (see Fig.3).



Figure 3. Liang Xuefang, (2018), *Chan He Si Ying*, silk and wood, In A Different Voice. Beijing

Chinese female fibre artists such as Liang Xuefang have played an important role in raising awareness of Chinese fibre art and promoting the development of the field. These female fibre artists create fibre artworks with two different consciousnesses: technique and concept. Over the years, they have actively engaged with the medium, explored its possibilities and contributed to its development and recognition in China and on the global stage. Furthermore, Chinese female fibre artists have used their artworks to address a wide range of social and cultural issues. They have explored themes related to gender, identity, cultural heritage, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Through their practices, they have sparked conversations, challenged societal norms, and advocated for greater inclusivity and equality. They have also played a significant role in mentoring and nurturing the next generation of artists.

My relationship to fibre art

I have been engaged in fibre art creation for a decade, with experience in both fibre art and textile design. My undergraduate studies introduced me to textile techniques such as weaving, dyeing, patchwork, and knitting. Weaving, in particular, reveals a symphony of materials and patterns through the interaction of warp and weft. These woven pieces embody a mystique for me, evolving from two-dimensional to three-dimensional forms and incorporating traditional materials, metals, and synthetic fibres.

My postgraduate studies focused primarily on the concept of textile works, emphasising not only the diversity of textile techniques but also engaging with various artistic themes. These included sustainability, artificial intelligence, social humanities, and physical perception. Sustainability became the primary concept in my postgraduate work. With the fashion industry's sustainability as my context, I examined fabric wastage within clothing production. Inspired by garment washing labels, I wove these labels into my pieces, visually representing textile waste.

Gradually, I came to understand the relationship between textile art and fibre art, beginning to explore the evolution of fibre art and fibre artworks. Weaving has consistently been my research and creative focus. From my undergraduate studies to the present, every work I have created has been connected to weaving techniques. Consequently, the practice works in this research also adopt weaving as the primary technique.

Research Questions

This study addresses three research questions, which are stated here, but will be further explained in the following chapter. The questions are:

- To what extent is the work of Chinese female fibre artists concerned with the performance of gender?

- What specific experiences concerning the performance of gender — educational, personal and social — do Chinese female fibre artists interrogate in their work and how do they do this?
- How can I, as a female artist, build on these foundations to further explore gender performativity in fibre art?

Structure of the Thesis

This study is divided into chapters, as follows:

The first chapter is the research methodology. In this chapter, the three research questions are posed, and the methodology of literature research, gender performativity theory, as well as the case study research method are proposed. In addition, the practice research methods are explained and my early practice experiments are described.

Chapter 2 focuses on gender performativity theory. I will analyse how Butler's theory of gender performativity relates to my research and to Chinese female artists, and describe the influence of gender concepts in China, particularly as exemplified by my own educational background from childhood onwards, in addition, this chapter explores gender theory in China and Chinese social attitudes towards women.

Chapter 3 is a contextual analysis of Chinese fibre art, which focuses on how Western fibre art was introduced to China, how Chinese contemporary fibre art has developed, and what kind of creative atmosphere Chinese female fibre artists are engaged with. Also, this chapter analyses how Chinese female fibre artists create fibre artworks with two different consciousnesses: technique and concept.

How Chinese female fibre artists continually create fibre artworks influenced by individual and societal factors, is examined through the specific case studies

discussed in Chapter 4. The gender performativity theory set out in Chapter 2 is combined with an analysis of works by Chinese female fibre artists, as the basis for the case studies. Six Chinese female fibre artists are discussed individually and as a collective in terms of their representative works. This chapter includes an examination of the influence of social, political and economic factors in China, as well as the cultural construction of female identity.

Chapter 5 presents the concept of my own fibre art practice, materials and process, building on the previous research and using it to inform my own practice.

Research aims and the practice-research approach

As a practice-based study, this research examines the broader context of fibre art and gender in China, exploring how social, political, and economic factors influence the development of contemporary fibre art, shape the experiences of female fibre artists, and intertwine with constructions of gender identity. I combine my personal perceptions of these studies with visual works to express my understanding of Chinese female fibre art, responding to the investigation of the perspectives of Chinese female fibre artists. This research argues that Chinese female fibre art practice, through the use of fibre materials, the weft-warp interweaving technique, and various forms of art practice, with a focus on female characters, is an act of self-realisation and contributes to the wider society. Due to the influence of traditional Chinese philosophy, especially regarding the gender concepts of Yin (female) and Yang (male), the Chinese female fibre artists' choice to pursue fibre art as a career can be perceived as a result of their passion for the materials (soft but strong), the weaving process (focusing on balance and harmony, a virtue in China), and the desire to represent themselves, either expressing an affectionate regard for family and for women, or to communicate more radical views on social issues in China.

The practice part of this study presents my interpretation of Chinese female fibre artists' practices, based on a practice-based study and a visual presentation of the analysis of their artworks. The practice component supports the influencing factors in the textual research through the visualisation of artworks and combines them with my own experience of creating fibre art based on personal experiences. The creative outcome is therefore about the embodiment of gendered performativity in the works of Chinese female fibre artists and the personal understanding of gendered performativity. The current status of Chinese female fibre art and the intertwined relationship between fibre art and Chinese women will be elaborated from the perspectives of artistic practice and the process of art creation. The purpose of this practice is to demonstrate how the contribution of Chinese women to society and the family, and their desire for independence and equality, can be explored and expressed through fibre art practice. Family, society, and the individual are issues that burden Chinese women, and we are all exploring how to balance them. Chinese women of different generations have different preferences in balancing family, society and the individual. The final work is based on a three-generation exploration with my mother and grandmother. Ultimately, I hope that this study encourages more young women born in the 2000s to recognise the identity of fibre art and to pursue this profession, continuing the journey of female fibre artists in the future in China.

Chapter 1: Research Methodology

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the contextual review and research methodology and methods that were adopted in this study. The study explores the relationship between women and fibre art in China and the identity of female fibre artists in contemporary Chinese fibre art. This involves examining the Chinese female fibre artists and their art practices. In addition, the study explores how the practices of female fibre artists in China are socially constructed, shaped by social, political, and economic factors, as well as by the country's cultural constructions of female identity.

Butler's theory of gender performativity is relevant to the creative practice of contemporary Chinese female fibre artists examined in this study. In 2018, I participated in the Queer Asia Conference held at SOAS University of London, where I first encountered Butler's theory of gender performativity including her work *Gender Trouble*. During the conference, I attended a workshop on gender performativity theory. The leader provided a brief introduction to the theory. Rather than defining gender performativity in academic terms, she explained that from a young age, girls are told by their parents and wider society that they should 'be like girls', so they strive to perform their gender in a way that matches society's perception of what it means to be women. The leader explained that this is why women perform as women, and men perform as men. This simple explanation reminded me of my childhood. When I was young, my father told me that girls should be gentle, wear skirts and have long hair, while my mother, during my childhood, encouraged me to be myself. It was precisely because of my parents' differing views that my understanding of gender and my exploration of self-awareness were affected. Before this conference, I was aware of traditional attitudes towards gender in Chinese society, but I remained unfamiliar with the underlying principles and theories behind these phenomena.

Consequently, this conference introduced me to gender theory and gender performativity. It marked the beginning of my journey into the study of gender performativity theory.

With regard to my practical work, this conference proved profoundly influential. Initially, my approach to fibre art—specifically works exploring gender performativity and their relevance to Chinese female fibre artists—was simply an attempt to express how Chinese gender concepts are reflected in the work of these artists, with fibre art as the medium. As I gradually came to understand the theory of gender performativity, I began to realise that several concepts within this theory are connected to fibre art. I will elaborate on this point in subsequent chapters.

Three research questions are addressed in this study in exploring how Chinese female fibre artists embody their gender identity through fibre art. These questions were set out in the introduction. They are restated here with an explanation of the thinking that lies behind each question.

The questions are:

- To what extent is the work of Chinese female fibre artists concerned with the performance of gender?
- What specific experiences concerning the performance of gender — educational, personal and social — do Chinese female fibre artists interrogate in their work and how do they do this?
- How can I, as a female artist, build on these foundations to further explore gender performativity in fibre art?

To address the first research question, this study interrogates and deconstructs the critical theories surrounding the revolution of fibre art, Chinese fibre art,

gender performativity and Chinese gender concept. Thus, this study can critically examine the interwoven relationship between the female fibre artists and fibre art in China, situated in a wider context. This research aims to unveil the political, social and economic factors which might influence and determine the artistic practices of female fibre artists, including the promotion of the cultural and creative industries in China, the socially accepted inherent Confucian ideology, educational development, and public attitudes in China.

The specific experiences that influence the artwork of Chinese female fibre artists and how their gender identities are reflected in their artworks are related to many social constructs. In the introduction, I explained that social constructs depend on society, politics and the economy, while personal experiences and educational backgrounds are the main influencing factors for Chinese female fibre artists. In addition, it was suggested that Chinese female fibre artists would reflect their specific experiences in their artworks. The second question is thus a detailed opening up of the first question, analysing the history of the development of Chinese contemporary fibre art, the environment of Chinese fibre art creation and the state of gender conceptions in China as the background for the analysis of the characteristics of Chinese female fibre artists' artworks.

The evidence I use to address these research questions is predominantly qualitative. The purpose of this study is to apply the theory of gender performativity to fibre art practice, using it to interrogate the creative characteristics of Chinese female fibre artists. It explores how gender performativity can be expressed in a meaningful way through fibre art.

The third research question concerns my own practice as a Chinese female fibre artist. As practice-based research, my art practice serves as the thread throughout the whole research process to ensure its rigour and validity. The

objective is to obtain new knowledge especially through practice and practical outcomes, in other words this is original, practice-based research (Candy, 2006, p.3). These original contributions and investigations are presented and demonstrated in the form of my fibre artworks.

1.2 Overview of relevant literature:

The literature relevant to this study was selected based on the research questions about contemporary Chinese fibre art, the environment in which Chinese fibre art is created, and the local characteristics of Chinese fibre art. This research investigates the definition of fibre art, and the development of fibre art in the West. In the case of China, this study illustrates the development and direction of contemporary fibre art in the country by interviewing and analysing data obtained through close collaboration with scholars and critics in the field. In addition, as part of the investigation of the development of fibre art in China, this study focuses on how fibre art introduced itself to China from the West, the higher education of fibre artists in China, and the major fibre art exhibitions in China. Literature on all these subjects has been used as the basis for the research, and it is presented and analysed across chapters 2 and 3. This section offers a short overview of the areas of literature that are drawn on, which include definitions of fibre art, the history of fibre art and its association with women in the West and China, and key exhibitions.

Firstly, this study investigates the definition of fibre art (Barber, 2008; Cotton 2017), and the definition of other forms of art that are related to fibre art (textile art and tapestry art) (Lurçat 1950; Love, 2009; Cotton 2017). Secondly, based on the definition of fibre art, the study extends the research on the history of fibre art in the West (Koplos, 1986; Hemmings, 2005). Based on the development process of fibre art in the West and the definition of fibre art, I establish the correlation between fibre art and women. This correlation is the reason why this study chooses gender performativity theory as the research theory. Thirdly, through interviews with Chinese scholars in the field of fibre art and literature research related to contemporary fibre art in China, the association between contemporary fibre art and traditional textiles in China is

analysed including an exploration of how fibre art was introduced to China from the West (Shi, 1999; Lin, 2021). Fourthly, by taking two major Chinese fibre art exhibitions as examples, this research analyses the changes in the proportion of female artists' participation in Chinese fibre art exhibitions and highlights that two exhibitions are the main platforms for the presentation of the artworks of Chinese female fibre artists (Shan, 2013; Shi, 2013). I present the development of contemporary fibre art in China indicating the number of participants and the countries involved in the two most representative fibre art exhibitions in China, the International Fibre Art Biennale 'From Lausanne to Beijing' and the 'Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art' (Lin and Yi, 2000; Shi, 2013). This also demonstrates the scope of participation of Chinese female fibre artists through the awards received for the artworks entered in these two exhibitions and the gender of the winning artists. These serve as a context for the study of contemporary Chinese female fibre artists and facilitate my analysis of how Chinese female fibre artists create art practices, the identity of Chinese female fibre artists in relation to fibre art, and the interweaving relationship between Chinese women and fibre art.

The above overview of the literature on contemporary Chinese fibre art and the motivations for creating Chinese female fibre art is intended to be integrated with the gender performativity theory applied in this research. This focuses on the ontology of gender performativity, the concept of gender in China, and the expression of gender performativity by Chinese female fibre artists in their artworks.

1.3 Gender Performativity Theory

As indicated above, the second question of this study asks how Chinese female fibre artists incorporate their specific gendered experiences into their artworks. By examining the historical development and the creative environment of fibre art in China through case studies and interviews, I selected six Chinese female fibre artists whose works reflect the integration of their gender identity into fibre artworks. The methodology of the case studies will be explained in the next section. The literature on the development of Western fibre art shows that fibre

art has a correlation with women (see Introduction), and there is also a relationship between women and textiles in the traditional Chinese textile field. These are explained in detail in the next chapter. This study adopts gender performativity theory, as developed by Butler (1990), as its primary theoretical framework. It examines Judith Butler's conceptualisation of gender and applies her insights to the context of Chinese female fibre artists. As a practice-based study, Butler's theory of gender performativity relates to my practical work, which will be elaborated further in the practice chapter. The Introduction describes my first encounter with gender performativity theory. Since this research commenced, I have gradually engaged with relevant literature on gender performativity theory and Butler's perspectives. Meanwhile, I have analysed the development of contemporary fibre art, including its evolution in China. I have explored the connections between gender performativity and fibre art. The technical process of fibre art involves weaving, where the interaction and repetition of warp and weft threads form the fabric of the work. This interaction and repetition form the basis of my understanding of fibre art. Guided by this understanding, I have re-examined gender performativity theory on multiple occasions. Consequently, in the subsequent chapters on gender performativity theory and practice, I elucidate the connection between the theory and my practical works.

Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity argues that rather than being a trait which is simply determined by biology or an inherent embodiment of identity, gender is performed and reinforced repeatedly based on certain social norms (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018, p.1). It is a social construction that influences and feeds back on gender, and Butler's perspective is applied in this research to explore how the artworks of Chinese female fibre artists are affected by factors such as the Chinese society, the Chinese fibre art environment, personal experiences and female identity. This process of repetitively enacting gender reflects an individual's relationship with society. It also responds to changes in Chinese society. As the environment of fibre art in China evolves, so does the education of female artists. Their creative periods and career paths have also shifted. As a result, their works present new technical approaches and a deeper sense of personal awareness. This phenomenon is specifically analysed in

Chapters 2 and 4 of this study. The gender concepts constructed in Chinese society have an impact on the work created by Chinese female fibre artists, as well as on their careers.

Several questions arise including the following: What are the gender stereotypes of women in Chinese society? What stereotypes affect the work of female fibre artists? Are there female fibre artists whose work reflects such influences, or resists them? These issues, related to gender concepts in Chinese society, are central to the exploration of the case studies. Social structures such as differences in social roles, power and status determine gender stereotypes. The gender stereotypes affect both gender behaviours and reactions to people who deviate from the gender stereotypes (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018, p.6). For example, the common question in the study of Western philosophy is, who am I? In China, the question becomes, who am I to other people? These two questions reflect on individualism and collectivism. Individualism versus collectivism is a common dichotomy in cross-cultural research. Individualism is the moral stance, political philosophy, ideology and social outlook that emphasises the intrinsic worth of the individual (Wood, 1972, p.67). In gender conceptions, the pursuit of individualism and the rise of female self-awareness in the West has contributed to the radical work of Western women artists with a distinctive point of view (see, for instance, Judy Chicago, described in the Introduction). On the contrary, Chinese female fibre artists are influenced and educated by a collectivist culture (including social influence, family education, school education, and community influence, among other factors). These artists must balance themselves with others (society, family, friends, parents, and husbands) in the creation of their fibre artworks and the performance of their gender.

In Butler's (1999) preface to ‘Gender Trouble’, she argues that performativity is a repetition and a ritual rather than a ‘monolithic act’, which realises an effect through its physical naturalisation in the context of the body. The perspective that gender is performative attempts to show that the intrinsic nature of gender as defined by us is manufactured through a series of ‘sustained acts’, through

the ‘stylisation’ of the body in terms of gender (Butler, 1999, p.xix). The characteristic of ‘sustained acts’ is reflected in the process of creating artwork by female fibre artists in China. The artworks of female fibre artists in different periods, with different choices of materials and different concepts, represent ‘sustained acts’. At the same time, works produced in different periods may extend the use of the same materials, while exploring new forms of expression for the same underlying concept. In both cases, the ‘’sustained acts' of artistic performance become the repetitive embodiment of gender performativity. The creation of fibre works by Chinese female fibre artists is a long-term process of discovering personal awareness through materials, processes and concepts that are constantly being experimented with. Fibre artworks serve as a medium for female artists' personal gender performing.

1.4 Case studies

In the context of this research, the case studies aim to offer an in-depth and detailed examination of the gender performativity of the Chinese female fibre artists from 2010 to the present. This study seeks to explore how Chinese female fibre artists understand and express fibre art within their creative practices, as well as how they perceive and apply the concept of gender performativity. Therefore, collecting and analysing cases of Chinese female fibre artists is an important research method in this study. Yin (2003, p.35) argues that case studies may focus on individuals, or groups, using various techniques to collect specific data, such as observation, documentation and in-depth interviews. In this study, interviews were adopted to explore the experiences of the Chinese female fibre artists. Their individual perspectives were recorded and analysed in the context of their creative practices.

To investigate the identity and underlying significance of the Chinese female fibre artists’ artworks, I selected six representative female fibre artists as cases. The selected artists come from different generations, each having made substantial contributions to the development of contemporary fibre art in China. The six female fibre artists are Wu Fan (born 1968), Liang Kai (born 1986), Xu

Jia (born 1985), Zhang Yifan (born 1988), Wang Yangzi (born 1990) and Yue Mingyue (born 1996). Although Wu Fan is a senior artist who has exhibited work from around 2000, I chose to focus on her work from 2010 for the case study, in line with the time period of this study, although this is contextualised within notable developments in her artistic practice as a whole. The decision to study artists from different generations aims to explore patterns and enable a comparative analysis of the art practices of female fibre artists who lived in different social, economic, and political contexts. With educations spanning both China and overseas, these artists demonstrate a diverse range of technical skills and conceptual practices in fibre art. Each holds a different perspective of the concept of gender in China and the interpretation of gender in the creation of fibre artworks. These Chinese female fibre artists are not the most recognised names in the field, but they have made significant contributions to fibre art in China. Wu Fan and Liang Kai, for example, have been involved in 'From Lausanne to Beijing Fibre Art Biennale'. As a student of Lin Lecheng, Liang Kai writes about the development of contemporary Chinese fibre art and the development of Western fibre art, complementing the lack of theoretical research in Chinese fibre art. Xu Jia continues to create fibre art as the daughter of Shi Hui, the founder of the Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art. The remaining artists bring individual perspectives shaped by their unique backgrounds and creative approaches. I have chosen these Chinese female fibre artists not because of their status or achievements, but because they have a particular connection to the focus of my research. I intend to elaborate on these particular connections in both the case study and practice chapters. Meanwhile, there are some connections between each of the case artists, for instance, some connections are due to the similarities in creation, while others are due to the similarities in educational and professional experiences. On the other hand, there are some differences due to different educational backgrounds and periods of their work which lead to the formation of new episodes in the development of fibre art in China. The specific artist connections will be analysed in detail in the Case Study chapter. The case studies are based on analyses of the artists' representative works alongside insights from their personal experience. I posit that analysis of the Chinese female fibre artists' concept of creating a work of fibre art and the artists' own understanding of

working with fibre art, can contribute to the development of my art practice in this study, given that the art practice is case study based.

To obtain an in-depth understanding of the motivations and concepts of these Chinese female fibre artists' work, I carried out interviews in-person or through video or voice call. The use of video or voice calls was dictated partly by COVID-19 travel restrictions during 2021 to 2022, when I was carrying out the interviews, and the artists' different geographic locations in China. I prepared the interview questions in advance (in English), with the specific questions detailed in the transcripts. However, during the interviews, the artists responded in Chinese. Subsequently, I transcribed the entire interview content in Chinese in my notebook before organising it for the research. During this organisation process, when translating the Chinese into English, certain omissions were made due to linguistic and cultural differences. The full Chinese transcript of the entire interview (from my notebook) constitutes primary sources materials, aligning with Yale University Library's definition that primary sources offer first-hand evidence or direct proof regarding the subject of study. These sources are created by individuals who have personally experienced the events or situations they describe (Yale University Library, 2008). As participants incorporated filler words, personal family anecdotes and other content unrelated to this study into their interviews, I have edited and condensed their responses during the translation process. These edits and summarisations constitute secondary sources. Secondary sources constitute summaries, interpretations, evaluations, analyses or reviews based on primary sources (Pantuso et al., 2023, p.60).

In-depth interviews typically use small samples and conduct direct one-to-one personal interactions. Semi-structured interviews were deployed. Adams (2015, p.23) observes that these are carried out conversationally with one respondent at a time, using a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up 'why' or 'how' questions. The interviewees were

afforded flexibility to share their personal experiences and understanding. The main purpose of the case study approach in this research was to examine the perspectives of the artists on the environment for creating fibre art in China, the impact of the artists' femininity on the creation of fibre art, the focus of the creation of fibre artworks (technical or conceptual or both), and the representation of gender performativity in the artworks or the embodiment of personal gender values. Interviews with the six artists and analyses of their work from 2010 to the present (including materials, forms, concepts, and periods of creation), as well as connections and differences between the artists, facilitated the exploration of the research questions and the development of new knowledge in this research.

1.5 Practice research

Practice research methodology is an important feature of this research. A practice-based research approach generates new knowledge through both the process and outcomes of creative practices. Therefore, practice as a research method is applied in this research. Art practice allows this study to produce different interpretations and visualisations of gender performativity, contemporary fibre art in China and Chinese female fibre artists. The creative outcomes can be used either as part of the research process or as a component of the practice. Practice outcomes need to be supported by documentation of the research process, as well as some form of analysis or interpretation of the text to justify the position and to illustrate a critically reflective approach (Candy, 2006, p.4). This is carried out in Chapter 5.

In a 2021 interview, Wu Fan observed:

> Delicacy is a feature of fibre art and expressing oneself through the characteristics of materials is the most different point between fibre art and other contemporary art forms (see Transcripts 1, 30-32).

From my interaction with Wu Fan and my studies of her work (A detailed

examination of Wu Fan's works is conducted in Chapter 4), I concluded that female fibre artists should expand their materials and forms of expression, rather than being limited to the softness of textile materials and single visual effects. (The connection between Chinese female artists and soft fibres is mentioned in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). For example, in Liang Xuefang's embroidery works, she focuses on traditional Chinese textile techniques, with silk as the main material of preference. Whereas Wu Fan's choice of cotton and metal in two different periods of her work, is a notable change in the choice of materials.

Within the broader landscape of Chinese fibre art, many female artists continue to employ traditional textile materials – such as cotton, linen and silk – often combined with synthetic fibres. Others introduce hard materials including metal, cement and resin as innovative departures from traditional fibre materials. Contemporary fibre art practices in China are most often realised in three-dimensions, incorporating both textile and sculptural techniques. Whether utilising traditional textile materials or mixed-media approaches, the final works may be presented as singular or multiple compositions, and may be static or dynamic forms.

In my creative practice, I have chosen materials that are both soft and hard to reflect different visual effects and feelings. Soft materials embody the softness of women and hard materials bring rupture and visual three-dimensionality. At the same time, I recognise the metaphorical approach in Wu Fan's 'Ye Wei Yang' (2018) work. Although it does not seem as intuitive as Yue Mingyue's 'Blessed Be the Fruit' (2021) in expressing women's issues, the metaphorical approach is more able to bring the audience to think in multiple perspectives with an open-ended viewing of the work. A specific examination of their works is presented in Chapter 4.

The conceptual framework of the practice emerges through associative thinking around key terms such as 'Chinese women', 'fibre', 'interweaving', 'identity', and 'female contribution'.

The practice component of this research reflects my own interpretation of Chinese female fibre artists' practice through practice-based research, as well as a visual demonstration after analysing their artworks. Based on a research question formulated in this research, a textual approach is used to analyse the factors influencing the gendered performativity of the work of Chinese female fibre artists from 2010 to present. The practical component complements this analysis by visualising those influencing factors, integrating them with my own creative process and personal experiences as a fibre artist. Thus, the creative output is about the embodiment of gender performativity in the artworks of Chinese female fibre artists and my personal understanding of gender performativity. The current state of Chinese female fibre art and the interweaving relationship between fibre art and Chinese women is articulated through the perspective of artistic practice and the process of creating art.

Since my undergraduate studies began in 2013, I have been engaged in the field of textiles and fibres. My consistent focus has been on the study and research of weaving techniques and material variety. Thus, my practice work for this research is dedicated to exploring weaving as a foundation. I liken the 'sustained acts' in gender performativity to the movement of the weft threads passing back and forth through the warp threads in weaving. In addition, Butler's (1999) preface to *'Gender trouble'* illustrates the oscillation between the linguistic and the theatrical as a way of understanding performativity, an interplay she describes as 'chiasmic'. The adverb form 'chiasmatic', which describes something having a chiasmic structure (also known as chiasmus) or arranged in a criss-cross pattern, is associated with the warp and weft. Thus three words — repetition, sustained, and chiasma — are my keywords in the theory of gender performativity in this study. Therefore, one of the techniques used in the work is weaving. In the process of creating the final work, I did some experiments. The purpose of the experiments was to select materials and techniques for the final practice, as well as to explore my own sense of creativity in relation to the works of the six Chinese female fibre artists in the case studies.

The title of this experiment is '*Burn and Trace'.* As a female fibre artist, I thought about how to show contemporary Chinese women in the form of fibre art, and how to describe women's stories in the form of fibre art based on my personal experience. These two points are the main issues of practical experimentation. The aim of these practices is to demonstrate the identity and value of Chinese female artists through fibre, and to visualise how women and fibre are interwoven with my own knowledge, as a contemporary Chinese fibre art practitioner.

The process of experimentation is divided into three parts: sketching, materials, and process. The purpose of the experimentation was to select materials, techniques and concepts for the final practice, as well as to explore how to find my own sense of creativity in relation to the works of the six Chinese female fibre artists in the case study. The experiment, entitled '*Burn and Trace'* aimed to articulate the cultural and artistic value of contemporary Chinese women through fibre art, as well as exploring materials and forms for the final practice. It was followed by preparatory work for the woven component of the final practice, refining both conceptual direction and material choices.

