

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

FALK AUDITORIUM

VITALITY, DIVERSITY, AND DIPLOMACY
IN CHINESE CONTEMPORARY ART

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PARTICIPANTS:

Introduction and Moderator:

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Presentations and Discussion:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. LI: Please be seated. We will start very soon. Good morning. My name is Cheng Li, and I'm the director of John L. Thornton China Center here at Brookings. It is my distinct honor to welcome to you to today's event: "Vitality, Diversity, and Diplomacy in Chinese Contemporary Art."

This is an extraordinary, and in many ways unique event, hosted by a Washington-based think tank, primarily focused on public policy and international affairs. When it comes to U.S.-China relations many of us in D.C. tend to be preoccupied, rightly or wrongly, by topics like the South China Sea, East China Sea, nuclear insecurity, perceived or real cyber-attacks, trade wars, growing national resentment both countries, and each country's mutually reinforced fear of the other.

We may become narrow-minded in focusing only on the political, economic and security domains, overlooking other important and possibly more influential forces at work in both countries. Artists, especially avant-garde artists of a number among the keenest observers of society, and are the most forward-looking and critical thinkers. Artists are also characteristically talented bridge builders as artworks often illustrate. Not only the distinctive quality of each individual growth and the nation, but also the common bonds and the shared aspiration of the human race.

Today, we are so privileged to be joined by two giants in Chinese contemporary art. They are outstanding cultural ambassadors from China, and two of the most creative minds in the art world whose work transcends geographic and cultural barriers.

Professor Xu Bing and Professor Fan Di'an; their bios in the program provide more detailed information about their achievements. Let me very briefly share a few highlights.

Xu Bing received a MacArthur Foundation Genius award -- or "Genius Grant" in 1999, Xu Bing has become an icon of China's avant-garde movement. His landmark work, "Book from Heaven," is one of the most famous pieces of contemporary Chinese art.

Xu Bing's artwork has not only been displayed at the most prestigious art shows, and in permanent exhibitions at major museums around the world, but also appears in numerous high school and college text books. Last year, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, as we see on the photo, presented Xu Bing with a Department of State Medal of Arts award for his efforts to promote cultural understanding

through his artwork.

Fan Di'an, president of China's Central Academy of Fine Arts, is a leading figure in modern Chinese art studies, art criticism and the creation of contemporary art. Over the past three decades Fan Di'an has made remarkable contributions to contemporary Chinese art, at both the domestic and international levels. At home he is advocate for the idea of a museum for public (Speaking in Chinese); this is the term that he created and the concept he developed. And he has played a key role in promoting the construction of art museums in China. Overseas, Fan Di'an has organized a series of major exhibitions to introduce Chinese avant-garde artists to foreign audiences.

Professor Xu and Professor Fan, we are so thrilled to have you here to share with us your artwork and your perspectives.

Also, we are honored to have with us Ms. Jan Stuart, to serve as a commentator. She is the Melvin R. Seiden curator of Chinese art, at the Freer and Sackler Galleries, for the Washington art community, Jan is a well-known authority on Chinese art, having worked in Freer and Sackler Galleries, for almost 20 years before moving to the British Museum in London in 2006.

As the head of the Asia department there, Jan curated several Chinese contemporary Art exhibitions including Xu Bing's. She returned to D.C. two years ago to assume her current position. Welcome back. It's so swell to see you around. Fluent in Mandarin and extremely knowledgeable about both ancient and contemporary art, Jan has certainly been a bridge builder on the American side.

Now with my deep admiration for all three of these very distinguished guests, I would like to ask the audience to join me in welcoming them to speak at Brookings. (Applause)

Each of them will make a presentation which will be followed by a panel discussion, then we will also open the floor for Q&A. Now I would like to invite President Fan Di'an to the stage to begin our first presentation. Welcome. (Applause)

MR. FAN: (Speaking in Chinese). Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, good morning. First of all, I'd like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Brookings Institution, for inviting me and Mr. Xu Bing in a conversation and discussion with you about Chinese contemporary art.

I would like to also thank Dr. Cheng Li, our director of the China Center at the Brookings

Institution, for his warm welcome; as well as Madam Li Hong, minister of culture at the Chinese embassy in the U.S. It's also a great pleasure to see many old friends here, for example, Ms. Jan Stuart, as well meeting new friends here. So, in the context I would like to say that this is a great pleasure, a really great.

So how do we talk about Chinese contemporary art in such a brief time? I'd like to begin by offering you an introduction of some the basic elements in Chinese art and then we can expand our discussion on top of that.

As you know Chinese art has been a continuous art form, and Chinese art history has also been continuous including in architecture, sculpture, painting, and Chinese art has always been characterized by clear features and clear visual elements. It's fair to say that the aesthetic tradition is deeply rooted in Chinese cultural life that's formed through a long history.

Of course today's discussion focuses on contemporary Chinese art instead traditional Chinese art. As Robert Hughes an art author, the title of his book, "The Shock of the New?" this is on the Western contemporary art.

Since China opened its doors to the outside world in the 1980s, Chinese art has been impacted by two shocks, as Robert Hughes pointed out, one is the new shock, the other is the shock from Western art. So, it's fair to say that both Mr. Xu Bing and myself, began our studies in art during such shock from the Western art, and this is the background of our own artistic studies.

But this still is not the topic of our discussion today. Today during the era of globalization, Chinese art is facing new challenges or new shocks from the effects of globalization. So during the globalization process, it offered Chinese artists many opportunities to display their talent. However, many Chinese artists or Chinese art has also been labeled in a way that that's been characterized as only in Chinese.

