

EMBODIED MODERNITY: THE GENDERED LANDSCAPE OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART

ROSEMARY HADDON

Formerly Massey University, Palmerston North

Abstract

This article explores the artwork of three contemporary women artists and their relationship with China's cultural modernity. It examines whether their use of non-traditional materials provides pathways for strategies and innovative practices and opens up space for agency, difference and subjectivity.

Lin Tianmiao 林天苗 (b. 1961) is a fabric artist known for her sculptures and installations made of cotton thread. The artist painstakingly winds undyed cotton thread around an array of household utensils, balls, mannequins, bones and tools in the creation of artworks that are gothic and surreal. Lin's art can be placed on a continuum that interrogates gender roles, performative subjectivity and the role of capitalism in modernisation.

Body art is the preferred medium of Chen Lingyang 陈羚羊 (b. 1975), who produced the series titled *Twelve Flower Months* (1999-2000). This tour de force comprises twelve photographs of genitalia during menstruation juxtaposed with the flowers of the Chinese traditional calendar. Chen deploys the symbols of traditionalism to critique the tradition and the signs of capitalism to critique the capitalist market economy. The notion of spectacle—the body as commodity—raises questions about the ambivalence of a modernity that is spinning out of control.

Last but not least, the multimedia works of Cao Fei 曹斐 (b. 1978) represent the intersection of post-feminism and post-socialism. They explore the boundaries between dream world and fantasy, the real and the unreal. They capture like none other China's massive transformation. Built on the platform of *Second Life*, *RMB City* (2007-2011) features an online metropolis that explores the creative relationship between real and virtual space and promotes reflection on China's urban over-development. Cao's avatar China Tracy is a hybrid of machine and organism that hacks online at the domination of singular identities. China and her infant son discuss the reality of cyborg life and imagine a world without gender, genesis or end.

Each artist represents by turns the landscape of China's cultural modernity as it advances rapidly forward to an unknown future. She explores the ways that the national culture interprets and imagines its moment of unfolding.

Contemporary Chinese art offers an alternative model of modernism. Its inscrutability, its non-rational and un-systematised force, and the graceless energy it abstracts from the experiences of daily life, are a crucial aspect of its character.

Xu Zhen

In China, reform and opening up fostered developments in culture and media that revolutionised its contemporary visual art. The flourishing of new trends and styles took place alongside a growth in art museums and exhibitions such as the Shanghai Biennial that was launched in 1996. These events transformed Chinese contemporary art into a global phenomenon, their success introducing commercialism and exchange value into the art scene.¹ The artistic developments were a sign of China's cultural edge and gave new meaning to its rise. From that time on, the country's cultural modernity became synonymous with sophistication, marketisation and individual creative expression.

China's contemporary visual art can be defined as a hybridising of global and domestic forces alongside the embracing or rejecting of tradition. Images and techniques appropriated from modernism and postmodernism became fused with indigenous cultural thought and practice (Gladston, 2014: 1). The transculturation of concepts and practices fostered experimentation in both expression and the use of materials and techniques. The artwork that subsequently took shape can be viewed as modern or postmodern, hybrid, unbounded, and linked to technology and new media. These developments, however, coincided with the decline of socialism and the resurgence of traditional practices. China's cultural traditionalism thenceforth militated against an identity that has attempted to be modern and progressive, globalising and internationalising.

These contradictions affect women artists in particular ways and are parlayed into their artistic practice where they take shape in various forms. Cui Shuqin examines the historical place of China's female visual image and argues for the need to insert women's narratives into Chinese art history. More to the point, she comments on the relative absence of women artists in exhibitions and the neglect of agency despite the fact that Chinese contemporary art has attracted increased global attention (2016: 1). During May Fourth (1919) women artists were viewed either as students to be educated or as the other to be enlightened. National salvation ensured that representations of the female body served as indicators of modernity or sites of modernity for the purpose of constructing national discourses. Under socialism, female agency was located within a state-authored feminism that denied difference and regulated women's emancipation as a means to propagate political ideology (*Ibid.* 20–24). More recently, transnational post-modernity has accorded visibility to woman as an autonomous subject and has helped to raise the profile of women artists who strive for recognition and to achieve a national or international reputation.

1 The sale at Sotheby's in 2008 of Zhang Xiaogang's *Bloodline: Big Family No. 3* (1995) for a record-breaking US \$12 million is commonly cited as an example of the rise in the commercial value of Chinese art.

This article uses Cui Shuqin's study as the point-of-departure for an examination of contemporary gendered aesthetics to understand issues of agency, subjectivity and modernity. The focus is three contemporary women artists and their use of non-traditional materials and/or techniques. It builds on notions of the body, subjectivity and identity; the commodity culture; and the use of new media to explore temporality and change. All three artists create strategies of translation that are hybrid and fluid, and offer a lens on the rapid socio-economic change. Do fabric, body art and virtual reality offer strategies for agency, difference and freedom from traditional constraints? Are the works themselves subversive or complicit? Do innovative techniques offer an opportunity to critique China's cultural modernity in particular and global capitalist modernity in general? These questions provide insights into China's changing national culture and the way that contemporary modernity interprets and imagines its moment of unfolding.

Ambivalent strands in the pattern of fabric art

Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961) projects an image of innovative artistry that suggests radical change but halts at the threshold of genuine cultural change. This artist is known for her thread winding that puts a new spin on woman's work for a purpose that is all her own. Her extraordinary artwork validates folk virtues of frugality and thrift while interrogating traditional gender mores and the capitalist consumer economy. Biology is a more ambivalent motif and suggests conformity to conventional social roles. These carefully wrought pieces showcase a vision of modernity that is reminiscent of Lu Xun, China's twentieth-century writer who consigned traditionalism to the historical past while affirming traditional values and beliefs. Like him, Lin's impetus toward cultural change runs side-by-side with an ongoing attachment to the traditional cultural past.

Lin Tianmiao is a fabric artist from Taiyuan, Shanxi province, and one of a handful of Chinese women artists to achieve an international reputation. This member of the "apartment art" generation painstakingly winds undyed cotton thread around an array of household utensils, balls, mannequins, bones, tools and other objects in the creation of artworks that are aesthetically neutralised and can be interpreted as a "white still life" (Fibicher, 2005a: 318).² The process of binding entails "smothering, protecting, and transforming" while the objects themselves evoke the gothic, grotesque, surreal and theatrical (Gaskin, 2015; Johnson, 2012). Her repertoire of sculptures and installations is the medium for far-ranging themes: the domesticity that deadens and numbs, the performance of self, and the body that re-imagines the reality of women's lives. Subjectivity is bound up in a language of materiality that is at once oppressive and redemptive.