Sketching

Sketching serves as a preparatory process for developing practical concepts and stimulating the imagination. In my sketches, I combine female faces with collaged fibre materials, incorporating hand painting to establish a visual and conceptual connection between femininity and fibre (see Fig.4). The use of the female face is inspired by Wu Fan's 'Spring Memory' (2011), in which she uses the female face as the central focus of the work, to reflect the beauty of women across different periods.

I used line drawing to depict the female face, to emphasise the connection between this experiment and the theme of womanhood and to express my thoughts and emotions. This approach draws parallels with Yue Mingyue's 'Blessed Be the Fruit', where the dominant colour is red, symbolising blood and by extension, the female womb. I adopted red as the main symbolic colour to

explore passion, vitality and femininity – concepts linked to the element of fire in this experimental series (see Fig.5).

I created collages combining the female face, the colour red, cotton and polyester. The fusion of these elements was intended to inspire the subsequent development of material samples (see Fig.6). The sketches, particularly visible in Figure 30, explore the relationship between the female form and the textile fibres through the use of curved, twisting lines, evoking a sense of movement and interconnection between the two (see Fig.5).



Figure 4. Zhang, Y.L. (2021) *Sketch 1. [Drawing, collage].* In possession of the author: Hangzhou. Paper, acrylic paints, cotton, polyester.



Figure 5. Zhang, Y.L. (2021) *Sketch 2. [Drawing, collage].* In possession of the author: Hangzhou. Paper, acrylic paints, cotton, polyester.



Figure 5. Zhang, Y.L. (2021) *Sketch 3. [Drawing, collage].* In possession of the author: Hangzhou. Acrylic paints, cotton, polyester.

Materials

For the fibre artist, I regard the foundation of fibre art practice to lie in the choice of materials, whose properties convey both the nature of the work and the underlying concept. As shown in Chapter 4, Wu Fan, Xu Jia and Wang Yangzi each employ non-traditional materials for their fibre artworks. I propose that the selection of materials for contemporary fibre artworks is inseparable from both concept and form. Materials may combine soft and hard elements, employ textiles as the main technique, or treat fibre itself as a conceptual medium. For example, in Wu Fan's ‘Ye Wei Yang’, anodised alumina wire – though not a traditional fibre material – is handwoven to create a three-dimensional fibre artwork.

In this experiment, my focus is on the exploration of non-traditional fibre materials. Candles, though not a hard material, are conceptually significant to

my approach. As Wu Fan has noted, fibre artists need to seek out materials that reflect their personality or represent their identity. Following this principle, the main materials in this experiment are candles, natural fibres, synthetic fibres and metals.

The symbolic use of candles draws on a line by the Tang Dynasty poet Li Shangyin: ‘A silkworm exhausts its silk till death. A candle burns itself out to give light’ (春蚕到死丝方尽，蜡炬成灰泪始干). In Chinese culture, burning candles are seen as symbols of selfless sacrifice – they burn themselves to produce light and heat to support people. This contrasts with the Western perspective, where burning is often associated with negative connotations. Thus, the candle represents the idea that Chinese women, like candles, bring warmth and light to their families and society. Chapter 2 refers to the role of Chinese collectivist ideology in shaping traditional Chinese gender concepts, while Butler (1999) suggests that gender performativity is repeatedly enacted according to social norms; for Chinese women, collectivism has long shaped the notion of self-sacrifice for family and society. However, the connection between women and family also depends on traditional Confucian relationships, as discussed in Chapter 2. Within this context, Chinese women spend their lives in self-sacrificing dedication, constantly struggling to balance the needs of their families with their personal development.

The materials used in this experiment include transparent gel wax, cotton, hemp rope, polyester fibre, and metal (see Figs. 7 and 8). The various fibres incorporated into the candles represent the different age groups of Chinese female fibre artists. For example, cotton and hemp represent the elder generation, symbolising tradition and conservatism; polyester and metal represent the younger generation, associated with innovation and radicalism.

The different fabrics hold associations with the stories of the female members of my family and contribute to my final practice. My grandmother, as an elder generation of Chinese women, was born in the 1940s and grew up in the 1960s, when Chinese women's clothing was dominated by cotton, hemp and silk. This

influenced my grandmother's dressing habits from her youth to her old age. As a member of the younger generation living in the twenty-first century, I have witnessed rapid growth in China's fashion industry, along with a transition from cotton to polyester and the use of various functional materials in clothing, such as waterproof and lightweight technical fibres in sportswear.



Figure 7. Zhang, Y.L. (2021*) Preparing 1. [Candle making].* In possession of the author: Hangzhou. Transparent gel wax, cotton, hemp rope, polyester fibre, metal.



Figure 8. Zhang, Y.L. (2021) *Preparing 2. [Candle making].* In possession of the author: Hangzhou. Candles, cotton, hemp rope, polyester fibre and metal. 20 x 20cm (50)

Process

This experiment records the different sensations of a burning candle – sight, sound and smell (see Fig.9). The trace left when the candle is extinguished is random and uncontrollable (see Fig.10), reflecting the uniqueness of each act, whether extinguished by water, blowing or burning out naturally. For me, this signifies that Chinese women, despite their balancing and struggles, all leave their own distinctive mark - a trace that is uniquely theirs.

An illustrative parallel can be found in, ‘Going South’, a collection of stories by contemporary Chinese novelist Jane Yuan, which centres around the struggles and reconciliation of Chinese women, particularly around mother-daughter relationships, and female self-awakening. In the title story, a middle school girl confronts her authoritarian and oppressive mother whose rigid approach to education leaves the girl overwhelmed. Pushed to the brink of despair, the girl considers suicide by jumping off a building, before ultimately deciding instead to seek therapy. Her mother, in turn, accepts the psychologist's advice and begins to reconsider her parenting style. This is the story of a mother and her daughter's struggle to reconcile. Reconciliation with oneself is the beginning of examining one's self-awareness, whether it is the mother or the daughter who struggles with various social norms at home, school, or society. Jane Yuan's novel inspired my work on how Chinese women balance family, society, and self – an issue that is the core of my experiments and final practice. This practical work is documented and displayed as conceptual installation art in the form of artefacts and photographs.



Figure 9. Zhang, Y.L. (2021) *Candles Burning. [Photograph, video]* In possession of: the author: Hangzhou. Candles, fabrics. 80 x 120cm



Figure 10. Zhang, Y.L. (2021) *The Trace. [Photograph]* In possession of the author: Hangzhou. Candles, cotton, hemp rope, polyester fibre and metal. 60 x 50 cm

This experiment also serves as an investigation into materials and forms within fibre art, as a means of expressing Chinese women's societal contributions, their connection with family and their desire for independence and equality. I see this as an initial attempt to interweave the feminine with the fibre, embodied in the fusion of fabric and the life-force of the candle. Through the visualisation of my own and my relatives' lived experiences, the work brings into a tangible form the intertwined concepts of female contribution, personal identity, and the evolving language of Chinese fibre art. Fundamentally, the essence of experimentation lies in the exploration of materials, colours, forms, and most significantly, concepts. The final practice builds and expands upon these ideas.

The concept underpinning this practice is to show how the contributions of Chinese women to society and the family, alongside their aspirations for independence and equality, can be explored and articulated through fibre art. Balancing the demands of family, society, and the self remains a challenge that Chinese women continually navigate and collectively seek to reconcile. Chinese women of different generations approach this balance in diverse ways, shaped by their social, cultural, and personal contexts. The final artwork reflects a three-generation investigation, developed in collaboration with and inspired by my mother and grandmother.

1.6 Summary

This chapter began by outlining the main research questions. It set out the research methodology and research methods that are applied in the study.

This study uses qualitative research as the primary methodology, focusing on questions relating to contemporary Chinese fibre art, its creative environment, and its distinctive local characteristics. The purpose of this analysis was to explore the key concerns of Chinese female fibre artists in the creation of their work, focusing on how gender concepts are expressed in their artworks and how each artist responds to the specific creative environment of fibre art in China. Butler's theory of gender performativity serves as the primary conceptual framework for this investigation.

The case studies are based on interviews and analyses of specific artworks. This research involved working with six selected Chinese female fibre artists to analyse their motivation, choice of materials, and focus (technical or conceptual or both) in the creation of their artworks. It also addresses the question of how Chinese female fibre artists combine the local characteristics of Chinese fibre art with their personal perceptions in their fibre artworks, and how gender is performed in their work.

The knowledge and insights gained from the case studies directly inform the practical component of this research. In this study, practice refers to the process of experimentation and the creation and display of fibre artworks, as a means of demonstrating and communicating the knowledge generated. In this chapter, I have set out my initial practice experimentation methods, exploring it in stages of concept, sketch, materials and process.

The next chapter examines and presents the analysis of the gender expression in Chinese fibre art, addressing the question, ‘how do the artworks of Chinese female fibre artists demonstrate gender performativity?’.

Chapter 2: Exploring gender expression in Chinese Fibre Art: unveiling the power of textiles

2.1 Introduction

As highlighted in the Introduction, Chinese female fibre artists create their works with two distinct consciousnesses: technique and concept. This chapter examines these two approaches in depth, exploring how gender is expressed in their practice. It introduces Western understandings of gender while also considering traditional Chinese gender conceptions and how these are reflected in Chinese fibre art. In addition, it looks at how gender conceptions are embodied in the work of Chinese female fibre artists, paying particular attention to their personal consciousness and artistic conceptions. I argue that the gender performativity of Chinese female fibre artists can be analysed and understood through selected concepts and theories within gender studies. As indicated in the research methodology chapter, this study adopts gender performativity as the main underlying theory. A selective approach is taken to exploring theories of gender performativity, taking into account the environments in which Chinese female fibre artists create their fibre art, as well as the distinctive characteristics of their artwork.

In the field of gender studies, Judith Butler's (1999) book '*Gender Trouble',* introduced the concept of gender performativity. This is fundamental to the theoretical framework of this study. Butler argues that gender, sexuality and the performance of sexuality are about power in society. This research suggests that some Chinese female fibre artists perform their feminine characteristics as a response to societal expectations and power dynamics. Conversely, others create works from a female perspective without relying on traditional symbols of femininity – such as soft yarn, the female body, or textile crafts – to convey meaning. According to Butler, the basis for gender conceptions, as well as feminist studies, is the identification of women as subjects. However, there are

also female artists in Chinese contemporary art who address gender issues directly, often incorporating them into their work in a more explicit manner than is typically seen in the field of fibre art. For instance, Li Xinmo, is a Chinese artist who self-consciously perceives her work as being related to Chinese gender issues. Her artworks are created in a variety of media, including performance, painting, video, photography and installations. In June 2008, she performed her piece, ‘Death of the Xinkai River’. The Xinkai River is one of the main rivers in Tianjin. However, in recent years, the river has become seriously polluted due to urban water pollution and excessive discharge of water from industry. Every summer, this river emits a putrid smell and there is a huge quantity of algae growing on the surface. In the spring of 2008, a female student from the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts was murdered and her body was thrown into the river. As a result, Li Xinmo staged a performance in the Xinkai River, where she submerged herself in the water. Dressed all in white, she walked into the stench of the river (see Fig.11). Li Xinmo commented that this beautiful river was dead, and the young woman was dead too. Perhaps her intention was to confront us with the presence of death, forcing viewers to acknowledge the crimes. There are two meanings to this work, firstly, it is a tribute to a river, secondly, it is a declaration of the issues of women in China. Li Xinmo demonstrates the death of the female student with her own body, which is reproduced in a way that continues to portray the horror of her death. The decay of the river water and the green algae create an olfactory and visual shock. The photographs alone convey a powerful sense of fear and oppression.



Figure 11. Xinmo, Li. The Death of the Xinkai River (2008), Performance Art

The first argument presented in this chapter based on the gender performativity theory is that Chinese female fibre artists are influenced by Chinese society's perceptions of gender and others' perceptions of femininity. The concepts and techniques displayed in the work of these artists are influenced by these different external factors. The artists express their self-awareness through their work by attempting to get the approval of others as well as personal approval. This identity includes gender. Judith Butler's theory of "gender performativity" is put forth in '*Gender Trouble'* (1990) and in her essay 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' (1988). The gender performativity theory state that gender, and gender roles are elaborate social performances that one puts on in day-to-day life, the hegemonic versions of which underlie popular conceptions of "man"/ "masculine" and "woman"/ "feminine". This perspective illustrates that both men and women perform their gender roles and their social behaviours in response to societal expectations. At the same time, people tend to adjust their self-presentation to align with what they perceive as more socially desirable in the

eyes of others. This has parallels in a collectivist culture such as China, where people care more about how they are seen by others, and thus live for others.

Butler in '*Gender Trouble'* illustrates the gender binary system:

> When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one (Butler, 1999: 10).

Butler argues for the free-floating artifice of gender, which is also based on gender performativity. There are many social as well as individual factors that contribute to gender interpretation and gender fluidity. Cartwright (1968, p.618) points out the perspectives of essentialism that objects have a set of attributes that are necessary to their identity. However, there is also a negative aspect to essentialism. Some argue that essentialist thinking is at the core of many reductionist, discriminatory or extremist ideologies (Kurzwelly, 2020, p.356). I consider that it is necessary to clarify the relationship between identity, essence and characteristics. In the Platonic idealist sense of form and idea, essence describes the characteristics of a substance or a form. The essence is intrinsic to the object or person and is eternal and immutable. The fact that a characteristic is an external manifestation, such as femininity or masculinity, is contradicted by Butler's view of gender fluidity. Identity, on the other hand, is a definition given to an individual or a group by other people and events in the Chinese philosophical system, as well as in Chinese social concepts. Furthermore, identity is not only an evaluation or definition given by others, but as society progresses, the identity of an individual depends more on how he or she defines himself or herself. As previously mentioned, Chinese women fibre artists are more family-oriented due to the influence of collectivist culture and

Confucianism. Section 2 detail how the traditional Chinese gender theory and Confucianism, as socio-cultural factors, have influenced the creative artworks of Chinese female fibre artists. At the same time, due to some of the constraints imposed by the Chinese society, the artists are not able to fully express their individual gender in mainstream fibre art exhibitions.

As highlighted in the research methodology chapter, Butler's perspective on gender performativity is that, rather than being a trait which is simply determined by biology or an inherent embodiment of identity, gender is performed and reinforced repeatedly based on certain social norms (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018, p.3). This is a social construct that affects and informs gender. Butler's viewpoint underlies my research question on how the artistic production of Chinese female fibre artists has been affected by factors such as Chinese society, the Chinese fibre art environment, their personal experiences, and their identity as women. This repetitive enactment of gender is a response to the connections between the individual and society. It presents different techniques and levels of personal awareness. These vary as Chinese society and the Chinese fibre art environment changes. Over time, the education of female artists changes, and the stages of female artists' creative and professional careers evolve. The inherent gender norms given to contemporary Chinese women by Chinese society and their repeated reinforcement affect the personal awareness of the artists in creating fibre artworks. This is the second observation presented in this chapter. The second section contains a detailed description of the traditional Chinese concept of gender and gender-related social norms. This perspective is similar to that of the first study in this chapter, in that both focus on the impact of social stereotypes on Chinese females' awareness of individuality.

In Butler's (1999) preface to '*Gender Trouble'*, she argues that performativity is a repetition and a ritual rather than a singular act that achieves its effects

through physical naturalisation within a bodily context. The argument that gender is performative attempts to show that the intrinsic nature of gender as we define it is created through a series of sustained acts, through the gendered stylisation of the body. This notion of ‘sustained behaviour’ is evident in the art-making practices of Chinese female fibre artists, whose works over different periods represent an evolving form of ‘continuous behaviour’ in their shifting choices of materials and concepts. At the same time, their practices also demonstrate continuity, with certain materials being extended across periods and familiar concepts re-emerging in new forms. This observation is exemplified in section 4 of this chapter, as well as in the Case Study Chapter. The ‘sustained act’ is a repetitive manifestation of gendered performativity. The creation of fibre works by Chinese female fibre artists is a long-term process of discovering personal consciousness through materials, processes and concepts that they continuously experiment with. The fibre artworks are the medium for the female artists' personal gender performances.

Furthermore, this research has mentioned before that in Butler’s words, gender, sexuality and the performance of sexuality are related to power in society. I consider that these theories and perspectives on gender point to the sociality and malleability of gender consciousness and gender identity. In the past ten years, women in China have become more confident about themselves, especially the younger generation. The changing attitudes of the Chinese government and society towards women have resulted in a younger generation of women with a greater desire to explore their sense of self-awareness and self-worth. The changing attitudes of Chinese society towards women and the educational status of Chinese women have influenced the creation of fibre artworks by Chinese female fibre artists directly or indirectly. The self-identity of Chinese female fibre artists and their understanding of fibre art are the main motivations for the diversity of concepts in Chinese female fibre artworks.

2.2 Tracing gender performativity in the history of traditional Chinese fibre art

2.2.1 Traditional Chinese concept of gender

Before examining gender conceptions, it is important to first explore Chinese and Western views on individual consciousness, given that this study focuses on female fibre artists in China. The second point raised in the previous section relates to the influence of social structures and social norms on gender perceptions of women in China, and how this iteration and reinforcement affects the personal awareness of Chinese female fibre artists in the creation of their work. What is the influence of gender stereotypes in Chinese society? What causes the presence of gender performative behaviours in the personal awareness of Chinese female fibre artists to be influenced by social and other factors? Individualism versus collectivism is a common dichotomy in cross-cultural research. Individualism is the moral stance, political philosophy, ideology and social outlook that emphasises the intrinsic worth of the individual (Wood, 1972, p.72). In gender conceptions, the pursuit of individualism and the rise of female self-awareness in the West has contributed to the radical work of Western women artists with a distinctive point of view. In contrast, Chinese female fibre artists are influenced and educated by a collectivist culture (including social influence, family education, school education, and community influence, among others) and need to balance themselves with others (society, family, friends, parents, husbands) in the creation of their fibre artworks and the performance of their gender. In the subsequent chapters which contain interviews with Chinese female fibre artists, I found that the older generations of Chinese female fibre artists were more focused on how they were seen by others, which means their works and personal professional paths were affected more by society and family. The younger generation of Chinese female fibre artists are influenced by China's socio-economic development and education, and they are more self-aware in their professional planning and artwork

expression. However, they are still confined to the framework of society and family.

The concept of gender has been present in ancient China in religion, politics, philosophy, and other fields. The concept of gender influences the general methodology of Chinese thinkers, based on gender in Chinese Philosophy (Shen and Ambrosio, 2022). Confucianism has a relatively conservative view on the treatment of gender. On the one hand, it recognises the equality of women with men in some respects and affirms the value of women. On the other hand, it proposes the subordination of women to men, and this has had several negative effects, and has thus been greatly criticised. In the Confucian tradition, human beings are divided into men and women, however, man is primarily a moral concept and is subject to political, economic, cultural and social influences. In thousands of years of Chinese civilisation, standard female figures such as the fair lady, the virtuous wife and mother, and the chaste and filial woman have been produced. In addition, standard male figures such as the sage, the gentleman, and the magnate, are exemplars of human temperament, character, and the traits one possesses that have been generated in the norms of traditional Confucian culture (Zhu, 2006, p.4). In the male-centred ancient Chinese society, the concept of gender refers more to the awareness and view of women held by men in a dominant position. However, the issue of women in ancient Chinese society was not simply a gender issue; traditional women were constructed in a specific time and space for their development and role-playing with unique Chinese characteristics, and they could also assume the important responsibility of promoting the prosperity of the family, maintaining social stability, and contributing to the stability of the state power (Bian, 2023). Therefore, this study argues that the influence of traditional Chinese Confucianism on traditional Chinese concepts of gender is two-sided. On the one hand, Confucianism assigns women social functions and a lower status than men, and these factors suppressed traditional Chinese

women's inquiry into their personal needs. On the other hand, in the social environment of ancient China, the differences between men and women proposed by Confucianism were conducive to the stability of the social structure at that time. Under the patriarchal system, although women did not have ‘women's rights’ in the strict sense of the concept, they did have maternal rights within the family or household (Bian, 2023).

I contend that different religions and philosophies have their own epistemology in the traditional study of gender in China. However, due to the status and influence of Confucianism, women are disadvantaged, and unequal compared to men in traditional Chinese conceptualisation and social perceptions of gender. The essence of the constraint on women in Confucianism is a product of the discourse of patriarchy. In today's Chinese society, although the government has introduced laws and policies on gender equality, women have been given access to education and work opportunities. I will elaborate on this point later. However, in some remote areas of China, in areas with strong traditional attitudes, and amongst older people, there is still discrimination against women within Confucianism (Jing, 2022, p.12). For example, it is maintained that a woman must get married and have children when she reaches a particular age, and that after marriage a woman need not work but only need look after her husband, children and her husband's parents at home. This view is similar to the previously stated concept of ancient Chinese society. My argument is that traditional Confucianism and the concept of gender developed in ancient societies continue to influence contemporary Chinese society. Although attitudes towards women in contemporary Chinese society are regulated by law, there are still moral values that restrict women's freedom. These conceptualisations of gender influence contemporary Chinese women's perceptions of the family, society and the individual. In 2013, President Xi Jinping, in a meeting of the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF)[1], stated that:

[1] The All-China Women's Federation, founded in April 1949, is a people's organization of women of all ethnic groups and from all walks of life in China, united for further emancipation and development. As a people's organization under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), it serves as a bridge linking the Party and the government with women and is an important social pillar of the state power. (https://www.womenofchina.cn)

> Special attention should be paid to women's unique role in propagating Chinese family virtues and setting up a good family tradition. This relates to harmony in the family and in society and to the healthy development of children. Women should consciously shoulder the responsibilities of taking care of the old and young, as well as educating children. (Xi Jinping, ACWF, 2013 (https://www.womenofchina.cn))

The pressure of family responsibilities on women in contemporary Chinese society comes not only from traditional ideology, but also from the Chinese government. Chinese society requires women to assume family and reproductive responsibilities, which is a way to maintain masculinity as the dominant approach. In October 2015, China further relaxed its more than three-decade-old family planning policy, under a statement issued by the Communist Party of China Central Committee. Concurrently, a law was enacted: Law of the People's Republic of China on Population and Family Planning (Amended 2015). The statement said the country's ageing trend would be actively addressed by the universal two-child policy. The introduction of the concept of the universal two-child policy has intensified the pressure on women in Chinese society and is contributing to the intensification of the gender debate. At the same time, how to balance family, society and the individual has become a thorny issue for contemporary Chinese women.

2.2.2 Gender performativity in traditional Chinese fibre art (textiles)

The textile industry in ancient China evolved over a significant period, both technically and artistically. Therefore, gender performativity is also reflected in traditional Chinese textiles and fibres.

Ancient Chinese mythology and religious stories are marked by the pursuit and worship of feminine power. Examples include Nv Wa creation of humans (女娲造人) and the raising of silkworms by Lei Zu (嫘祖养蚕). The legends of Lei Zu's

silkworm raising are about textiles and fibres. Lei Zu - the founding goddess - taught people how to raise silkworms and make silk. Once she was drinking in a mulberry grove when a wild silkworm cocoon fell from the tree. She used a wooden stick to pick out the silk, but the silk was getting longer and longer, so she took the branch and kept reeling the silk (Sima, 1959, p.3). Thus, the technique of silk reeling was invented. This myth also indicates that in ancient China textiles were a symbol of females and that women were overwhelmingly involved in textile production.

Around the world, some perceptions of creative forces, in which the feminine and masculine act in unity, have been rooted in beliefs about the origins of life (Crerar and Beard, 2022, p.78). This stems from matriarchal society, where women dominate in production and life. However, for a variety of reasons, women did not hold on to their exalted position in the creation myths, but gradually succumbed to men as time progressed and society changed, so that there was a noticeable shift in the roles of men and women in the Chinese creation myths. In ancient Chinese myths about women early Chinese society worshipped female spirits and immortals, and the higher status of women, was a consequence of the development of primitive society. In matrilineality, women play a major role in production and life, playing an essential role in the reproduction of races and the maintenance of clans (Wang, 2011, p.53). Chinese myths about the origin of mankind are portrayed in female characters - Nv Wa (女娲). However, with the establishment of Confucianism, the Ceremony System, and the Feudal System, the worship of females gradually disappeared. In primitive Chinese society and in early feudal China, the interpretation and conception of the Chinese female myth was the worship of women and fertility. As feudal society maintained patriarchal and monarchical authority, the status of women declined and the number of female characters in Chinese mythology diminished, while different interpretations of existing female myths arose. Ancient Chinese women were despised if they had beauty, and

mythological stories of such women assigned seduction as the cause of the corruption of those in power. Daji (妲己), for example, is depicted as a fox demon possessed for a thousand years who compelled the emperor to kill innocent people indiscriminately (Wang, 2011, p.53). This was a collision of politics and gender in ancient China. Although the influence of women in ancient Chinese textiles remained with the change of sovereignty and ideology, their contribution to ancient textiles continues.

2.3 Unravelling gender performativity in Contemporary Chinese fibre art

2.3.1 Gender concept and social influence in Contemporary China

The previous section explored the concept of gender and the moral constraints on women in traditional Chinese ideology. This section explores the moral codes and duties of contemporary Chinese women.

According to Shi Yubin's (1987, p.74) views of gender morality in ancient China, there are three key points to consider:

1. Gender social morality: refers to the moral principles and norms that reflect and maintain the social status of men and women in a society, the social rights and duties of men and women, and the social roles of men and women.
2. Sexual morality: refers to the moral code and moral psychology of men and women in their sexual life, such as the concept of chastity.
3. Marriage and family morality: the moral codes and customs of men and women in choosing a partner, relationships, marriages (marriage, divorce, remarriage) and family life.

The moral norms that regulate relations between the genders in society are only rules of conduct for women and must be observed. Thus, the moral norms that regulate gender relations in society are a major factor influencing ancient

Chinese women, as well as contemporary Chinese women, regarding family, social and personal balance. The perspective of repeated performance and reinforcement of social constructions in Butler's (1999) theory of ‘gender performativity’ is relevant to this study, as it has parallels with the traditional maintenance of gender norms through repeated behaviours. The gender ethics that influence the creations of Chinese female fibre artists are also a process of social construction reinforced in the long-term.

