

# The Transnational Artists Yun-Fei Ji, Hung Liu, and Zhang Hongtu: Globalization, Hybridity, and Political Critique

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In this article I look closely at the works of three transnational artists in order to situate them in particular local contexts in light of the impact of globalization on their creative endeavors. I also examine the specific kinds of hybrid elements each artist utilizes to create a synchronicity from the components. Yun-Fei Ji draws monstrous figures influenced by Western artists like Bosch in his Chinese landscapes; in her more recent paintings, Hung Liu merges aspects of action painting and expressive brushwork with Chinese subjects; and in paintings of the last decade, Zhang Hongtu blends the landscapes of Western and Chinese “masters” like Vincent Van Gogh and Wang Yuanqi into a new hybrid form that is neither one nor the other.<sup>1</sup> The particular means these artists utilize to merge styles and motifs complicate simplistic notions about hybridity, as well as the certainty about what derives from the East or the West. I chose these three artists from many others because their lives and artworks fully embody the issues explored in this article. Their works have been accessible to me through their many exhibitions in the US, and a good deal of information is posted on the Internet about their recent activities. This is particularly important in the case of Yun-Fei Ji, who returned to China in 2009.

Issues of hybrid styles, globalization, cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism—all complex and controversial matters—have affected the lives and creative practices of these artists in profound ways. While constantly debated, one aspect of the impact of globalization is clear for these artists: “Theorists of globalization disagree about the precise sources of recent shifts in the spatial and temporal contours of human life. Nonetheless, they generally agree that alterations in humanity’s experiences of space and time are working to undermine the importance of local and even national

boundaries in many areas of human endeavor.”<sup>2</sup> These artists’ very lives seem to embody the undermining of local and national borders.<sup>3</sup> However, these three artists’ works are examples of the synchronization of the local and the global even while being transnational. Like many contemporary artists they are also cosmopolites, sometimes traveling and living for periods of time in both their countries of origin and in others. As a result of their experiences, they often create new forms that emerge from what Homi Bhabha and Arjun Appadurai have labeled the dialogic imagination. That imagination emerges from the internal dialogue the cosmopolite has between the various “trans-” experiences he or she has undergone. Bhabha, Appadurai, and the late Edward Said are among those that have been central to the discourse surrounding emigration and transnationalism. Said’s formulations are fervently political and explore the disastrous consequences of colonial exploitation and the forced migrations that enable the obligatory mixing that accompanies colonialism. Bhabha’s work has a more direct application to the issues I am discussing. He has formulated a strong notion of the hybrid as an issue of the individual’s inside response to various outsides.<sup>4</sup> He does so in order to theorize subjectivity fashioned from a heightened awareness of internal diversity as an appropriate model for the contemporary condition.

For some of the artists I am discussing, the issues related to internal diversity play out in the daily negotiation between the acceptance of their hybrid situation even in the face of hostility and the desire for a harmonic resolution of that diversity. What emerges from the struggle is constitutive of the stronger notion of the hybrid embedded in a different kind of vision that creates a synthesis out of the cultural parts. This may materialize from what Bhabha labels being in the third, or in-between, or transnational space. In relation to the three artists who are the subjects of this article, and for many transnationals as well, China does not constitute the originating past left behind with only memories and nostalgic feelings, and the US is neither viewed as a poor alternative nor as one that erases that past. Living with the presence of both in a new kind of concordance that is constantly negotiated constitutes Bhabha’s “in-between” and “third space” and Appadurai’s postnational world in which the transnational imaginary becomes a new form of social practice. Transnationalism then can be understood as embodying issues of hybridity insofar as the transnational negotiates—among other factors—between there/then and here/now.<sup>5</sup>

In Appadurai’s earlier writings, globalization from on high threatens locality:

Locality is thus fragile in two senses. . . . The first sense . . . follows from the fact that the material reproduction of actual neighborhoods is invariably up against the corrosion of context, if nothing else, in the tendency of the material world to resist the default designs of human agency. The second sense emerges when neighborhoods are subject to the context-producing drives of more . . . complex hier-

archical relations, a process we have usually discussed under such rubrics as state formation.<sup>6</sup>

Elaborating on these issues, the sociologist Ulrich Beck argues for a new understanding of cosmopolitanism in relation to globalization in his critique of the present nature of the nation state as an impediment to the ways in which many people want to or now live. Instead a situation would emerge “in which the global and the local do not exist as cultural polarities, but as combined and mutually implicating principles” and as “internal globalization from within national societies.”<sup>7</sup> Appadurai paints a picture of a related state of being in his more recent discussions of globalization from below.<sup>8</sup>

All of the above factors appear in the forms of political critique each artist visualizes. Yun-Fei Ji’s concerns center on events in China and the US; Hung Liu addresses issues primarily related to China; Zhang Hongtu’s earlier works, although rooted in issues about China, are extended to global institutions, in particular the art world. In all three cases, immigrating to the US enabled forms of political investigation that would have been impossible in China in the 1980s and 1990s, although somewhat more possible today.<sup>9</sup>

The form of their art education is also crucial to note. These three artists, who emigrated in the 1980s, went to art schools in China that had courses in the socialist realist style, and in oil painting. After the Revolution these schools were also abreast of many aspects of modern art including surrealism and abstraction; these factors are still apparent in these artists’ work.<sup>10</sup> As a transnational, one of them continued graduate education in the US, and that experience has also influenced her artwork. The three artists have continued to develop along the lines of their earlier education while absorbing postmodern forms as well as the return to painting, realism, and modernism practiced from the 1980s on in the US. They carried with them the effects of the particular time in Chinese political and social history in which they lived and were schooled. These factors were then wedded to the forms of education and the art scene that prevailed at the particular time they arrived and pursued their lives, education, and careers in the US. These experiences formed their unique artworks.

### **Yun-Fei Ji: The Three Gorges Dam Project**

Every child in China who reads a story about coming down the Yangtze River through the Three Gorges, knows about all the legends, and can recite all those poems; but this is the area they are going to change. . . . it was just impossible to recover everything in such a short period of time. It’s a very unfortunate situation.

—John Yau and Yun-Fei Ji,  
“In Conversation: Yun-Fei Ji with John Yau”<sup>11</sup>

Upon first perusing Ji's ink wash and mineral pigment paintings on handmade paper in catalogue form, I not only wanted to engage the originals but was also prompted to add a cruise on the Yangtze River to see the Three Gorges Dam project on my trip to China in 2008. After I returned, the first painting of his that I actually saw, *The Empty City: Autumn Colors* (2003) was on exhibition at MoMA in New York (see Figure 1).<sup>12</sup> I was engaged by the work on many levels: the delicacy of the watercolor; the complex brushwork and allegiance to classical landscape painting; and in particular the content that imaged the devastation to land and people brought about by the Three Gorges Dam project—in the name of economic and industrial progress.