2 Lin's arrangements of inanimate objects recall the painting genre of still life. The objects themselves are presented in varying shades of white.

The use of textiles to create art is associated with the revival of fibre art in Europe and North America during the 1960s and 1970s. Under the guidance of Judy Chicago, a movement took place that celebrated and reclaimed domestic arts such as needlework, embroidery and others. The techniques of knotting, weaving, twining and plaiting were revived for the purpose of creating wall-mounted or freestanding pieces (Lin, 2016). To be considered “art”, the objects should prioritise aesthetic value over utility and address topics such as gender, domesticity, personal and collective identities, women’s rights, the body, sex and others (Marcus, 2004: 3; Lin, 2016). Issues of difference, identity and rights dovetailed with the movement of third-wave feminism that militates against gender stereotypes while engaging with postmodernism to critique the culture of consumerism. The valuing of fabric or textile art is itself a feminist act due to its historic denigration that correlates with the neglect of traditional woman-centred activities. Beth Ann Pentney elaborates that domestic arts such as knitting can be utilised for feminist goals even if practitioners may not identify as feminist (2008). She adds that domestic cultural practices constitute a viable mode of political action that contributes to the promotion of a feminist ethos (*Ibid.*).

China likewise boasts a long tradition of textile art, needlework and crafts. The material artifacts were prominent in everyday life and were used to make clothes, rugs, wall decorations, furnishings and other objects. Their status as meaningful objects, related to the formation of identity, on the other hand, has emerged only recently in China’s contemporary art scene (Cui, 2016: 98). Historically, silk, hemp and embroidery were the preferred materials that were used in the production of textiles and textile art. Cotton was available since early times but was used primarily to make clothing for the lower classes. During the Ming era (1368-1644) cotton underwent a revolution and evolved into an industry that rivalled silk production. The humble material fostered a golden age for women’s incomes: cotton textile production catalysed a high level of female earnings and led to an economics of respectability for women (Xue, 2018). Cotton’s subsequent history is a story of a domestic industry service integrated with rural gender norms that flourished despite the external trade in cotton and cotton goods. Throughout the era of socialism, rural women continued to spend a large portion of their waking hours spinning and weaving to produce cotton thread and homespun cloth (*tubu*) some of which was used for barter.³ Lin Tianmiao draws on the complex legacy of cotton production to create a surface texture onto which are stitched ideas that are old and new, traditional and non-traditional. This artist conforms to a trend in contemporary visual modernity that transforms the Chinese cultural heritage from without.⁴

Lin’s installation *Bound Unbound* (1995-1997) combines thread winding with elements of deconstruction and bricolage to re-imagine the self as it is enmeshed in domestic life. The installation constitutes a contested site for the struggle between the old self and the new, bygone frugality and the values of the contemporary consumer economy. The subjugated self is caught in the intersection between past and present and

3 For the history of cotton production in China, see Kang Chao, *The Development of Cotton Textile Production in China* by Kang Chao (1977) and Jacob Eyferth, “Women’s Work and the Politics of Homespun in Socialist China, 1949-1980” (2012).

4 Wu Hong (2013) refers to this trend as a subset of Chinese contemporary artists.



Figure 1: *Bound Unbound* by Lin Tianmiao, 1995-1997. Accessed at <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/china/articles/no-feminism-in-china-an-interview-with-lin-tianmiao/>

is yet to make the transition to an emancipated state. *Bound Unbound* comprises 548 household utensils including bowls, plates, bottles and chopsticks that are tightly bound in cotton thread and placed at random on the installation floor. The artist suggests that the process of wrapping makes the objects worthless, “denying both their identity and their ultimate function” (Lin, 2001, quoted in Cui, 2016: 100). Cui Shuqin uses the term “deconstruction” to argue that the process of wrapping subverts women’s entrenched domesticity and their subordination in the domestic sphere (*Ibid.* 100). An on-site video projection features scissors poised to cut the warp threads, undoing what has been labouriously done. They suggest that objects can be unwrapped as well as wrapped, releasing what is repressed (*Ibid.* 101). *Bound Unbound* showcases the conflict between the hidebound identity and the desire to cut loose from traditional ties. The dilemma echoes the struggle to be both Chinese and modern, all the while remaining anchored in the traditional cultural past.

Bound Unbound raises issues of mass production and consumption and the role of capitalism in modernisation. Pre-industrial China suffered scarcity that fostered frugality and determination. The recycling of materials that were rarely thrown out was a survival strategy in an environment of poverty and deprivation that tested the limits of human endurance. Paul Theroux records in a similar way the industriousness of China’s peasant class and the patching, sewing and mending that informed ordinary life from traditional times until recently (2006: 188, 463). During the 1960s and 1970s when central planning was at its height, the valuing of scarce resources such as cotton thread was part of an ongoing narrative of thrift that was central to everyday life. The cotton gloves supplied by the work unit (*danwei*) were of particular value: the thread was unbound, washed and re-used to make sweaters and hats (Sun, 2012). *Bound Unbound* reinvents the narrative of thrift for purposes that are nostalgic and contests today’s wasteful commodity economy. The series memorialises the bygone frugality and the once-coveted household items that are now obsolete.

Waste Not (2005) by Song Dong (b. 1966) re-cycles in a similar way the nostalgia that contests the throwaway culture of consumerism. The installation displays over 10,000 household items from the home of the artist’s late mother, a woman who experienced first-hand the scarcity of the Maoist era. The row upon row of bottle caps, toothpaste tubes, toys, food utensils, ballpoint pens and other items re-imagine the deprivation, anxiety and fear of forty years earlier. The obsessive hoarding constructs a time capsule of modernising China that emerged from the cocoon of the past. *Bound Unbound* and *Waste Not* draw in equal measure on the lyrical and the mundane, the socialist past and the modernising present.



Figure 2: *Waste Not* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2006. Photograph by Andrew Russeth [Original image is in colour]. Accessed via Creative Commons licence <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>



Figure 3: *Braiding* by Lin Tianmiao, 1998. Accessed at http://sites.asiasociety.org/arts/past_future/perform01.html

Braiding (1998) by Lin Tianmiao takes to a higher level the issues of identity and the entangled self. This mixed media installation chronicles the subjectivity that emerges in the face of all odds. The freestanding piece comprises braided cotton threads, a digitised self-photograph and a video. In the foreground looms the twelve-foot high self-portrait that is airbrushed to androgyny and secured to a metal frame. Braided threads descend down from the back and cross over the installation floor. They lead to a video projection of the artist braiding the installation threads. The self-referentiality evokes a recursive loop that simulates the arduous process in the performative construction of identity. The piece showcases the constitution of self that takes place via the repetitive activity of braiding threads, stitching across surfaces and

binding the stitching to the tall metal frame. The installation's bindings are a metaphor of the oppressive socio-cultural constraints that must be negotiated, while the act of braiding represents the repetitive processes that bring the self into being. The braiding and re-braiding, binding and re-binding subvert the collective constraints and achieve an identity that is hybrid and ambiguous.