The contemporary Chinese morality of gender has been promoted and propagated by the various legal provisions on gender equality during the Mao period. After the establishment of PR China in 1949, Chairman Mao (1955) further advocated the rights of females through a top-down approach, such as ‘men and women are equal’ and ‘women hold up half the sky’ (see Fig.12), with a very direct purpose of utilizing half of the citizenry, women, for the civil war in China as well as to promote his advanced ideology as a leader of the Party. With the development of culture and economy in China, the social perception of gender has gradually changed. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Chinese Economic Reform Policy [2] prioritised economic development. Consequently, the market economy changed people's life and ideas. Shi (1989, p.46) who works in the Institute of Philosophy in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences summarises a gender norm based on a political framework in China as follows:

1. The socialist concept of equality between men and women, the demand for genuine (not average) equality between men and women in economics, politics, education, marriage and employment.
2. A healthy and scientific sexual morality based on love.
3. A moral concept of family marriage based on mutual love, mutual help,

[2] The program of economic reforms termed "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" and "socialist market economy" in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Led by Deng Xiaoping, often credited as the "General Architect", the reforms were launched by reformists within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on December 18.

mutual respect and mutual understanding.



Figure 12. Kui, S. (1974) The poster of 'women hold up half the sky'. Print.

In this study, the focus is on the social position of female fibre artists in relation to fibre art in China. Social identity and social stratification influence the social position of female fibre artists in China, so that gender identity and social status are intersecting factors. The social identity theory addresses the ways that social identities affect people's attitudes and behaviours regarding their ingroup and the outgroup. Social identities are most influential when individuals consider membership in a particular group to be central to their self-identity and they feel strong emotional ties to the group. Affiliation with a group confers self-esteem, which helps to sustain the social identity (Leaper, 2011, p.350). The political system, philosophy and culture of China, as well as the rapid economic

and cultural development in China in the last decade, are strikingly different from those in Western countries. This has led to the emergence of the social stratification (圈层文化) with regard to China's population and huge land area. The cultural and educational differences between regions have led to differences in people's perceptions of gender. Social identity, in which people's self-conception is based, is formed through their membership in a social group, while social stratification is the further refinement of social identity by differentiating social groups through different perceptions, interests, and occupations. The social stratification in China has emerged in the last decade and I contend that this phenomenon is different from class solidification. There are no class distinctions, under ‘The Socialist System of Laws with Chinese Characteristics’. However, geographical differences, educational differences and cognitive differences are in fact present.

As a result, social stratification is formed, where people of the same epistemic system meet and converge. Social stratification is young, active and niche, and members develop a sense of belonging to the community and a sense of identification with it. People enter different groups by constantly raising their awareness. It is fluid, not static and permanent. It is not to be denied that social stratification has a certain negative impact, and some Chinese media consider it to be a disguised product of class solidification, which is the classification of people into different classes through epistemology.

However, in the context of this study, the phenomenon of gendered social stratification, in other words, how gender and social stratification work together, is most relevant in understanding the gender performativity of Chinese female fibre artists. Firstly, gender education in China is relatively different from the Western system, and people's perceptions of gender originate from family, school education and even exposure to Western education and cultural exchange. Those who have received higher education are more advanced in

their perceptions of gender and gender equality. In addition, the existence of such a group will lead to more people discussing gender consciousness and gender equality, which will create a kind of propaganda and influence. This allows the gender perceptions of this community to influence other communities, and this is how my individual presentation of women in this practice influences the wider community, so that more people can understand or recognise the value of women and their individual needs. At the same time, the social identity of female fibre artists originates from their family background, educational experience and the period in which they grew up. Social identity influences the concepts of Chinese female fibre artists in creating fibre artworks and their initial intentions.

2.3.2 The status of women in contemporary China

This section will focus on the contemporary situation of women in China. In order to understand the contemporary female fibre art practices in China, it is necessary for this research to trace back the widely accepted inherent governing social ideology, Confucianism, as mentioned in previous sections. However, when compared to other East Asian countries which also have a Confucian cultural background, for example, Japan and South Korea, the status of females in China is different. The female employment rate is one of the aspects that show the status of women and gender equality. China has an above world-average record of women's labour force participation. Compared with Japan and South Korea, gender segregation is perhaps the least pronounced in China. While women tend to be over-represented in certain industrial sectors such as education, health care and services, they are present in all sectors and occupations in a relatively even pattern (Cooke, 2010). According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2021, the ‘Economic Participation and Opportunity’ score for women in China is 0.701 ranking 69th globally, 117th in Japan and 123rd in Korea. These data show that Chinese women have more

job opportunities and are more equal to men in employment situations compared to Japan and Korea. This research suggests that one of the reasons for this phenomenon was rooted in Chairman Mao's claim that ‘women hold up half the sky’, which was further promoted with a focus on the economic development where all human capital is valued. Moreover, it is necessary for this research to point out that the issue and level of gender equality in China depends on the geographical locations, occupations and educational background of women. For the purpose of this research, I focus on and argue that the women living in developed and affluent areas and cities are relatively more liberated and equal. Women working in education, business and government departments are more concerned about their rights. Women with higher education, especially those who have studied abroad, are more interested in gender equality and independence.

However, there are limitations to the development of gender roles in China. As a male dominated country, and in an environment where women's consciousness has not been awakened, the environment for the development of female artists and their creative concept is subject to certain limitations. Firstly, the political environment in China does not allow for the emergence of an overemphasis on the issue of gender equality, as the official view is that gender in China is relatively equal. From the government's perspective, the issue of gender equality in China is gradually being addressed. According to the Civil Code of the People's Republic of China (2020), Book V Marriage and Family, which specifies the equal rights of women in marriage. Gender equality is enshrined, as well as in other books. Secondly, there is a lack of awareness in Chinese society and among the general public that female injustice exists (except for the young generation and those with a western education). Thirdly, there is a deep-rooted patriarchal ideology in China, and in less affluent and educationally disadvantaged areas, there are still the ideas described in

common terms as ‘male superiority over female’ (男尊女卑) and ‘preferring sons over daughters’ (重男轻女). There are views held not only by men but shared by most women too. Because China is still a developing country, there are still gaps between the geographical (horizontal) and the age (vertical) in education and ideology. It is an ideology gap between the rapidly developing economic areas and the rural areas. Another ideology gap is between the younger generation and their parents' grandparents. This has caused fear and resentment among the 'patriarchal' community. Also, an important entry point was to explore the body politics and social structures through the issue of women.

2.3.3 Chinese female fibre artists within the context of Contemporary Chinese society

The impact of education and social power on individuals is significant. Foucault (1980) points out that juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent. Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms – that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control, and even “protection” of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice. But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures. Whereas Foucault's interpretation of power is considered in this study, it also illustrates the influence of power control on the individual. This can be extended to the control of individual thought by gender education, family education and even school education in China. The Confucian logic of “*self-cultivation, family regulation, state governance, and world peace*” centres on relationality as its core. It emphasizes that individuals realize their values within the collective, and that collective interests take precedence over individual interests, thus forming the ideological foundation of collectivism (Chen, 2015, p.33). This serves as the basis for the education of young people in

contemporary China and has influenced adult Chinese female fibre artists. Since the 1980s, Western individualism has been introduced to China, leading to a transition in the self-awareness of young people from collective dependence to individual independence, resulting in the coexistence of collectivism and individualism (Li, 2014, p.115). This illustrates that the self-awareness of Chinese female fibre artists born in the 1970s and 1980s is characterised by a search for balance between collectivism and individualism, a factor that influences their creative work, career development and family circumstances. This is explained in detail in the case study chapter.

Regarding the above perspectives, I propose to explore these through the example of my personal experience. I was born in the 1990s, a period when primary education in China had already reached a relatively advanced stage. From primary school through to secondary school, traditional Confucian classics formed a fundamental part of every student's curriculum, integrated within both Chinese language and history lessons. During my primary education, I studied and read Confucian classics including The Analects (论语), Mencius (孟子) and The Book of Rites (礼记). These Confucian classics constitute three foundational texts of Confucianism, the canonical corpus that structured Chinese ethics, politics, education, and social order for over two millennia (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2026; Library of Congress, 2024). As core primary sources of early Confucian thought, these texts document key ideals such as ren (benevolence), li (ritual propriety), yi (righteousness), and humane governance, and have shaped scholarly and popular understandings of self, family, and state.Some of these sections appear in secondary school Chinese language textbooks. For instance, the Twelve Chapters from the Analects as presented in the Chinese language textbook for Grade 7 (First Semester) of Compulsory Education, revised according to the 2022 Curriculum Standards (see Fig.13).



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12 《论语》十二章①

孔 子

预 习

◎ 大家都知道老子、孔子、孙子、庄子、孟子、荀子等古代先哲，“子”是他们的名字吗？你知道“子”的含义吗？

◎ 孔子是儒家学说的创始人，被后人尊称为“至圣先师”。关于孔子，你知道他的哪些故事呢？讲一讲，与同学分享。

子②曰：“学而时习③之，不亦说乎④？有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎？人不知而不愠⑤，不亦君子⑥乎？”（《学而⑦》）

曾子⑧曰：“吾⑨日⑩三省⑪吾身：为人谋⑫而不忠⑬乎？与朋友交而不

① 选自《论（lún）语译注》（中华书局1980年版）。《论语》，儒家经典著作，是记录孔子及其弟子言行的一部书。共二十篇。东汉列为“七经”之一，宋代把它与《大学》《中庸》《孟子》合称为“四书”。孔子（前551—前479），名丘，字仲尼，鲁国陬（zōu）邑（今山东曲阜东南）人，春秋末期思想家、政治家、教育家。

② [子] 古代对男子的尊称，这里指孔子。

③ [时习] 按时温习。时，按时。

④ [不亦说乎] 不是很愉快吗？不亦……乎，常用于表示委婉的反问。说，同“悦”，愉快。

⑤ [愠（yùn）] 生气，恼怒。

⑥ [君子] 指有才德的人。

⑦ [学而] 和下文的“为政”“雍也”“述而”等一样，都是《论语》的篇名，是从各篇第一章第一句中摘取出来的，并没有特别的意义。

⑧ [曾子（前505—前436）] 姓曾，名参（shēn），字子舆，春秋末期鲁国人，孔子的弟子。

⑨ [吾（wú）] 人称代词，我。

⑩ [日] 每天。

⑪ [三省（xǐng）] 多次进行自我检查。三，泛指多次。一说，实指，即下文所说的三个方面。省，自我检查、反省。

⑫ [为人谋] 替人谋划事情。

⑬ [忠] 竭尽自己的心力。

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Figure 13. Ben, H, W (2022) The Twelve Chapters from the Analects in the Chinese language textbook for Grade 7 (First Semester) of Compulsory Education, revised according to the 2022 Curriculum Standards.

I consider the study of Confucian classics to be systematic, long-term and normatively influential for myself and current Chinese students. It not only impacts our knowledge structures but profoundly influences how Chinese students comprehend gender roles, power relations, individual agency and social responsibility. The influence on gender roles comprises two aspects. One is the impact of traditional norms. For instance, the Analects emphasises “propriety” and social harmony, which in traditional contexts entailed explicit

gender division of responsibilities. On the other hand, this text has influence within the contemporary Chinese context. Textbooks either attenuate or critically present these traditional gender norms, emphasising gender equality in contemporary Chinese society within school education. Consequently, I gained an understanding of gender equality during my primary education. This also fostered a critical perspective towards traditional Chinese gender concepts. The impact on individual choice and social responsibility manifests in the prioritisation of the collective over the individual, as previously discussed. The impact on individual choice and social responsibility manifests in the prioritisation of the collective over the individual, as previously discussed.

This perspective encourages students to place greater emphasis on family and societal expectations when making life choices (career, marriage). Furthermore, the notion of ‘self-realisation’ is less frequently emphasised as the exclusive value. Self-cultivation within a moral framework, specifically the strengthening of self-discipline is stressed, rather than a predominantly individualistic approach to choice. Regarding social responsibility, students develop a pronounced collectivist consciousness and sense of social participation. As previously noted, this is consistent with contemporary Chinese social contexts. These perspectives have influenced my personal development, strengthening my emphasis on family relationships and consequently affecting my art concept in final practice.

The above reflects the influence of traditional Confucian classics on myself and my generation of Chinese female fibre artists, while also illustrating the impact of these traditions on the Chinese people.

2.4 Summary

The concept of gender performativity refers to the idea that gender is not an

inherent or fixed quality but rather a social construct that is performed and enacted through repetitive acts and behaviours. This study identifies gender performativity as a fundamental influence on the concept of Chinese female fibre artists' practice. Whether the artist engages with gender from a personal perspective or through the lens of broader social conditions, the core of the work centres on gender performativity – shaped either by the artist's identity and lived experience as a female fibre artist or by the influence of Chinese societal norms and collective consciousness.

The next chapter focuses on how Chinese female fibre artists explore the development of Western fibre art within China by integrating indigenous Chinese culture, encompassing the fusion of traditional Chinese culture and social consciousness.

Chapter 3: Exploration of Fibre art in China

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter on gender performativity explores how Chinese female fibre artists perceive both fibre art and their societal context, and how this awareness informs their artistic practices and contributes to broader social discourse in China. This chapter explores the development of fibre art in China. The main objective is to develop a background study of the creative works of Chinese female fibre artists based on research issues such as contemporary Chinese fibre art, the creative environment of Chinese fibre art and the local characteristics of Chinese fibre art. In addition, this chapter focuses on the development of fibre art, in particular, its progress in China and how this relates to Western fibre art, the major Chinese exhibitions around the art form, and the prominence of female fibre artists in the Chinese art field. Fibre art is a form of art which is composed of natural or synthetic fibre and other components (such as fabric or yarn), and is based on basic textile technique, often combined with other artistic methods. At the same time, through the unique sensory properties of fibre materials, it is easier for the audience to obtain the concept and message transmitted by fibre artists compared with other forms of contemporary art (Koplos, 1986, p.21).

In China, fibre art is a form of contemporary fine art that has seen rapid development and growth during the last twenty years since 2000. The textile art has a profound history of development in China. It has been closely related to textiles and the textile technique, and has a profound traditional foundation. This is explained in the subsequent section. Therefore, fibre art and textile art are inextricably connected in China. Due to the close connection between women and fibre, Liang Kai, a Chinese female fibre artist, argues that there is a relatively high proportion of female artists in the field of fibre art in China. This

is based on an interview with Liang Kai in her case study.

This chapter discusses the development of fibre art in four aspects. The first one focuses on the definition of fibre art and the development of fibre art in the West. As fibre art is closely related to tapestry art and textile art, I also explored part of this relationship. The second aspect is the development of fibre art in China, highlighting the close relationship between traditional Chinese textile techniques and contemporary Chinese fibre art and how fibre art was introduced and developed in China. The third aspect is a study of two major fibre art exhibitions in China, which examines the exchange between Chinese fibre art and the West, and how it has served as a platform for Chinese female fibre artists to present themselves. The final aspect is about the awareness of Chinese female fibre artists towards fibre art, by examining the awareness of these artists regarding fibre art and to society, and the concept of their fibre artworks. This will contribute to the subsequent chapter on the gender performativity in fibre art.

3.2 The fibre art development

3.2.1 The definition of fibre art

Fibre art serves as a bridge between the traditional and contemporary art forms, with its foundations firmly rooted in textile and tapestry art. This section aims to define ‘Fibre Art’ in the context of this thesis by exploring its evolution and relationship with textile and tapestry art. In addition, it highlights the shared materials and techniques, and the shift in its classification over time as it has gradually changed from two-dimensional to three-dimensional. In addition, the choice of materials by fibre artists has increasingly changed from traditional textile fibres to metals, artificial fibres, and mixed media. Fibre artists tend to focus on personal, social and other areas similar to contemporary art in their concepts of creation. Fibre art, as a connection between traditional and

contemporary art, will be examined in depth in subsequent sections of this study. Both textile and tapestry art form the bedrock of fibre art. Textile art encompasses the arts and crafts that utilize plant, animal, or synthetic fibres to craft practical or decorative objects (Barber, 2008, p.7). The connection between textile and fibre art is evident in their common materials such as wool, leather, linen, silk, cotton, fur, polyester, and nylon, as well as techniques like knotting, twining, plaiting, coiling, pleating, lashing, and interlacing (Love, 2009).

Magdalena Abakanowicz (Polish; 20 June 1930 – 20 April 2017) was a pioneer artist, sculptor and fibre artist, also remarkable for her use of textiles as a sculptural medium (The Museum of Modern Art, 2017). Abakanowicz (1969) stated that she sought the “total obliteration of the utilitarian function of tapestry” and demonstrated the capacity of fibre to produce forms that were soft, yet, structured and complex. Abakanowicz created radical sculptures from woven fibre. In 1967, she began producing three-dimensional fibre works called ‘*Abakans’* (see Fig.14). These towering works that hung from the ceiling were soft not hard, ambiguous and organic, and pioneered a new form of installation. Her use of "unexpected, often soft materials, arranged in modular or serial structures” in her Abakan series, places her within the post-minimalism art movement that began in 1966 (Sandler, 1996, p.50). I consider that with these works I brought soft, fibrous forms into a new relationship with sculpture and fibre art. Meanwhile, Abakanowicz brought weaving into the more ‘male’ domain of abstract fine art sculpture.



Figure 14. Abakanowicz, M. (1969) *Abakan Red,* sisal weaving on metal support. 300 x 300 x 100 cm. Collection of the Museum Bellerive, Zurich.

Contemporary fibre artists focus on the expression of concepts such as human and fibre, technology and science, art activism and constant innovations in materials, techniques and form. In addition, they also pay attention to the inheritance of traditional crafts and culture heritage. For instance, Joana Vasconcelos (Portuguese; born 1971) is a fibre artist whose work is a strategy conceived to provoke and question the social and political implications of everyday life. Her approach to large-scale projects, which involves working with delicate materials, reflects a practice focused on exploring the concept and legacy of female crafts (Strategy, 2014). Located somewhere between aesthetic appeal and serious social commentary, the art of Joana Vasconcelos

employs soft materials and energetic shapes to examine the personal and collective identity of individuals, social groups, and nationalities (see Fig.15). Thus, fibre art is a form of art that communicates some sort of message, emotion or meaning and goes beyond just the literal meaning of the materials.



Figure 15. Vasconcelos, J. (2018) *Finisterra*. Handmade woollen crochet, ornaments, polyester, on canvas, gilded relief frame, plywood, iron. 340 x 550 x 80 cm

Tapestry art, one of the most ancient forms of textile art, traditionally created on a vertical loom, is characterized by a weaving technique that conceals all the warp threads in the finished work (Jarry, 2019). Tapestry artist Jean Lurçat (1950) pointed out that tapestry is not an art of small format, but a type of monumental art. In 20th century textile design and art, tapestries, created for their aesthetic beauty and ability to cover a large area, have been partly replaced with fibre art which is conceptual in its very origin and includes intellectual concerns, and diverse references. Textile art gained the identity of “object of art”, and its modern tapestry identity in 1962 with the help of the Biennial International Lausanne Tapestry Conference led by Jean Lurçat. The artists who attended this conference, like Abakanowicz, Owidzka and Sadley, stated the power of textile art by working beyond the wall carpet tradition and provoked further studies focusing on large-scale works. The conference started

as a continuation of traditional tapestry art, hosting classical tapestry products and performing as a showroom. New forms of fibre art emerged from this origin, and the term “tapestry art” was no longer enough to name the three-dimensional and conceptual fibre art that resulted. Thus, the name of the conference was changed to ‘*Biennial International Lausanne Conference: Modern Textile Art’* in 1992, which shows that fibre art had been accepted as a modern textile art in the international framework (Cotton, 2017, p.78). Therefore, as a continuation of tapestry art, fibre art inherits the technique, materials and expression of tapestry art. Jean Lurçat argued that all forms of artistic expression that operate with textile or make use of the traditional techniques of processing yarns arguably reference the Lausanne International Tapestry Biennials, one of the most important exhibitions in tapestry and textile arts in the 20th century. For half a century, the importance of this recurrent event was to position textile art within an expanded view of art history and to ground it socially, aesthetically, and architecturally, changing the definition of tapestry itself to align with the diversified culture, concept and form of contemporary fibre art. Just as the name of “tapestry art” in the Lausanne Biennial was replaced by “fibre art”, this changed terminology travelled to China when the name of From Lausanne to Beijing – Third International Fibre Art Biennale (2004) of Tsinghua Academy of Fine Arts in China was also changed from "tapestry art" to "fibre art".

In the 1980s, contemporary fibre art began to develop rapidly under the influence of diversified European art trends in China. As many Western tapestry artists and fibre artists came to China to study and teach, Chinese fibre art developed rapidly (Lin, 2021). My research regarding the development of contemporary Chinese fibre art is primarily based on an interview with Lin Lecheng. Lin Lecheng is a prominent Chinese fibre artist and professor.In the spring of 2021, I conducted a voice call with Lin Lecheng. The questions focused on contemporary Chinese fibre art, the International Fibre Art Biennale

From Lausanne to Beijing in 2000, the contributions of Chinese female fibre artists to contemporary Chinese fibre art, and the future development of fibre art in China. During the entire interview, Lin patiently outlined the evolution of contemporary Chinese fibre art and how Western fibre art was introduced to China. He shared with me his experiences as a fibre artist studying and engaging in exchange programmes in Europe, as well as the original intention and process involved in establishing the International Fibre Art Biennale From Lausanne to Beijing in 2000. I have documented his specific responses, which are detailed in subsequent sections. This interview with Lin Lecheng serves as a comprehensive chronicle of the development of contemporary Chinese fibre art, and his answers have provided me with a complete understanding of the field.

Chinese fibre art was introduced from Western fibre art. The development of fibre art in China is discussed in Section 3.3. I will conclude this section by outlining my own introduction to fibre art, starting in China. My bachelor's degree was completed in China, where I studied Textile Design. This course required undergraduate students to acquire fundamental textile techniques such as weaving, printing, dyeing, and embroidery. Concurrently, during the year 3, I attended a lecture on Tapestry Art. Since then, I have developed a passion for tapestry art, engaging in research on the techniques, evolution, and relationship with fibre art. Among the textile technologies studied during my undergraduate studies, I demonstrated particular proficiency in weaving techniques. However, the Chinese textile design curriculum at undergraduate level tends to focus on product design, whilst my strengths were in exploring techniques and concept development for works. During my final year, my tutor advised pursuing postgraduate studies in the UK to deepen my understanding of textiles and fibre. At the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), my MA focused on the relationship between textiles and installation art, exploring how to transform two-dimensional woven pieces into three-dimensional forms. My

graduation project also integrated the trending concept of sustainability, which was my first attempt at concept-based creation. These formative experiences have guided my current research. My practice is concept-based, integrated with my expertise in weaving techniques.

3.2.2 Fibre materials as artistic medium and evolution into fibre art

The previous section on the definition of tapestry art described the origins of the Lausanne International Tapestry Biennials and the artists associated with them. The Lausanne Biennials connect tapestry art, textile art and fibre art. Fibre materials have been integral to artistic expressions throughout human history; woven, knitted, printed, and otherwise manipulated materials have endured as vital creative mediums (Henning, 1977). Constantine and Larsen (1981) elucidated that 'fabric' constitutes a universal term encompassing all fibrous constructions. They elaborated that each fabric piece signifies an individually crafted unit by an artist, produced through various techniques, either with or without a loom, encompassing knotting, knitting, crochet, and beyond. They posited that fibre artworks represent an amalgamation of the artist's efforts, passion, and talent, intertwined with superior technical capabilities and materials. Fibre artists employ diverse materials and multidisciplinary techniques based on textile arts. Consequently, their creations reflect personal emotions, cognition, and backgrounds, leading to a wide array of forms and profound expressive potential in fibre art.

Fibre material, an integral part of fibre art, is a prime focus of exploration for fibre artists. They investigate and shape their unique expressive forms and techniques. As Corwin outlines, artists in the United States and Europe, often marginalized or 'ghettoized,' experimented with fabrics and linear elements like linen, sisal, and cotton. The resultant works varied widely - they were wall-hanging or free-standing, two or three-dimensional, flat or volumetric, non-

objective or figurative, and could be either representational or abstract (DeGraw, 1972). Taylor (1983, p.33) traced the evolution of the Biennales Internationales de la Tapisserie in Lausanne from 1962 to 1981. She noted the shift from artisan-executed tapestries designed by cartoon-painters to artist-conceived fibre works. The aesthetic emphasis changed from imagery to the materiality, the textured or structural qualities, of textiles. Furthermore, works moved from two-dimensional mural textiles to three-dimensional forms. Tapestry artists of the late 1960s through mid-70s expanded the space between their work and the wall, engaging in the *nouvelle tapisserie* category, which later became known as "fibre art" (Porter, 2014, p.64). This spatial and three-dimensional exploration led to the transition of these artists into fibre artists. Long-standing experimentation with materials and technique developed into material-specific concepts related to fibre's softness, permeability, and drapability, among others. In addition, there was a new focus on creating work which confronted cultural issues such as gender and feminism; domesticity and the repetitive tasks related to women's work; political and social issues. (Marcus, 2004, p.27). Concurrently, Hemmings (2005, p. 31) posits that fibre art has rapidly diversified, crossing boundaries with technology and science, dance, and theatre.

In conclusion, with a long history and heritage, fibre art, as a contemporary art practice, is a form of art which is composed of natural or synthetic fibre and other components (such as fabric or yarn), based on basic textile technique, combined with other fields of technique. At the same time, through the unique sensory properties of fibre materials, it is easier for the audience to obtain the concept and message transmitted by fibre artists compared with other forms of contemporary art (Koplos, 1986, p.30). Therefore, this research, suggests that fibre art can be categorised as a form of art whose material consists of natural or synthetic fibre, with artworks created in two- or three-dimensional forms, through the utilisation of traditional textile techniques, as well as a contemporary cross-boundaries medium with technology and so on. At the same time, the concept of creating fibre artworks is based on the fibre artist's

personal factors and social influences, as will be explored in the analysis of six Chinese female fibre artists as case studies in Chapter 4.

3.3 Contemporary fibre art in China from 2000 to present

3.3.1 Traditional Chinese textiles meet Western fibre art influences

Textiles in ancient China used hemp, silk, wool, cotton fibres and gold as raw materials. Spinning and silk reeling produced yarn, with hand weaving employed to transform yarn into fabric. K'o-ssu (Chinese silk tapestry), is the most splendid crystallization of ancient Chinese textile art (see Fig.16). The name itself literally means "cut silk", because the distinct and unblended areas of colour in these tapestries gives the illusion that the threads have simply been cut (Schwartz, 2020).