So, I've shown you several artworks here on the screen, and maybe some of them you have already heard from the media. And artists Fang Lijun, Wang Guangyi, these are very well known in the West, and they have done exhibitions in the Western world. But some of these arts may have been known as iconic or as labels of contemporary Chinese art, but I think that there are also new elements or

new characteristics in Chinese art, domestically that's worth our attention.

There have been a lot of Western art that are coming to China and are being communicated in China, through exhibitions and through different forms of communication, but there hasn't been enough Chinese art that are going abroad to the world. For example, right now in Beijing there is an art exhibition from the United States, but there hasn't been enough Chinese art that are being exhibited in the U.S., so I think that there is still a little bit of deficiency in the Chinese or its process of going global.

So, what propels art -- the development of art? Of course other cultures influence, influence from the West, these are very important and great inspirations but it also requires indigenous motivations, indigenous innovation.

So there are several reasons, several elements that together formed the broader background of Chinese art today. First, there's the development of art museums. In China this is a time for art museums, local governments have invested a lot in developing art museums and the public has also invested a lot in art museums. For example, in Shanghai the government has converted the China pavilion from the world expo in 2010 into an art museum which is called the Chinese Art Palace. This, perhaps, is the largest art museum in the world. It's covering 160,000 square kilometers.

And of course in other provincial capitals there have also been a lot of new art museums, for example, in Shandong, and other smaller provincial cities. Now this is the art museum of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, where I serve. There is also a burst on the scene of private art collections in art museums, for example, the Today Art Museum in Beijing, and The Long Art Museum in Shanghai.

And last year in Beijing the Minsheng Art Museum was built. Minsheng is the name of a bank, so this is an art collection that's founded by a financial institution. Even in remote areas such as Yinchuan and Ningxia province, a new art museum has also been built and it's built with very unique architectural characteristics.

Of course there has been a lot of hardware in the Chinese art museum scene but the software is still to be built, and the software means talents such as exhibitors, curators, educators, fundraisers, and this is an area where China-U.S. exchange can really benefit the development of

Chinese art.

The second characteristics of Chinese art is the proliferation of art districts, and these are often abandoned factories or loft buildings. For example, in Beijing you may be familiar with the 798 Art District, and also Sunjung.

As you know the Chinese economy is now going through a difficult period where it's going through structural adjustment as well as reduction of capacity, and this will free out a lot of factory space which then present an opportunity for art districts to be formed.

The central government of China, and the local government as well have been supporting strongly the development of culture and art industries, but such support and the hardware alone will not be enough, for the software to be developed for the Chinese art talent to be developed there needs to be more investment in talent.

The third characteristic is the development of the art market, or the art industry, as we know that although the Chinese economy has been growing slowly, the art collection, the art investment industry has been growing very fast, and this has been a new trend of the economy.

I'll give you several examples to illustrate the burgeoning scene of the Chinese art market, in 2005 alone, so the total volume of art trade -- art business in the world is \$63.8 billion, and in China alone that number is \$11.8 billion. And that is China's art market is 18.5 percent of the entire world. And contemporary art has taken up a very large majority -- very large portion of that total volume of trade.

So the three elements, the new art museums, the art districts, and the art industry, the art market, I would say that these three are the driving forces behind China's art development, and these also help Chinese art from creation to consumption. And this is the new ecological system of Chinese art. Of course, when it comes to art we have to address not only the external forces but also art itself.

So, here, during our brief time I will talk to you about a few new phenomena in Chinese art. The first one is urbanization, urbanization started in China in 21st century, and now it's been continued, which is why it has become an important theme of Chinese art. And the process of urbanization continues.

I was in New York City yesterday and some may argue that just like Beijing we have been seeing construction fields all over the place. There are two key words in terms of the effect of urbanization on art that are really prominent; one is scenery. So as French director famously said, "Right now we are living in a society of sceneries."

So it's fair to say that everything in the world has become an object of visual art, or visual object, and these visual objects are determining the way we live these days, and the effect of capital has also been strongly reflected. And the effect of capital has evolved from being to owning and to appearance.

The second keyword is theater, as people's roles in society evolve to the minds of artists, to the imagination of artists, the world has become a theater. The second point I would like to make is the existence of new realism in Chinese art and this has been also very prominent in Chinese art.

And the so-called revolutionary realism, new realism, of course was formed when China was still a closed society, but this has been very representative of Chinese contemporary art during that time. Strictly speaking, Chinese art education did not include Western elements such as the modern languages and the modern characteristics.

But a more positive effect of that education is that during that period it required artists to devote their lives to real life, to real people and then to depict subjects that are reflective of real lives. This tradition has not faded entirely. For example, in artist Liu Xiaodong's work it has been developed or redeveloped.

And Liu Xiaodong's work has been characterized by not doing his work, or not painting his art in studios based out of imagination, but rather in the field. And a keyword that may describe his work, is presence, so he's present with his subjects during those creative processes. And this year Mr. Liu has been visiting locations that to me, I think are the cultural focus and he's been creating his work there.

So his work reflects the real side of China or the society, the people and the locations that he has visited. And of course the charm of his art is also an important supportive (crosstalk). And of course Chinese art has a very rich history, very rich tradition and how do you transform that tradition into

contemporary art is the subject of many artists' pursuit.

For example, the Chinese "shan shui" painting which is the sceneries in free-hand brush, it's something that's very traditional and it's very personal, and how do you translate that personal feelings into public sentiment is something that Chinese artists are exploring.

The same goes with calligraphy which is also an expression of personal emotions and time. And Chinese calligraphy has also been transformed into visual art, in contemporary art. And of course Mr. Xu Bing here is very famous, is very well-known for transforming calligraphy into contemporary art. And I'll let him discuss that himself.