Lin Tianmiao's portrait recalls the celebratory images of China's political pop art of the 1990s. Modelled after the American Pop movement of the 1960s, this satirical art form juxtaposes Cultural Revolution propaganda, such as grandiose portraits of Chairman Mao Zedong, with symbols of globalisation and consumer culture (Li, 2017). The pop aesthetic of Li Shan, Wang Guangyi and other artists coincided with the resurgence of Mao Fever and its associated nostalgic memorabilia in which portraits of the Great Helmsman appeared on postage stamps, cigarette lighters, badges and other consumer items. The victorious subjectivity of Lin's portrait resonates with the large-scale propaganda photos of Mao Zedong while overturning the Chinese-style bravado of the pop images with their hubris of sham masculinity. The shattering of the gender stereotyping opens up space for asexuality but elides other identities, subjectivities and romantic orientations. In China, progress has been made in the recognition of gay, lesbian, binary, non-binary and queer identities, but there is still a long way to go. *Braiding* captures the ambivalence in the progress that has been made to date. In short, it subverts the masculinised culture while deploying the totalising sameness to perpetuate social and cultural repression.

Lin Tianmiao walks a fine line between traditionalism and enlightened social modernity. The ambivalence suggests the entrenched protocols that are not easily overturned. Biology is the final frontier due to its power to determine agency, notwithstanding the impulse that puts woman at the centre of works. Lin's gendered history is constituted in the language of materiality that binds and re-binds and betrays the slippage to conventional biological roles. Her "bodies that matter" possess the ability to speak to the material level of sexuality and reproduction; nonetheless, they remain silent throughout.⁵

Viewers who give due consideration may query the subversive role of contemporary visual art when it comes to the changing national culture. By contrast, Chen Lingyang (b. 1975) deploys a more seasoned approach to navigate the complex and contradictory forces that compound the reality of women's lives. Her iconoclasm takes the form of the intersection of the bias of traditional culture and the commodification of the capitalist market economy. In Chen's artistic imagination, these forces are the source, moreover, of the dark side of the country's socio-economic transformation, that is, the widespread social and psychological malaise that haunts many Chinese lives.

5 The phrase "bodies that matter" is borrowed from Judith Butler's essay of the same name. (See Judith Butler, "Bodies that Matter" (2015 [1993]).

Subversive tendencies of flowers and blood

Is art that shocks and repels necessarily subversive? In what way do blood and flowers challenge traditional mores? Last but not least, is there a relationship between assertive femininity and the anxieties of late capitalism? These questions apply to Chen Lingyang, an artist from Zhejiang province who deploys the symbols of traditionalism to interrogate tradition and the signs of capitalism to critique the commodity market economy. The motifs of blood, flowers, mirrors and the body that bleeds and feels pain work together in unison to create a conversation about anxiety and the ills in the current social and cultural environment. Chen's images reflect a long tradition of using plants as symbols of bodily desires and physical problems as metaphors for moral or emotional concerns (Bai, 2005: 155; Ryor, 2005: 155). Chen Lingyang contrasts with her older contemporary Lin Tianmiao in obvious ways: her femininity promotes agency as a force for social change.

Chen's menstrual art makes a statement about metaphysics and femininity, taboo and ecological health. This artist uses an analogue camera for its heightened truth value and its ability to freeze time. The photography captures the temporality in the cycles of life, in particular, the flow of menstrual blood that synchronises with the laws and rhythms of the natural world. Chen first came to fame as a young artist in 1999 when she smeared menstrual blood on a six-metre long narrow strip of paper mounted on silk. The horizontal piece titled *Scroll* launches a celebration of the female essence and presents a manifesto against a cultural tradition that is the exclusive preserve of men (Fibicher, 2005b: 310).

Twelve Flower Months (1999-2000) mounts a similar manifesto. The photo-montage combines shots of the artist's genitalia during menstruation juxtaposed with the botanical symbols of the Chinese traditional calendar— narcissus for the first month, magnolia for the second month, and so on.⁶ Flower imagery is used throughout history to depict women's beauty, in particular, the peony that in the late Ming was a symbol of gorgeous women and their genitalia (Ryor, 2005: 137). The associated meanings of beauty, fecundity and germination stand the test of time and transcend the boundaries of east and west (Green-Cole, 2015). In *Twelve Flower Months*, the cyclical revolution of flowers, flows, months and years is rooted in a Daoist cosmology that is ecological in philosophical orientation and links the cycles of the universe to cycles in the body (Li, 2001).

Chen's menstrual art merges bricolage, performance, fragmentation, irony and spectacle, all part of the postmodernism that informs China's contemporary visual art. The proliferation of images suggests the spectacle of the mass media and the unreal nature of the commodity economy.⁷ The reified spectacle at the centre of the work – the body in bits and pieces – is re-written as fetish and detached from real life.

6 The first month is represented as the narcissus; the second, magnolia; the third, peach blossom; the fourth, peony; the fifth, pomegranate; the sixth, lotus; the seventh, orchid; the eighth, osmanthus; the ninth, chrysanthemum; the tenth, poinsettia; the eleventh, camellia; and the twelfth, plum blossom.

7 See Guy-Ernest Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1994) for an examination of the spectacle of mass media.

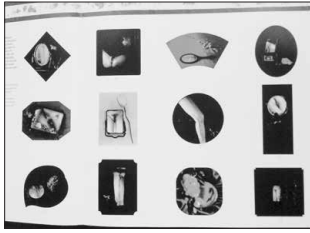


Figure 4: *Twelve Flower Months* by Chen Lingyang 1999-2000. As depicted in the book “Chen Lingyang”. 2005. In Bernhard Fibicher and Matthias Frehner (eds), *Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection*. Hatje Cantz: 310–311.

Chen playfully reworks the spectacle of mass culture to interrogate the declining social relations and the psychological effects of rapid social change. Framing devices draw attention to who is doing the gazing and on what. The focus alternates between the gaze of the spectator and the self-gaze, that is, the gaze of the self that gazes on itself. The interlocking frames consist of traditional shapes, the mirror, the photographic meme, the camera lens and the human lens.⁸ Among them, the mirror is key: it mediates the gaze of the self as it gazes on itself. Michel Foucault comments that the mirror signifies both presence and absence, real and unreal. It enables seeing yourself when you are absent and the discovery of your absence from the place where you are (1984: 4). The rupture of the fourth wall enables the participation of the spectator who contributes to the construction of the story about what is displayed within. Kathleen Ryor comments in a similar way on the somatic effects of art in which the body of woman and the bodily needs and desires of both artist and audience constantly converge and intersect (2005: 145).