Figure 16. Dynasty (1636-1912 AD), K'o-ssu, silk, gold, 142 x 176cm, The Palace Museum, China

In addition to these traditions, the development of contemporary fibre art in

China is closely related to the rise of western fibre art and tapestry art. The concept of fibre art first appeared in China in the early 1980s with the emergence of fibre art in China greatly influenced by the western practitioners who came to study or teach in China including Ruth Kao (American, 1933-1985), Maryn Varbanov (Bulgarian, 1932-1989) and Givi Kandareli (Georgian,1933-2006). The following section sets out a detailed explanation of how these three artists introduced Western fibre art to China.

The development of fibre art in China has experienced a process from pursuing the painting effect (mainly imitating patterns and painting) to investigating three-dimensionality (soft sculpture) and then to comprehensively exploring the combination of material, texture, space and concept (contemporary fibre art). In this development, there was a direct causal relationship between the initial stages and China's reform and opening-up in the 1980s, when contemporary fibre art in China was initiated.

In the development of Western fibre art, tapestry art is the predecessor of fibre art. In China, the development of fibre art is also preceded by the rise of tapestry art. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, with China's reform and opening-up period, the emancipation of the mind and economic recovery of large-scale building demand led to the indoor and outdoor environment design, the concept of environment art began to form in the artists' minds. In the early 1980s, Zhang Ding, the headmaster of the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts, Yuan Yunpu and other artists first played a role in the revival of the Chinese tapestry art. The artists only made drawings (figurative or patterned), and then the weavers in the carpet factory made them according to the drawings (Hang, 2000, p.99). During this period, after the Cultural Revolution, the traditions of weaving technique had been interrupted, which led to a decline in the weaving ability of the weavers. The artists were mainly engaged in factory weaving, although some American artists came to hold training courses on tapestry art creation and introduced some abstract forms. The overall appearance of tapestry art in

this period was still dominated by patterned forms.

The department of dyeing and weaving of the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts (Beijing) was the first to accept/adopt the concept of fibre art. Ruth Kao was a Chinese-American female fibre artist and professor at the University of Wisconsin. In the spring of 1981, she led 15 American fibre art students to study in the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts, which initiated the research and development of contemporary fibre art in China (Lin, 2021). In 1984, the first Chinese wall hanging art exhibition was held in the China Art Museum. In 1985, Maryn Varbanov (Bulgarian, 1932-1989), a famous international fibre artist who had studied in the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts in the 1950s with a special interest in Chinese culture, came to the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts again and began teaching tapestry art.

Tapestry art first entered China during the “1985 New Wave” in Chinese art. “1985 New Wave” was an art movement that appeared in the Chinese mainland in the middle of the 1980s. The young people at that time were dissatisfied with left-wing, and they were tired of the art stereotypes of the Soviet Union. They were also tired of outdated values in traditional culture, and tried to find new ideas from western contemporary art, which triggered a new trend in art all over the country. Artists had found new means of artistic expression; the Chinese government also accepted this new aesthetic form. In 1986, Varbanov transferred from the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts in Beijing to Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (predecessor of the China Academy of Art) in Hangzhou and founded the Varbanov Tapestry Research Centre (the first tapestry research centre in China). Moreover, he also started lecturing at the institute (Shi, 2013). Recalling Varbanov’s teaching in Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, Professor Liang Shaoji pointed out the innovation of the modernity of tapestry art, at the same time as opposing the simple misappropriation of traditional Chinese cultural resources, and the separation of artists and producers. He

always advocated that students need to make tapestry art by themselves. To guide students, one needs to acquire an understanding of the nature of materials and technology, in order to develop and innovate on this basis (Shi, 2013). Shi Hui, a famous Chinese fibre artist who was one of Varbanov's students, argued that what Varbanov wanted to bring was not only the creation issues in the field of modern tapestry art, but also through these methods. Based on an understanding of the development, creative processes, and modes of thinking in modern tapestry, this perspective aims to convey the essence of western modern art and to foster a more accurate understanding of the development of contemporary Chinese art (Shi, 1999, p.45).

Givi Kandareli (Georgian,1933-2006) was an internationally famous designer and creator of tapestries, who was an artist of the former Soviet Union, and a professor of Tbilisi State Academy of Arts in Georgia. He had been engaged in the artistic creation of Gobelin tapestry since the 1960s.[3] His works had been selected in the 10th Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie in Lausanne. The Central Institute of Arts and Crafts invited Professor Kandareli to teach Gobelin in the dyeing and weaving department in 1990s. Professor Kandareli paid equal attention to both creation and teaching. Also, he was a famous fibre art and Gobelin master globally, and one of the founders of the International Fibre Art Biennale *From Lausanne to Beijing* Symposium (Lin, 2021). Therefore, he played an important role in the creation and development of fibre art in China.

During the interview with Professor Lin Lecheng, this research discovered that the development of Chinese fibre art since 1986 can be divided into northern and southern schools, with differences emerging between these two regions. Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (the predecessor of the China Academy of Art) was the centre of the southern school. Given that Varbanov was familiar with

[3] A tapestry of a kind woven at the Gobelin works in Paris, France, noted for rich pictorial design.

Chinese traditions and had an international modern fibre art background, the style of this school reflected both Chinese styles and international trends. Twenty years ago, some of the southern school's artists gradually moved towards integration, also expressing their concepts publicly in installations (Hang, 2000, p.99). The Central Institute of Arts and Crafts (predecessor to the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University) was the centre of the northern school. Here, artists focused on decoration, drawing inspiration from traditional patterns and folk art, with a strong national and traditional style (Hang, 2000, p.99). In the northern school, Professor Lin Lecheng of the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University was the leading figure whereas in the southern school Professor Shi Hui of the China Academy of Art was prominent. They are respectively the originators of the International Fibre Art Biennale *From Lausanne to Beijing* and the Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art.

The rapid development of the Chinese contemporary fibre art began with the first International Fibre Art Biennale *From Lausanne to Beijing,* which was successfully held in Beijing in 2000 (Lin, 2000). Later, the Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art, Zhejiang, offered further influence of the impact of Lausanne on curatorial practices. For the first time, audiences in China had an opportunity to explore the historical and current development in contemporary artistic production spanning different traditions, concepts and cultures (Cotton, 2017, p.87). The fibre art in China has subsequently developed rapidly, with more than one hundred art colleges and universities setting up fibre art majors or curriculum. This has resulted in a fibre art education system that spans from vocational education to general education. The development of contemporary fibre art provides an experimental field within contemporary art (Zou, 2016). Yet this research argues that since the concept of "Fibre Art" was introduced into China more than 30 years ago, its theoretical research and criticism are relatively limited compared with other disciplines.

3.3.2 Fibre art development: higher education

The development of China's fibre art and fibre art higher education are interdependent. The teachers at many other colleges and institutes are directly derived from the birthplaces of the two schools of Chinese fibre art (Qiao, 2005, p.50). Those engaged in fibre art creation are mainly distributed in various colleges and institutes, including the teachers and students in the major of dyeing and weaving, textile design and fibre art, as well as teachers and students who are in other majors or research departments but are also engaged in fibre art creation (Lin, 2021). In addition to the two schools of the China Academy of Fine Arts (southern school) and Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University (northern school), there also emerged some more distinctive factions in the 2000s. For example, the colleges in northwest China often have no obvious form and media tendency in fibre art creation, which is mainly characterized by the emphasis and use of regional cultural and visual resources. For another example, colleges in Guangzhou, Hong Kong and other places have strong research and development power in textile technology. So, their works tend to have advantages in this aspect, which is close to the textile art of Japan, South Korea and other countries (Qiao, 2005, p.50). Despite these developments, at present Chinese higher education in fibre art is still centred on the two major schools. Meanwhile, the majors of textile design and fibre art in other colleges and universities are constantly innovating materials and artistic styles (Lin, 2021). Lin Lecheng, Liang Shaoji and other artists believe that the several large-scale fibre art exhibitions of recent years have indeed formed an environment and atmosphere conducive to the development of contemporary fibre art in China, which has contributed to the construction of the curriculum in many colleges and universities. Moreover, this has generated students' enthusiasm and interest in learning. Some of these students will enter society and become a new force in the creation of fibre art.

Until 2021, the higher education of Chinese fibre art has always been a course of dyeing and weaving (as secondary disciplines belonging to design departments) or sculpture (as secondary disciplines belonging to art departments), or even a short course. However, in 2021, the China Academy of Fine Arts successfully applied to introduce a four-year fibre art major within its art department (Ministry of Education of P.R China, 2021). At the same time, the Chinese Ministry of Education announced the record and approval results of undergraduate disciplines in colleges and universities in 2020; it officially listed fibre art as a new discipline in its undergraduate specialty catalogue of colleges and universities (Ministry of Education of P.R China, 2021). This will promote the development and dissemination of Chinese fibre art in the future, and greatly encourage the creation of fibre art practitioners.

3.3.3 Major fibre art exhibitions

As mentioned earlier, the major international exhibitions played a foundational role in the development of the fibre art, and this also applies in China. Therefore, it is crucial for this research to interrogate these two major exhibitions in China in the field of fibre arts, the International Fibre Art Biennale From *Lausanne to Beijing* and the Hangzhou *Triennial of Fibre Art*. This research investigates the inception of both exhibitions in China as well as their development trajectory during the last 20 years.

As a visiting scholar, Professor Lin Lecheng studied Gobelin art at Tbilisi State Academy of Arts in Georgia in 1993. After returning to China, he devoted himself to the research of the contemporary fibre art and published the book "Fibre Art" in 1996 (Lin, 2021). “Fibre Art” was the first book in China to systematically introduce the concept and development of fibre art. In 1996, Professor Lin studied tapestry art in France and Britain. He also applied to participate in the *Lausanne Biennale* in the same year, but the 16th Lausanne

Biennale had been closed. He was disappointed at not being able to see a *Lausanne Biennale*. This experience is also one of the reasons why Professor Lin wanted to continue the essence of fibre art, and decided to bring the Lausanne tradition to China, naming it *Fibre Art Biennale From Lausanne to Beijing in China* (Lin, 2021).

Under the proposal of Professor Lin, the first *International Fibre Art Biennale From Lausanne to Beijing* was held in the autumn of 2000 in the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts. More than 140 works from more than 90 artists from 15 countries, including China, participated in this first exhibition. Professor Lin claimed that the exhibition title, *From Lausanne to Beijing*, expresses appreciation and recognition of the historical and cultural significance of the Lausanne Biennale. The exhibition serves as an academic platform for West to East cultural exchanges. However, it is not organizationally affiliated with the Lausanne Biennials. The participating fibre artists signed the Beijing Declaration and undertook the mission of inheriting the "Lausanne spirit". Hang Jian reinforces how the title of the exhibition — *From Lausanne to Beijing* — is meaningful to the international community of artists who regretted the demise of the Lausanne Biennials. The significance to China is even greater. It marks the rise of a new stage of fibre art that continues the spirit of the Lausanne Biennials and demonstrates how China has started to take a leading position in fibre art internationally (Hang, 2000, p.99). *From Lausanne to Beijing* has been held in different cities all over China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou, Zhengzhou, Nantong, Wuzhen and Shenzhen, since 2000. The 9th Biennale received about 2000 applications from 54 countries and districts, which made it the largest fibre art biennale in the world. This again suggests the significance of fibre art nationally and internationally in the art arena.

As shown in the data in Appendices 1 and 2, the number of participating works and countries has more than tripled through the last 20 years. This research

argues that the exhibition has pushed fibre art in China as a globally recognised art practice, and China has now become the centre of the exchange and promotion of fibre arts globally. The themes of the Beijing Biennale have also gradually shifted focus towards innovation, interdisciplinarity and social concerns. As illustrated in Appendix 1, the numbers of award-winning Chinese fibre artists have increased year by year, including female fibre artists such as Pang Qi, Xu Wen, Dai Minhua, Li Wei, Ding Jianxin, and Liang Xuefang.

The establishment of the Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art is closely related to the demographics of the city of Hangzhou and the local institute, the China Academy of Art. Hangzhou has a long history of weaving and silk culture. The earliest silk products that appeared in Hangzhou were from Liangzhu culture, 5000 BC (Shan, 2013, p.77). In 1928, the National Academy of Art which is located in Hangzhou was in the first group of higher art institutions in China. Afterwards, it was renamed the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (predecessor of the China Academy of Art) (Chen, 1998). In the 1980s, as discussed, Maryn Varbanov fostered the first young artists engaged in tapestry art creation here, including Gu Wenda, Shi Hui and Liang Shaoji (Shi, 2013). After Varbanov's death, his student Shi Hui continued to work in fibre art. In 2003, the Fibre and Space Art Studio was established in the Sculpture Department at the China Academy of Art, which, integrating with the Varbanov Tapestry Research Centre, has been dedicated to modern fibre art creation (Xu, 2013, p.50). Shi Hui became the director of the studio. The Fibre and Space Art Studio started planning the 1st Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art in 2010 (Shan, 2013, p.78). After two years of preparation, including research investigations of the Kaunas Biennale 2011 in Lithuania and the Exhibition *Cotton: An International Thread* at the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester, the 1st Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art was officially launched in 2012, with Professor Shi Hui as the Chief Curator and Professor Janis Jefferies (Goldsmiths University of London), Assadour Markarov (Associate Professor and Director of the Weaving Art Department of

the National Academy of Art, Sofia, Bulgaria) and Professor Shan Zeng (of the Fibre and Space Art Studio, China Academy of Art) as co-curators (Xu, 2013, p.50). The formation of such an international curating team suggests that this exhibition is not just a national event, but an international platform for fibre arts in the world.

Although the quantities of artworks and countries involved in the Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art has remained stable, it has been seeking innovation in its themes, and exploring the most fundamental significance and value of fibre art. After six years, the Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art, supported by the China Academy of Art, is known as the representative of fibre art in southern China. Moreover, the participating artworks have gradually changed from two-dimensional and traditional tapestry art of fibre materials in the last century, to three-dimensional, cross boundaries, conceptualized and scientific installation art, interactive art and visual art. The proportion of female artists has also increased significantly, especially Chinese female artists.

In addition to a study of the background and development of Chinese fibre art, this study also requires analysis of the personal experiences, fibre artworks and personal awareness of specific Chinese female fibre artists as case studies, which illustrate the connection between Chinese fibre art and Chinese female fibre artists. This will be discussed in the next section as context to the case studies that are presented in the next chapter.

3.4 The awareness of Chinese female fibre artists in China

This section focuses on the second research question of this study, which is how Chinese female fibre artists create fibre artworks that expand in relation to Chinese specific cultural, educational, social and personal consciousness. The fibre artworks of two Chinese fibre artists are explored as examples to analyse

the two types of awareness, technique-oriented and concept-oriented, that Chinese female fibre artists adopt when creating their fibre artworks. These artists' perception of Chinese fibre art encompasses two aspects. On the one hand, there are some Chinese female fibre artists who focus on traditional Chinese techniques, but also create fibre artworks combined with contemporary art forms. This is a technique-based creative perspective. According to previous research through the development of Chinese fibre art over the last forty years, the forms and concepts of Chinese fibre art have continued to reform and innovate. Chinese fibre art has also evolved because of the continuous creation and technical improvement of artists, and the major fibre art exhibitions in China have been the primary platform to exhibit Chinese fibre art and to exchange with the world of fibre art. Due to the development of Chinese society and education, the understanding of fibre art by female fibre artists is changing. Chinese female fibre artists draw attention to the historical significance of Chinese fibre art traditions such as embroidery, weaving and textile techniques, which are often associated with women's domestic work. By reconceptualising and reconstructing these traditional practices, they challenge the notion that fibre art is confined to the realm of craft or decorative art, positioning it instead as a legitimate and meaningful artistic expression. From the traditional to the contemporary, to the combined traditional techniques and contemporary art forms.

The development of Western fibre art in China has been a continuous process of absorbing the unique Chinese culture, including the integration of traditional Chinese culture and Chinese social consciousness. The increasing interest of Chinese society in the Chinese intangible cultural heritage as it develops has also prompted the fibre arts and textile fields to focus on Chinese intangible cultural heritage. As defined by UNESCO, the importance of intangible cultural heritage does not consist in the cultural expressions themselves, rather it is the wealth of knowledge and skills that are passed on to generations through which

it is created. This includes the wealth of knowledge and skills that are traditional, contemporary and living, inclusive, representative and community-based. The first China Textile Intangible Cultural Heritage Conference was held in 2017. Out of the 1,372 major items of national intangible cultural heritage in China, more than 80 items of intangible cultural heritage are related to the textile industry. In particular, Chinese traditional silk weaving techniques, Nanjing Yunjin brocade weaving techniques and Li traditional spinning, dyeing and weaving embroidery techniques were included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List. For example, Nanjing Yunjin was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009 (4.COM). Yunjin is made by two craftsmen operating the upper and lower parts of a large, complicated loom to produce textiles using fine materials such as silk, gold and peacock feather yarn (see Fig.17). Once used to make royal garments such as dragon robes and crown garments, this craft is still used today to make high quality clothing and souvenirs. The method of weaving, which is mainly preserved in Jiangsu Province in eastern China, consists of more than a hundred stages, including the manufacture looms, drafting patterns, the creation of jacquard cards for weaving patterns, dressing the looms, and the other weaving processes (UNESCO, 2009). The Chinese textile industry and government departments have offered their support as well as providing policies for this (Xin, 2017, p.30). The intangible cultural heritage of textiles refers to the knowledge, skills, practices, and traditions associated with textile production and use that are passed down through generations within a particular community or culture. It encompasses a wide range of techniques, designs, and cultural expressions related to textiles (Xin, 2017, p.30).



Figure 17. Gold-plated Peacock Zhuang Hua Dragon Robe Material (织金孔雀羽妆花纱龙袍料) Ming Dynasty (1368-1644AD), 'Zhuang hua'(Yunjin's weaving technique), silk, gold. from Nanjing 'Yunjin' Brocade Research Institute Company Limited, China

In contemporary Chinese fibre art, there are several women artists who use silk as a material in order to spread the intangible cultural heritage of Chinese textiles. For example, Chinese fibre artist Liang Xuefang uses silk and combines contemporary art elements with traditional Suzhou embroidery. Her artwork *Chan He Si Ying* expresses the life cycle of the lotus with minimalist abstraction and guides people to think about nature from details. It also expresses the understanding of the laws of life, and realises the infinite possibilities in limited life (see Fig.18). With the lotus as the main subject, Liang Xuefang separates the different periods of the life cycle of the lotus into separate images, from opening to withering, each placed on a different panel. The image of the lotus is traditionally embroidered on both sides, which is one of the techniques of Suzhou embroidery. The lotus engraved by Liang Xuefang with silk thread shows a different shine when illuminated by light. This traditional embroidery of fibre work favours the technique and the image of the work, and her work is about spreading Chinese intangible cultural heritage through fibre.



Figure 18. Xuefang, L. (2018) *Chan He Si Ying*. Silk and wood, embroidery. In A Different Voice. Beijing

On the other hand, the aspect is representative of the concept-based fibre artworks created by some Chinese female fibre artists. These changes are reflected in the work of Chinese female fibre artists due to changes in their personal concepts of creation and understanding of fibre art. These changes are reflected to the audience through the fibre artworks, thus contributing to a transformation in the perception of Chinese society and the public towards Chinese fibre art. Chinese female fibre artists have played an important role in raising awareness of Chinese fibre art and promoting the development of the field. Over the years, they have actively engaged with the medium, explored its possibilities and contributed to its development and recognition in China and on the global stage. Furthermore, Chinese female fibre artists have used their artworks to address a wide range of social and cultural issues. They have explored themes related to gender, identity, cultural heritage, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Through their practices, they have sparked conversations, challenged societal norms, and advocated for greater inclusivity and equality.

During the early 1990s, after a few years in New York, Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961) returned to Beijing and established herself as part of the experimental scene in the capital. Most of her work consists of mixed media installations and using thread, textiles, and stereotypical 'feminine' objects, in which she defies normative concepts of female identity, beauty and motherhood (Merlin, 2018, p.21). As an example, her installation entitled Chatting (2004) illustrates six females chatting with each other. The chats are undercut by an audio installation of their conversations. The six female fibreglass body figures, wrapped in white silk satin, are clones of Lin's body. Their full bodies represent the physique of a middle-aged woman. These women stand in a circle, connected by thin threads, representing the fragile relationships between women. Their heads are made of audio speakers covered with fabric, and the sound of voices chatting is convincing (see Fig. 19). In this work, Lin Tianmiao expresses her awareness of female identity, the relationship between female and female, represented by winding threads. Through the aural and visual transmission, it brings the viewer a sense of envelopment and empathy.



Figure 19. Tianmiao, L. (2004) Chatting. Bodies covered in silk fabric and connected by threads

Chinese female fibre artists have actively participated in educational initiatives, workshops, and community outreach programmes, passing on their knowledge, skills, and passion for fibre art to younger artists. Their dedication to sharing their expertise has contributed to the continued growth and development of the field. An example is the previously mentioned Shi Hui, who is a leader in the field of fibre art in China and a practitioner of higher education in fibre art in China. As a professor of fibre art at the China Academy of Art, she has continued to educate fibre artists and provide a platform for fibre art exhibitions.

3.5 Summary

This chapter focused on the development of fibre art in China and contains discussion of the definition of fibre art, the development of fibre art in the West and the association of fibre art with tapestry art. It has set out how fibre art has been introduced to China since the 1980s and has been communicated to Chinese artists through Western fibre artists. Finally, I explored the work of Chinese female fibre artists.

The aim of this study is to explore the development of Western fibre art in China through female fibre artists combined with Chinese specific culture, including the integration of traditional Chinese culture and Chinese social consciousness. This development is regarded by this research as a form of localised development. Also, their underlying significance when creating fibre artworks. This chapter provides the context for the purpose of this study, which is the development of fibre art in China and the awareness of Chinese female fibre artists. These contexts provide a framework for the creation and individual development of Chinese female fibre artists, as well as a basis for their localised creation and self-expression. The next chapter presents case studies of six Chinese female fibre artists and how they combine their education, social and personal experiences to create fibre artworks, and how their fibre art creations demonstrate gender performativity.

Chapter 4: Case study in Chinese female fibre artists

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the identity and significance of the artworks of Chinese female fibre artists. Through detailed case studies, and building on previous chapters, it uses gender theory as a lens to analyse each artist's work within the broader context of China's female fibre artist community. The discussion focuses on six Chinese female fibre artists, Wu Fan (1968), Liang Kai (1986), Xu Jia (1985), Zhang Yifan (1988), Wang Yangzi (1990), and Yue Mingyue (1996), who were born between the 1960s and 1990s. The chosen artists were educated in China and abroad respectively, and they focused on technical and conceptual creation of fibre artworks.

There are notable connections between the six Chinese female fibre artists. Wu Fan and Yue Mingyue are from different generations, with contrasting educational experiences leading to distinct conceptual approaches. Liang Kai and Xu Jia both transitioned into fibre art from other disciplines – art history/theory and architecture, respectively – resulting in cross-disciplinary artworks. Similarly, Zhang Yifan and Wang Yangzi's different educations in China and the West inform the conceptual focus of their work, though both maintain a strong emphasis on traditional Chinese textile techniques. Collectively, their personal understanding of fibre art reflects the broader theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter 2, particularly regarding self-representation and agency in the work of Chinese female fibre artists.

In order to provide insight into the motivations and concepts of Chinese female fibre artists, I conducted interviews via video and voice calls. These serve as the primary source material for the case studies. The semi-structured interviews gave respondents flexibility to share their personal experiences and

understandings, whilst keeping the research within the methodological framework. Secondary research includes analysis of their practical work and written texts.

Gender performativity in Chinese fibre art refers to the exploration and expression of gender identities and roles through the medium of fibre art in the context of Chinese culture. In the past 10 years, Chinese female fibre artists have been using their techniques to challenge traditional gender norms and address issues related to gender identity, sexuality, and femininity. They employ fibre materials and techniques to create artworks that challenge societal expectations and explore diverse gender expressions. Some artists utilise traditional Chinese textiles and embroidery techniques to subvert gender stereotypes. They incorporate unconventional materials, colours, or symbols associated with masculinity or femininity in unexpected ways, thereby disrupting the conventional understanding of gender. Other artists engage with the concept of gender performativity by using fibre art to represent personal experiences, struggles, and identities. They create fibre-based installations, sculptures, or garments that embody and communicate their own understanding of gender, reflecting on issues such as androgyny, fluidity, or non-binary identities. By integrating gender performativity into their works, these artists aim to challenge societal norms, raise awareness, and foster dialogue around gender issues within their cultural context. Their art serves as a means of self-expression and a platform for exploring the complex and nuanced nature of gender identities and roles in the Chinese society. This research uses the example of Lin Tianmiao and Liang Xuefang to explain gender performativity in the creation and practice of Chinese female fibre artists. These two female fibre artists explore gender performance through different technical methods and conceptual frameworks in their work. However, they both use their fibre artworks as a medium of expression of their personal consciousness, showing their own perceptions of fibre art and society. In

addition, the analysis of these two artists' work as examples prepares the basis for the analysis of the works of the six Chinese female fibre artists.

Liang Xuefang, specialises in embroidery and explores the conflict between traditional techniques and contemporary art. As a leading representative of the ancient Chinese tradition of embroidery, which has many inheritors in China, Liang, as one of the inheritors of Su Xiu (苏绣), a master of the art of embroidery. She also thinks about the combination of traditional craft and contemporary art, which is not just imitation but innovation. As a visiting scholar at the Academy of Arts & Design at Tsinghua University, she considers her experience there as an opportunity to acquire a deeper understanding of contemporary art, and to show the depth and thoughtfulness of her embroidery work. Her application of materials has gradually introduced new natural fibres, artificial fibres, metals, plastics and paper. The *Er Ruo Sheng Kai (2012)* by Liang is a reflection of nature, with its abstract image of a symbolic lotus blossom, which is different from the traditional lotus blossom in embroidery (see Fig.20).



Figure 20. Xuefang, L. (2012) *Er Ruo Sheng Kai.* Silk and wood, embroidery, 35cm×35cm

Lin Tianmiao regards her creative work as a healing process that allows her to release her emotions. Her work draws inspiration from her mother and family. In her works, she reveals personal and family experiences, and through these private emotional aspects, gender issues and education in China are captured. An example of this is her work '*Boys and Girls'* from 2004 (see Fig.21). '*Boys and Girls'* was made twenty years ago when her son was in the first grade of primary school. Lin's premise is that our education system has been standardised, like a machine that produces boys and girls. It teaches boys never to cry and girls to be gentle. They are socialised and normalised to fit into certain boxes. This is not only disrespectful to individuality but also to moral values and the local culture. This has caused many problems in the society. She has been considering this and trying to retain the 'local' qualities of her son. Thread is the material of choice for fibre artists, and Lin deals with complex themes through the intricate threads, which also reveal a sense of boundaries between things, between genders and between people.