So I think that during the era of globalization, how do we translate local art impression, or local art methodology into contemporary art expression is really important. For example, in architecture and the award-winning architect in China has transformed the Chinese traditional architecture into more functional architecture. And such transformation has not only created a poetic living environment, it is also representative of a cultural attitude.

And another architectural way has turned the process of porcelain making into an exhibition -- into a museum, and it's reflective of the traditional porcelain-making process. Of course I still have to mention Mr. Tae Bo Chung who is living in the United States, and he has been able to combine the (inaudible) with China's shan shui painting, China's ink wash painting, and it has created a unique form of art.

And Chinese digital art has also been developed very rapidly, for example, Yao Chow Chun which is a digital artist has been using digital forms to depict the world to his mind. The Chinese public art scene has also been developing very rapidly, for example, in Kassel, Germany we have organizing exhibition of Chinese public art, and this young artist has created an art that's related to the museum.

And this young Chinese artist created a statue of Guan Gong, which is a Chinese god, from before, with scrap auto parts. And these artworks are based on the imagination as well as its combination with the public space. Among all these artworks, everything is a reflection of the artist's own perception of the society and of the culture. And I would like to end with Mr. Xi Bing's work, which I will

not discuss but as a segue to introduce my colleague. Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. XU: (Speaking in Chinese) It's a great pleasure for me to come to the Brookings Institution and to share with you my thoughts. First of all, I'd like to thank Dr. Cheng Li for his work, for his organization of this event. We have actually met a long time ago, almost a decade ago in the United States during another event.

And it's also a great pleasure to see Ms. Jan Stuart, who is an old friend as well, and she has done a lot of research on Chinese art, and my work as well. And also I'd like to thank, of course, Minister Li Hong from the Chinese Embassy, and all the staff that have contributed to this event.

Mr. Fan offered a fantastic analysis of Chinese contemporary art and its relationship with the macro, the broader global art. And so for myself as an individual artist, I would like to offer myself as an individual case to illustrate how the -- one artist's own cultural genes has been playing a role in the global cultural context. Also, I'd like to discuss how an artist's creativity is transformed through the energy from the society.

So, first of all I'd like to begin with the role of an individual artist's own cultural genes. And I'd like to begin also with my perception, my own judgment of the global -- the world. There are two hidden elements behind the process of globalization. Since the falling of the Berlin Wall, the prevailing culture, or the universal value of capitalism has been -- has seen a clot of conflict and -- conflicts with local culture and local art.

And also, the overall development of global civilization has also created an unprecedented tension between the world and the natural that we live in. Another element is the development of so-called digitalization. The development of digital technology has transformed society, philosophy, religion and even our own physiological patterns, so this has made the aforementioned elements a passive behavior, almost.

So the human race has not accumulated enough knowledge or experience to explain this rapidly-changing world. So, as artists, this poses a question of how do we face the time we live in and how do we perform our work? So, as individual artist my understanding is, how do we make our own, as individual artists, our own cultural genes, effective in this social context.

I'd like to give you brief overview of this artwork, which is English characters. I came to the U.S. in 1990, in fact, when I first came to the U.S. in 1990 I had hidden a lot of my old works under my suitcases because I didn't to show them these, I would like to appear as a contemporary artist. But in reality some of these old works of mine are strong reflections of my own unique cultural genes.

So, if you have to decompose my cultural DNA, there are a few elements that can be discovered, for example, traditional Chinese culture, early socialism culture, and when China first began its opening up process, as well my 18 years of experience living in the west. So these, together form my culture DNA. So, these cultural DNA elements, even if you are trying to hide them, they are, indeed, deeply embedded in yourselves, and when needed they will emerge again, and to help your work.

And this series of work, English-Chinese calligraphy, is a reflection of the conflict between my own culture and Western civilization. I think you may even be able to read these characters or words, "Art for the People." So, on the façade it looks like Chinese culture, but within it is Western civilization.

So when we write these, we really didn't have a clue whether we are writing in Chinese or English. In fact, we don't really have an existing concept that supports or explains calligraphy in this form. I have turned my exhibitions into a classroom, a classroom that's familiar, most times because they look like a Chinese traditional calligraphy classroom, but once people walk into this classroom they will find western cultural elements that they are familiar with.

This form of exhibition reflects my own thought on a problem that exist in contemporary art which is the huge gap between art the ordinary folks. So, when I first began my artistic exchanges, the relationship between art and people has been something that's deeply embedded in my own perception of art. And this idea has been playing an import role during my work of global contemporary art.

So, this is a textbook that I created for this form of exhibition which is a classroom, and this looks like a Chinese book, but it's actually an English book. The second point I would like to address is: How does Chinese traditional culture play a role in my works. This is a book that I composed, I made with science that I collected throughout the year. It a novel, it's made of science but it's a book that

everyone can read and understand.

It talks about the 24 hours of a person's daily life. So if we read the second row is a person taking a subway to the company, to work, and the third line is this person getting on the internet and reading emails, and then going to Starbucks. This book is a bit different from my earlier work, "The Book from the Heaven," that book nobody can understand, but this book everyone can read.

These are some of the signages that I kept collecting over the past -- more than a decade, and I didn't create any of these signages, these are all my collections, because I think that these new -- these signs that I collected are the new round of signage, language. We have also created a software that no matter your input in Chinese or English it eventually turns into icons.

And this is harp for exchange between different languages. And this book, no matter where it's published in the world, requires no translation. And it's also favored by young people. So, why do I bring up this piece of work? Not only because it is a contemporary artwork, but also because it reflects my own Chinese traditional culture, my own Chinese tradition of reading graphs, of reading icons.