Figure 1. Yun-Fei Ji, *The Empty City: Autumn Colors*, 2003. Mineral pigment on Xuan paper, 31½" x 92½". The Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Copyright Yun-Fei Ji.

Ji is a landscape painter from Hangzhou, and everyone who writes about him notes that his work bears comparison with Song dynasty painters active there. While his interest in classical painting is evident, he uses the tradition as a scaffold on which he builds a contemporary narrative of the destruction of the land and of people's lives in the wake of modernity. However, to call his work narrative belies the disjunctions in both historical time and spatial order on which he builds his tales of the horrors of rapid industrialization. He utilizes the mode of viewing often seen in classical Chinese painting of three perspectives: reading from the bottom up and concentrating on sections at a time in order to leisurely scrutinize every detail. With this spatial approach, Ji blends content culled from Western modern art in order to create a contemporary visual field that seamlessly links with the Chinese tradition.

Born in Beijing in 1963, then growing up in Hangzhou, Ji returned to Beijing in 1982 to study at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He came to the US in 1986 on a Fulbright scholarship to the University of Arkansas and stayed on to complete his MFA in 1989; he moved to New York in 1990 and later became an American citizen. Ji recently returned to Beijing, in part because the situation for transnational artists in

China has become welcoming. Like several other transnational artists of his generation, but more fortunate, Ji went to live with his grandmother in Hangzhou after his mother was sent to a labor camp for hard work and reeducation during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>13</sup> It was there that he started to do drawings related to the comic-book style he first learned from an army artist who had illustrated combat manuals. He also copied heroic images of workers as decreed by the government. He was immersed in an environment that produced the popular culture that is as intrinsic to his paintings as is the classical tradition. One of the most interesting issues to consider when confronting his life and work is “his own conflicted relation to China,” as well as to the West.<sup>14</sup> In an interview with Melissa Chiu, Ji said, “There are two periods of great cultural destruction in Chinese history. The first was the Cultural Revolution and the second is happening right now.”<sup>15</sup> His ink and brush paintings are dedicated to showing aspects of that destruction in the wake of the rush to modernity and industrialization, as well as the destruction caused in earlier periods. On the other hand, he recently stated, “I use landscape painting to explore the utopian dreams of Chinese history, from past collectivization to new consumerism.”<sup>16</sup>

Not only addressing Chinese industrialization and the eradication of traditional culture, Ji’s images of destruction are icons of devastation that can apply to many places, in part due to cataclysmic moves to industrialize in some “developing” countries and still going on in supposedly developed ones. Aside from the obliteration of life and social and cultural forms, this path is hastening the horrors of global warming resulting from decades of wanton industrialization and exploitation in and by the West: “Global failures and blindness become an almost palpable part of the structure of Ji’s paintings. That such transport, dislocation, and change take place almost invisibly on the wind and the water—subjects of much traditional Chinese landscape painting—is one of many ironies evident in the paintings.”<sup>17</sup>

Narratives of displacement and annihilation play out in horizontal and vertical scrolls that at first glance look like contemporary versions of classical Chinese landscapes. Close perusal tells another story. Ji avoids bombastic visual devices, but careful viewing uncovers horrific images. Caught in the ruin of the land, resulting from all the government-sponsored projects to quickly convert the agricultural economy into an industrial one, are ghosts—drawn but not colored in—of the dead with their possessions in total disarray, as are the displaced animals and the disruption of the natural environment around them. Phantasmagoric creatures, some with skeleton heads and body parts, populate these paintings, surreal beings replacing the extinct human species except for scavengers, members of the government, and tourists.<sup>18</sup> Post-apocalyptic landscapes are filled with a post-apocalyptic species, and the whole of Chinese culture, past and present, is brought close to extinction. Ji fills the classical landscape setting with the debris of modernity: “these strange versions of a quiescent and meditative nature [related to painters of the Song dynasty] were seeded with alarming disturbances. I recall rockets and weapons; billboards for cigarettes; slightly greenish billowing clouds suggesting industrial accidents and nasty pollution; derelict

vehicles abandoned in the landscape; other mutant vehicles and science-fiction machine parts that had no discernible purpose; circa-1950s gas pumps; ominous helicopters whirring through the air at an angle; tilted basketball hoops; bereft cartoon figures; and scattered bones; to mention just a few examples.”<sup>19</sup> Other examples occur in one of the most complex and brilliant of the group of scroll paintings, *The Garden of Double Happiness* (2001), in name and content an homage to Hieronymus Bosch with no stretch of the imagination (see Figure 2). Sexual perversions with or by half-human, half-animal creatures and concocted grotesques are embedded everywhere in the landscape. The horizontal scroll is washed in pale browns, tans, blues, greens, and pinks, both a reference to traditional painting and a way of emphasizing the fading landscape, while a marvelous array of pen and brush patterns evokes nature’s beauty. While bringing to mind a distant history, things like the overturned jeeps and the pathetic figures wearing dunce caps are part of what returns us to the recent past. The intelligentsia was made to don such caps as part of their torment during the Cultural Revolution.



Figure 2. Yun-Fei Ji, *The Garden of Double Happiness*, 2001. Ink and mineral pigment on mulberry paper, 40” x 108”. Collection of Ninah and Michael Lynne. Copyright Yun-Fei Ji.

Ji’s early work as a student in China was socialist realist, in the medium of oil painting—as were many works by fellow students, taught by teachers who were the artists of the 1930s but were sent to the countryside for reeducation in the Communist propaganda style. Ji also chose to study with a teacher known for painting historical subjects, and he encouraged the study of both Western and classical Chinese painting. When Ji traveled to Tibet to make drawings of Buddhist sixteenth-century temple paintings, he directly experienced examples of traditional painting, and that stimulated his return to the brush and ink medium on paper. He also traveled in China, in particular to the Three Gorges landscape area, the inspiration for so much of Chinese

landscape painting from its beginnings. His love of that tradition was further stimulated by studying calligraphy (taught to him as a boy by his grandfather), like other artists going to art school in Beijing after the Cultural Revolution; however, unlike Xu Bing and Gu Wenda—two of the most prominent transnational Chinese artists—he did not use calligraphy for political purposes.<sup>20</sup> Instead he was one of the few artists who turned to classical landscape painting as a statement by referencing and utilizing it as a vehicle for potent political and social imagery. While others employed modern and postmodern Western forms, Ji was radical in acknowledging the magnificent past of Chinese painting denigrated during the Mao years, revitalizing it as a contemporary form.