Chen’s postmodernism challenges the hierarchies of old and new, and the high and low cultures that inform everyday life. The presence of the old inserted into the new creates a dissonance between the expected image and the scenes that actually appear before one’s eyes: the tableaux reminiscent of a private boudoir. Traditional Chinese shapes frame each print: fan, peach, mirror, door, window, tile and hanging scroll. The mirrors of differing shapes, bright red against lacquer black, and the cultural narratives of colours and flowers recall the lyricism of China’s imperial past. The motifs embellish the peephole into the voyeuristic display. Mary Wiseman comments that Chen Lingyang “dresses her bleeding vagina in the clothes of classical China: flowers and mirrors beautifully shaped like the windows in garden pavilions” (2011: 19). She adds that the artist treats her monthly flow as a subject worthy of artistic expression as flowers and mirrors (*Ibid.*). These metaphors encourage meditation on aesthetics, the boundaries between the inner and outer world, and the thresholds of imagination in conceptual art.

This story written in blood about blood comprises a textured layering of narratives, discourses and competing cultural worlds. The essentialism that links vaginas with flowers is complicit with traditional norms and contests the feminism for which the

8 Credit is due to Ruth Green-Cole for this idea. Her list includes the eye, the mirror, the camera, the photograph and the reproduction of the photograph (2015).

artist is known.⁹ The iconoclasm, on the other hand, lifts the lid on traditional values to expose the bias beneath. In traditional China, menstruation is commonly deemed dirty or polluting: it evokes the ambiguous fear of feminine power and the misogyny of traditional Chinese life (Furth and Ch'en, 1992: 27). Menstruating women are forbidden from entering temples and the menstruating body is a particularly powerful cultural marker of female inferiority with its multiple negative messages (*Ibid.* 44–45). In short, “gendered blood” transforms woman into the subject of evil and taboo, the cause of which must be kept firmly out of sight (Green-Cole, 2015). The display of genitalia oozing blood possesses a shock value that disturbs the traditional order: it dispels the taboos surrounding a bodily function that is normally kept well out of sight.

Chen Lingyang explains that the series of twelve prints was produced during a twelve-month period in which she experienced poor mental health. During the time in question—from November 1999 to December 2000—she was unemployed and suffered from anxiety and social isolation (Cui, 2016: 124). As a consequence, she developed a greater awareness of her body and the way that the cycles of nature coincided with her menstrual cycle (*Ibid.*). *Twelve Flower Months* chronicles this significant life episode and her journey back to wellbeing. The following discussion deals with selected images and their salient themes of self-affirmation and regeneration.

First Month Narcissus launches the odyssey with a monologue on shame: the lower half of the body facing away suggests abjection and a turning away from the source of the humiliation. Positioned in the in-between space framed by the mirror, the blurred image denotes a transforming inner self. The narcissus reinforces the idea of new beginnings and the possibility of renewal.¹⁰



Figure 5: *First Month Narcissus* from *Twelve Flower Months* by Chen Lingyang 1999-2000. As viewed from the Walther Collection website. <http://www.walthercollection.com/en/collection/artworks/the-first-month-narcissus-from-twelve-month-flowers>

Seventh Month Orchid stages the unthinkable to overturn the taboo. The cocked leg with the show of blood flaunts in broad daylight what is normally suppressed. It trumpets loud and clear: womanhood is desirable and should be treated with awe. *Eighth Month Osmanthus* evokes the otherness of voluptuous feminine space: the lighter tones

9 Bernhard Fibicher refers to *Twelve Flower Months* as an “absolute masterpiece of feminist art” (2005b: 310).

10 The narcissus, which in the west denotes self-love, symbolises the lunar New Year in the Chinese traditional calendar.



Figure 6: *Tenth Month Poinsettia* from *Twelve Flower Months* by Chen Lingyang 1999-2000. As viewed from <https://hyperheterotopia.wordpress.com/2014/05/17/chen-lingyang-twelve-flower-months-1999-2000/>

encasing the darker folds showcase the sensual architecture of feminine desire. *Tenth Month Poinsettia* poses a similar celebration: the image of the inner thigh streaming with blood is transgressive and unsettles traditional mores. The disembodied thigh both repels and attracts, shifting the gaze from voyeurism to aesthetic contemplation. The trickle of dark red caressing the inner thigh washes away the shame and creates new meanings for erotic desire. Inscribed with the cultural connotations of *yipinhong* (poinsettia), the apparition disrupts the boundaries marking inside and out and reimagines the aesthetics that privilege feminine norms.¹¹ The vagina power with its fecundity and health embellish in a similar way *Eleventh Month Camellia* that flaunts even more the erotic properties of lines, folds, petals and flesh. Embedded with a gaze within a gaze, the images put on display the source of feminine power bursting with life. The images re-script the object of pleasure as the subject of *joissance* and open up space for the speculum that sheds light on what was once unfathomable or unknown.¹² The rupture of *neiwai* (inner, outer) and *gongsi* (public, private) subverts the ingrained practices and dichotomies that perpetuate the subordination.¹³ Chen's journey back to health closes with the lower half of the body that faces the mirror. *Twelfth Month Plum* suggests agency and, like the plum flower itself, the ability to stay the course.¹⁴

Twelve Flower Months recalls *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago (1979), an installation comprising elaborately stylised vulvas on place settings set against runners embroidered with equally elaborate needlework. *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler deals in a similar way with identity, sexuality and feminine empowerment. It brings the vagina to the light of day where it makes a statement about cultural norms, sexuality as the source of empowerment and the vagina as the ultimate embodiment of individuality. Herstory breaks taboos, strips away shame and foregrounds the vagina as the tool of empowerment. These pioneering works overturn the historic invisibility of woman in culture and art.

11 *Yipinhong* 一品红 translates to "everything red."

12 In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) Luce Irigaray uses the speculum as a metaphor for woman's exclusion from Western philosophical discourse and to argue for an understanding of sexual difference.

13 See Cordia Ming-Yeuk Chu (1980) for a discussion of entrenched folk beliefs about menstruation and menstrual blood.

14 In traditional Chinese thought, the plum flower represents endurance and nobility.

Twelve Flower Months is an allegory about the crisis of the personal self that mirrors the crisis of the national self. To borrow the words of W.B. Yeats, the centre cannot hold and a blood-dimmed tide is loosed upon the world.¹⁵ The use of menstrual blood to spell out the crisis is transgressive and hints at just how broken the system is. Chen Lingyang herself walks a fine line between wellness and ill health, victimhood and empowerment. Her motifs of blood, flowers and the body tell a story about personal pain. At the same time, they create an allegory about moral and emotional concerns and the etiology of a wider, pervasive malaise.