The next work I'd like to show you is called "The Stories Behind." This painting is actually not done on paper or canvas, it's actually done with light. This is what's behind this painting. Actually you'll see that behind this glass, this is a piece of glass I actually turned into a milky glass, and behind it are plants, different -- even garbage's that were placed strategically to adjust for light, and eventually they, together, form this painting.

This idea actually originated from Jan, who, at the British Museum has curated this exhibition. And so, this work after its completion it looks like a very elegant Chinese painting, but as the viewers go to the back of the painting they'll see the stories behind it.

So, Jan told me that this is indeed a painting, and I said this is more of a device, but she says that is a painting with light. And this is our work in progress. And the reason why I brought up this work, is to illustrate the transformative relationship between Chinese traditional and contemporary art. And this is a artwork, a device that we set up at the third plastic factory in Beijing which is an abandoned factory, and we used a lot of the factory waste and garbage's to, together, form this shan shui painting.

And this is our process. So, the fact that we were able to create this work, this artwork

was plastic waste. It's a great point that illustrates the traditional Chinese culture and ancient Chinese artists were able to create this art form, this shan shui painting that we can then recreate with contemporary elements.

This is a image that Mr. Fan showed you earlier. This is actually the last painting of Zhan Daqian a very famous Chinese artist. And in fact, all the brush work, all the ink work is done through light and through plastic waste. So, through these examples, I'd like to explore the question: What are the really valuable elements from Chinese traditional civilization?

For example, a very important element in Chinese traditional culture is to fear or to respect nature. But such an element or such respect or fear of nature, wasn't of great value 100, 200 years ago, because during that time the human race was propelled its need to industrialize and to modernize. But the same cultural element, which is the harmony between nature and human, plays an important role and offers new inspirations for contemporary civilization.

So, in my view, traditional and contemporary art are actually interchangeable -- inter-transforming during our civilization process. And this is why, and this is also my understanding, my perception of the reason why my work has been perceived by some as traditional and by others as contemporary.

And my next point is, how does the creative energy of an artist is transformed from (inaudible) energy in the society? The international relations today and the Chinese society, combined, presents a very strong energy field for us. In particular, the Chinese society, no matter what time you live in, it always creates a lot of energy.

For example, during different periods of Chinese history, the early socialism days, Cultural Revolution, reform and opening up, all these time periods provide a very strong energy field, and if they are used correctly they will offer a lot of positive influence to society, but if wrongly, they will also do a lot of damage.

To me, in the past, I used to believe that the artist's ability resides within his or her own abilities, but now I think more -- now I think that it's really important for artists to translate social energies into artistic expressions and languages that they can internalize. The reason why I think creativity should

originate from this, is because the social scene, the social context is forever changing.

It is extremely experimental the social context and it always offer artists with new feelings and new sentiments that need to be expressed. And these new expressions have not been said before so that's why we are in constant pursuit of new, artistic language, new artistic expressions.

And this painting is something I created eight years ago when I returned to China to the Central Academy of Fine Arts, my alma mater. And these are 30 meters in width each, and the materials are from the construction waste from Beijing's construction fields.

I started to reflect, why every time I go back to China the form of my art has become gigantic, it has become very large, for example, the "Book from the Heaven" and the "Great Wall," which are my previous works. And the dimensions of my work actually are part of my artistic expression, part of my artistic language, that's determined by the energy and the space offered by the field that I work in.

So this work which is called "Phoenix," is a reflection of many elements. For example, the relationship between capital and labor, and also all the waste and fragments that we create in life, and how do we face them, how do we use the. And this is how it appears at night. And this is when it's on exhibition in the U.S. And this is in the St. John's Cathedral in New York; and the "Phoenix" went to the Biennales in Venice last year. So, these lights will come to life at night. But in Venice the exhibition halls close after 7:00 so the "Phoenix" is enjoying its appearance alone by the river.

And the last work of art I'd like to show you, I'd like share with you, is an example of, how do we use new materials in our creative processes. And this is actually a film project that me and my studio is working on, it's called "Eye of the Dragon Fly," and it's a collection of all of the surveillance videos that we can find on the internet. I'll show you a segment from this film. So this is a trailer that lasts three minutes.

(Video played)

MR. BING: (Speaking in Chinese) This film after it's completed will be 80 minutes in length, and it's very unique because every frame from this film is from a real scene from society. And what I'm interested is this new methodology because we do not have a camera crew, but the surveillance cameras in China and around the world are working for us 24/7.

We don't have actors or actresses, but the people who appear in this film will be best talent that will be shown. So, this is a new methodology and the new creative process that I would like to explore, one that reflects the relationship between art and the contemporary world.

This new methodology is like car-sharing software such as Uber and Didi in China, these companies do not own a single vehicle but all the cars in the cities are working for them. And this is my exploration of the new methodology in contemporary art. Thank you. (Applause)

MS. STUART: Well, I have tried to speak in many different places, but I've never had to speak after a film like that, which, I think has got our minds all in a whirl, but what it does, it provides a segue for me say, one of the things that I have always admired about Xu Bing, as an artist, is I think he is the most socially responsible artist I know.

And that comes out over and over in his work, and I want to come back to that. It's a great honor to be here, but after two such fantastic presentations there's not a lot for me to say, and we are short on time.

But the first question I wanted to ask you is, growing up, if most of you, or some of you have grown up in America when you think of Chinese art, you have a very vague sense of what it is. Although we do museums and we've become increasingly interested in Chinese art, that's great, but when people talk about contemporary Chinese art, they always talk about the global art market, and they talk about it being Western-centric, and how China is being forced to conform to Western traditions.