As a radical act in his Fulbright year in the US, Ji turned from socialist realism to Chinese landscape painting, and he filled the field with perverse sexual, surreal, and grotesque imagery. *The Three Friends* (1999), like *The Garden of Double Happiness* mentioned above, is a case in point in which what seems like a decorative landscape is filled with monstrous beings participating in obscene acts, partially related to Chinese folk mythology and ghost stories and paintings, as well as to Western artists like Jan Brueghel and Hieronymus Bosch, and German expressionists like Otto Dix and George Grosz, whose works he saw after he emigrated.<sup>21</sup> Ji was also drawn to the paintings and drawings of Philip Guston, an American artist who combined painterly concerns with comic-book stylizations and ironic undertones that have been important to Ji from the beginning of his practice.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1990s these influences merged with the issues surrounding the Three Gorges Dam—a group of paintings that he has titled *The Empty City*—and his work became much larger in scale and more concerned with the results of recent historical events (see Figure 3). Ji credits looking at the scale of paintings in the West for enlarging his painting to better depict the horrors of the Three Gorges Dam project: *Below the 143 Meter Watermark* (2006) is a 118-inch scroll, and *Water Rising* (2006) is a horizontal scroll diptych with the combined panels measuring 318 inches in length.<sup>23</sup> While these “scrolls” have been referred to as historical narratives, they are very different from the usual conception of a narrative. They show the real effects of events through fragmentation and the breakdown of sequential storytelling associated with the received methods for recording history. In many ways Ji’s form of historical narrative is utilized to picture a world at the end of human history, brought about by human action. In my trip on the Yangtze River to the Three Gorges and the dam project, I saw the remarkable technological feats in building new cities, industries, roads, bridges, and of course the dam itself—accomplished in so short a time—but I was also aware of the demise of communities that had lived off the river for so many generations. Most somber were the signs that showed how far the river would rise before the dam is finally completed, and the many other sites that would be flooded. These directed me back to Ji’s paintings with a more profound understanding of their meanings.



Figure 3.  
Yun-Fei Ji, *Below the 143 Meter Watermark*, 2006. Mineral pigments and ink on mulberry paper, 118½” x 56⅛”.  
Copyright Yun-Fei Ji. Courtesy of the James Cohan Gallery, New York.

The 10-foot scroll *The Three Gorges Dam Migration* is an artist’s book hand-printed in China in 2008–2009 from five hundred carved woodblocks—the technique over a thousand years old—made by Rongbaozhai, one of China’s most famous printers and publishers. It is the seventh book commissioned by the Library Council of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a joint project of the publishing house and the museum. In a 2010 exhibition at the James Cohan Gallery in New York titled *Mistaking Each Other for Ghosts*,<sup>24</sup> Ji showed this work alongside ones he had made in the eight months he spent in Beijing while the scroll was being printed. His figural drawing style has always been indebted to the socialist realism he learned in China; however, in many drawings and finished watercolors from the Beijing trip, Ji overtly emphasizes the socialist realist approach and forgoes the skeletal renditions of ghosts

of the dead and the grotesques that previously inhabited his landscapes. As examples, the figures in *The Three Gorges Dam Migration*, *Blind Stream* (2008), *The Wait* (2009), and *The Guest People* (2009) depicting displaced persons, and *The Garden Party* that images the depraved behavior of the powerful, are drawn in a fluid realist style forging the Bosch-like nightmare content of the earlier scrolls (see Figure 4). Turpitude gives way to lethargy expressed in the bodies of the dislocated as well as the self-indulgent. All these paintings are more colorful than past work, and the calligraphic strokes that form the landscape are even more multifarious than in the past paintings. Most of the scrolls have columns of Chinese writing on the sides, a motif that binds them even more closely to the classical tradition.



Figure 4. Yun-Fei Ji, *The Garden Party*, 2009. Watercolor and ink on Xuan paper mounted on silk, 19 $\frac{7}{8}$ " x 69 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Copyright Yun-Fei Ji. Courtesy of the James Cohan Gallery, New York.

In several scrolls, like *The Ghosts Come Out at Night* (2009), Ji continues to draw clusters of figures in states of transformation into grotesques. Many small drawings that are only figural show groups of the kinds formerly encountered in his large scrolls. Long tongues extend from the mouths of many of them. Isolating the tightly knit groups rather than embedding the figures in the landscape sometimes produces monstrous caricatures rather than the complexity of social import characteristic of his earlier paintings.<sup>25</sup> Yet his drawing abilities are so strong, and these figures so imaginative, that they often stand on their own as compelling images.

As a transnational, Ji's perspective is clearly formed from that space "in-between," which enables him to see the results of uncontrolled power clearly and also to engage audiences with subjects that would still be difficult to exhibit in China. Gregory Volk writes about one such painting, *Forbidden City Ghosts* (2002), with descriptive force: "[Ji] revisits the Cultural Revolution as an orgy of drunkenness, perversity, hallucinatory violence, lethargy, and moral decrepitude—very similar to the poet Qu Yuan's condemnation of the Chu court. In Ji's painting, a pot-bellied Mao Zedong sits slumped on a chair, attended by young women in bright red (note the color) underwear. . . . Madame Mao frantically masturbates with a dildo; next to her

an assassin knifes a victim in the eye. Various other lesser leaders, apparatchiks, and freakish hybrids drift about in an evil haze.”<sup>26</sup>

Ji’s penchant for attacking power is not only aimed at China; after Hurricane Katrina he visited Louisiana and made some drawings of the catastrophe. He compared the conditions to China: “I saw this natural disaster as an example of government failure. And after the financial collapse, I saw similarities—how the government failed to do its job as a watchdog. It’s very disproportionate in both cases how the people who put in all the work paid the price, and the people who benefited from all the work paid no price.”<sup>27</sup>

Pop Mao mania is no longer a style in China, but it was the vehicle for the first major radical iconography to appear in the 1990s. What is particularly significant about Ji is that he could have followed that manner of working when he immigrated to the US, as it was quickly picked up and marketed by Western collectors and museums. Instead he eschewed easily identifiable avant-garde protest and, through the specificity of Chinese history—the Boxer Rebellion and the Opium Wars, as well as the Three Gorges Dam project—in landscape form, he tapped into some of the most crucial issues confronting China and the world today. The effect of globalization on Ji’s creative work is intrinsic to its content but, rather than becoming a tool of the technologies that often neutralize local matters, he utilizes globalization’s capacity to disseminate information in order to return us to the specific with worldwide implications. While he makes no claim to generalized content, the subjects Ji paints are of universal concern, and digital technology with its global reach enables the dissemination of profound political and social urgencies to large numbers of people worldwide.