Figure 21. Tianmiao, L. (2004) *Boys and Girls*, threads

Lin Tianmiao's artistic journey is based on her life experiences as a Chinese woman and fibre artist who has lived in both the United States and China. With the use of fine thread, Lin interweaves social issues of the past and present in China into a critical gender perspective on gender consciousness and self-examination. Her work contains insightful references to gender equality, industrialisation and population migration in China, hidden in images of traditional female occupations - sewing and working with thread and fabric. Soft, subtle, clean threads conceal the harsh realities of working and the living conditions in a rapidly evolving contemporary China. As a Chinese female fibre artist, she uses fibre materials and textile techniques in her work to express gender performativity and personal awareness, while gradually moving away from individuals, or women, to the whole of society. Lin is the embodiment of a group of Chinese female fibre artists. Her education, family background,

personal experiences and social environment have influenced her practice. Her transformation is a process of growth for a female artist and the different stages of creativity.

This research argues that Liang focuses on the technical aspects of creating fibre artworks, to express her personal consciousness and understanding of fibre art, which is influenced by the Chinese society. Lin's works reflect a conceptual approach, which is influenced by Western contemporary art. This is also the reason for the differences in form, medium and expression in their works.

This study proposes that the Chinese female fibre artists' gender expression of creating fibre artworks in a technical or conceptual oriented approach is based on the female artists' personal educational experiences, creative environment, and social environment. Their artworks combine their own experiences with Chinese social environment and cultural background to create Chinese female fibre artworks. As an example, Liang Xuefang's embroidery artwork '*Rooting, Blossoming, Fruiting'* is a work by a female fibre artist who uses traditional embroidery techniques as a medium (see Fig.22). While gender is not expressed visibly in the work, Liang presents the tree as a pattern, with steel wire, paper, linen thread and fishing line as materials, to visually demonstrate the vitality of the tree and the process of life growth. The red colour as the main colour of the work is visually impactful. By using the tree as a metaphor for the life of a person, this is Liang's perception and understanding of the growth process of life. Moreover, her work is a reflection on the life of a person from a female perspective, incorporating the life of a woman. This study argues that this implicit expression reflects a gender performativity approach by Chinese female fibre artists to demonstrate self-awareness in their work, within the constraints of the social environment.



Figure 22. Xuefang, L. (2008) *Rooting, Blossoming, Fruiting*, Wire mesh, handmade paper, twine, fishing line, 100cm x 200cm

The majority of Lin's work involves a technique called thread winding, which means that she winds silk or cotton threads around an object until it is completely covered and eventually transformed. In '*All The Same'*, Lin Tianmiao (2011) horizontally arranged 200+ synthetic human bones from large to small on a wall. Wound with fine, lustrous silk threads, each bone glistened in their

colour gradation arrangement (see Fig. 23). Lin states that bones were the only remaining perfect objects in the world. The concept is about the relationship between human bones and a human being. There is no difference in hierarchy, culture, classes, politics or social status in bones. They represent a socio-political and cultural concept of what the sexes and all races have in common. The twisting and binding of bones have another precedent in Chinese history of gender difference. This work evokes memories of the cultural practice of binding and deforming wealthy women that began during the Song dynasty (960-1276 AD). A woman with bound feet was bound to domestic life because she could not leave the house without the help of family members or servants. With threads and fabrics wrapped around these basic human forms, this work reflects the concept of feminine bondage. Lin uses the silk-wrapping technique to create a tactile and visual experience, delivering an immediate sensory impact that speaks to themes of constraint and identity. This is a typical work in which fibre technology is an expression of gender.



Figure 23. Tianmiao, L. (2011) *All The Same*, Coloured silk thread, resin bones, metal constructions. 590 3/5 in x 1500 cm

The artworks of the above two artists differ from those analysed previously. For instance, Lin's works have the embodiment of technology, although it is not the main emphasis. Instead, it is the technique that is used to assist the conceptual creation which embodies the concept of gender. Liang's work also has a conceptual focus, however it is built on technique. I contend that both technique and concept are a form of gender performativity by Chinese female fibre artists. The technique is influenced more by the Chinese society, including education and profession. However, the concept is influenced by the West. After conducting a preliminary exploration of gender performativity in the creation and practice of Chinese female fibre artists through a study of the works of Lin Tianmiao and Liang Xuefang, I will now turn to an analysis of six case study artists in order to examine this issue in further depth.

4.2 Wu Fan: Material explorer

Wu Fan is a Chinese contemporary fibre artist, fashion designer, scholar and curator whose works bridges fashion, textiles, installation and sculpture. Early in life, Wu Fan was deeply influenced by her family, particularly her father, a sculptor (see Transcripts 1, 1-2). From 1987 to 1992 she pursued studies in textiles, dyeing and weaving design and fashion at the School of Textiles, Donghua University in Shanghai and Academy of Arts ans Design, Tsinghua University in Beijing (see Transcripts 1, 2-5). As discussed in the gender studies chapter, China’s collectivist culture makes the family environment and family education key influences in shaping an individual's artistic preferences. During her studies, the ‘1985 New Wave’ in Chinese art encouraged a shift from functional design to personal artistic expression. (see Transcripts 1, 5-8). Both familial inspiration and broader social shifts shaped her creative direction. After 2000, Wu Fan’s work broke from traditional textile forms, becoming increasingly three-dimensional and sculptural in style. By 2009, at the age of 40, she felt she had reached a turning point in the vision and maturity of her fibre artworks (see

Transcripts 1, 9-11). As observed, the social identity of a female fibre artist – shaped by family backgrounds, educational experiences and personal growth – deeply informs the concepts and artistic intentions apparent in her work. Wu Fan's career exemplifies the intricate interplay of gender and social influence in contemporary China.

Wu Fan argues that fibre is inherently associated with femininity and can express the changes of women's personal growth and life stages. In her early fibre installation work ‘Spring Memory’ (2011) she draws parallels between women’s growth and the life cycles of plants. Made from light flaxen brown cotton string and wire, these five reliefs (each 50 cm x 50 cm) evoke memories of childhood and good times. Youthful faces, delicate facial features covered by cotton string create a hazy impression, adorned with abstract flowers, seeds, leaves and branches, formed from metal wire wrapped in cotton thread. The faces are in sculptural relief, with a thickness of about 30cm. The five pieces express different feelings in different periods of one's lifetime, such as childhood, a young girl blossoming, love, longing and romance (see Fig.24). The gallery light is reflected from the top of the work, projecting the softness of the cotton thread and the curved form of the woman's face onto the background, allowing the work to have contrasting light and shadow. The anonymity of the female faces entwined with floral motifs highlights a romanticised universal feminine experience.

During this period, Wu Fan’s figurative interpretations of women combined with her use of cotton fibre firmly roots her practice in tradition (see Transcripts 1, 12-22). Cotton is widely used in Chinese fibre artworks, especially in embroidery. In ‘Spring Memory’, Wu Fan intuitively brings together traditional material techniques and her conceptual intent to create a direct and positive expression of female life and love.



Figure 6. Fan, W. (2011) *Spring Memory.* Cotton string, wire, mask. 50 x 50 x 30cm

Another fibre installation work, ‘Ye Wei Yang’ (2018), marked a further evolution in her material approach. Made using anodised alumina wire in silver and black, the piece measures approximately 120cm x 80cm x 220 cm. Illuminated from above and below, the metallic surfaces acquire a lustrous sheen. According to Wu Fan, the work symbolises a dialogue between tradition and modernity, East and West, and as an exploration of the subtle balance between yin and yang, movement and stillness, and the different states of life.

In interview, Wu Fan explained that the metal Chinese traditional chair in this work represents potency and masculinity, while the high-heeled shoe symbolises femininity. Their juxtaposition expresses her vision of gender dynamics between men and women (see Transcripts 1, 23-28; Fig.25).

Interpreted through Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity (discussed in Chapter 2) – which sees gender being repeatedly enacted and reinforced through social norms – the juxtaposition of the chair and high heels reflects the

persistence of traditional Chinese conceptions of male authority and female identity. At the same time, this work expresses the integration of Chinese traditional culture and contemporary art through the medium of fibre. The adoption of metal as the main material for her fibre artworks marks a new direction in her practice signalling a move toward concept-driven work in which social commentary is embedded in the form itself. Whether the theme of the artist's creation is related to gender factors and the personal experiences of female fibre artists, or the influence of the Chinese social environment and social consciousness, it suggests that the essence of the work lies in its expression of gender performativity.

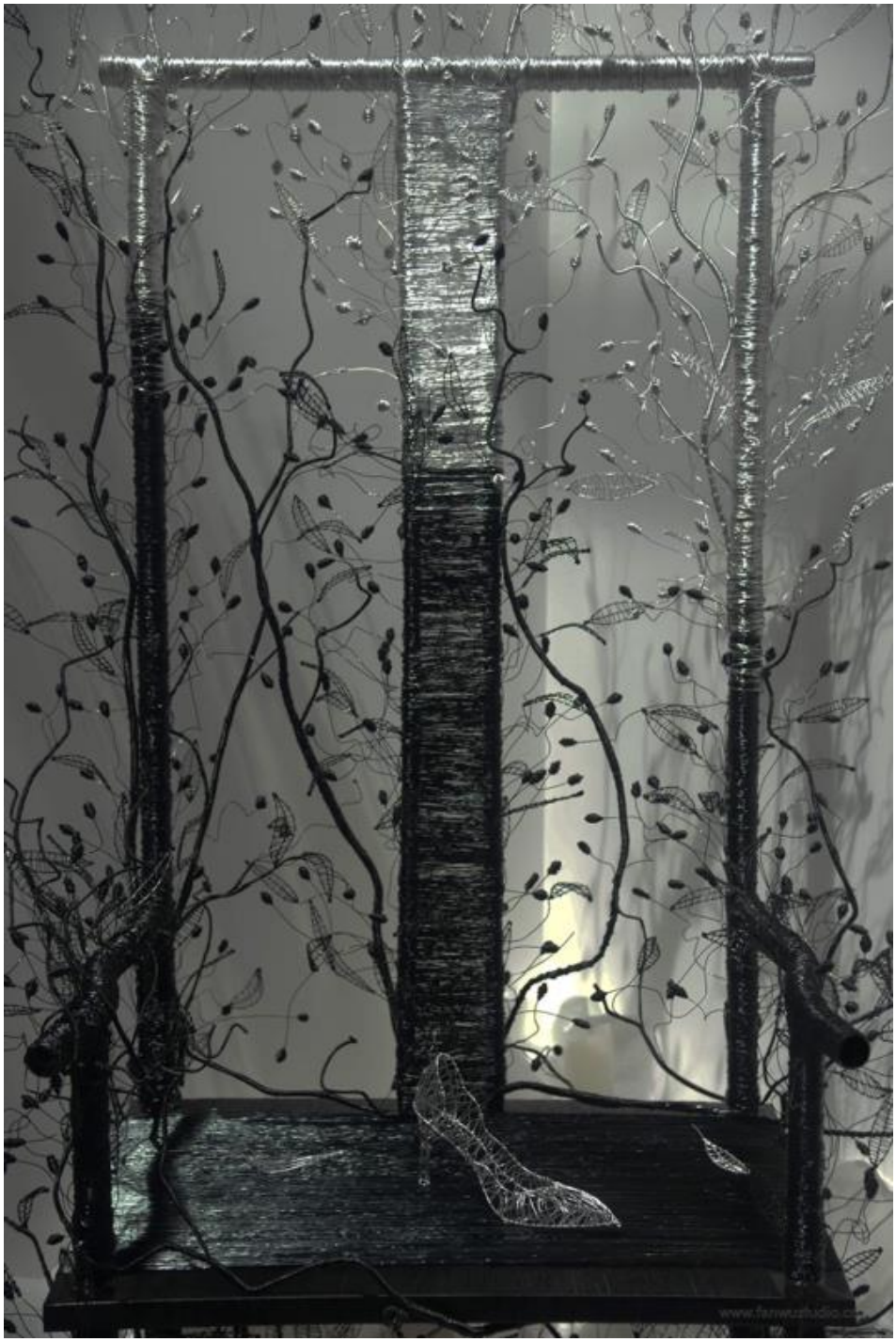


Figure 25. Fan, W. (2018) *Ye Wei Yang.* Anodised alumina wire, hand weave 120 x 80 x 220cm

Reflecting on her identity as a woman and artist, Wu Fan connects her creative ideas to broader social issues as well as to textile and fashion technologies. In her early fibre artworks, she primarily employed soft, traditional fibres; more recently, she has increasingly incorporated metal, and her art has gradually

turned towards large-scale, three-dimensional installations. Wu Fan observes that delicacy is perceived as a defining quality of fibre art, and that the interplay between self-expression and material qualities distinguishes fibre art and other contemporary art forms. For Wu Fan, contemporary Chinese fibre art should not only express visual beauty, but also address social issues and evolve with the times (see Transcripts 1, 30-34).

Wu Fan's artistic development reflects this shift: as the social environment and the artist's personal experience change, so too have the forms and concepts of her work. Concept-led practice, she notes, is increasingly characteristic of Chinese female artists. While entering the broader field of contemporary art remains challenging for women in China, they comprise a relatively high proportion in the field of fibre art (see Transcripts 1,39-42). Wu Fan is optimistic about the future, predicting that fibre art will become widely popular in China for two reasons: firstly, because fibre art is closely related to textiles and daily life, making it more accessible and engaging for the public, and secondly, fibre art has been offered as an undergraduate major in Chinese universities and colleges since 2021. The discipline’s growing presence in Chinese higher education, will not only bring more young people – especially female students – into the field, but will also influence public aesthetics and cultural awareness (see Transcripts 1, 43-55).

In summary, Wu Fan represents an earlier generation of Chinese female fibre artists and is both widely recognised and influential. Her works are deeply shaped by her family background and China’s evolving art environment. Opportunities such as the International Fibre Art Biennale, ‘From Lausanne to Beijing’, have enabled Wu Fan to present Chinese fibre art to an international audience. She interprets social phenomena and fibre art from a female perspective, evolving her style and concepts over decades. Wu Fan encourages younger Chinese female fibre artists to develop and maintain their

own identities within their art. Her shift toward metal and conceptual approaches illustrate how exploration can shape new directions in the field.

4.3 Liang Kai: Chinese Fibre Art Researcher

Liang Kai is one of very few artists in the field of the contemporary fibre art in China that is dedicated to theoretical study and research. Liang Kai was born in the 1980s and she studied in the Department of Art History in the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University, for both a bachelor's degree and master's degree (see Transcripts 2, 53-54). She joined the team of the International Fibre Art Biennale ‘From Lausanne to Beijing’ as the news coordinator (see Transcripts 2, 54-59). Her experience and interest in fibre art led her to pursue fibre art as her doctoral study where she became the first PhD graduate in fibre art at Tsinghua University (see Transcripts 2, 59-60). Although Liang Kai's bachelor's and master's degrees were not art and design majors, her study of art history laid a substantial foundation for her theoretical research. Thus, she chose to investigate the artistic communities and practices within fibre art, as well as the underlying concepts and theoretical frameworks behind these phenomena.

Liang Kai focused her research topic on ‘Fibre art in a care narrative’. In this study she collated writing and analysed the work of artists from nearly 20 countries, including Poland, the Netherlands, Germany, Lithuania, the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Peru. She interviewed more than 100 international fibre artists and completed a 300,000-word thesis. In her communication with these artists, she experienced the warmth, kindness and vitality of the fibre art community (see Transcripts 2, 61-63). She argues that fibre art is a practice that can change the artist's own life, as it is an art that can blend with daily life (see Transcripts 2, 63-64). The results of her research have led to a new and deeper understanding of fibre art, enhancing her appreciation

for the connections and interactions between fibre artists and their work.

Inspired by these exchanges, Liang Kai's more recent writing and curating has focused on the human impact and healing potential of fibre art, most notably in the format of therapeutic fibre art workshops. In 2018, she curated the exhibition, "Fibre art in a care narrative", at the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University (see Fig.26). Her research frequently involves translating visual art into written analysis, demonstrating her ability to systematise and critically reflect on Chinese fibre art through theoretical writing. Through her essays and curatorial practice, Liang Kai draws together Chinese and Western concepts of fibre art, fostering greater connections between artists and the medium itself. Her contribution serves as a bridge for Chinese fibre art, facilitated both by her writing and her involvement in the International Fibre Art Biennale 'From Lausanne to Beijing'.



Figure 7. Kai, L. (2018) The exhibition 'Fibre art in a care narrative.' Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University

Liang Kai's conceptual approach offers the viewer a different experience from

the other Chinese female fibre artists, bridging theory and practice, local and international perspectives, and text-based and visual forms of expression. By integrating research, documentation, and curatorial activity into her artistic identity, she has become an important mediator in the development of Chinese fibre art, ensuring it is both critically examined and meaningfully connected to global discourse.

4.4 Xu Jia: Cross-disciplinary combination of fibre arts

Xu Jia is a young female artist and curator of contemporary fibre art in China. Her mother, Shi Hui, is a leading figure in Chinese fibre art, celebrated for founding the Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art. Despite growing up in an environment surrounded by fibre art, Xu Jia was initially uninterested in both fine art and fibre art. Instead, she chose architecture as her undergraduate degree at Tongji University, China (see Transcripts 3, 85-86). After graduating from university in 2008, she spent the next two years immersing herself in Chinese painting, jewellery design and fibre art (see Transcripts 3, 87-91). In 2010, she began a master's degree in the history of Chinese art at the China Academy of Art, specialising in Literati Paintings while also researching fibre art (see Transcripts 3, 91-94). During this time, Xu Jia found that there were few researchers or artists in China studying the work and theories of the influential Bulgarian tapestry artist Maryn Varbanov. So, she began to examine Varbanov’s theories in relation to fibre art. This interest, combined with the need to assist her mother – whose advancing age had made organising the Hangzhou Triennial increasingly difficult – prompted Xu Jia to engage more deeply with the field and take on a supporting role in the organisation of the Triennial (see Transcripts 3, 94-98). In addition, Xu Jia sees a strong connection between fibre art and architecture and aims to draw on her architectural expertise to explore the future development of contemporary fibre art (see Transcripts 3, 99-102).

The transition from science and technology back to a career in the arts reflects both a personal transformation and the continuation of her family's artistic legacy. Due to her mother's influence and achievements in the field of Chinese fibre art, she feels it is her responsibility to follow in her mother's steps and bring about further advancements in Chinese fibre art. Therefore, whether in teaching or curating fibre art, she maintains an attitude of both inheritance and innovation. In Xu Jia's view, Chinese female fibre artists are transitioning from a focus on materials to more concept-driven work, with increasing concern for social issues, while preserving traditional techniques.

There are parallels between Xu Jia and Liang Kai in that they both worked in other fields before engaging with fibre art, and both integrated their previous fields with fibre art. Their approach differs from other Chinese female fibre artists working within more conventional trajectories, in that they both convey their understanding of Chinese fibre art from their own distinctive perspectives and in their own specialised approaches. Liang Kai expresses the close connection between fibre art and the artist through her writing and curation on the healing function of fibre art. Xu Jia connects architecture with fibre art and pursues alternative ways of presenting fibre art, pursuing an alternative expression of fibre art that is technological, conceptual and three-dimensional. Xu Jia also contributes to the field by documenting and summarising the history of contemporary Chinese fibre art, providing people with a deeper understanding of Chinese fibre art.

Xu Jia's series, 'Reading the City' (2009 to 2023), focuses on the theme of cities, including Tokyo, Venice, Barcelona, Toledo, Florence, Beijing, Hangzhou, New York, Paris, London, and Heidelberg, combining three-dimensional fibre artworks in soft and hard materials. Early pieces, such as 'Tokyo', clearly reflect her architectural background in both materials and form (see Fig.27). In 'Tokyo' the overall creation is based on a satellite map of the city, mounted on a wooden

board. Using wound coloured wire, wood, crystal mud -– a maleable, non-toxic, sticky and oily colour-bearing material made primarily from guar gum (also known as Slime) – and paper, she formed three-dimensional shapes to present a tactile cityscape. This shows how Xu Jia can move from a two-dimensional image to a reimagined cityscape through material and fibre techniques.

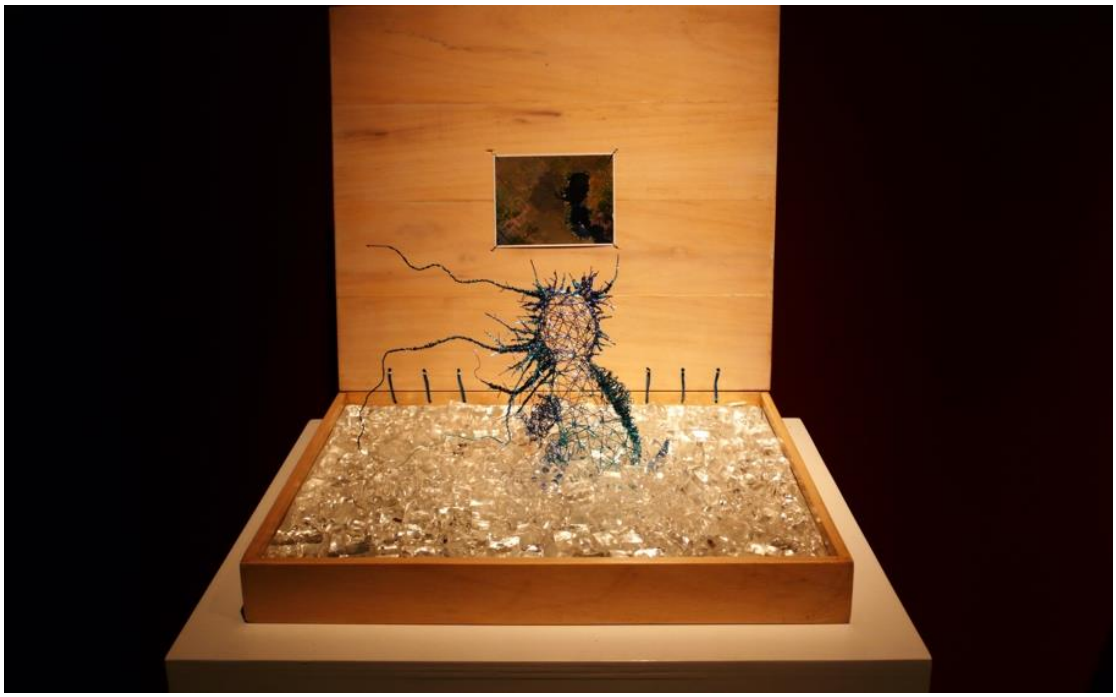


Figure 27. Jia, X. (2009) *Reading the City:* Tokyo. Coloured wire, wood, crystal mud, paper 50 x 40 x 7cm

Similarly, her ‘Hangzhou’ work (2011) uses a stainless-steel rectangular box, coloured soft pottery and crystal mud. In this work, she created the Leifeng Pagoda, a representative traditional building in Hangzhou, and a view of the West Lake in coloured soft pottery with green crystal mud surrounding the centre of the work. In visual terms, the work conveys a sense of Hangzhou as a combination of natural scenery and traditional Chinese architecture. These examples show how Xu Jia’s architectural background informs not only her choice of materials, but also the concepts behind her fibre artworks (see Fig.28).



Figure 28. Xu Jia, X. (2011) *Reading the City: Hangzhou.* Coloured soft pottery, crystal mud, stainless steels. 50 x 40 x 10cm

Xu Jia's family influence is profound, as her mother is a leading figure in the Chinese fibre art field. She therefore feels not only a responsibility to inherit her mother's understanding of the discipline, but also the need to develop and demonstrate her own distinctive vision. In this way, the combination of architecture and fibre art in her practice represents both a conceptual innovation and an expression of her personal artistic perspective. For Xu Jia, gender expression is conveyed through the dual processes of heritage and innovation within Chinese fibre art. She communicates her perception of fibre art and society through the textual organisation and transmission of ideas, using fibre as a medium for articulating her personal consciousness.

Xu Jia's interpretation of fibre art is shaped by both family background and education. I suggest that her mother Shi Hui's contribution to the development

of contemporary Chinese fibre art created an environment in which Xu Jia was immersed in fibre and textiles from an early age. Her works draw on both soft and hard non-traditional fibre materials, combined with an architectural awareness of mapping and structural form – an influence of her undergraduate education. Xu states that she is less concerned with gender issues and more concerned with social issues and the future of fibre art (see Transcripts 3, 108-110). She attributes this to the stereotyping of gender in mainstream Chinese exhibitions and the reluctance among many fibre artists to categorise their work by gender. This position is also noted later, in the case of Yue Mingyue.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Chinese philosophical system and prevailing social concepts often ascribe fixed definitions to individuals or groups. Xu Jia, however, resists being constrained by such social stereotypes of women's gender roles, choosing instead to use her fibre artworks as a means of personal self-definition. Alternatively, it may be observed that, as a Chinese female fibre artist, she exhibits limited engagement with ideas related to her own gender – a point also noted in Chapter 2.

4.5 Zhang Yifan: Defender of Tradition

Some Chinese female fibre artists, such as Zhang Yifan, focus their work on traditional Chinese textile techniques. Zhang Yifan completed both her undergraduate and postgraduate education in fibre art at the Tsinghua University before pursuing a PhD in South Korea. She has since returned to China to continue creating fibre artworks (see Transcripts 4, 112-114). She regards traditional Chinese textile techniques as appealing in a distinctive way, and her primary creative direction lies in combining traditional embroidery and weaving methods with contemporary fibre art forms (see Transcripts 4, 115-117). Her doctoral studies in Korea also introduced her to approaches to the preservation and innovation of traditional skills in other East Asian countries.

With China’s rapid economic growth over the last decade, both government and society have increasingly prioritised the safeguarding of traditional Chinese techniques.

Zhang Yifan observes that Western fibre art tends to focus on concepts and modes of expression, including the combination of art and science for strong visual impact. However, through her research into the ‘From Lausanne to Beijing Biennale’, she notes that while earlier editions of the exhibition pursued material innovation – similar to Western fibre art – recent years have seen a renewed emphasis on Chinese tradition, integrated with contemporary modes of fibre art expression (see Transcripts 4, 119-127).

On 27th May 2020, Zhang Yifan's solo exhibition ‘The Interest of Heaven’ was held in Seoul. The ‘Mountain Series’, shown there, comprises fibre artworks based on embroidery techniques combined with representations of the natural landscape. Using natural materials to explore natural themes, the works investigate the relationship between fibre art and nature, pursuing an aesthetic of “natural interest” (see Fig.29). As an inheritor of traditional Chinese fibre art, Zhang Yifan’s work showcases both traditional Chinese embroidery techniques and traditional landscapes. Based on earlier research into Chinese fibre art, the incorporation of technology as a display method can be seen as a common form of expression for female fibre artists.