Well, may I ask; do you know where global art started? If I asked in 1980, was it a Western-centric global art market? Yes. If I asked you 10 centuries ago, the beginning of the global art market was in China, and the Chinese global art market started through ceramics, one of the greatest, the first global commodity, and it took painting and shape, and glaze, technology, aesthetics, all over the world. Nobody complained, everybody was happy to receive things from China.

So, my point is just to say that when we talk about this East-West, we shouldn't be looking at just decades, we should be looking at the fact that we have centuries of interaction as people, and what art does, it is a bridge and it is something that opens our minds, and what we want to recognize is that cultures are taking from each other all the time. So we have borrowed from China many times in

our traditions, and China has taken certain shock value from Western art in recent time.

But that's fine. If you go back to the 18th century in the Qing dynasty, the most admired popular artists were the Italian Jesuits, and they were the first in recent times, if you count a couple hundred years as recent, they were the first hybrid artists, completely taking on board Chinese ways of painting, Chinese ways of seeing and merging it with their own vision of what they've grown up with in Europe, in Italy, in France.

So this idea of artists borrowing from each other's traditions is not new, and it's not something alien in China. So, it is natural there, and it is natural here, but I think it's some of our art critics that need to maybe do a better job at opening their minds.

At the British Museum in 2011, when I did a show inviting Xu Bing to do the background story that you saw, the Financial Times wanted to cover, and I thought, great. But Jemil Anderlani who is not primarily an art critic, the first thing he said was: but I'll only cover this story in the Financial Times if you'll also talk about Ai Weiwei.

Okay. Why? Well, yes, he had just been arrested, and yes, he's an elephant in the room because he hasn't been mentioned, but if I ask you who is the Chinese artist that is best known in the United States of America, that is the one name everybody can say, now it's easier to pronounce. That gives them some leg up.

But my point is that he is just one artist, and yet we, as a culture, become fixated on that, and so what I like about this panel, what I like about Fan Di'an's work, and all the exhibitions that's he's taken abroad, as well as curating in China, is we are saying, China is fantastic because it has the largest breadth of creativity and artists working with different responses.

If you want to say, well, China is being restrictive, that they don't love Ai Weiwei's work, you can say that. But because I have a very short amount of time, the thought I want to leave you with, is the artist who has flourished in China, the artist who has flourished internationally is Xu Bing. And do you know what? He is the most dangerous artist I've ever met.

Why is he dangerous? Because he doesn't look at whether you are Chinese or American, or whatever you are, he questions your ability to interpret what you see. He actually says,

"Perhaps everything you see is an illusion. Perhaps you haven't thought to the bottom of it."

Now, Chinese have played with the idea of danger for a long time. You go to a beautiful Suzhou garden and you see these wonderful artificial mountains, they are just a rock planted into the ground. And there's a whole theory about the rocks, make them look dangerous, make them look like they are going to topple over. You have a top-heavy part up here at the top, and then it gets very narrow. But what you don't know when you go by, is that it's planted very deeply in the ground. It's not going to topple over.

So, this is playing with the mind, pushing you. Chinese painting in the Song dynasty, was it political? Well, there were a whole group of artists who were writing poems on their paintings in the rhyme scheme of dissident literati so that they could get messages across, and they could convey criticism without being overt.

There's a painter in the Yuan dynasty who didn't like the takeover of that particular government, so he painted orchids without ground under them. Well, if you look at all of the artists that Fan Di'an showed us, if you look at Xu Bing's work, there are things you can code and decode through looking, asking, questioning. But you know, what you read and see won't always be what the artists put there.

What the artist really put there, is the gift of creativity, the gift of marshaling all of the world around them, and putting together in a way that is stimulating and makes you think, makes you use your mind. That's what's dangerous. That's also what builds the bridges.

So, I think Chinese art is spot on, that it's a very full, rich, tradition. I think that there's a lot of tolerance for the shock factor and for the tradition. I think Xu Bing, he's Chinese, there's no doubt about that, but you see things in his work that are because he lived in the West too.

But remember that's not new. Castiglione, or Lángshìníng was his Chinese name, this 18th century Italian living in China, he was the same. So this isn't a new concept, but this is a concept where China has given us a lot of the best artists the world has today. And so if it's only 18.5 percent of the global market now, it's just going to keep going up, because of the great creativity. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. LI: Okay. I have never been at a Brookings event that so many camera clicks. And that's fantastic, it tells you a lot about the panel. And (inaudible), could you try and take this.

Well let me start with -- I have a few questions for all the panelists. To start with, the first one, in Xu Bing's presentation you mentioned about the DNA, you know, elements in your artwork which had four elements, during the cultural revolution, and immersed in Chinese tradition and Chinese culture, and certainly that your stay in the United States also influenced you with the Western culture. And finally, the lives of commercialism as a result of market reform.

Now, these are the elements, I think, that really integrate together, make your generation, our generation unique. My question is, whether you should treat, in our view, do you think that these four elements, more or less, carry the same weight, or there's any one particular element among these four, really shape your artwork? So that's my question for both of you.

MR. XU: (Speaking in Chinese)

MR. FAN: (Speaking in Chinese)

MR. XU: (Speaking in Chinese) I think these elements are actually shared traits of artists, Chinese artists in our generation. We are fortunate because it almost looks like we have lived several lives. So they are thinking our philosophy has different layers and it's very complex. This helps us prevent viewing the very complex world through a singular lens.

Dr. Li asked me which element is more important. To me I think Chinese traditional culture plays a more important role. So, why do I say that? Because I think that the nutrition offered by Chinese traditional culture, is actually related to all these other elements.