### **Hung Liu: A Feminist Critique**

As Liu searches out new paths for her work, she is energized by the ambiguities of her history. “I am not really Chinese anymore . . . but I am not one hundred percent American. I cannot get close to my history, but I cannot get rid of it. I’m carrying my past into the future.”

—Meredith Tromble, David Salgado, and Glen Helfand,  
*Hung Liu: ZZ (Bastard Paintings)*<sup>28</sup>

Melissa Chiu, in her book *Breakout*, discusses the curious fact that many artists of Chinese background, whether they were born in the US or emigrated here (particularly those who came in the 1980s and 1990s), have a “residual attachment to being Chinese that cuts across generations for those who have resided outside China.”<sup>29</sup> This is not entirely surprising in relation to issues of displacement, but what interests Chiu is how little they seem to identify with the US even if they were born here or have lived here for a very long time. It is certainly understandable, as Chiu suggests, that an immigrant

would relate to the country of their cultural origins, but what seems strange is that artists who have been successful because they have migrated would not feel equally attached to their adopted country. This connection to China is probably growing stronger as it has emerged as a world power. Artists are turning their attention more frequently to Chinese subjects, and those who become famous are even returning to China, or going back and forth when they can afford to. Although Liu's identification with being in the US is strong, Chinese subjects—particularly related to women—have been central to her work from the beginning. However, I think that the current themes she is developing court nostalgia, perhaps related to the desire to attract a Chinese audience. Unwittingly, in Liu's use of Chinese symbols and paraphernalia, “orientalizing” issues emerge that need to be addressed.<sup>30</sup>

Liu is one of the very few transnational artists from China who is active as a feminist in her artwork, dedicating it almost entirely to the role of subjugated and heroic Chinese women. She has persisted in a painting style that seems to be largely unaffected by global trends, although these same trends have recently made her work more desirable to collectors, particularly in China. While oil painting and printmaking—she has experimented with several processes at different presses and print institutes—have been her principal mediums, photography, mixed media, and installations are also of interest. In the case of photography, she often utilizes images taken on her trips to China, and alongside appropriated images like diagrams, they become part of her mixed-media projects.<sup>31</sup> An often-reproduced example is *Bonsai* (1992), a hand-colored photolithograph that pairs a photograph of a Chinese woman with bound feet with a Taoist book alchemy diagram of a man trying to increase his powers. To this image Liu adds furniture and other objects to produce an installation format, as in *Olympia* and *Olympia II*, both created in 1992.<sup>32</sup>

Alongside the use of the oil medium is her signature handling of the paint, thinned out and allowed to drip down the canvas, seemingly to scar and render fragile the documentary nature of the image while highlighting painting itself. She has found ways to do the same in her prints. What is most intriguing about her work since she has immigrated is the manner in which she weds political and social concerns in a form of socialist realism learned in China, with an expressionist painting vocabulary intensified through her art experiences in the US. Liu wields the brush in exciting ways and her interest in “painterly” approaches can be found in the post-impressionist mode of her very early work in China, particularly in a series of landscape paintings called *My Secret Freedom* from 1972–1975. Painted while she was relegated to a reeducation program in the country, these small oils on paper are not only amazingly proficient for a young artist, but they reveal her knowledge of Western, modern art, and her desire to be a modern painter in spite of revolutionary restrictions.<sup>33</sup>

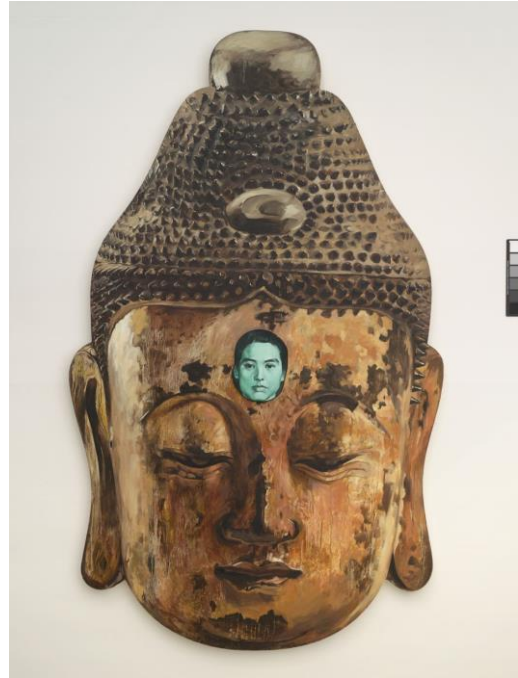
Liu spent most of her youth in Beijing, although she was born in 1948 in Changchun, an industrial northeastern city. When she was less than a year old her father was accused of being an enemy by the Communist Party, and her mother was forced to divorce him. Liu, like so many other artists and intellectuals, was sent to a

reeducation camp in the countryside, working alongside peasants in the fields for four years. Between 1969 and 1975, in secret, Liu took some of the most compelling photographs of children and women in the village that remain among her most poignant works. Like Xu Bing, her paintings and prints address political issues of importance in educating the populace that probably result from her “Maoist” education during those years. Towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, Liu was able to return to school and graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, where she studied mural painting. She applied to the University of California, San Diego, in 1981 but had to wait until 1984 to be allowed to leave China with a passport, and she has remained in the US since. She is Professor Emerita of art at Mills College in Oakland, California, and is fully integrated into both the art and academic worlds.

It is revealing to compare the installed mural *Music of the Great Earth* that she painted for the Central Academy in Beijing in 1981, just before she left China, with *Where is Mao?*, an installation at Southwestern College in Chula Vista, California, from 1988–1989. The former work is decorative with traditional Chinese dancers in elaborate costume, while the latter work belongs to the Political Pop movement emergent in Beijing at that time.<sup>34</sup> While Liu has been influenced by modern Western art, she has retained more ties to China than most of the artists who have emigrated.