Modernity at the intersection of the virtual and the real

If Chen Lingyang represents the subversiveness of *yin*, then Cao Fei (b. 1978) embodies the predominance of *yang*. This award-winning artist deploys new media to create a futuristic vision referencing technological and other forms of change.¹⁶ Cao came of age with the internet and pushes the envelope of creativity in ways that go beyond conventional art. Her aesthetic represents the outlook of the new millennium and dissects the language of modernity in ways that were previously inconceivable. Virtual reality is Cao's tool of choice to stage the urban landscape of migrants and youth, the cybernetics of virtual city life and the anomalies of rapid change. Underpinned with irony and wit, her multimedia works traverse the boundaries of gender and nation, fantasy and reality, the real and the unreal.

Cao Fei was born in Guangzhou to a family of artists.¹⁷ As a teen her family resided in Hong Kong, where she had access to global culture through the medium of MTV. She recalls spending her youth in the world of electronic entertainment and advertising (Cao, March 2015). The internet was readily available and Cao became drawn to digital platforms in a way that is second nature. The artistic repertoire that emerged contains a mix of documentary and fantasy, social commentary and popular aesthetics (Cao, 2015). Hers is a world of simulation, animation, avatars and cyborgs, in other words, an artificially intelligent environment that excites utopian imaginings and enables reinventions of the self.

Cao Fei is a member of the younger generation of Chinese artists that came of age after the Cultural Revolution. This cohort possesses first-hand insight into modernity and operates with a mindset unrestrained by the previous socio-cultural protocols (Smith, 2007: 17). The demise of the cultural legacy of Maoism fostered an artistic sensibility free of politics and cynicism. The result is a generation concerned with a search for authenticity, the personal, and one's place as an individual rather than with the

15 The lines are from the poet's "The Second Coming" (1920).

16 Cao Fei received the Best Young Artist Award at the 2006 Chinese Contemporary Art Awards. She was nominated for the Future Generation Art Prize and was a finalist for the Hugo Boss Prize, both in 2010. She has held multiple solo exhibitions and has participated in international biennials and triennials.

17 Cao's father is a sculptor and a former professor of drawing and sculpture at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Her mother is a printmaker.

achievement of a collective position in a society lacking a stable reference point (Groom, 2007: 13). For the first time, Chinese artists thought of themselves as individual creators rather than as members of a collective resistance to social oppression or as a front serving the cause of politics or the market (Hou, 2005: 33). This generation understands China's place in the world and their individual position in a society defined by change (Grunenberg, 2007: 6). Theirs is an everyday reality in which everything is subject to a transformation that is not only total but also beyond anything many of us could possibly envisage (Groom, 2007: 15). Framed by co-existing worlds and temporalities, the narrow band of the present is constantly superseded by future possibilities that give way to yet further visions of what the future might hold. How to envision the self is the mission of artists like Cao who seek to secure a sense of oneself in a context defined by flux.

Cao Fei's work at the turn of the millennium explores the radical urban transition and pairs off disparate characters with their physical environment or, alternatively, ordinary people with an interfaced world of fantasy and reality (Smith, 2007: 47; Cui, 2016: 171). *COSplayers* (2004) showcases the youth culture of those who grew up in China's coastal cities. The video-game addicts are infatuated with personal fantasies and engage in posturing and escape like youth everywhere (Smith, 2007: 45–46). The cinematic work reveals the vulnerability of these urban adolescents and the escape route afforded by manga or anime. During the day, they conform to the daily routine at home and school. But by nightfall, the costumed teens play out their heroic fantasies in abandoned warehouses or construction sites.

Milkman (2005) depicts in a similar way the split between the private, or fantasy, self and the public self that confronts the reality of the workaday world. The protagonist is an aspiring singer who must settle for life as a humble milkman. *Whose Utopia? What are you doing here?* (2006) (*Ibid.* 47) likewise deals with the interior fantasy world and the aspirations that live on as dream. This colour video was produced during Cao's participation in Siemens Arts residency programme, undertaken in the company's manufacturing plants across China (*Ibid.* 48). The artist chose to do her residency in the Osram Foshan lighting factory in the Pearl River Delta Economic Zone, the site of her research, surveys and filming (Cao, January 2015).¹⁸ The Delta is particularly attractive for young migrants from the countryside who have left their farms for the flourishing



Figure 7: *Whose Utopia? What are you doing here?* by Cao Fei, 2006. Images from the video can be viewed from https://www.google.com/search?q=whose+utopia%3F+cao+fei&client=safari&rls=en&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj4ILv86fDfAhVJqI8KH8a-TAO0Q_AUIDigB&biw=1440&bih=765#imgsrc=7Z1tf9Xz3RBwM:

18 Cao Fei spent six months researching, interviewing and holding workshops for the factory workers prior to the filming. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/whose-utopia>

urban centres. The camera lens focuses on the workers, both men and women, young and old, who engage in the repetitive, mechanised task of making lightbulbs. The lens then shifts from the labouring body to the performing body that acts out the fantasies: the elegant dancer of the Peacock Dance, the middle-aged worker who dreams of becoming a martial arts master and the would-be rock star whose dreams may or may not become reality.

The performance takes place along conveyor belts or in the aisles of the packing plant that serve as the stage for the alter ego of the anonymous figures who dance and play while their co-workers labour on obliviously at the production line. The poetic, dreamlike vision “illuminates the otherwise invisible emotions, desires and dreams” of the labouring classes that are constrained by reality but refuse to be diminished (Trotman, 2007). The video concludes with a close-up of faces that challenge the dismissal of dreams that are no less real than the dreams of anyone trapped in the dystopia of industrialisation. The words printed across their T-shirts read, “My future is not a dream”. *Whose Utopia?* presents China as the world’s factory and raises questions about the utopia being portrayed. Is it the workers’ utopia, the city utopia or the utopia of capital? (Cao, March 2015). The docudrama exposes the sacrifices that take place for sake of the national aspiration: the Chinese dream of the current president of the People’s Republic of China.