So, for example, during the socialist era and during Mao's era, a lot of -- not even during the Cultural Revolution, a lot of the way that things work, the way that Mao worked was actually a changed form of Chinese traditional culture. And with regards to reform and opening up period, and my own experience in the West, I think that it's in fact, traditional Chinese culture that has helped me work and create in the West.

So, although the Culture Revolution and the socialist period presents a fault line in Chinese traditional culture, there is one unique characteristic that makes Chinese traditional culture stick,

because it's not documented words or by language, but rather it is recorded through our interactions with our previous generations, through the way that they talked, the tone, the tempo of their speeches, and this has resulted in the traditional culture's DNA to be very stubborn, and to be very effective.

In fact, any cultural DNA has its positive and negative sides, it's all a matter of how do we put them to use, and even the negative elements can be turned into a positive. To sum up, traditional culture must be activated in order for it to be effective.

MR. LI: Thank you. President Fan, do you want? No, no. It's for you.

MR. FAN: (Speaking in Chinese) I have not rehearsed this with Mr. Xu Bing, but I actually share the exact feeling, which is, I feel that I have lived through several lifetimes. And this is a result of the drastic changes that China has experienced as well as its relationship with the world, that's also constantly changing.

Since the 1980s it's fair to say that the forces of Chinese art and Western art have been characterized by two forces. One is, one that's characterized by contrast competition, and the second is mutual inspiration. So that Western contemporary art was first introduced to China in the 1980s, in the early 1980s, and in 1981 and art collection, an exhibition from Boston was displayed in Shanghai and Beijing, and that was the inception of Western contemporary art in China.

And in 1986 a large-scale exhibition from Luxemburg was displayed in Beijing, and this opened people's eyes and make them see a new form, a new world of contemporary art. So, as someone who studies art history, and as an art critic, I placed far more emphasis back then on contemplating and studying the terminologies, the focus points of Western art, than my focus on Chinese art.

So, the lexicon within the Chinese art community is actually heavily influenced by Western contemporary art, and such lexicon overshadows China's own language, China's own way of critiquing art, and China's own perception in art.

So, to answer Dr. Li's question, among the several elements that he mentioned. Although my colleague Mr. Xu Bing thinks that traditional culture plays a more important role; to me, from a theoretical perspective, from a perspective research, I think that the international art community has

played an important role in Chinese art. It's important for Chinese artists to get into discussions and conversations with international artists and try to form a consensus of how we can use the Chinese way to adopt the Chinese voice in international art.

So, to a certain extent globalization offers new opportunities and it has made China and the rest of the world to be at the same starting point. I think it is of great value for artists to remember their artistic, their cultural DNA's and make them effective. I think this is very valuable.

MR. LI: Well, thank you so much, President Fan. I will go back to you and also to Jan. The next question is for Xu Bing. The last weekend I visited the legendary American architect, Philip Johnson, his famous "Glass House." Have you been there?

MS. STUART: Yes.

MR. LI: Okay. In Connecticut and in New York, and when the tour guide said that this is the place where art and architect converge. And I cannot help but thinking of your work, Xu Bing's work, which is celebrated for branding, painting, and calligraphy, images and words, tradition and modernity, and the printed work and the artwork. Your work is contemporarily reflecting the avant-garde movement, yet distinctively Chinese or traditional as I just said.

Now, two questions for you. First, when you developed this fascinating new style, through gradual process, or was it the result of sudden artistic impulse? That's my first question. The second question, English speakers often misperceive your creating of fake Chinese characters as being authentic Chinese words, as we can see from all your things. Is this reflective of other misperceptions that arise between cultures and across national borders? A phenomenon that continue to plague U.S.-China relations?

I'm very happy that you mentioned about the word politics in your presentation, so I want to ask you that question as well. So these are my two questions for Xu Bing.

MR. XU: (Speaking in Chinese) So, to answer your question, Dr. Li. In terms of whether my work has been a gradual creative process or a result of sudden impulse, I think to artists their inspirations may reflect as being impulsive or as being spontaneous. But, for example, the background stories that I displayed earlier, this was, when I was at the American Academy in Germany, I had an idea

of creating artworks with wastes that are from World War II.

So, that museum is actually very interesting because now 85 to even 95 percent of the collection was actually taken away after World War II by the Soviet Red Army. And I was wondering if there's a way to express my feelings through artwork, but I didn't know how. Until I was at an airport in Spain later that year and I saw pensas -- I saw plants that were behind a milky glass of an office.

So all of these experiences, the stolen, the missing art, the glasses, the plant behind milky glasses have inspired a vision which is, you know, I think that some these art can reappear, or their souls, their shadows, can reappear behind glasses.

Of course, we have all seen these elements before, but why at that time I was struck by the inspiration. I think it's related to the tension of my ideas, at that time in my desire to express what I've seen in Germany.

MR. LI: Okay. Yeah. My second question, in line with this, it's just a link that -- and it has created a Chinese character, so this, and (Speaking in Chinese).

MR. XU: (Speaking in Chinese) To answer your second question, I think to me, the creative process or art has -- always have a directly relationship with your experiences with the world. So I wouldn't have created the English-Chinese characteristics if I hadn't lived in the United States. So this work, this artwork reflects a direct issue that I faced at that time.

So, on the surface, these artworks reflect the differences, the relationship between East and West, but in fact it represents my reflections on the limitations of people's imagination, and people's thoughts. Many of my works, I've been interested in the boundaries of different concepts, or the blurry areas between different concepts.

So knowledge has taught us the concept of Chinese, and knowledge at the same time has taught us what it means to be English, but when faced with such an artwork, or old concepts, our old knowledge cease to function. Now, the differences between the East and the West is a reflection, or is a testing ground for people's limitations in terms of understanding the differences between different (inaudible).