Figure 29. Zhang, Y. (2019) *Mountain Series.* Embroidery, 70 x 90cm

In the 11th Lausanne Biennale in 2021, Zhang Yifan exhibited ‘Stormy Night’, a colourful felt piece, with large and small felt balls protruding from the surface, extending from the wall to the floor, transforming the work from a two-dimensional to three-dimensional form (see Fig.30). While her practice is grounded in traditional fibre skills, she also experiments with techniques beyond embroidery (see Transcripts 4, 128-130). Influenced by long-held social perceptions in China that women excel at embroidery, she nevertheless explores ways of expanding fibre crafts through new forms. Zhang Yifan’s experiments with moving works from two- to three-dimensional forms aligns with Butler's theory of gender performativity, discussed in Chapter 2, which argues that gender is a social construct which influences and mirrors societal norms.



Figure 30. Zhang, Y. (2021) *Stormy Night.* Felt. 180 x 120cm

In addition to her research into traditional Chinese textile techniques and her interest in natural themes, Zhang Yifan reflects on her identity as a female fibre artist, a perspective that informs her creative process. Looking ahead, she plans to focus more on social issues and environmental protection in her work,

aiming to convey her views to audiences through fibre art in ways that enlighten them. This intention adds a further layer of value to her artistic practice. I suggest that Zhang Yifan's approach – rooted in traditional techniques yet responsive to social contexts – illustrates how some Chinese female fibre artists reinterpret contemporary fibre art by integrating heritage with contemporary expression, imparting to it a distinctly Chinese identity. In this way, her work exemplifies gender performativity in both its themes and the concepts it communicates.

4.6 Wang Yangzi: Innovator of Tradition

Wang Yangzi is another female fibre artist who, like Zhang Yifan, maintains a strong focus on traditional Chinese textile techniques. However, Wang Yangzi's more than five years of fibre art education in the UK has given her work a distinctly conceptual, materially innovative, and cross-disciplinary character (see Transcripts 5, 139-142). During her undergraduate and postgraduate studies at Central Saint Martins, she placed particular emphasis on experimenting with new materials and developing the conceptual side of her practice (see Fig.31) (see Transcripts 5, 143-145). One of her early works, which uses resin elements and creates a powerful visual impact, stands in contrast to Chinese female fibre artists who focus on traditional fibre materials and techniques. I argue that Wang Yangzi's five years of study in the UK have helped shape her distinctive approach to material choice and fostered a creative sensibility that prioritises both concept and visual effect – a hallmark of her work. Simultaneously, she also developed strong weaving skills during her time as a student, which has had a significant effect on her subsequent practice.



Figure 31. Wang, Y. (2014) *Materiality of fear.* Silicone and felt, 55cm x 90cm

Wang Yangzi emphasises that a weaver must see and think as a weaver (see Transcripts 5, 146). As a result, weaving has become central to her practice after graduation. In 2016, she participated in the Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art where she first presented her concept of 'Co-Weave'. This artwork was both a fibre piece and a performance, serving as a reinterpretation and re-invention of the traditional Chinese backstrap loom (see Figs.32 and 33).



Figure 32. Wang, Y. (2016) *Co-Weave.* Fibre materials, acrylic, wood, 4 people weave (unknown)



Figure 33. Wang, Y. (2016) *Co-Weave (close view).* Fibre materials, acrylic, wood, 6 people weave (unknown)

When fibre art becomes a dynamic and performative display, the visual and interactive experience is greatly enhanced for both artist and audience. This interactivity can also challenge and subvert the viewer's preconceived notions

about weaving and the role of fibre art in contemporary China. Since returning to China this approach has become central to Wang Yangzi's practice in which she combines traditional Chinese textile techniques with elements of interaction, performance, and formal innovation. Her work is grounded in conceptual development, blending traditional Chinese textile techniques with Western concepts and contemporary forms, and reflecting the ongoing evolution of fibre art in China.

As a Chinese female fibre artist, Wang Yangzi suggests that women hold a substantial advantage in this field, although she does not believe that female fibre artists should feel compelled to emphasise specifically feminine qualities in their work. Instead, she argues that both male and female fibre artists should focus on the identity and value of Chinese fibre art itself, and on their personal understanding of fibre and life (see Transcripts 5,148-152). Wang Yangzi acknowledges that, traditionally, women have demonstrated notable skill in textile crafts, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. However, she maintains that contemporary Chinese female fibre artists need not limit themselves to this perspective; rather, fibre artworks should prioritise conceptual content over the expression of inherent feminine attributes or conformity to traditional social perceptions of textiles.

This study argues that artists like Wang Yangzi – educated in the context of Western contemporary art and living in a rapidly changing and materially rich China – develop independent views on Chinese fibre art. Butler, cited in Chapter 2, argues that gender is a free-floating illusion, constructed through gender performativity. Multiple social and personal factors contribute to the interpretation and fluidity of gender. Irrespective of whether they begin with gender-related concepts or concepts related to the social environment, the essence of their work is shaped by gender performativity, reflecting both their personal experiences and the influence of China's social context and cultural

consciousness.

4.7 Yue Mingyue: Confronting Gender Issues

Yue Mingyue is a young female fibre artist currently pursuing her PhD at Tsinghua University in Beijing. Her practice spans a range of media, including fibre art, photography, painting, theatre and short films. Her art practice conveys her reflection on death as a part of life, while she also explores the relationship between conception and the female body. At the same time, Yue Mingyue pays particular attention to traditional Chinese textile crafts, such as embroidery. She observes that when fibre art spreads to a new place it absorbs the local characteristics (see Transcripts 6, 156-160). Notably, the concepts about gender expression appear explicitly in her art.

A recent artwork by Yue Mingyue, ‘Blessed Be the Fruit’ (2021), is a large-scale womb-like installation, measuring four metres in length and width, and between 1.5 and 2 metres high, using an embroidery mechanism with red Chiffon and cloth (see Fig. 34) (see Transcripts 6, 174-176). The intention of this artwork is to transport the audience back to the mother’s womb, creating an enveloping environment that can be physically entered (see Transcripts 6, 176-178). The work’s fabric was created on a massive embroidery machine, where fabric and thread were constantly fed into the machine to form a blood-like effect, resembling wrinkled skin and endometrium. The overall composition of the work is visually rich, built around the shape of the uterus and with yarn cascading vertically. Using chiffon – a translucent fabric – allows the interplay of exhibition lighting and material to evoke partial obscurity, and simulate the blurred memories associated with the womb (see Fig. 35).



Figure 8. Mingyue, Y. (2021) *Blessed Be the Fruit.* Yarn and cloth, 400 x 400 x 200cm



Figure 35. Mingyue, Y. (2021) *Blessed Be the Fruit.* Yarn and cloth, 400 x 400 x 200cm

Yue Mingyue describes the meaning of this work from two perspectives. On the one hand, she notes that the womb determines, to a significant extent, the social role of women; this fertility can be a source of oppression or life constraints. Yet, from another perspective, the womb remains sacred to her because it creates and nurtures life, as a creator does (see Transcripts 6, 178-182). In my view, her art demonstrates both an understanding of female identity, and an expression of the harm caused by fertility and the potentiality of women. The female body is the object of her gender expression, and her practice as a female fibre artist in China is radical and passionate. The perception of traditional Chinese society is that a woman is to serve as a bearer of fertility, with her responsibility being to keep breeding and perpetuating the development of humanity. This is illustrated in Chapter 2 on traditional Chinese concepts of gender. Consequently, the issue of fertility is one of the more acute problems facing young women in China, and Yue Mingyue's work directly addresses this issue. While the womb is considered a taboo subject in China, her work conveys the concept that women should be proud of their own physiology, rather than the societal perception of the female womb. Yue Mingyue's work is also an attempt to encourage the public to recognise the contribution and value of women; rather than perpetuating the existing perception that fertility is an obligation. In this way, her work aims to empower young women not to be afraid to face the issue of fertility but instead, to be positive about it.

Yue Mingyue differs from the previously researched artists, such as Wu Fan, who implicitly expressed gender concepts in her fibre artworks (figurative female faces, to gendered metaphors of high heels and chairs). By contrast, Yue Mingyue directly explores gender in her works, displaying female biological structures in a figurative manner. While her work is not always a performance of gender, her strong focus on these themes demonstrates a clear and personal consciousness – her fibre art becomes a direct vehicle for gender performativity.

Furthermore, Yue Mingyue notes that the mainstream arts culture in China does not fully align with wider contemporary art practices. Some sensitive topics like LGBTQ+ and gender issues are acceptable only in the smaller exhibition spaces (see Transcripts 6, 162-165). Therefore, occasionally she has had to shed or weaken overly sensitive gender concepts in some of her mainstream exhibitions.

This study argues that contemporary female fibre artists – like Yue Mingyue – provide important opportunities for society to observe and understand gender performativity and the diverse contributions of women artists. Yue Mingyue supports this view. She and her contemporary Wang Yangzi both grew up during the two most rapid decades of economic and cultural development in China (2000-2020). This generation of women is better educated and more receptive to Western cultural perceptions. They question inequalities in society and express themselves confidently. However, sometimes they must compromise for their professional development. Nevertheless, Chinese female artists continue to present fibre art and themselves as individuals in their own unique way.

4.8 Summary

This chapter analysed the influence of social, educational and personal factors on the practices of Chinese female fibre artists across generations, drawing on case studies of six Chinese female fibre artists and their works. Using gender theory as a critical lens alongside an analytical investigation of the environment in which Chinese fibre art is created, the chapter examines both the differences and similarities among these artists in terms of age, educational background, creative focus, and perceptions of gender performativity.

These factors shaped not only their understanding of fibre art but also their

approaches to reconciling tradition with innovation. I illustrate that Chinese female fibre artists combine traditional Chinese textile techniques and materials with contemporary concepts influenced by Western fibre art, resulting in works that are localised and responsive to their environment, education, and personal perspectives.

Each artist – whether through visual works, scholarly writing, or curatorial activities – articulates their own perspective on Chinese fibre art, making a distinct contribution to its future development by uniting heritage and innovation, engaging with social issues and cultural norms, and broadening the medium's conceptual scope. In so doing, their work actively links personal artistic identity to the ongoing evolution of Chinese fibre art.

This chapter analysed the personal experiences, creative directions, and concepts of six Chinese female fibre artists. These have influenced my own practice. For instance, Wu Fan's exploration of materials within fibre art—from traditional cotton and linen to metallic materials—establishes a material as emblematic of the artist's characteristics. This has influenced my practice, where I employ a combination of wax and traditional cotton fibres as materials to highlight my understanding of contemporary fibre art, embodying both innovation and continuity. In the subsequent practice chapter, I provide a detailed explanation of how the creative approaches and artistic forms of these six artists relate to my own work, and how they have influenced my practice.

Chapter 5: Art Practice

5.1 Introduction

The art practice forms a significant part of this research serving to demonstrate new insights gained through the study. Grounded in an understanding of fibre art and the features of Chinese female fibre art practices, the work focuses on the exploration of materials, forms, techniques and concepts. The practice is divided into two stages: the experimental phase and the production of the final work, conceived as an interlinked and progressive process. The aims of the practice are to explore the different forms of fibre art and to visualise the lived experiences of women in contemporary fibre art practices in China. For this purpose, I have used three generations of women in my own family, from a developed area on the eastern coast of China, as the basis for the work.

In this study, I position my own creative practice within this understanding of contemporary fibre art, placing emphasis on the process of making. The documentation of this process is an integral aspect of the artwork’s presentation.

In the previous case study chapter, I interviewed six Chinese female fibre artists and analysed their representative works. They all have their unique understanding and approach to contemporary Chinese fibre art, and to how they express their self-awareness in relation to gender issues through their fibre artworks. For example, Wu Fan's two periods of work, and the changes in her choice of materials previously mentioned. In addition, Wu Fan's Spring Memory focuses on the beauty of women in different periods, and the cotton material gives the audience a soft feeling and gentle light. However, in Ye Wei Yang, Wu Fan does not use soft figurative female forms to express Chinese gender issues, instead she chooses to make figurative objects out of hard metal materials as a metaphor for masculine and feminine dynamics. From a visual point of view, this figurative metaphor is more visually appealing. I can appreciate the change of concept, the development of expression, and the variety of materials in Wu Fan's work from 2011 to 2018.

The work of the six Chinese female fibre artists has significantly influenced my practice. My work embodies and performs gender identity approached from the perspective of a Chinese female practitioner. Cavanaugh (2015) argues that the performative perspective challenges the view that one's identity is the source of secondary actions – such as speech and gestures – and instead posits that these actions, behaviours, and gestures are both a result of, and a source that contributes to, the formation of personal identity, which is constantly being redefined through speech acts and symbolic communication.

Within this framework, my practice can be understood as my personal process – an enactment and embodiment of identity through the creation of fibre artworks. Each stage of making serves as both a mode of self-expression and a means of articulating identity. This understanding is further informed by Butler's (1999) preface which articulates an understanding of performativity as an oscillation between language and theatre, with a ‘chiasma’, or crossing over, of the two. As discussed in the Research Methodology chapter, ‘sustained acts’ of gender performativity can be aligned with the act of weaving, in which weft threads moving back and forth through the warp threads embody sustained acts of repetition and chiasma. However, the candles introduce a novel material that have potential to disrupt or co-exist with the woven parts.

The objective of practice-based research is to obtain new knowledge through practice and practical outcomes (Candy, 2006, p.6). As outlined in the methodology section, the case study and interview methods are integrated with practice and build on each other. The practical component unfolds through a series of steps including mind mapping, material exploration, sketching, and experimentation.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the practice in this research serves to explore how Chinese women balance family, society, and individual identity, and how they produce cultural value through fibre art. Grounded in my own perspective as a female Chinese fibre artist, a visual narrative is constructed from the different perspectives of three generations: my grandmother, my mother and myself to articulate the social and historical contexts that shape these three women’s

lives.

In the final part, I present the conceptual concerns, and how they connect to the theoretical framework of gender performativity. It includes a critical discussion of the selection and application of materials and their formal qualities to convey layered narratives of gender, identity and cultural continuity.

5.2 Final Practice

5.2.1 Concept

Based on the narrative developed for the practice section in the research methodology chapter, this practice explores how Chinese women's contribution to society and family, as well as their aspirations for independence and equality, can be explored and expressed through fibre art. Questions of family, society and individual identity are central for Chinese women, and we are all exploring how to balance these issues. Each generation has different preferences in balancing family, society and individuality. Chapter 2 on Gender Performativity discusses traditional perceptions of women in Chinese society – the expectation of submission to husbands, childrearing, and elder care – which still influence contemporary Chinese society. For instance (as discussed in Chapter 2) in 2013, in a meeting with ACWF[4], President Xi Jinping highlighted women's special role in promoting family virtues and traditions, linking this to national harmony and development:

> Special attention should be paid to women's unique role in propagating Chinese family virtues and setting up a good family tradition. This relates to harmony in the family and in society and to the healthy development of children. Women should consciously shoulder the responsibilities of taking care of the old and young, as well as educating children.

[4] The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), founded in April 1949, is a people's organization of women of all ethnic groups and from all walks of life in China, united for further emancipation and development. As a people's organization under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), it serves as a bridge linking the Party and the government with women and as an important social pillar of the state power. Website from ACWF https://www.womenofchina.cn

The pressure of family responsibilities on women in contemporary China comes not only from traditional ideology, but also from the Chinese government. Chinese society requires women to assume family and reproductive responsibilities, which is a way of maintaining male dominance. In October 2015, China further relaxed its more than three-decade-old family planning policy, under a statement issued by the Communist Party of China's Central Committee. The statement said the trend towards the country's ageing population would be actively addressed by the universal two-child policy. The introduction of the universal two-child policy has heightened pressure on women in Chinese society and further intensified the gender debate. Family, marriage and maternity have become unavoidable topics for contemporary Chinese women. The urban-rural development gap in China corresponds closely to the education development gap, with the disparity in education at its core (Li, 2009, p.22). Factors such as differences in the cultural attainment of urban and rural residents, varying expectations regarding children's education, the persistence of traditional thinking and disparities in family dependency ratios, all contribute to the divide (Wang, 2011, p.53). As a result, Chinese women's choices are shaped by their urban-rural background, level of education and social class.

Judy Chicago's 'The Dinner Party' (1979), discussed in the Introduction, uses kitchen tableware as figurative representations to honour important women (see Fig.36). 'The Dinner Party' tableware includes embroidered table mats, gold chalices and cutlery, as well as painted porcelain plates with raised central motifs in the form of vulvas and butterflies. Chicago employs these items as symbolic representations, using embroidery to highlight the individuality of each woman honoured in the piece. This approach parallels the narrative of the kitchen that informs my own practice. While Chicago used embroidery, I have adopted weaving as my primary method. In 'The Dinner Party', the embroidered tableware and its arrangement, along with the use of colour, serve to express the distinct identities of the women – each piece is unique in its characteristics. Colour, pattern and accessories are utilised to convey individuality, an idea I also integrate into my practice. I use different materials to reflect the unique qualities of my grandmother, my mother and myself, as described in the

materials subsection.



Figure 9. Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party,* (1974-1979), detail. Ceramic, porcelain, textile; triangular table. 1463 × 1463 cm. Elizabeth A. Sackler Centre for Feminist Art. Brooklyn.

Based on previous discussion of the connection of Chinese women with the family, raising children and caring for other members of the family, the home is a significant part of Chinese women's lives, and the kitchen is a specific location that reflects the household chores that Chinese women undertake. Accordingly, the final work starts in the home, with the story of my grandmother, my mother and me, and the connection between our three generations in the kitchen.

My grandmother was born in the 1940s; she had a middle school education and after studying nursing, become a nurse. She lived and worked on the east coast of China, a region with a high level of economic and cultural development. My mother was born in the late 1960s, the same period as fibre artist Wu Fan. She graduated from university with an undergraduate degree and is a middle school teacher who loves her job as an educator and works very hard. I, meanwhile,

was born in the mid-1990s and received my undergraduate education in China and postgraduate education in fibre art in the UK. These represent distinct educational backgrounds and career paths across our three generations.

My memories of being in the kitchen with my grandmother centre on the dishes she prepared and my favourite foods from childhood. Because my grandmother was born in a seaside town, she loved fish as a child. As far as I can remember, my grandmother was also the best at cooking fish for the family. Fish and Grandma are very closely related. Her last name in Chinese pinyin is Yu (虞), which is pronounced the same in Chinese pinyin as fish. Grandma herself believed that this was one of the reasons why she liked to eat fish (鱼). Grandma said 'Seafood has a delicious flavour, such as ribbon fish and sea bass. Steaming is the best way to bring out the freshness of the fish' (see Fig.37). Mum was also influenced by grandmother and also liked to eat fish, but she was born in a city by a river, and prefers to eat freshwater fish, such as mandarin fish. As for the cooking method, because of her busy work she too prefers steaming but primarily for convenience (see Fig.38).



Figure 10. Steaming ribbon fish by grandma.



Figure 11. Steaming mandarin fish by mum

While neither my grandmother nor my mother likes spicy food, my own preference for spicy cuisine has been shaped by my social environment in the UK. My grandma and mum liked to cook fish for me when I was a child, as they thought eating fish made me intelligent. So, I'm good at cooking fish now, and as I like it spicy, I add chilli. There is no preference for the type of fish, English sea bass is what I often cook (see Fig. 39).



Figure 12. Stir fried sea bass with spicy sauce by me

Fish symbolises abundance and harmony in Chinese family culture; this is reflected in the Chinese idiom of nián nián yǒu yú (年年有余), “wishing for surpluses and bountiful harvests every year” – with “yú” (余) (surplus) pronounced the same as “fish” (鱼) in Chinese.

These kitchen memories and food preferences connect three generations in my family. The fish motif serves as a figurative link connecting the three generations and the final work aims to capture our family's shared kitchen experiences. These narratives also involve male members of the family: for example, both my grandfather and my father, took on supporting roles, cleaning and tiding up after my grandmother had cooked. The gender division of labour in the family is a central theme in contemporary Chinese marriage and family life, and the willingness and intrinsic motivation of married men to share household chores are key to the process of equalising the gender division of labour in the family. These issues can contribute to women's personal development dilemmas, marital conflicts and family relationships (Niu, 2020, p.12).

In the artistic presentation, memories around the kitchen are represented primarily through weaving, as well as other forms. The weft threads in the weaving function metaphorically as lines of type writing in a letter; a thread recording memories and personal histories through material form.

5.2.2 Materials

This section outlines the materials used in the final practice, which centres on the kitchen and fibre. As in the earlier experiments, the final work incorporates candles. Candles were chosen because in traditional Chinese culture, the burning of candles symbolises light and warmth, representing a source of benefit to others. This is the spirit of collectivist sacrifice that has been promoted in China, and discussed in the gender performativity chapter. The candle becomes an objectified representation of Chinese women's contribution to family and society. The act of burning a candle evokes the stove or fire in the kitchen, the heart of the household, where female members of the family have prepared meals across generations.

The candles are made from crystal wax melted at high temperature and then cast into moulds. In order to represent three generations within the material narrative, I sourced clothes once worn by my grandmother, my mother and myself. My grandmother liked to wear silk garments, cotton and dark colours (see Fig. 40). When my mother was younger, she liked to wear synthetic materials with bright colours and printed patterns (see Fig. 41). These clothes were collected and prepared for both candle making and weaving.

Additional materials include cotton thread and transparent fishing line. Beyond the symbolic fish motif in the kitchen, other activities – such as my mother brewing coffee and my grandmother making tea – hold strong memories. So, coffee powder and tea leaves are also incorporated into the work.

Drawing from the colour choices in earlier experiments, a red colour scheme was used for the woven elements. The use of fishing line not only references the fish motif, but also plays a practical and visual role, connecting elements

within the artwork and interacting with the exhibition lighting to create layered visual effects within the woven pieces.



Figure 13. Zhang, Y.L. (2024) *Materials (grandmom).* [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Silk, cotton



Figure 41. Zhang, Y.L. (2024) *Materials (mom).* [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Synthetic materials, cotton.



Figure 14. Zhang, Y.L. (2024) *Cotton threads.* [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton.



Figure 43. Zhang, Y.L. (2024) *Fishing Line.* [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Crystal clear nylon

5.2.3 Process and experiments

The candle part

The main figurative scene for this work is the kitchen, and combining the kitchen theme and candles was a central part of the process. The final artwork is divided into two components: the candle display and the woven display. The candle-making process is described in the experimental section and follows a similar method.

Two types of moulds were used: ceramic cups, because my grandma and mum make tea and coffee in such cups – and spherical silicone moulds. Strips of my grandma’s and mum's clothing were placed in separate moulds with melted wax and shaped accordingly (see Figs. 44 and 45). Coffee powder and tea were added at the same time. The candles made in cup moulds function like a microscopic kitchen, with coffee grounds and pieces of mum's clothes symbolising her life in the kitchen.

Building on the materials section, I incorporated clothing from my grandmother, my mother and myself as the primary fibre material. Ball-shaped candles, produced in two sizes, one large and one small, both filled with fragments of these garments. The spherical silicone-mould candles symbolise the enduring story of my grandmother and the kitchen, while their arrangement in the shape of a fish draws on Chinese cultural symbolism of abundance, harmony, and continuity. In uniting these elements, the installation weaves together personal heritage and cultural tradition, using the fish form as both a visual connector and a narrative device that binds the intimate memories of three generations to the wider expressions of collective identity.

Specific fish-shaped candle arrangements are detailed in the exhibition proposal (see 5.3.4 below). For both aesthetic and exhibition safety reasons, each candle has been produced without a wick and is therefore not intended to be burned. Pictures and videos of previous candle-burning experiments will be displayed in the exhibition, while the physical candles in the installation will act as microcosms of life – vessels of memory, lineage and identiy.



Figure 15. Zhang, Y.L. (2024). *Spherical silicone-mould candles 1*. [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Silk, artificial materials, cotton, wax.



Figure 16. Zhang, Y.L. (2024). *Spherical cup-mould candles 2*. [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Silk, artificial materials, cotton, wax, coffee powder and tea.



Figure 17. Zhang, Y.L. (2024). Candle strips. [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Synthetic materials, wax.

The woven part

The woven component unites fragments of clothing from my grandmother, my mother, and myself. I constructed the woven fabric in the simplest plain weave, with red, purple, pink and grey cotton threads for the warp. I employ plain weave as the main pattern because it is the most fundamental woven structure, demonstrating the interaction between warp and weft threads. This relates to the concepts of repetition, sustained acts, and chiasma within the theory of gender performativity previously mentioned. The colours are based on those used in the previous experiment '*Burn and Trace'*. The red colours represent the power of female life and the burning flame of a candle. The weft is woven with red cotton threads, alternated with strips of clothing, transparent candlewax and fishing line. The clothing strips are alternated between my mother and grandmother within the same sample, while my own clothing strips are woven into a separate sample. This represents my relative independence from my grandmother and my mother. Each woven piece acts as a narrative fragment –

a tactile record of our shared and individual stories centred in the kitchen.

The integration of candlewax within woven fabric is an important part of the concept. When cut into strips, the candlewax carries with it the symbolism of light, sacrifice, and care, embedding these values into the structure of the cloth (see Fig.46). Multiple weaving trials produced small sample sections, which were then used as the building blocks for the larger composition. The separate sections are joined using fishing line – a deliberate choice linking the work to the fish motif, itself a cultural emblem of abundance, continuity, and familial harmony (see Figs. 47, 48, 49, 50 and 51).

In their physical construction, the horizontal joins employ twisted fishing line, while vertical links are secured with wax strips. This dual approach offers varied connections, mirroring the differing, sometimes fragile ways generations remain bound together (see Figs. 48 and 49). Candle strips appear in two distinct roles – as weft threads running through the woven cloth, and as connecting components binding the smaller sections – alluding to a candle's capacity to bring light and their associations with unity and memory. The transparent fishing line interacts with the exhibition lighting, casting subtle shadows across and between the pieces, further enhancing the interplay between material form and symbolic meaning.



Figure 18. Zhang, Y.L. (2024). *Woven samples.* [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, fishline, wax, 19.5cm x 26cm.



Figure 19. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Woven samples.* [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, fishing line, wax, 19.5cm x 26cm.



Figure 20. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Woven samples.* [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, fishing line, wax, 19.5cm x 26cm.



Figure 21. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Woven samples.* [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, fishing line, wax, 19.5cm x 26cm.



Figure 22. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Woven samples.* [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, fishline, wax, 19.5cm x 26cm.