RMB City (2007-2011) features a utopia of a different sort, one the artist refers to as E-topia City, E-colony city, mobile city, among other terms (Hauters, 2009). Cao’s magnum opus captures the tension between reality and utopia, public space and individual freedom. The online metropolis was conceived and developed by the artist, produced through a team of collaborators, and supported by a range of art institutions and networks. According to the official website, *RMB City* comprises an online art community that explores the creative relationship between real and virtual space and the explosion in urbanisation and culture (Cao, 2009). The kaleidoscopic depiction is a “condensed incarnation of Chinese cities” and provokes reflection on the massive transformation they continue to undergo (Cao, 2015 [2007]; Berry, 2015: 207). Created on the platform of Second Life, the metropolis is a hybrid of Beijing and global metropolitan settings, or an abridged version of the PRC itself. The 3D virtual world is a laboratory for creative activities such as architecture, cinema, politics and society and is used to stage live theatre, filmmaking and games. Cao Fei elaborates that the project derived from her experience living in 24/7 cities such as Guangzhou and Hong Kong, adding that she conceived the project around the time of *Cities on the Move* (Cao, March 2015).¹⁹ *RMB City* is a virtual response to the urban scene and incorporates the “entire ecology of artistic creativity” with its “imagination of elsewhere” that includes the archaeological record of past possibilities, selfie culture and other things (*Ibid.*). This is the embodiment of future architecture, virtual community building, multicultural exchange and pan-internationalism. The postmodern collage of landmarks and urban over-development constitutes a model of urban planning and interfaces the Chinese nation with the contemporary global world.

19 *Cities on the Move* (2014-2016) is a NewCities event about the future of urban mobility.



Figure 8: *RMB City* by Cao Fei, 2007-2011. Image accessed from the artist's site <http://www.caofei.com/news.aspx>

The virtual world is inherently transgressive: it affords unlimited opportunities to design and to play. More significant, it provides insights into the psychology of users and how they negotiate their identity online. This idea applies especially to Second Life, which gives players the freedom to build their own worlds, create alternative identities and write their own stories online. For women users, cyberspace offers the opportunity to engage with the “informatics of domination” to re-write the social constructs of gender and sex. Cao Fei’s avatar China Tracy exemplifies the freedom to experiment with identity and to explore new avenues to gain power and authority. She is a hybrid of machine and organism, an “extension of touch and feeling, a resident braving adventure in the virtual world and a mirror image” (Hauters, 2009). The cyborg has the ability to subvert hierarchies and to hack online at the domination of singular identities and the grids of control that suppress marginalised groups— women, ethnic minorities and alternative sexual identities. Donna Haraway argues that the cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that transcends the polarity of public and private to define the revolution in social relations (1990: 192). The condensed image of imagination and material reality is resolutely committed to partiality and perversity (*Ibid.* 191, 192). The symbol of post-feminism explores the new metropolis with her young son China Sun, re-writing the discourses of domination and identity, gender and sex. Their conversation touches on their ontology that is freed from procreation and the myth that equates sex with reproduction alone. Cao Fei’s cybernetic beings possess no memory of the past and imagine a world without gender, genesis or end. The post-humanism is innately subversive and goes to the heart of the mythologies that manipulate and control the country’s collective life.

RMB City’s activities extend to civil disobedience and the undoing of class and social divisions. The online city comprises images of a smokestack belching smoke, a statue of Chairman Mao, a giant panda, a shopping cart full of skyscrapers and architectural icons such as Beijing’s new CCTV building and the Bird’s Nest stadium. The landmarks are out of reach for most people in real life but are open for free access in Second Life. The People’s Big Elephant Centre consists of demolished or unfinished buildings, a sight all too familiar in the chaotic urban landscape of Beijing’s



Figure 9: *China Tracy from RMB City* by Cao Fei, 2007-2011. Image accessed from the Asia Society website <http://museum.asiasociety.org/collection/artists/cao-fei/object/2011-009-i-mirror-by-china-tracy-aka-cao-fei-second-life-documentary-film>

contemporary built environment. The Centre stands as a critique of the transition from the planned economy to the capitalist enterprise of the free market economy (Cui, 2016: 179). Even the name *RMB* (*renminbi*) suggests a city constructed with capital rather than with the interests of the people in mind.

The parodies of architectural landmarks satirise the symbols of power and control and enable alternative histories that subvert the socialist ideal. People's Palace is modeled after the Forbidden City but serves as the city hall and information centre for online visitors (*Ibid.* 178). People's Patron Saint recalls the monument of revolutionary martyrs in Tiananmen Square, but the knock-off interrogates the meaning of the heroic figures in the construction of history (*Ibid.*). The counter-narrative challenges the ideology of heroism in China's revolutionary history and the presence of propaganda in the writing of national history. The re-writing of history is a form of civil disobedience that is out of the question in real life but flies under the radar in Second Life. There, it interrogates the operations of power of the post-socialist state.

RMB correlates phonetically with "remember" and evokes the loss of collective memory with China's rapid and chaotic change. *Haze and Fog* (2013) deals in a similar way with the razing of old Beijing to allow for the modern metropolis.²⁰ This dark zombie film queries the impact to the collective consciousness of those living in the time of the "magical metropolis" or the reality that is already beyond imagination (Cao, 2013; Wade, 2013). The images of the walking dead that have lost their soul question the ethics of progress and the transformation of social and cultural capital that lacks intrinsic meaning. By contrast, *RMB City* memorialises the new that supersedes the old. China Tracy comments, "There is no place in Second Life that is familiar to Chinese people. Collective identity and memory will be lost if no one ever logs onto a globalized cyberspace and virtual world" (Cui, 2016: 177). *RMB City* is a heterotopia: it reflects but does not restore the present. Our memories of the past are likewise not recalled (China Tracy, 2009). Online, even memory is virtual: one remembers nothing of what came before, sensing only the virtual. The site manifesto reiterates that the purpose is the birth of a city that cannot be wiped from memory. The temporality of the virtual world frames the transition to a collective consciousness in which we forget the temporality of what came before. Preserving memory in this way anchors the self to the present and allows us to live on.



Figure 10: Still image from *Haze and Fog* by Cao Fei, 2013.

20 *Haze and Fog* was filmed after the artist moved from Guangzhou to Beijing, notorious for its poor air quality.

RMB City promotes critical thinking about urban over-development and fosters participation for the purpose of creating change. The digital platform of Second Life obliges us to log on and to set up an avatar in order to navigate the site. The user is thus in a position to observe the online activities and inhabitants and to reflect on the transformation that has taken place through massive urban construction. This participation fosters a heightened consciousness that translates into political and social activity in the real world, or at least reflection on what is happening there (Berry, 2015: 211). Chris Berry argues that Cao Fei's virtual city is a form of participatory art that promotes interventionism and overturns the rationality and alienation of modern urban life (*Ibid.* 204, 215). More important, the metropolis showcases the power of the algorithm to transform human life. Once logged on, the user comes face to face with the future consequences of the digital age: the global inter-connectivity, the transforming identities, smart cities, robotics, human enhancement, the future of *homo sapiens* and the endless possibilities of artificial intelligence. *RMB City*'s message can be summed up in this way: the algorithm is the way of the future and China is a leader in this future that in many respects has already arrived.