MR. LI: Thank you. I still want to have the audience questions, before that let me ask

you two quick questions for President Fan, and also for Jan. Jan, you said, you referred to the misunderstandings, the misperceptions of Chinese art. I fully agree with you that there's a prevailing perception in the West, Chinese artists are either pro-government or anti-government. It's a mindset, and it's the Chinese-America, and particularly if you are offended by this kind of way of thinking, but that has been quite prominent in the West, especially the United States.

And my question, first for President Fan is, probably more than anyone in China, you really introduced Chinese art to the West, contemporary art. Now in your view what are the prevailing misperceptions in the West about Chinese avant-garde artists?

Now, the next question is for Jan. American scholar, Joseph Nye, used the term self-empower, and he particularly emphasized American advantage in the self-power, but in your presentation really tells us, we really should look at the very, very dynamic Chinese avant-garde artists. I mean '80s we learn from the West, but now they move to the frontier of the art world. If you look at the commercial term probably Chinese artists dominated the top 100, you know, the commercial market.

That certainly may not be the most important criteria, but at least it tells us the very dynamic area, as is represented by the two artists with us. But what's wrong with the Chinese self-power, because this should -- Chinese artist may need to find a better strategy to present their art piece? Or because our -- "we" Americans really become inward-looking, deny the fascinating changes in the art world, et cetera?

So these are the two questions for our two panelists. First, President Fan.

MR. FAN: (Speaking in Chinese) I have done a lot of work in exhibition, curation, planning and organizing, but I've also seen these works, these exhibitions as my own work. I was trying to -- I've been trying to create a field or a scene for cultural participation. The misperception among cultures has been an ancient phenomenon and has always been there.

With the development of information technology, it appears that we are getting a lot more information or a lot of knowledge, but the misperception is deeply rooted in our interactions with different cultures. So, such misperception can be traced to two reasons. One is, perhaps there are still blind spots that are not understood or not perceived by the other culture. And another one is some of the

biases, especially historic biases that are clouding our judgments today.

So, as exhibitors or as exhibition planners, our job is to create spaces for people to discuss different cultures from multiple angles. It is to create a space where Chinese artists can explain Chinese art from within, and for the rest of the world, for example, the United States, to examine Chinese art from without. And it's within that process that we can better understand each other.

The lack of understanding contributes to curiosity, and curiosity is what's driving creative processes, and what's driving art, and when Mr. Xu Bing, and in the '80s when we were in the Central Academy of Fine Arts, when we were classmates, he had already started to create artworks that were making everyone else curious. And throughout these past decades he's been continuing on that pursuit, and this is I think why he's able to contribute so much to the community.

MR. LI: Well, it sounds like a diplomat, (inaudible) ambassador. Yes, Jan?

MS. STUART: I think museum work is diplomacy.

MR. FAN: Yes.

MS. STUART: It is self-power. I think that one of the things that your question brings up in my mind, is how much does America care about art? So, you know, we have to look what is art to us, and I'm always thinking about a comment by Peter Voulkos, a very famous ceramic artist, in the 1970s he was telling the artists -- the art students that he was working with; "If you want it to be liked, make it big, make it red or make it gold."

There is something about American history, American aesthetics that has made us to go for the big and shiny. So, some of what is coming through from China, it's just -- there's still a little bit of a disconnect with *schwerha* painting. Are we as an American people, ready for it. But you have artists like Lao Dong who has just done an ink painting where he has created a Chinese -- from his Chinese DNA he has created a Chinese landscape, but he very openly puts his model next to this landscape.

His model is a drawing by Raphael of horses and religious figures in an architectural setting. But for him it became a landscape. Now we in the West are more willing to accept that, because there's a Western reference. What it is, is a comfort level. So I think America is trying to get itself ready for Chinese art, but when there's no direct connection to our own tradition, people are nervous.

So it's just like when you put an artwork on a wall, as a museum curator, you know you need to put a label. If people can read a little bit about it, then they relax, then they look. You don't put a label on it, they go into the room they panic, they leave. Of course not everyone. But there is something, so I think we are trying, we are getting there, but it's a slow process. We have to get people more comfortable with looking at what they are not familiar with.

MR. LI: Thank you so much. I want to take maybe one or two rounds of questions. And first, identify yourself, and limit your question for one. And also if you want to address particular panelists, please say so. The gentleman?

SPEAKER: Thank you, both presentations -- all three presentations are --

MR. LI: Identify yourself, please?

SPEAKER: Garth Shrinkle, Washington, D.C., and Berkeley, California. My question is for Xu Bing. You spoke very movingly about the Academy in Berlin, and becoming aware of art that had been taken by the Soviets, away. You spoke about learning about American and Western art in 1980, but the works you've shown are extremely sensitive, extremely thoughtful, but I don't get the social realism or the radicalness that would come through if you had perhaps used a little bit of the social realist content of what you experienced in Berlin, of seeing art taken away.

Do you think your experience in Berlin of the German art taken to the museums of the Soviet Union? Do you believe that perhaps it will come through in subsequent works that you will be doing?

MR. LI: We will hold; we will hold -- a few more questions. Yes, the lady with the pink -- Yes, you, go ahead.

SPEAKER: (Speaking in Chinese)

MR. LI: Can you translate the question?

TRANSLATOR: Sure. So, just to sum up the question. The question is, so in the avant-garde art scene in countries like France, in Britain and the United States, how do we make sure that the Chinese ink or the Chinese ink brush art, or Chamorro paintings are well presented and well conveyed.

MR. LI: The gentleman, yes.