I have been following Liu’s painting career since I moved to the West Coast in 1992, having seen her earlier work for the first time in a two-person exhibition at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 1994, and her more recent work in group exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2008, at the Nancy Hoffman Gallery in New York in 2009, and at the San Jose Museum of Art in 2013. In the 2009 show, nine works made between 1991 and 1994—including paintings, photolithographs, and mixed media—were exhibited. These reflect Liu’s experience of the Cultural Revolution and “how her cultural history has informed and misinformed her sense of self. . . . [Her] paintings are a reminder that we are all bound by cultural trappings that both inform our individual identity and impede our own free will.”<sup>35</sup> In this exhibition Liu used as source material Victorian examples of photos found in a Western catalogue of Chinese prostitutes posed in interiors and surrounded by Western paraphernalia.<sup>36</sup> In *Opium* (1993), for example, a prostitute is posed after Manet’s famous *Olympia*, whose frontal confrontation with the viewer is recognized as an early challenge to the subject as object. For the Chinese prostitute, however, in the context of a culture where downcast eyes were codified as propriety, this confrontation was an inevitable humiliation. In contrast to this subjugation of women, Liu paints a self-portrait in the middle of the forehead of a very large painting of the head of Buddha in *A Third Eye* (1993), giving direct visual confrontation a strong feminist orientation (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.  
Hung Liu, *A Third Eye*, 1993.  
Oil on canvas and inset wood, 91" x 55".  
Collection of the Kemper Museum of  
Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO.  
Courtesy of the artist.

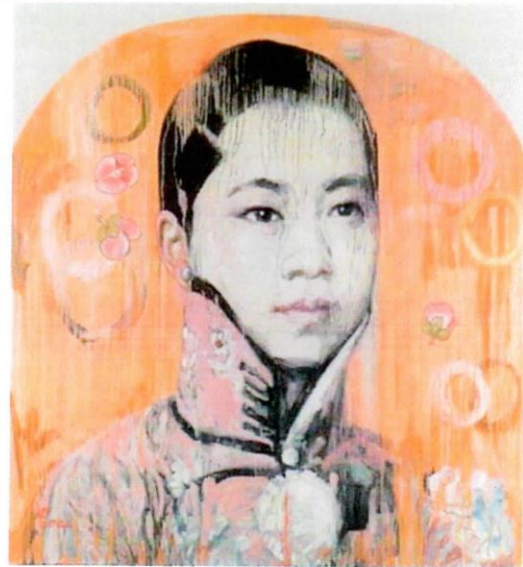


Two other works, *Still Life* (1991) and *Golden Lotus/Red Shoe* (1990), which I have only seen in reproductions, extend the range of Liu's political work. The former, a diptych, references Tiananmen Square of 1989, depicting a single figure with his back towards us, facing a row of seated Communist soldiers, and a market scene below with a display of a row of slaughtered chickens. The latter is more complex, pairing a prostitute with bound feet and a female Red soldier with a rifle striking a militant pose. To the left of the latter figure is a copy of a small photograph of Liu during military training, in a uniform and holding an automatic rifle, taken during her college days in the early 1970s.<sup>37</sup> Social and political dominance over women unites these three images. At the same time, the female soldier and Liu in uniform are a far cry from the woman whom traditional foot binding has rendered immobile.

Returning to that theme of subjugation, Liu has recently made many large portrait paintings and digital prints to honor individual prostitutes and courtesans of prerevolutionary China. She surrounds them with the insects, birds, and flowers often found in the tradition of Chinese painting, perhaps turning subjugation to elevation. In contrast to her earlier depictions, these paintings and prints are extremely colorful and decorative; without precise knowledge of the subject, they evoke the voyeurism identified with orientalist images of women in their native costumes surrounded by beautiful flowers, butterflies, birds, etc., not forceful critique, as in the earlier works (see Figure 6). While the figures in paintings like *Olympia* might also be objects of voyeuristic desire, the full figure and surrounding trappings are so replete with meaning that their position in society is entirely transparent. This is not the case for the more recent images, particularly the digital prints that enshrine beauty and could easily adorn a wall as a decorative object.



Hung Liu, Visage I, oil on canvas, 51 x 48 inches, 2004



Hung Liu, Visage II, oil on canvas, 51 x 48 inches, 2004



Hung Liu, Visage III, oil on canvas, 72 x 72 inches, 2004



Hung Liu, Visage IV, oil on canvas, 72 x 72 inches, 2004

Figure 6. Hung Liu, *Visage I, II, III, IV*, 2004. Oil on canvas; I and II, 51½” x 48” ; III and IV, 72” x 72”. Courtesy of the artist.

In contrast, in the 2008 exhibition *Half Life of a Dream* at SFMOMA, Liu exhibited a large oil triptych *We Have Been Naught, We Shall Be All* (2007), based on scenes from an actual event in the Second Sino-Japanese War of the 1930s and 1940s. Her source, Ling Zifeng’s 1949 propaganda film, *Daughters of China*, chronicles a group of women soldiers carrying the body of a dead comrade into the river—having chosen death by drowning rather than be taken prisoners by the Japanese. This monumental work glorifying women’s roles in fighting the Japanese is an interesting return to the use of socialist realism—animated by vibrant brushwork—to depict an event in

prerevolutionary China. It ennobles female soldiers who sacrificed their lives, as men did, and calls attention to historical subjects other than those of the Communist Revolution, still a prime period of artistic attention.

What is problematic in this work is that the form diminishes the power of the event portrayed so powerfully in the film. Liu's use of expressionist modes of painting, her signature paint drips, and the scale of the triptych seem to dilute the "political" force of the event by calling attention to the means rather than the meaning; put another way, the content has not been embodied in an appropriate vehicle as it is in the film. Consequently, an aura of nostalgia clings to the work in a manner that often accompanies works like early twentieth-century Russian propaganda history painting.<sup>38</sup> In this way her recent portraits of prostitutes and *We Have Been Naught* bear comparison.

This tendency to sentimentalize is particularly apparent in the 2009 Nancy Hoffman Gallery exhibition of paintings made after Liu arrived in Beijing for two exhibitions of her work, just as the horrendous earthquake hit Sichuan province on May 12, 2008, and took over ninety thousand lives. These paintings are obviously emotional responses to the tragedy, but they raise a complex problem. While they picture human beings trying to exist in the aftermath of the devastation, these large expressionist canvases are again painted in gorgeous colors and with Liu's signature drips. The explosions of painterly bravura that surround the figures tend to diminish their centrality, rather than rendering them the prime focus of the work as victims of utter devastation (see Figure 7).<sup>39</sup> And in some of the most harrowing portraits of suffering, Liu introduces the flying angels of Buddhist lore known as Apsaras, or heavenly nymphs, placed there as signs of hope. These orientalized, floating figures lessen the power of these forcefully painted portraits to move the viewer. There is no question that Liu's responses are absolutely heartfelt, but in contrast to Liu's early transnational experiences that enabled her to make works with a critical bite, works like this one, and many others she has more recently produced, may suffer from her yearnings towards China and her increasing fame there. At the same time, this split between Eastern subjects and Western painting modes results in a form of obvious hybridity that undermines the import of the image.