* * *

To sum up, China's contemporary visual modernity presents a panorama of old and new ideas mapped onto old and new technologies. Framed by contending forces and philosophical trends, it captures the complexities in the national culture as it undergoes rapid socio-economic change. Art by contemporary Chinese women provides a particularly useful lens into the changing national culture not only because of the resurgence of traditionalism but also because of the issues of agency, difference and post-feminism. Each of these three women artists has something valuable to say about China's unfolding modernity and the way forward to the future of change.

Lin Tianmiao's fabric art aims to cleave free from traditionalism, but the embedded memories block the impetus toward radical social change. Caught in a web of ambivalence, her bodies that matter re-imagine the reality of women's lives: the numbing effects of domesticity, the complexities of sexual identity and the ongoing entrenched biological roles. Lin's "white still life" says something significant about the continuing hold of the legacy on contemporary life. By contrast, Chen Lingyang deploys an iconoclastic approach to the traditional legacy that intersects with the commodity market economy. The intersection of the symbols of traditionalism with the signs of commodification creates a powerful critique of the ills in the current social and economic environment. Her iconography bifurcates into the smaller and larger self in which the etiology of one is interchangeable with the other. *Twelve Flower Months* suggests alignment with natural laws as a way back to ecological health. The performative display promotes reflection on the body as commodity and the market economy as the source of the dis-ease. Cao Fei, in turn, represents the radical development in the use of cyber tools to critique China's cultural modernity in particular and global capitalist modernity in general. This pioneering artist traverses the interface between authenticity and ideology, public space and independent worldview to access the dreams of the inner self and the world of the subcultures that bear the brunt of

change. The imagination of cyberspace transforms the user in previously inconceivable ways, bringing to life online the futuristic vision that is radical and perverse, post-socialist and post-humanist. In short, *RMB City* fosters disobedience and brings to light the dreams that will always remain hidden in the non-virtual world. Each of the three artists discussed here embodies temporalities old and new and spaces that are virtual and non-virtual to explore the ways that China's national culture interprets and imagines its moment of unfolding.

Glossary

Cao Fei	曹斐
Chinese Dream <i>Zhongguo meng</i>	中国梦
Chen Lingyang	陈羚羊
<i>COSplayers Jiaose</i>	角色
<i>Haze and Fog Mai</i>	霾
Lin Tianmiao	林天苗
<i>Milkman Niunai</i>	牛奶
"My future is not a dream" <i>Wode weilai bushi meng</i>	我的未来不是梦
<i>qi</i>	气
<i>RMB City Renmin chengzhai</i> <i>RMB City</i> is the English name. The Chinese name is People's City.	人民城寨
Song Dong	宋冬
<i>tubu</i>	土布
<i>Twelve Flower Months</i> <i>Shi'er yue hua</i>	十二月花
* <i>Whose Utopia?</i> <i>What are you doing here?</i> <i>Sheide wutuobang?</i> <i>Tamen zai zher zuo shenme?</i>	谁的乌托邦？他们在这做什么？
work unit <i>danwei</i>	单位
<i>yang</i>	阳
<i>yin</i>	阴

- * Cao Fei's videos are available on Youtube. A four-minute long clip of *Whose Utopia?* is available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNId85g9nV>

References

- Bai, Qianshen, 2005. "Illness, Disability, and Deformity in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Art". In Wu Hung and Katherine R. Tsiang (eds), *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 147–170.
- Berry, Chris, 2015. "Images of Urban China in Cao Fei's 'magical metropolises'". *China Information* 29, no. 2: 202–225.
- Brown, Claudia, 2018. "Chinese Textiles". *Lovetoknow: beauty & fashion*.
<https://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/fabrics-fibers/chinese-textiles> (accessed 3 October 2018)
- Butler, Judith, 2015 [1993]. "Bodies that Matter". In Petra Lange-Berndt (ed.), *Materiality: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Whitechapel Gallery. London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 120–122.
- 2010. "Performative Agency". *Journal of Cultural Economy* 3, no. 2: 147–161. DOI: 10.1080/17530350.2010.494117
- Cao, Fei. 2015. "about". *Cao Fei: about biography bibliography contact* <http://www.caofei.com/about.aspx> (accessed 1 November 2017)
- 2013. "Cao Fei: Haze and Fog 21 September to 16 November 2013". *Eastside Projects*. <https://eastsideprojects.org/projects/cao-fei-haze-and-fog/> (accessed 1 November 2017)
- March 2015. "Conversations. Premier. Artist Talk. Cao Fei". *Art/Basel Hong Kong, March 15-17 2017*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6bW3Ct73LY> (accessed 1 November 2017)
- 2009. RMB City 人民城寨 <http://rmbcity.com> (accessed 1 November 2017)
- 2015 [2007]. "RMB City: A Second Life City Planning" (2007). In "works". *Cao Fei: about biography bibliography contact*. <http://www.caofei.com/works.aspx?%20id=17&year=2007&wid=3> (accessed 1 November 2017)
- January 2015. "Whose Utopia". *Tate Etc.* Issue no. 33, Spring. <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/whose-utopia> (accessed 1 November 2017)
- Chao, Kang, 1977. *The Development of Cotton Textile Production in China*. Vol. 74. Harvard University Asia Center. Harvard University.
- China Tracy, 2009. "City Manifesto: RMB City Manifesto (*RMB—to be ReMember*)". RMB City 人民城寨 <http://rmbcity.com/about/city-manifesto/> (accessed 20 November 2017)
- Chu, Cordia Ming-Yeuk, 1980. "Menstrual Beliefs and Practices of Chinese Women". *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 17, no. 1, January-April: 38–55.
- Cui, Shuqin, 2016. *Gendered Bodies: Toward a Women's Visual Art in Contemporary China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Debord, Guy-Ernest, 1994. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books.
- Eyferth, Jacob, 2012. "Women's Work and the Politics of Homespun in Socialist China, 1949-1980". *IRSH* 57. Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, 365-391. DOI: 10.1017/S0020859012000521
- Fibicher, Bernhard, 2005a. "Lin Tianmiao". In Bernhard Fibicher and Matthias Frehner (eds), *Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection*. Hatje Cantz, 318–319.