5.2.4 Final practice display proposal

‘Kitchen Memory’ draws together this practice-based research through an installation that creates dialogue between two interconnected elements. The first is a wall-mounted modular woven work constructed from cotton threads, candlewax strips, fishing line, and garments from three generations of my family. This cascades onto the floor in a dynamic transition inspired by Zhang Yifan's ‘Stormy Night’, creating a flowing textile landscape that connects visually with the second element: a floor-based fish-shaped structure. This skeletal form, created from alumina wire, contains numerous transparent spherical gel-wax globes, each embedding fabric fragments drawn from the same generational materials, creating capsules of family memory throughout the installation space (see Fig. 52)

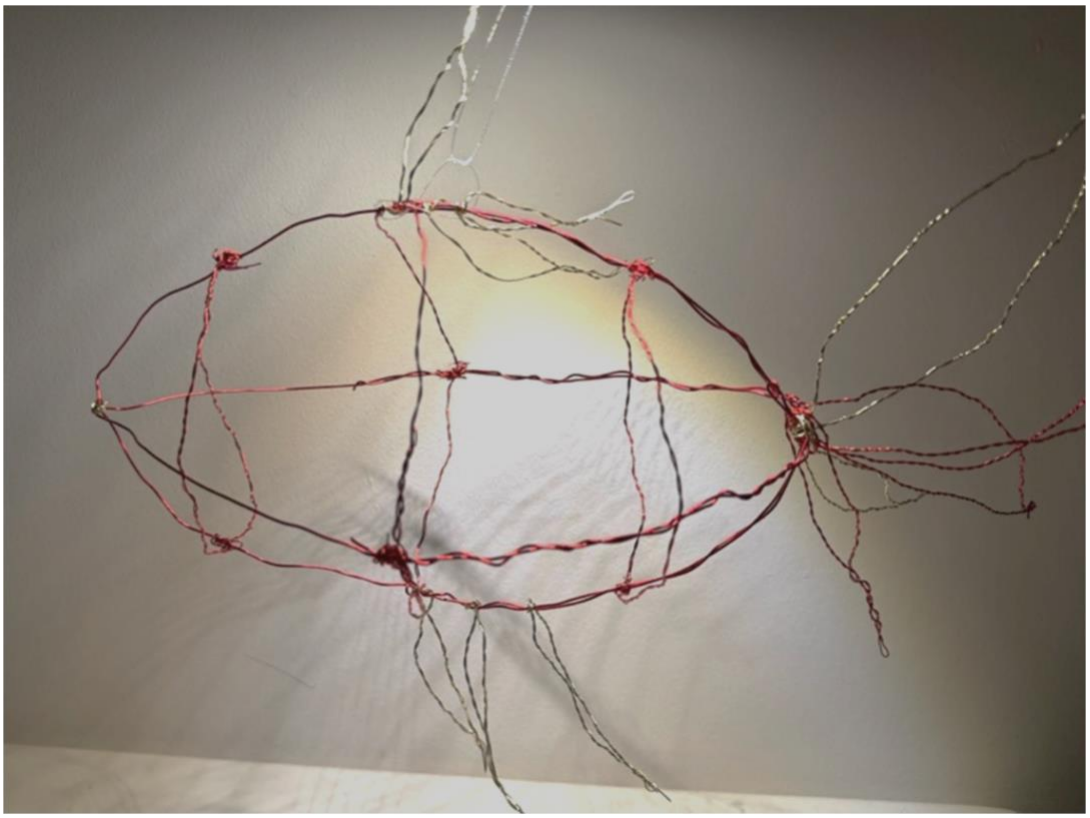


Figure 23. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Fish samples for final work.* [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Alumina wire, 25cm x 14.5cm x 12cm.

To aid visualisation, I utilised AI-generated imagery to render the fish element of the final installation, providing an approximate interpretation of the final piece (see Fig. 53).



Figure 24. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Final fish layout illustration.* [AI].

Each candlewax sphere operates as a microcosm of intergenerational experience, containing compressed narratives of changing taste, economic circumstances, and cultural shifts across decades. The transparent gel wax creates a lens-like quality, making memories visible yet untouchable, mirroring how family histories remain present but mediated.

Fishing line functions structurally and conceptually throughout, linking woven sections while creating layered visual effects as light refracts between the cascading textile elements and the candlewax spheres. The fish motif symbolises abundance and continuity, while the material dialogue between soft elements (cotton, garments, gel wax) and hard materials (wire, fishing line, light technology) reflects the balance of care and resilience in women's lives.

As a whole, the work operates as what Butler terms a “sustained act” — materially performing intergenerational female identity through repeated gestures of weaving, assembling, and arranging — and invites viewers to engage with themes of memory, gender, and contemporary Chinese fibre art.

5.3 The display of ‘Kitchen Memory’

The previous section covered the concept of the final practice, the specific processes for creating the woven pieces and candle components, and the display plan. This section primarily details the form, dimensions, display format, and visual presentation of my final work.

Kitchen Memory comprises three elements: the woven piece, the fish-shaped candle, and the spherical candle extending from the fish-shaped candle to the floor (see Fig. 54). The woven section consists of three plain-woven pieces measuring 100cm in length and 30cm in width, alongside a longer fabric composed of eleven plain-woven samples measuring 130cm in length and 65cm in width (see Fig. 55) (see Fig. 56). Displayed at the rear, these three

fabrics are distinguished by their respective origins: one from my grandmother's clothes, one from my mother's, and one from my own. Each sample piece is interconnected by fishing line, as detailed in the preceding section. The three characteristics of the woven piece—repetition, sustained acts, and chiasma—reflect the sustained of gender performativity theory.



Figure 54. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). '*Kitchen Memory*'. [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, fishing line, wax



Figure 55. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Woven part*. [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, fishing line, wax



Figure 56. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Woven part*. [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, fishing line, wax

The fish-shaped candle occupies the central position, symbolising the bond between three generations of female members in our family. It also connects the woven pieces to the ground candle components, which is why it is placed in the middle. The fish-shaped candle installation is handmade from wire, with strips of fabric from the clothing of three generations of our female members wrapped around the frame, alongside spherical candles. The fish-shaped element measures 125cm in total length, with an LED light strip threaded through its body. When the surroundings are dark, the light strip illuminates. The light from the strip shines through the spherical candles embedded within the fish's form, creating an overall luminous effect reminiscent of candles burning in the experiment (see Fig. 57) (see Fig. 58). The use of LED strips to replicate the effect of burning candles encapsulates the instability and safety concerns observed in the experiment's candle burning. This aspect also embodies the work's concept of sustained acts.



Figure 57. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Fish part*. [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, fishing line, wax



Figure 58. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Fish part*. [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, fishing line, wax

The grounded candle elements extend from the woven piece and fish-shaped candle installations, this display method inspired by Zhang Yifan's Stormy Night. The weave transitions from wall to floor, embodying the progression from two-dimensional to three-dimensional form that characterises contemporary Chinese fibre art. Spherical candles are presented in two scales: 5cm diameter and 6cm diameter (see Fig. 59). Candles are scattered upon my own clothing, this arrangement representing myself as an extension of my grandmother and mother in, the woven piece symbolising them.

Consequently, this work similarly avoids explicitly stating gender concepts, instead directly addressing women's contributions to the family, society, and their reflections on individual development. Additionally, the artwork reflects my contemplation of gender performativity theory, presenting the value of women through my perspective.



Figure 59. Zhang, Y.L. (2025). *Candle part*. [Photograph]. In possession of the author: Farnham. Cotton, cloth, wax

Chapter 2 explores the emphasis placed on family values within traditional Chinese Confucian ideology, as well as the responsibilities assigned to women within the household framework of Chinese gender concepts. Kitchen Memory principally revolves around the shared recollections of three generations of female members of my family concerning the kitchen, with fish emerging as the visual focus of the work, representing a common memory point across these generations. In the Chapter 4, interviews with Liang Kai and Yue Mingyue, both noted that female artists in contemporary Chinese fibre art exhibitions tend to avoid discussions on gender-related concepts. Regarding this phenomenon, I consider it relates to the influence of Chinese Confucian ideology on contemporary Chinese society, as discussed in Chapter 2, and the profound integration of collectivist principles into Chinese education. Openly confrontational gender discourse is often viewed as destabilising, which prompts female artists to confine their work in mainstream exhibitions to socially

acceptable, non-confrontational themes. However, I maintain that the focus on female values within the scope of themes permitted by Chinese society constitutes a form of obscuring gender issues. Yue Mingyue's work illustrates this perspective. Gender performativity theory also addresses the influence of social construction on gender. When artists employ fibre materials without emphasising gender, they thereby subvert the pre-assigned gendered significance of such materials. Wu Fan's mention in an interview of her use of traditional cotton materials and the figurative depiction of female faces in her early works serves to illustrate the gendered association between women and fibre. However, in her 2018 work, 'Ye Wei Yang' adopted metal as her medium. This re-selection of materials and the creative process demonstrate that the gendered attributes of materials are not inherent but socially constructed, thus amenable to be re-performed. Chinese female fibre artists are able to choose materials, define their gendered attributes, and perform their understanding of fibre art. From the perspective of gender performativity theory, this avoidance constitutes not an absence of gender consciousness, rather a distinctive critical practice: by withdrawing from the compulsory performance of gender roles, they challenge Chinese societal gender norms in a non-confrontational manner.

Consequently, this work similarly avoids explicitly stating gender concepts, instead directly addressing women's contributions to the family, society, and their reflections on individual development. Additionally, the artwork reflects my contemplation of gender performativity theory, presenting the value of women through my perspective.

5.4 Summary

This chapter documented the evolution from initial candle-burning experiments to the completed *Kitchen Memory* installation, demonstrating how practice-based research materially embodies Butler's "sustained acts" of gender performativity across generations. The spherical wax forms encapsulate and

preserve intergenerational textile memories, while the wall weaving allows experiences to flow more freely in the contemporary space.

The installation operates as both personal narrative and broader commentary on Chinese women's experiences, using the kitchen as conceptual foundation to represent domesticity, nourishment, and family sustenance. Through the interplay of contained memories (spherical forms) and flowing inheritance (wall weaving), the work makes visible female contributions often rendered invisible in daily life, evidencing how fibre art serves as a medium for exploring complex intersections of gender, identity, and cultural tradition while contributing to the field's evolution as a contemporary art form.

Conclusion

This study has examined the personal backgrounds and experiences of Chinese fibre artists, alongside their creative practices, to explore the interrelationship between female identity and the nature of contemporary Chinese fibre art. The research set out to address questions surrounding Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity in relation to the identities of Chinese female fibre artists. The findings in this study identified connections between the creation of fibre artworks and the performative nature of gender, while also analysing the social, educational, and personal factors that influence these creative processes.

Conducted as practice-based research, the study integrates both theoretical investigations and my own creative practice. The practice element was informed by my personal perspective and unfolds around the memories and stories shared between my grandmother, mother and myself centred in the kitchen. Using fibre art as a medium, I developed work extending from two-dimensional to three-dimensional forms; this development the concept of 'sustained acts' in Butler's notion of gender performativity – an ongoing, iterative exploration of fibre art and women's experiences, from initial experimentation to final practice.

Chapter 1 set out the methodology framework, establishing practice-based research and qualitative methods to address the research questions. The overview of literature and contextual analysis traced the development of contemporary Chinese fibre art and its environment, while relevant aspects of Butler's theory were identified – notably her argument that gender is not fixed by biology but rather is repeatedly performed and reinforced through prevailing social norms (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018, p.3). This theoretical grounding was applied in subsequent chapters, particularly in the case study analysis, to show

how Chinese female fibre artists' creative decisions are shaped by intersecting Chinese social norms and socio-cultural contexts. The six case studies also influenced my own practice.

Chapter 2 examined Butler's theory in detail, relating its principles to the creative work of Chinese female fibre artists. It considered how social norms and traditional gender concepts in China – rooted in Confucian moral frameworks – continue to affect women's roles in marriage, fertility, education and work. Furthermore, the intrinsic nature of gender, as defined by gender performativity, is constructed through a series of 'sustained acts'. This research argues that, whether the artists approach their work from an explicitly gendered perspective or from their broader social context, the underlying essence is gender performativity, arising both from factors such as the artists' gender and personal experiences, and from the Chinese socio-cultural environment.

Chapter 3 provided the contextual foundations by tracing the development of fibre art in China, recognising the significant contributions of female practitioners, and analysing the major exhibitions that have promoted the field nationally and internationally. It identified two distinct but overlapping creative tendencies – technique-oriented practices, which focus on preserving and reinterpreting traditional textile skills, and concept-oriented practices, which use fibre art to examine a wide range of contemporary social and cultural issues, exploring themes related to gender, identity, cultural heritage, environmental sustainability and social justice. In both tendencies, gender performativity is present, whether in the implicit values carried through inherited materials and techniques, or in the explicit articulation of identity, agency, and social critique. These contexts provide an essential backdrop for my own creative decisions and informed the translation of theoretical perspectives into material practice.

Chapter 4 explored six case studies from different generations, analysing how

social, educational and personal factors inform each artist's approach to fibre art, and their perception of gender performativity. By examining their differences and commonalities, the research found that Chinese female fibre artists combine traditional Chinese textile techniques and materials with contemporary Western influences to create works that are specific to their own environmental factors, educational backgrounds, and personal understandings of Chinese fibre art. Through visual works, writings and curated exhibitions, these six Chinese women fibre artists present their personal perspectives, their understanding of Chinese fibre art and its future direction. This interplay between tradition and innovation, mediated through personal identity, has been a key influence on my own practice methodology.

Chapter 5 placed my creative practice within this theoretical and contextual framework, adopting Butler's concept of the 'sustained act', to interpret making as a mode of gendered performance. The characterisation of "sustained act" is reflected in my practice, which involves an ongoing exploration of materials and forms through the medium of fibre art as a means of articulating my own gender awareness. The practice encompasses the continual investigation of concepts, materials and forms, evolving from the experimental work 'Burn and Trace' in 2021, through to the creation of samples for the final practice, and culminating in the production of the final work. The final work is not an endpoint but part of the overall research process. The three generations of memories around the kitchen remain past, present and future realities, with the fish motif, the three generations, female contribution and the female consciousness forming the core of the practice.

The research addresses a gap in understanding the factors shaping the creative work of contemporary Chinese female fibre artists, analysing their practices through the theoretical lens of gender performativity. From my position as a Chinese female fibre art practitioner, the research constitutes a sustained

engagement with the medium that is both personal and scholarly. It confirms that different generations of Chinese women approach the balance between family, society and individual identity in distinct ways. Within my own family, the contrasts and connections between my grandmother's, my mother's, and my own generational experiences have informed the conceptual foundation of the work, which centres on kitchen memories as a shared yet evolving domestic narrative.

By uniting generational fabrics, candles, and fish, my practice symbolically and materially suggests an interweaving of memory, sacrifice, continuity and hope, offering a layered reflection on gender, family, and the evolving identity of Chinese women.

Future Research

While this thesis has made a contribution to understanding the relationship between fibre art and female identity in contemporary China, several areas warrant further exploration. Subsequent research could focus on the intersection of gender with ethnicity, class, region, sexuality, and gender identity to expand the framework of analysis. Cross-cultural comparisons may illuminate the global position of Chinese female fibre artists, and examining the impact of digital technologies and online platforms will be crucial for understanding the changing landscape of fibre art practice and dissemination.

Finally, as a 'sustained act', future research could involve longitudinal studies to investigate in depth and over time, how gender performativity affects the professional development and family life of Chinese female fibre artists.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

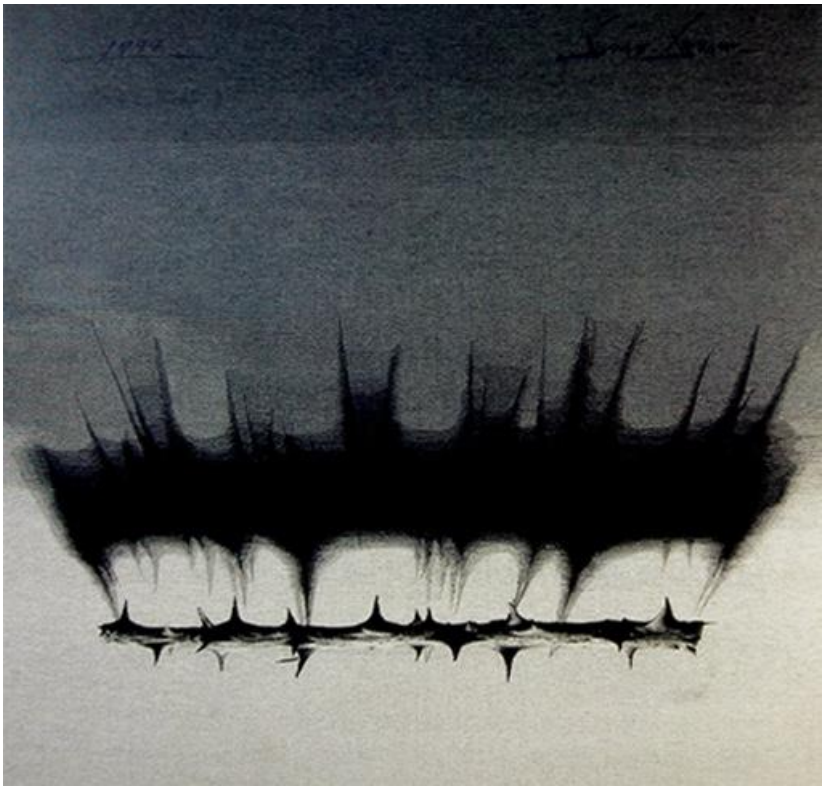
Information on the International Fibre Art Biennale *From Lausanne to Beijing*

Sessions Year	Location	Theme and Trend	Total number of artworks	Total number of participating countries
1st /2000	Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University. Beijing, China	*From Lausanne to Beijing* Continue the 'Lausanne spirit' and make a new stage of international fibre art in Beijing	140	15
2nd/2002	Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University. Beijing, China	Interaction and Transcendence	125	18
3rd/2004	Shanghai Institute of Technology. Shanghai, China	Continue the 'Lausanne spirit' and make a new stage of international fibre art in Beijing	230	18
4th/2006	Suzhou Art& Design Technology Institute. Suzhou, China	Continue the 'Lausanne spirit' and make a new stage of international fibre art in Beijing	290	20
5th/2008	Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University. Beijing, China	Continue the 'Lausanne spirit' and make a new stage of international fibre art in Beijing	300	30
6th/2010	Henan Art Museum, Zhengzhou, China	Connected with Heart and Hand. Connected with Fibre	262	27
7th/2012	Nantong NO.1895 Cultural and Creative Park,	Return and Transcendence	307	37

	Nantong, China			
8th/2014	Nantong NO.1895 Cultural and Creative Park, Nantong, China	Tolerance and Integration. Tolerance is the only way to achieve enlightenment and all-win results through dialogue and exchange; integration is the only way to achieve greatness and boundlessness through absorption and integration	270	43
9th/2016	Guan Shan Yue Art Museum. Shenzhen, China	The Boundary to Hold and Break. Cross field and integration	221	54
10th/2018	Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University. Beijing, China	Globalisation	321	43
11th/2020	Online	In the case of Covid-19, we should embrace crisis and coexist. The online exhibition supported by Internet technology	300	56

Appendix 2

Awards of the International Fibre Art Biennale *From Lausanne to Beijing*

Sessions Year	Representative Artworks
1st /2000	 From that day on, Song Burn-soo, Korea