As mentioned above, these yearnings may have also led Liu to increasingly introduce stereotypical Chinese imagery in a manner that differs from the way they functioned in her earlier paintings. In some works Liu transforms ordinary Chinese people into heroes, adding decorative elements associated with Chinese classical painting and compositional modes identified with revolutionary propaganda. I look back to her photographs taken in the Chinese village that are so affecting in their simplicity. The courtesan paintings of the 1990s referencing bound feet, interior rooms with Asian decor, or courtesans dressed in gorgeous costume all also function as instruments of the critique of the persecution of women. In some of the more recent work, while it is Liu's intention to ennoble women who were forced into prostitution, dressing them in Chinese headgear and surrounding them with lotus flowers and other

exotic plants and birds conjures up much of the negative concerns identified with orientalism. There is no intrusive moment to help the viewer to read “against the grain.”



Figure 7. Hung Liu, *Richter Scale*, 2009. Oil on canvas, 80” x 160”. Collection of Marsha Elser-Smith and Larry Smith. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 8. Hung Liu, *Silver River*, site specific May 2013. Gallery-length mural (disappeared September 29, 2013), acrylic on drywall. San Jose Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artist.

In 2013 Hung Liu was celebrated with retrospective exhibitions at the Oakland Museum of California and Mills College in Oakland. Recent works were part of the exhibition *Questions from the Sky: New Work by Hung Liu* at the San Jose Museum of Art. New modes of working are revealed in two paintings that are performance pieces. In *Silver River*, Liu spent a week in the museum creating a gallery-length painting of “ghost” flowers and undulating calligraphic drawings and her signature drips. In *Four Cantos*, she painted an abstract work in front of the audience, inspired by a simultaneous video projection of a film of revolutionary movies she saw when she was

growing up in China (see Figure 8).<sup>40</sup> In recent years, emphasis on the spectacular has become a dominant method of art-making globally. Among Chinese transnationals, the internationally renowned artists Cai Guo-Qiang, Gu Wenda, and even Xu Bing have created installations of enormous scale. While all these works seem to have some political or social content, like Liu's paintings, the elements of spectacle submerge that subject matter through the bravura of the performance.

Hung Liu is a remarkable painter. However, like other transnationals with international presence—in China, Liu has had two solo exhibitions in Beijing in 2008 and 2011 and one in Hong Kong after years of lack of recognition—she may be unwittingly catering to global audiences through the utilization of hybrid connections and the taste for exotica and virtuosity. This pursuit of orientalizing material on the part of “Orientals,” who in their earlier work often protested against such victimizing imagery, is a distressing phenomenon. The issue is complicated and will become more so as transnationals are encouraged to pursue global careers and to appeal to audiences in the countries from which they emigrated and to which some of them have returned.

### **Zhang Hongtu: Interrogating Multiculturalism**

Because of the influence from my life experiences and my multicultural background, I have always been interested in different cultures, and the relationship between them. But my recent “hybrid” works don't give an answer to these current issues such as “globalization,” “East and West,” “high and low,” “elite culture from the museum and mass culture from the society.” Rather, what I have been doing via my art is to question viewers' conventional taste, to evoke viewers' thinking on these issues from a different perspective.

——Zhang Hongtu, quoted in Jerome Silbergeld,  
“Zhang Hongtu: The Art of Straddling Boundaries”<sup>41</sup>

I'm a Chinese Muslim. . . . I don't care about anything pure—pure Chinese culture, or pure European culture. I don't think there's anything pure. I just want to mix, and from the mixture to make something new.

——Zhang Hongtu, quoted in David D'Arcy,  
“Artist's Pointed Critique Is Barred from Beijing”<sup>42</sup>

Zhang Hongtu is the most cosmopolitan and transcultural artist in the group I have chosen to focus on vis-à-vis my questions and concerns about transnationals in a time of globalization. I have always admired Zhang's varied forms of conceptual work, but

I dismissed Zhang's more recent paintings as a capitulation to global market forces that encourage simplistic multiculturalism, particularly when he started the *Shan Shui* (mountains and water) series. In these scroll-like paintings, he merges the works of famous Chinese landscape artists with the brush style of famous Western "masters" like Monet, Van Gogh, and Cezanne. While I am still troubled by what I think is a clever attempt at cross-cultural appeal, it may also be the case that these paintings are part of the same political "tongue in cheek" that he has employed since he came to the US in 1982, or part of a sincere desire to form a new union from elements of Eastern and Western styles. For the art historian Britta Erickson, Zhang "lays bare the assumptions we make when viewing works produced in the Chinese or the Western painting tradition."<sup>43</sup>

Zhang was born in 1943 into a Muslim family of the Hui minority group—now, as in the past, persecuted by the Chinese government. His family was devout and Zhang's father, immersed in setting up Muslim religious schools, moved his family with him all over China.<sup>44</sup> As a result of his Muslim education, and unlike most of the other transnational artists from China, Zhang was aware of Middle Eastern cultures and also studied Western ones: "My interest and knowledge were not glued by Confucianism and Daoism. Through religious influence I had more knowledge about the West. I know many stories from the Old Testament, which is also part of Western Culture: if you study Western art history you have to understand the Bible."<sup>45</sup>

Zhang's work has been exhibited all over the US and, in the last decade, in Cuba, China, Taiwan, as well as other countries, and he is becoming one of the more well-known Chinese artists. While he is known particularly for his series of "Mao" images, he may actually have become instantly famous internationally after his daring cubist painting *Bird's Nest* was seized by Beijing customs when they decided, as an excuse, that it was a too-drab rendition of the stadium. In all probability the painting was seized because it had pointed references to "'human right,' Tibet, the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 and the French president's support for the Dalai Lama."<sup>46</sup>

Zhang studied calligraphy and ink painting at a high school attached to the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and then went to the National Academy of Arts and Crafts. Like many others during the Cultural Revolution, he spent three years in the countryside as part of reeducation. However, he continued to be considered suspect because his Muslim father was condemned as an enemy of the people. Zhang was not allowed to be a Red Guard or paint images of Mao. His obsession in the late 1980s and early 1990s with Mao images of every kind may have been rooted in that proscription, as well as in the omnipresence of pictures of Mao in China.