MR. HAMCOCK: Yes. I'm Dr. Sam Hamcock of EmeraldPlanet, EmeraldPlanet TV. Dr. Li, thank you for introducing everything. And I want to say praise to the translator he has done an absolutely fantastic job. (Applause) They always get forgotten.

Anyway, to both of the artists I first start working in China through the Australia-China society in 1973, so a long time seeing the change in China like you've gone through. What would be the two most impactful times or cultural changes that you've seen in China, that now is being reflected in the art, that helps the West to understand all of the transition over these last 40 years that China has gone through? And that's for both of the artists.

MR. LI: Okay. Good. We just have -- Yeah, three questions. Yes?

SPEAKER: (Speaking in Chinese).

MR. XU: (Speaking in Chinese) So to answer the question from the first gentleman, I'm struggling to capture the essence of this question because that museum in German was exhibiting -- most of the exhibits are from East Asia, or East Asian artworks. So, in that context I didn't interact directly with the social realism and the radicalism at that time in Germany. But such relationships of course can be an indirect relationship.

Because, in fact, when we received our art education realism in Germany and the realism tradition has profound influence on our own backgrounds and education. So, although realism may not reflect directly in my artwork, the relationship between art and reality and the fact that art originates from the society is very important to me.

MR. FAN: (Speaking in foreign language) So, I will first answer the question from someone who's actually from my hometown. The Chinese ink wash painting is actually an art form that's very systematic in the world. And it's unique not because of the objects that ink wash painting is trying to portray but, rather, it's the tools that are used, which has enabled a direct connection between the characteristics of the artwork and the artist's own sensitivity, and his or her own ecology.

We have talked a lot about the influence of Western art on Chinese or on Eastern art, but we can also trace several hints that evidences the impact of ink wash painting on the Western art. So as my friend, Jan, pointed out, it is important in the exhibition or in the museum world for different cultures to

cross reference, and I think that the same goes with ink wash painting in China.

So, if you are only adopting a kind of a closed mindset, adopting a linear inheritance of tradition, that is not going to resonate with the Western audience, but rather we should look for, or we should select in these exhibitions artworks that are able to resonate with the audience, and are able to identify common languages.

MR. LI: The third question. Anyone want to comment on the third question?

MR. FAN: (Speaking in Chinese) I think the question from the gentleman, the third question is actually very difficult to answer. But I think in terms of how Chinese culture, or Chinese exhibitions can communicate with the rest of the world, we need to consider two issues.

The first issue of consideration is how to, through a large-scale exhibition, display the modernity of Chinese art, I think this hasn't been done enough and its worth consideration. And also, since during the 20th century China has gone through wars and revolutions, the academia might have neglected whether throughout this experience China has develop its own unique modernity in art.

So I think, you know, the second issue indeed is, whether we can, through exhibitions and art exchanges, explore or discuss the modernity of art, of Chinese art -- (Speaking in Chinese) -- contemporary nature of Chinese art.

MR. LI: Any addition, comment, or just pass.

MS. STUART: I would just like to say that art, the best art is able to transcend cultural boundaries. And I'm going to be opening an exhibition in September that is a Mark Rothko painting next to a 15th century Chinese red-glazed ceramic, simply with the idea that art objects can have dialogues with each other. And we can have dialogues with art objects. And I think what Fan Di'an was talking about, is that China has created its own contemporary visual language, and the best of those artists actually are able to communicate internationally.

The slightly lesser level can communicate nationally. But the really transcendent ones, it becomes an international language.

MR. LI: Yea. I want end in fact, seven minutes, so last couple of questions. Anyone? The lady in the middle, yes, here in the middle. In the middle, here, yeah, with the white clothes? Why

don't you stand? Why don't you stand? Here, yeah. You've been so patient, yeah.

SPEAKER: So, Lu Tai from Western Media. My question is for President Fan. So, do you think the Western world is manipulating Chinese art market, and how do you see the future of Chinese art market?

MR. LI: Okay first question. Probably we don't have time for any more questions, I apologize. So, last question for you.

MR. FAN: (Speaking in Chinese) I don't have a lot of information on the subject, but I also don't think that I can agree to describe the relationship between the West and the Chinese market as the West is manipulating Chinese market? Of course the market is related with capital and we can have a discussion on the value and effectiveness, or the role of capital in art market.

And of course there has been a lot of international auctions, international auction market, and Chinese artworks have been offered very high prices, and within Chinese society there are a lot of folk collections, and that's also a very vibrant market. Of course, in theory we would like to say that artist should not follow the wind of the market, don't work for the market. Great artists always create with sincerity and eventually gain recognition and value from the market.

MR. LI: Thank you. Well, this has been an intellectual and artistic feast. And the images, ideas and the perspectives shared by our panelists have enriched our understanding of Chinese contemporary art. Its vitality, diversity and role of diplomacy.

Chinese culture in the artist scene, or creation are at the heart of China's art scene. But the Chinese contemporary art also reaches beyond these subject, and tries to identify and comment on something much greater, much bigger.

Now, I'd like to conclude with a quote by President John Kennedy who said at the peak of the Cold War, "I'm certain that after the dust of centuries has passed over our cities, we, too, will be remembered, not for victories or defeats in battles or in politics, but for our contributions to the human spirit."

The work of Xu Bing -- Xu Bing's and also Fan Di'an's reflect this human spirit. Its ability to imagine and build new creations, it's a constant search for peace and dignity, it's the critic of all kinds of

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absurdities, and it's call for international dialogue and global thinking. In honor of this human spirit I would like the audience to join me in thinking Xu Bing, Fan Di'an, Jan Stuart, and also our interpreter, I mean, he has interpreted for President Jimmy Carter, for those of you who do not know him, for this wonderfully, stimulated discussion. Thank you so much. (Applause)

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