1st /2000

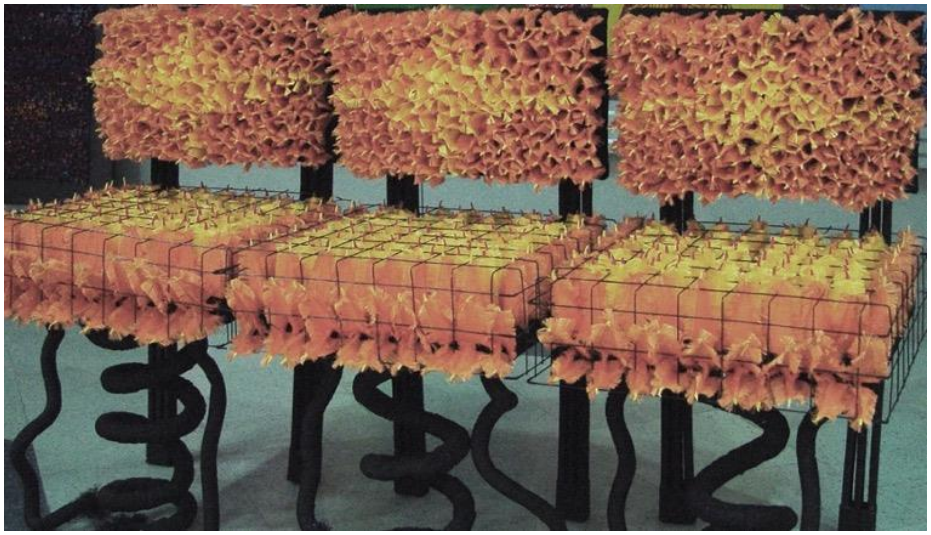


After the concert, Givi kandareli, Georgia

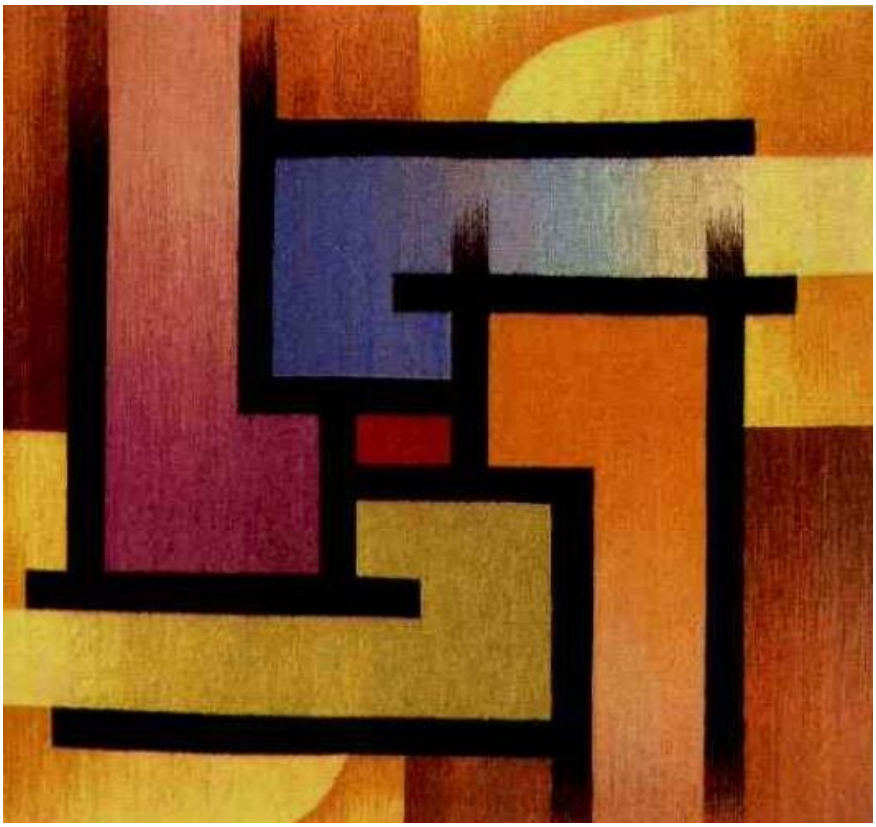


山高水长, Lin Lecheng, China

2nd/2002



Role, Pang Qi (F) and Xu Wen (F), China



The imagination of the window, Ni Yuehong, China

3rd/2004



Gold Award. Xi (禧), Wang Qin, China



Gold Award. Summer night, Shihoko Fukumoto (F), Japan

4th/2006



Gold Award. Xu (虚), Dai Minhua (F), China

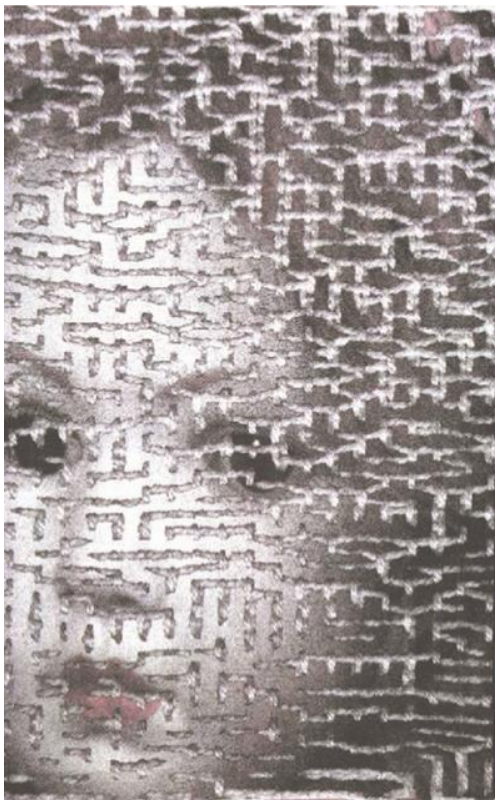


Gold Award. Ink landscape, Ren Guanghui, China

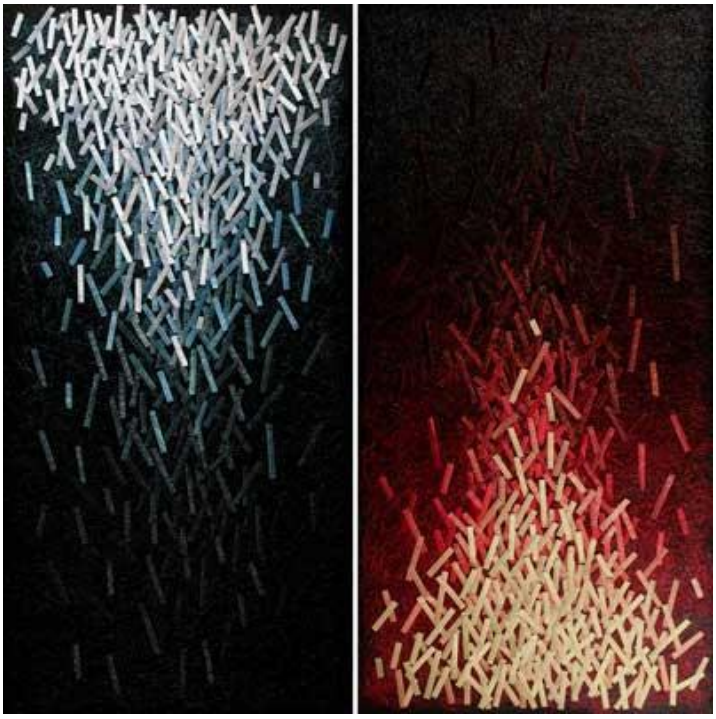


Gold Award. Floating Objects in the Morning, Yoon Junghee (F), Korea

5th/2008



Gold Award. Enchanted Doll, Lia Cook (F), America

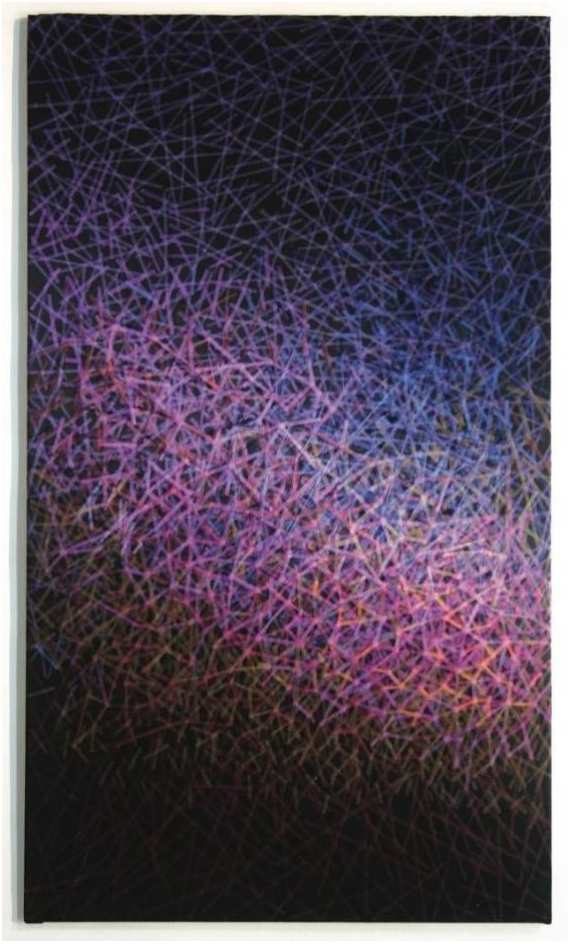


Gold Award. Melt (融熔) Zhang Haidong, China

6th/2010



Gold Award. QingYuanJing (清远静), Li Wei (F), China



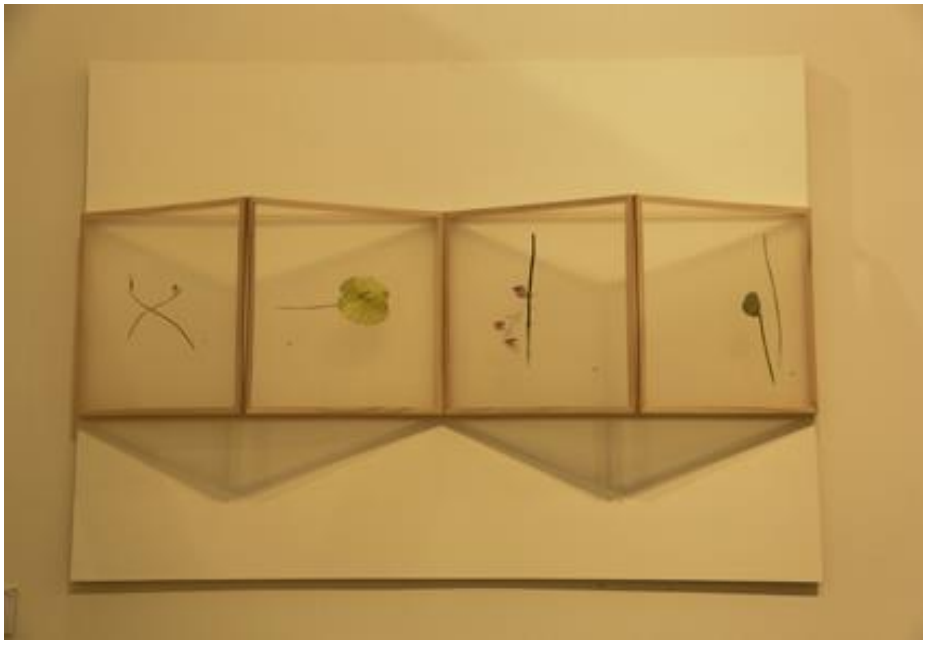
Gold Award. You and Me, Yue Song, China

7th/2012



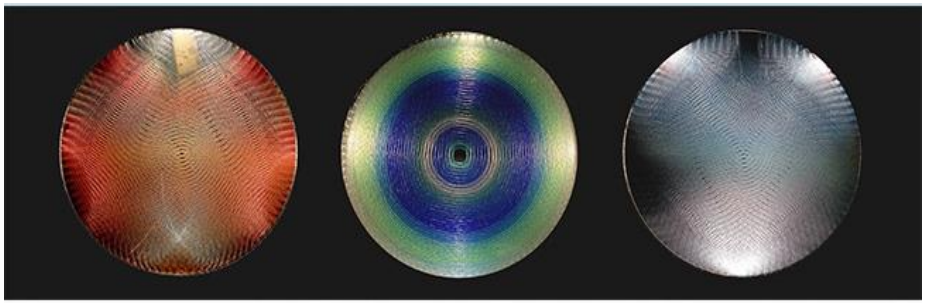
Gold Award. Lotus charm (荷韵), Hong Xingyu and Ding Jianxin (F), China

8th/2014



Gold Award. Er Ruo Sheng Kai Two (尔若盛开二), Liang Xuefang (F), China

9th/2016



Gold Award. Xiang Wai (象外), Liu Xingbang and Lv Hang, China



Silver Award. Between Earth and Sky, Feliksas Jakubauskas, Lithuania



Blue Light 2, Rajia Jokinen (F), Finland



Women's World: Charm in the Coffee, Elvan Ozkavruk Adanir (F), Turkey

11th/2020



Gold Award. Symbiosis, Mi-Kyoung Lee (F), Korea/USA

Appendix 3

Information on the *Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art*

Sessions Year	Location	Theme and Trend	Total number of artworks	Total number of participating countries
1st/2013	Zhejiang Art Museum and China Silk Museum	Fibre Visions The first part: Warp and Weft, Sprawling towards Four Directions. The second part: Coordination between Hand and Heart. The third part: Motivation Springs from the Opposite. The fourth part: The Net World	186	16
2nd/2016	Zhejiang Art Museum, China Silk Museum and Museum of China Academy of Art	Weaving and We The language of weaving & maxim. Body & Identity. Weaving & Casting. Scene & Phenomenon	226	23
3rd/2019	Zhejiang Art Museum, China Silk Museum and Museum of China Academy of Art	Boundless Encounters Mingled Interval. Boundless Alienation. Crossline Entanglement. The Second Skin	78	18

Appendix 4

Awards of the *Hangzhou Triennial of Fibre Art*

Sessions Year	Representative Artworks
1st/2013	 Abakan Red, Sisal and metal, Magdalena Abakanowicz (F), Poland, 1969
	 The Silk Road, Goat Wool, Maryn Varbanov, Bulgaria, 1987



Longevity, Hemp Wool Silk, Shi Hui (F) and Zhu Wei, China, 1986

2nd/2016



A Needle Woman, Video installation, Kimsooja (F), Korea, 2005



Book “my strong soul”, Thread Cloth, Maria Lai (F), Italy, 2002



Tube Hangzhou, Polypropylene fibre and metal structre, Numen/For Use, Croatia/Austria, 2016

3rd/2019



Diary. Red thread, wooden table, wooden chair, paper. Chiharu Shiota (F), Japan, 2020



Gate. Silk, embroidery and stainless steel tubes. Do Ho Suh, Korea, 2019



The Earth. Mixed materials such as textile fabric, cotton, and metal.
Ma Ke (F), China, 2019

Transcripts

1. The questions and answers of interviews with Wu Fan

1. What or who were your early influences and how has your life/upbringing influenced your work?

When I was young, I was influenced by my family and interest in crafts, painting, sculpture because her father was a sculptor. 1987 to 1992, I studied textiles, dyeing and weaving design and fashion design at School of Textiles, Donghua University in Shanghai and Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University in Beijing. During this period, influenced by the Chinese ‘85 Art Ideological Trend’, I believed that the creators engaged in the field of art and design at that time became to understand the western modern art concept, and the transformation from the functional design to the self-concept in the art creation.

2. Do you think there are some female characteristics in your works? What are the influences of these female characteristics on your works?

In 2009, it was also a turning point in the maturity of my fibre art works. when I was 40, a certain vision and experience, and a stable thinking mode for creation had begun. Fibre is feminine and can express the changes of women's self-growth and life. For example, my early works (2011) Spring Memory expressed the growth process of women in the plant growth cycle. This work means the memories of youth and good times. Young faces, delicate facial features covered by cotton strings mean the hazy impressions and distant images adorning with abstract flowers, seeds, leaves and branches which are made of metal wires wrapped by cotton strings.

The five works express different feelings in different periods of one's lifetime, such as a young girl’s, flower season’s, love, missing and romance.

Gradually my work has changed from the cotton and linen materials of the early period to metal materials, and from indoor to outdoor. This is also the expression of women's growth process in fibre art. Another work Ye Wei Yang (2018) is made of metal and fibre. It is expressed in the way of hand weaving, through the symbolic

dialogue between tradition and modernity, east and west, the subtle relationship between Yin and Yang, dynamic and static, and the understanding of life state. The metal Chinese traditional chair in this work represent potency and men, and high-heeled shoes represent women, so as to convey gender equality between men and women. Through the material implicitly expresses the problem of gender equality.

3. **What do you think about the relationship between female and fibre art, such as the origin of fibre art, the choice of materials and the express of technique. What do you consider this relationship?**

As I am a woman in my creation and delivers the concept about society and the textile and fashion technology. Delicacy is a feature of fibre art and expressing oneself through the characteristics of materials is the most different point between fibre art and other contemporary art forms. The Chinese contemporary fibre art is not only to express the beauty of art, but also to pay more attention to some social issues and moves with the times.

4. **What do you believe are the current phenomena in the fibre art? Especially, for female fibre artists?**

Fibre art in China is not only about crafts and expressing only aesthetics, it needs to intersect with contemporary art. The works need to express concepts and be inclusive. Starting from the artists themselves and continuing to create, the ideas and concepts put forward by the artists will also be accepted slowly, which is a kind of inspirational role brought to the society by the art, with transmissibility. In China, it is not an advantage for Chinese female artists to intervene in contemporary art, but Chinese female artists account for a relatively high proportion in the field of fibre art.

5. **What do you think is the influence and value of fibre art and female artists in China?**

This is similar to what I mentioned earlier about the role of fibre arts in relation to society. Secondly, the development of fibre art in China is very good, and there are many fibre art exhibitions in China that provide a platform for women to display their fibre art. Through their works, female fibre artists are able to

interpret society and art from a female point of view and display them through fibre art. This is one of the values provided by female fibre artists.

Fibre art will be mass art in China. First, because fibre is closely related to textile and tends to be daily life, the public has a higher acceptance and participation in fibre art. Second, fibre art was be included in the undergraduate major of Chinese universities and colleges in 2021. The Chinese students will study this major in the future increasingly, especially female students. Due to the popularity of fibre art in Chinese higher education, it will also affect the aesthetic concept and spiritual world of the Chinese public.

2. The questions and answers of interviews with Liang Kai

1. What or who are your creative influences? How has your life/upbringing influenced your work?

I was studied in the Department of art history of Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, for both bachelor's degree and master's degrees. This is a major focusing on the study of art history and theory, but there are also elective units such as calligraphy, lacquer art, fashion, fibre art and so on. Because of these elective units, I had the opportunity to contact Professor Lin Lecheng and fibre art. Also, I joined the team of International Fibre Art Biennale *From Lausanne to Beijing* as the news coordinator. This experience and interest in fibre art made me to decide to further pursue fibre art as my doctoral study.

2. What is your understanding of fibre art, especially the contemporary fibre art in China?

I have interviewed more than 100 international fibre artists and completed a thesis of 300,000 words for my PhD research. In my communication with these Western fibre artists, I realised the warmth, kindness and life of fibre art. Fibre art can change the artist's own life, which is an art that can blend with life. Fibre art is one of the more popular forms of art in China and a form of contemporary art. Fibre art has a healing function, and this is the direction I have been

67. researching recently. Public Participation.

3. As a female fibre artist, what impact do you consider the labels of female have on your creation?

68. Female artists of Chinese contemporary fibre art are unwilling to label themselves
69. as female artists. Because China is a male dominated country, the obvious gender
70. label will make the public ignore the ability of artists and pay attention to the
71. gender of artists. In fact, the number of female fibre artists is more than that of
72. male artists in China. In my work or my research, I would be more inclined to
73. include the three elements of motherhood, family, and children, as well as
74. concepts about life.

4. As far as China is concerned, what do you think of the current artistic and cultural environment? What are the influences on the development of female artists?

75. In the future, due to the continuously reforming of the higher education in fibre art
76. and the efforts of fibre artists, the contemporary fibre art will become a popular art
77. in China and promote the aesthetic cognition of Chinese society. Chinese women
78. are influenced by traditional ideologies and social influences in their career
79. development by their families and children. Many female artists prefer to remain
80. with their families. As Chinese society is different from the West, artists who make
81. a career out of fibre art are highly utilitarian, unlike independent artists in the West.
82. Chinese fibre artists need to consider their own career development and therefore
83. the development of fibre art and artists are mostly employed in Chinese higher
84. education institutions.

3. The questions and answers of interviews with Xu Jia

1. What or who are your creative influences? How has your life/upbringing influenced your work?

85. My mother is Shi Hui, a representative Chinese fibre artist. Thus, as a child I

86. grew up in an atmosphere of fibre art, which I nevertheless rejected.
87. Consequently, my educational background is in science and technology, and I
88. chose architecture as my undergraduate major, Tongji University, China. After
89. graduating from university in 2008, I felt lack of traditional Chinese culture.
90. Through two years of consideration and reflect, I was exposed to Chinese
91. painting, jewellery design and fibre art. In 2010, I studied for a master's degree
92. in the history of Chinese art at the China Academy of Art, specialising in Literati
93. Paintings of China. When I was in research degree, not only continued to study
94. Literati Painting, but also research in fibre art. Until the first Hangzhou Triennial
95. of Fibre Art (2013), I found that there were few researchers or artists in China
96. to study and arrange Maryn Varbanov’s works and theories. So, I began to sort
97. out Varbanov’s and the theories related to fibre art. The reason of decided to
98. research and create fibre art is my mother grew older and needed support.

2. **What is your understanding of fibre art, especially the contemporary fibre art in China?**

99. Because of my education background of architecture. There is a close
100. relationship between fibre art and architecture. I want to rely on my
101. understanding of architecture to explore the development of contemporary
102. fibre art in the future. I think Chinese fibre art should be diversified and
103. integrated with other fields, not only art but also technology or other fields.

3. **As a female fibre artist, what impact do you consider the labels of female have on your creation?**

104. The female fibre artists of my generation and my mother's generation are
105. sensitive to materials, especially in the creation of fibre art, and are more
106. delicate than Chinese men. However, my students, both male and female, are
107. equally sensitive to fibre.

4. **As far as China is concerned, what do you think of the current artistic and**

cultural environment? What are the influences on the development of female artists?

108. Young contemporary Chinese fibre artists have gradually weakened their
109. gender. Chinese female fibre artists are more concerned with social issues
110. and the future of fibre art.

4. The questions and answers of interviews with Zhang Yifan

1. What or who are your creative influences? How has your life/upbringing influenced your work?

111. I started my undergraduate studies in 2008 and has been studying fibre arts for
112. 13 years. I received undergraduate and postgraduate education in fibre art at the
113. Tsinghua University before pursuing a PhD in South Korea. In recent years I have
114. returned to China to continue to create fibre art works. The traditional Chinese
115. textile techniques as attractive in a different way, and the combination of traditional
116. embroidery and weaving techniques with contemporary fibre art forms is the main
117. creative direction. My doctoral studied in Korea also introduced me to the
118. preservation and innovation of traditional skills in East Asian countries.

2. What is your understanding of fibre art, especially the contemporary fibre art in China?

119. With the rapid economic development of China in the last decade, both the
120. government and society have begun to actively preserve Chinese traditional
121. techniques. Contemporary fibre art in China needs to be based on traditional
122. Chinese textile techniques and inherited. Western fibre art focuses on concepts
123. and forms of expression, the combination of art and science and strong visual
124. impact. However, through my research into the From Lausanne to Beijing
125. Biennale, while earlier the exhibitions pursued material innovation similar to
126. Western fibre art, recent years I have returned to Chinese tradition and combined
127. it with contemporary forms of fibre art expression.

3. **As a female fibre artist, what impact do you consider the labels of female have on your creation?**

128. From a traditional Chinese textile perspective, women have an innate
129. sensitivity to embroidery and colour. I also bring this subconscious into my
130. work.

4. **As far as China is concerned, what do you think of the current artistic and cultural environment? What are the influences on the development of female artists?**

131. Since I mainly focus on embroidery and traditional Chinese techniques and
132. fibre arts, I think the current creative environment is very good, with the
133. government supporting the inheritance of traditional Chinese crafts and the
134. society's attention to embroidery. For Chinese female fibre artists, whether
135. they focus on combining traditional techniques with contemporary art or on
136. concepts and forms, I think there are many platforms related to fibre art in
137. China. Female fibre artists can show their understanding of fibre art and
138. spread their concepts on different platforms.

5. The questions and answers of interviews with Wang Yangzi

1. **What or who are your creative influences? How has your life/upbringing influenced your work?**

139. My family background is related to textile and fibres, so this has contributed
140. to the interest in fibre art from an early age. I have over five years of fibre art
141. related education in the UK has led me to create fibre art works that are more
142. conceptual, innovate in materials and cross-disciplinary. During the
143. undergraduate and postgraduate studies, on new materials and the
144. conceptualisation of my work at Central Saint Martins led to a bias towards
145. new materials and conceptual innovation at this stage.

2. **What is your understanding of fibre art, especially the contemporary fibre**

art in China?

146. As a weaver need to see as a weaver, think as a weaver. Focusing on the act
147. of weaving as a dynamic multiplicity of symbols and forms of communication.

3. **As a female fibre artist, what impact do you consider the labels of female have on your creation?**

148. Women have an absolute advantage in fibre art, but it does not mean that the
149. work of female fibre artists needs to emphasise the characteristics of being
150. female. Rather, both male and female fibre artists should focus on the identity
151. and value of Chinese fibre art itself, as well as the artist's personal
152. understanding of fibre and life.

4. **Do you think there are some feminine qualities in your work? How have these feminine qualities influenced your work? Or what kinds of topics you will focus for your creative concepts?**

153. Not too much related.

6. The questions and answers of interviews with Yue Mingyue

1. **What or who are your creative influences? How has your life/upbringing influenced your work?**

154. I chose fibre art as an undergraduate and continue to study and create it.

2. **What is your understanding of fibre art, especially the contemporary fibre art in China?**

155. When I was in BA and considers fibre art to be an expression of contemporary
156. art. Fibre art encompasses both art and technology and is a critical art, with
157. fibre as a medium of expression. Chinese fibre art is extremely inclusive,
158. encompassing traditional Chinese textile techniques as well as some crafts.
159. At the same time, the spread of fibre art to a region or country as absorbing
160. the local characteristics and continuing to spread and develop.

3. **As a female fibre artist, what impact do you consider the labels of female have on your creation?**

The aim of gender equality is to build a society where the disadvantaged have dignity and are treated equally. The contemporary art in China is relatively disadvantaged for women. Mainstream art exhibitions in China are not able to directly express works about gender issues and other subjects, but they can indirectly do so. This is a constraint on artists and Chinese artworks need to be recognised on mainstream platforms.

China women's art is replacing feminist art, which is mostly reduced to the art with a feminine quality. Femininity has become a key point in defining women's art in Chinese female artists criticism. For example, the materials used by female artists are limited to the daily objects related to women's lives which are socially regulated, such as clothing, jewellery, and other objects with strong feminine representations that become the vehicle and goal of Chinese female artists' practices.

4. **Do you think there are some feminine qualities in your work? How have these feminine qualities influenced your work? Or what kinds of topics you will focus for your creative concepts?**

Of course. For example, Blessed Be the Fruit is the latest art works. I created a female womb installation of four metres in length and width by using an embroidery mechanism with red yarn and cloth. Aims to bring the audience back to their mother’s womb, creating a simulated environment that they can be wrapped by. The expression of this work is in two sides. On the one hand, the uterus determines to a significant extent the social role of women. Because this fertility may bring oppression to women or put them in a worse state of life. However, from another perspective, the womb remains sacred to her because it creates and nurtures life, as a creator does.

183. Fibre art does not have to be associated with gender studies, but rather that
184. as female artists it is necessary to make the contribution of female artists felt
185. in society through their work and for the work to be perpetuated.

7. The questions and answers of interviews with Lin Lecheng

1. Why do you want to develop fibre art in China? What was the initial development of fibre art in China?
2. Why did you hold the International Fibre Art Biennale From Lausanne to Beijing in 2000? What are the challenges and chances? What is the original intention?
3. What problems do you think have encountered in the development of fibre art in the past 20 years in China? What are the influencing factors?
4. What role do you believe does fibre art play in the development of contemporary art in China? What is its international status and influence?
5. When you create fibre art works, do you pay more attention to the choice of materials, the form, or the concept of the works?
6. How would you describe your work and where do you think it fits within the sphere of contemporary art?
7. In the field of fibre art, there are many excellent female artists and concepts related to women. What do you believe the relationship between contemporary women and fibre art?
8. What do you regard of Chinese female fibre artists? And their influence and contribution to contemporary fibre art in China?
9. What do you consider about the development of Chinese young female fibre artists in the future? What support can we provide for these young female fibre artists?
10. What are your perceptions about the development of China’s fibre art in the future? How will the artistic value and social value of fibre art be embodied?

The concept of fibre art emerged in China in the 1980s, specifically between 1983 and 1984, when it was introduced by the department of dyeing and weaving of the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts (中央工艺美术学院). Ruthkao, a Chinese American female fibre artist and professor at the University of Wisconsin system. In the spring of 1981, she led 15 American fibre art students to study in the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts, which initiated the research and development of contemporary fibre art in China. She proposed that fibre art could be woven in all materials except concrete and steel.

The rise of contemporary art in the USA, artists begin to experiment with materials. The development of craft in America has similarly moved from traditional craft materials to a multi-material exploration, a way of re-exploring traditional art and finding its American cultural roots. Fibre art is thinking about the work in terms of materials which is different from traditional dyeing and weaving in China.

In the 1980s fibre art was only introduced in teaching, not in academia, and Lin saw it as a different concept, although some teachers objected. This was because the art teaching system in China after the establishment of the PRC was based entirely on the Soviet system. After the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts was the first to exchange with Europe and America and ceased to be influenced by the Soviet Union. After 85 Art Ideological Trend, Chinese art education instantly embraced the Western model of art education, and in 1990 the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts hired Georgian artist Givi Kandareli to teach Gobelin. Givi suggests the importance of the artist's personal thought, and he argues that weaving is an expression of the artist, rather than just a work of design.

As a visiting scholar, Lin Lecheng studied Gobelin art at Tbilisi State Academy of Arts in Georgia in 1993. After returning to China, he devoted himself to the research of the contemporary fibre art and published the book "Fibre Art" in 1996. He wanted to expand fibre art beyond the art of tapestry to a popular audience in China. The “Fibre art” is the first book in China to systematically introduce the concept and development of fibre art. In 1996, Professor Lin， as a visiting scholar，studied tapestry art in France and Britain. He also applied to participate in the *Lausanne Biennale* in the same year； but the 16th Lausanne Biennale has been closed, he was disappointed at not being able to see a Lausanne Biennale. This experience is also one of the reasons why Lin wants to continue the essence of fibre art, and decided to bring it to China, hence named it as Fibre Art Biennale *From Lausanne to Beijing* in China. There were irregular places and funds of *From Lausanne to Beijing*, and the main fund-raising by themselves. It was very difficult to hold the exhibition, only with the full devotion of the artists and staff. Although, the 9th and From Lausanne to Beijing were supported by the China National Arts Funds. However, they were still under funded and limited in the size of artworks. Until the 11th From Lausanne to Beijing, due to the influence of COVID-19, the exhibition was exhibited online. Therefore, the funds, artworks’ size and form of this exhibition were improved compare with before. Due to the particularity of the 11th From Lausanne to Beijing, the organizer proposed that all the judges of the previous session should be the judges of this session.

These judges have firm ideals and beliefs in fibre art. Thus, they did not require to be paid and were willing to be volunteers for this session. The elderly foreign artists were fair and had international perspectives, judging all the works of this session in the "Lausanne spirit".

Until 2021, the higher education of Chinese fibre art has always been a course of dyeing and weaving (the secondary discipline belongs to Design department) or sculpture (the secondary discipline belongs to Art department), or even a short course. However, in 2021, China Academy of Fine Arts successfully applied for fibre art major (Four-year) as a secondary discipline of undergraduate education, which belongs to Art department (Ministry of Education of P.R China, 2021). It will promote the development and dissemination of the Chinese fibre art in the future, and greatly encourage the creation of fibre art practitioners. This is an effort by practitioners as well as educators in the field of fibre arts in China. In China, the development of a profession requires national recognition and government support, so fibre art will henceforth receive more national support and social recognition. At the same time, Lin views that there is no employment problem for artists, and that creation itself is a kind of ideal realisation, which is also the rationale for fibre art education and its future development.

Female fibre artists present their fibre artworks with a deeper and more delicate emotional expression than male fibre artists. There are many successful female fibre artists in China, such as Shi Hui. The future of fibre art in China needs to be deep, difficult and adventurous. Chinese female artists are compared to male artists, who have the absolute authority in traditional art forms, but Lin believes that in the field of fibre art female artists have the absolute authority and creative advantage. Fibre art has a soft and gentle quality from a material point of view, which is in accordance with the graceful and gentle nature of women. Women have been active in the field of textiles from ancient China to the present day, which is one of the reasons why female artists have a significant voice in the field of fibre art. In addition, in recent years there has been a gender weakening of Chinese fibre art works, with less emphasis on the gender of the fibre artists themselves and the advantages and characteristics that gender brings.

The future of Chinese fibre art no longer emphasises craft and technique but rather concept, material and individual artist expression. Society needs to recognise the fibre artist and the fibre artist needs to have an impact on society.