After returning to Beijing, Zhang chose to take a government-directed job with the Beijing Jewelry Import-Export Co., where he spent nine years designing jewelry only to find it unrewarding, painting only in his spare time. Zhang was offered positions teaching art, but the company he worked for refused to let him go. Unable to practice his art, Zhang immigrated to the US in 1982, leaving his wife and son behind (they joined him two years later), with the excuse that he wanted to study at the Art

Students League. As a result, he was not part of the avant-garde movements in the 1990s in China, yet he created his own radical version of those movements in the US.

While Zhang was included in shows dedicated to Asian Americans and immigrants in the US, it took a few years for him to acquire a reputation in New York. In 1984 Zhang had his first one-person exhibition, *In the Spirit of Dunhuang*, at the Asian Arts Institute; it traveled to Harvard University the following year.<sup>47</sup> He says of his works in the 1980s, “I experimented with this and that in order to shake off, as best as I could, the hold of the academic school and the so-called socialist realism on me.” Zhang describes this work as including “semi-abstract works on rice paper, a series of works painted on the New York Times [sic] newspapers, a series of acrylic works influenced by the Neo-expressionism in vogue in New York, as well as a *Back of Head* series, an *Impression-Sunrise* series.”<sup>48</sup> Many of these works were also indebted to his love for the paintings of the French artist Georges Rouault whom he learned about while still in China. These paintings often used mixed media and soy sauce and burlap as medium and support; they show the impact of his direct engagement with modern and contemporary art in New York; and if they are what one would call “all over the place,” they express the exhilaration occasioned by the freedom to paint as he wished. How ironic that the painting *Last Banquet*, with Mao repeated in every figure at the table, was banned from an exhibition in Washington, DC, in 1991 so as not to offend the Chinese government (189).

As a transnational, Zhang was able to begin dismantling the ubiquitous image of Mao through irony and satire, which would have been impossible in China.<sup>49</sup> Zhang states, “If you stare at a red shape for a long time, . . . when you turn away, your retina will hold the image but you will see a green version of the same shape. In the same way, when I lived in China, I saw the positive image of Mao so many times that my mind now holds a negative image of Mao. In my art I am transferring this psychological feeling to a physical object.”<sup>50</sup> In 1987, Zhang started his *Long Live Chairman Mao Series* and the *Material Mao Series* with the *Quaker Oats Mao*. He painted or cut out Mao’s silhouette from all kinds of materials, including a ping pong table and pieces of rice paper covered with lipstick, corn, soy sauce, and feathers, mounted on pages of Mao’s Red Book (see Figure 9). He also made the 5 x 14-foot acrylic painting *Last Banquet* mentioned above with laser-printed pages of the Red Book as background. In this work, Mao was not only the new Christ, but every other disciple at the table as well. Both the presence and absence of Mao’s image raise complex issues about the power of an icon, even as Mao’s hold on political ideology is less important today than revering him as a hero.



Figure 9.  
Zhang Hongtu,  
*Corn Mao*, from the  
*Material Mao Series*, 1992.  
Corn kernels on plywood,  
39” in diameter.  
Courtesy of the artist.

While Zhang does not like to be labeled, there is a strong conceptual premise in parodying objects that appear in auctions and auction catalogues like his *Christie's Catalogue Project, Ongoing* (1998–2001). These computer-generated images question the role of the market in valuing and defining fine art, as well as in the selling of objects that are superficially Chinese to collectors ignorant about Chinese culture. The emphasis on ignorance is also part and parcel of the collection of chinoiserie that has been a staple of Western collectors' desire for things “oriental and exotic” since the eighteenth century. Zhang's most notorious work in this group is a stamped Coca-Cola bottle titled with an auction catalogue number 25 *Blue and White Bottle (Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644)*. As in an auction catalogue, the work is described as “painted in an underglaze-blue of brilliant deep purplish tone with a continuous scene of boys at play. Height: 7-5/8in. (19.3cm.) \$4.99 for a six pack.”<sup>51</sup> Another page with a McDonald's stamp is entitled number 113 *Bronze Tableware (Han Dynasty 206 B.C.–220 A.D.)*. In 2002 Zhang also executed the tableware in cast bronze (see Figure 10). The catalogue page describes the item as consisting of two containers, one fork and one knife, and then lists them separately with their sizes in inches and centimeters. The interplay between the pseudo-bronze surface decorated with magnificent designs and the interior McDonald cardboard is both visually comical and conceptually loaded on the page as in the casts. Zhang's conjoining of two disparate entities plays with hybrid mixtures rooted in simplistic multicultural postures and the power of capitalist enterprises to erode the significance of cultural artifacts. At the same time, he points to the auction

house as the institutional framework of the global art market responsible for hyping the latest fad and reducing cultural items to monetary values. The catalogue works are visually intriguing and conceptually clever, in keeping with Political Pop and cynical realism being produced by contemporary artists in China in the 1990s. However, Zhang is more overtly political as he critiques both capitalism and the Chinese government. He is also less interested in appropriating the signs of American Pop art often included in works by artists in that movement in China.



Figure 10.  
Zhang Hongtu,  
*Mai Dang Lao*, 2002.  
Cast bronze, actual size.  
Courtesy of the artist.

In the 1980s Zhang painted the *Impression – Sunrise* series, in which he completely transformed the style of the artist he referred to in a manner so outrageous that the very notion of “homage” is questioned. *Landscape #5: Impression – Sunrise. 117 Years After Monet* (60 x 68 inches) is a mixed-media work of 1989. Thick oil paint and burlap are applied to the canvas in contrast with the stylish brush marks of a typical Monet impressionist landscape. The title adds irony to an exciting painting in its own right, but one that is also out of step with the turn to representational painting in the US in the 1980s and more of a tribute to modern art -isms. Zhang plays with the system of style and questions the role “heroic artists” play in the creation of the movements that still form the structural base of art history in the West.