- 2005b. “Chen Lingyang”. In Bernhard Fibicher and Matthias Frehner (eds), *Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection*. Hatje Cantz, 310–311.
- Foucault, Michel, 1984. “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias”. *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*. October: 1–9.
- Gaskin, Sam, 2015. “Lin Tianmiao Speaks to artnet News About the Art of Endurance”. *artnet news*. October 1. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artist-lin-tianmiao-artwork-336164> (accessed 1 October 2017)
- Gladston, Paul, 2004. “Deconstructing Gao Minglu: critical reflections on contemporaneity and associated exceptionalist readings of contemporary Chinese art”. *Journey of Art Historiography* no. 10, June: 1–19.
- Green-Cole, Ruth, 2015. “Gendered Heterotopias: Creating Space for Menstrual Blood in Contemporary Art”. In *Hyper-heterotopia. blood and milk: contemporary maternal and menstrual art histories*, March. <https://hyperheterotopia.wordpress.com/tag/menstrual-art/> (accessed 15 October 2017)
- Groom, Simon, 2007. “The Real Thing”. In *THE REAL THING: contemporary art from China*. Liverpool: Tate, 8–15.
- Grunenberg, Christoph, 2007. “The Real Thing”. In *THE REAL THING: contemporary art from China*. Liverpool: Tate, 8–15.
- Haraway, Donna, 1990. “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s”. In Linda J. Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 190–233.
- Hauters, Jan, 2009. “Cao Fei’s RMB City: Brick-Reduced Recipes for Beijing’s Future”. Tr. Zhao Li. *That’s Beijing*, February 1. <http://rmbcity.com/2009/02/rmb-city-on-thats-beijing-feb-2009/> (accessed 1 November 2017)
- Hou, Hanru, 2005. “Longing for Paradise, Negotiating with the Real: Looking at the Chinese Art Scene Today”. In Bernhard Fibicher and Matthias Frehner (eds), *Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection*. Hatje Cantz, 29–34.
- Irigaray, Luce, 1985. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Johnson, Ken, 2012. “Common Threads, Uncommon Ties: ‘Bound Unbound, Lin Tianmiao’ at Asia Society”. *The New York Times*, 6 September, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/07/arts/design/bound-unbound-lin-tianmiao-at-asia-society.html> (accessed 1 October 2017)
- Li, Shan, 2017. “Political Pop”. *Artsy*, n.d. <https://www.artsy.net/gene/political-pop> (accessed 1 October 2017)
- Li Xiantang, 2001. “Macro-Cycles and Micro-Cycles: Preface for the Twelve Flower Months Exhibition,” May 21. <http://www.msgproduction.com/timeofwomen-li.htm> (accessed 19 October 2017)
- Lin, Amy, 2016. “Famous Fibre Artists to Follow”. *Widewalls*, 25 December. <https://www.widewalls.ch/famous-fiber-artists/> (accessed 1 October 2017)
- Lin, Tianmiao, 2001. Interview by Roxanna Marcoci. In *Threads of Vision: Toward a New Feminine Poetics*. Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Centre for Contemporary Art, 47.
- Marcus, Sharon, 2004. “Critical Issues in Tapestry”. *American Tapestry Alliance: A Quarterly Review of Tapestry Art Today* 30, no. 2, Summer: 1–13. <https://www.>

- americantapestryalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Critical-Issues-in-Tapestry-SMarcus.pdf (accessed 1 October 2017)
- Peckham, Robert, 2011. "Cao Fei: Demolishing the Virtual. RMB City and the Crisis of Art-Reality". *Digicult*. <http://www.digicult.it/digimag/issue-059/cao-fei-demolishing-the-virtual-rmb-city-and-the-crisis-of-art-reality/> (accessed 1 November 2017)
- Pentney, Beth Ann, 2008. "Feminism, Activism, and Knitting: Are the Fibre Arts a viable Mode for Feminist Political Action?" *Thirdspace: a journal of feminist theory & culture* 8, no. 1, Summer. <http://journals.sfu.ca/thirdspace/index.php/journal/article/view/pentney/210> (accessed 1 October 2017)
- Pollock, Griselda, 2014. "Women, Art, and Art history: Gender and Feminist Analyses". *Oxford Bibliographies*. <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199920105/obo-9780199920105-0034.xml> (accessed 1 October 2017)
- Ryor, Kathleen M., 2005. "Fleshly Desires and Bodily Deprivations: The Somatic Dimensions of Xu Wei's Flower Paintings". In Wu Hung and Katherine R. Tsiang (eds), *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture*, 121–145.
- Smith, Karen, 2007. "art@lastminute.cn". In *THE REAL THING: contemporary art from China*. Liverpool: Tate, 16–23.
- Sun, Yunfan, 2012. "Wrapped Up: An Interview with Lin Tianmiao". *ChinaFile*, September 24. <http://www.chinafile.com/wrapped-interview-lin-tianmiao> (accessed 1 October, 2017)
- Theroux, Paul, 2006. *Riding the Iron Rooster: By Train Through China*. New York, New York: Mariner Books.
- Trotman, Nat, 2007. "Cao Fei: Whose Utopia". *Guggenheim Collection Online*. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/22047> (accessed 1 November 2017)
- Wade, Gavin, 2013. "The Making of a Modernity". Cao Fei interviewed by Gavin Wade. *Cao Fei, texts*. <http://www.caofei.com/texts.aspx?id=41&year=2013&aitid=2> (accessed 1 October 2017)
- Wu, Hong, 2013. "Transcending the East/West Dichotomy: A Short History of Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting". In Maxwell K. Hearn, *Ink Painting: Past as Present in Contemporary China*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Distributed by Yale University, New Haven and London, 19–33.
- Xue, Melanie Meng, 2018. "Cotton textile production in medieval China unraveled patriarchy". *Aeon* (27 June) <https://aeon.co/ideas/cotton-textile-production-in-medieval-china-unravelling-patriarchy> (accessed 3 October)
- Wiseman, Mary Bittner and Liu Yuedi, 2011. *Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Art*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Wu, Hong, 2013. "Transcending the East/West Dichotomy: A Short History of Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting". In Maxwell K. Hearn, *Ink Painting: Past as Present in Contemporary China*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 19–33.
- Xue, Melanie Meng, 2018. "Cotton textile production in medieval China unraveled patriarchy". *Aeon* (27 June) <https://aeon.co/ideas/cotton-textile-production-in-medieval-china-unravelling-patriarchy> (accessed 3 October 2018)

Biographical Note

Dr. Rosemary Haddon obtained her PhD in modern Chinese literature from the University of British Columbia, Canada, in 1992. In 1993-1994 she was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Australian National University. She was then senior lecturer in Chinese and Chinese Programme Coordinator at Massey University, Palmerston North. Her research interests include Chinese literature and film, colonialism, the intersection of hegemony and identity, gender and writing, and online Chinese pedagogy.