The continuing *Shan Shui* paintings that Zhang started in the late 1990s raise issues in relation to the global market that he so aptly critiqued in his earlier work. These paintings seem to pair East and West in a manner that skirts the conceptual complexity of his mixed-media work. Horizontal and vertical oil paintings in the compositional format of “masters” of the Chinese landscape tradition are painted in the brush style of modern “masters” like Van Gogh, Cezanne, and Monet. One of the earliest, *Guo Xi – Van Gogh* (1998), is over eight feet long and over five feet wide, and

has the traditional stamps of authorship, ownership, and calligraphy at the top—a full-scale rendition of a literati scroll. *Shitao – Van Gogh #7* (2004) is somewhat smaller but utilizes the same strategy, only changing the Chinese master in the pairing with Van Gogh (see Figure 11). As suggested above, the calligraphic text adds complexity and satire to an understanding of the paintings. Jerome Silbergeld translates the Chinese text in the 1999 work *Zhao Mengfu – Monet (Noon)* in this manner:

Thank you for coming so close in order to read this calligraphy. You must be able to understand Chinese, right? However, have you noticed something truly unfortunate has happened? When you come close enough to be able to read these words, which is to say just at this moment, you lose the possibility of enjoying the painting as a whole. So . . . please step back five or six steps (but be careful not to bump into anyone or anything behind you!). Find what you feel to be an appropriate distance and angle, and shift your attention from these words to the painting. Thank you for your attention.<sup>52</sup>

This is an adroit spoof on the prescribed mode of looking close at the brushwork and then stepping back to see the whole painting in impressionist, post-impressionist, and abstract expressionist art. It also speaks to the debates about adding cultural labels in structuring art exhibitions rather than emphasizing only the visual.<sup>53</sup>

Silbergeld's reading of this series of paintings roots them in postmodern discourse. While he says that they follow a simple format, he finds them anything but simple, and he notes several reactions to the works. He goes on to say, "still others may contemplate the profundity (tinged with sly wit) of the numerous aesthetic and cultural questions raised by the artist's simple act of mixing traditions, blending (and thus radically reconfiguring) our fixed cultural stereotypes. Like any savvy postmodernist, Zhang is keenly attuned to his audience, intent not on pleasing them . . . but on challenging expectations, raising questions of values, and producing differential responses."<sup>54</sup> Silbergeld discusses the Chinese tradition of artists copying from the masters and adding their own differences, and contends that Zhang is participating in a similar practice, questioning the "continuing tradition of authoritarian politics" through the orthodox or iconic readings of artworks.<sup>55</sup> While this may be part of Zhang's intentions—and given his past work one can make this argument—it is difficult to understand these paintings formed through bravura brushstrokes, brilliant colors, and seemingly obvious pairings in relation to the underlying complex theory Silbergeld proposes. Encountering one of these well-painted hybrids is rewarding (Zhang is an accomplished painter), but viewing many of them becomes somewhat redundant in spite of the theoretical claims.



Figure 11.  
Zhang Hongtu,  
Shitao-Van Gogh #7, 2004.  
Oil on canvas, 72" x 32 ½".  
Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 12.  
Zhang Hongtu,  
Re-make of Ma  
Yuan's Water  
Album L  
(780 Years Later),  
2008.  
Oil on canvas,  
50" x 72".  
Courtesy of the  
artist.



On the other hand, Silbergeld's interpretation is apt when applied to twelve works, all 50 by 72 inches, that Zhang painted in 2008–2009. In a group he calls *Re-Make of Ma Yuan's Water Album (780 Years Later)*, the paintings all use the Song dynasty painter Ma Yuan (c. 1160–1225) as a source and are distinguished by a letter.<sup>56</sup> Ma's paintings are scenes of the beauty of the *Shan Shui* (mountains and water); Zhang utilizes the underlying structure and brush marks of the earlier artist to depict China's rivers today in all their ghastly forms of pollution. In painting L of the series, he chooses an acid lime green to suggest the algae forming from toxic waste (see Figure 12). In H, the lyrical flow of Ma's painting changes to a chaotic and rocky overlay caused by blockage of the Yellow River by dams and irrigation canals.<sup>57</sup> Ma was a painter in the twelfth century using previous masters as his source and known for his innovations. Zhang reforms that tradition through allusions to contemporary issues, staying clear of the simplistic hybrid form of the *Shan Shui* paintings.

Zhang Hongtu's work has developed in many exciting ways partially as a result of his courage to emigrate from China, a place that then restrained his creativity. He is one of the most original of the Chinese transnational artists because he has learned so much about the art of the West while remaining deeply invested in Chinese classical and contemporary art. However, to my mind, some of Zhang's *Shan Shui* series of paintings cater to the tendency in the global marketplace to provide a mass public with easily decipherable texts and images. While the global discourse about East and West and about hybrid forms has become more sophisticated in intellectual circles, the global audience for works of art, for the most part, still appreciates beautiful pictures particularly in the impressionist and post-impressionist styles. Yet Zhang continues to confound me with works such as *Bird's Nest, in the Style of Cubism*, which he painted in 2008. His ability to appropriate painting styles results in a work akin to his brilliant Mao pieces as he mocks technological wonder, China, and the Olympics. The text in Chinese—"Sacred Olympic torch," "One world, One dream," "Family Joy, Happiness," and in English, "Tibet" and "Human Right"—seems to pair propaganda with critique. However, I end on the uncertainty I mentioned at the beginning. In contrast to Zhang's usual irony, he says of this work, "I feel that the Olympic Games are a good opportunity to make this world a global village. It is a big party for all the people to get together without regard to national boundaries. 'Bird's Nest' was created with that thought in mind."<sup>58</sup> Or is this also part of his ironic and conceptual program?

## Conclusion

To return to the beginning, this study of three artists is grounded in the specifics of each artist's life and work as transnational on a global stage. Yun-Fei Ji, Hung Liu, and Zhang Hongtu live and work in Homi Bhabha's "in-between" and the "third space." Bhabha's analysis demonstrates that the importance of the kind of hybridity that emerges from these special positions "is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity . . . is the 'third space' which enables

other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.”<sup>59</sup> Bhabha’s concept of the third space merges transnational status with the impact of globalization, hybridity, and the domain of the political as it applies to the art and lives of these three artists. Each in his or her way has created artworks that reflect perspectives from the “in-between.” Their status as transnationals has also enabled each artist to pursue political agendas in their own direction. However, they also share in common an unleashing of those perspectives as a result of their immigration to the US. Their best work may provide prototypes for synthesizing profound multicultural elements in contrast to the simplistic use of hybrid elements and multicultural forms.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Wang Yuanqi (1642–1715) was one of the four Wang family members who were masters of the early Qing dynasty.

<sup>2</sup> William Scheuerman, “Globalization,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, June 21, 2002, substantially revised June 10, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/globalization/>.

<sup>3</sup> In contrast, Marwan Kraidy argues that one consequence of globalization and the lauding of hybridity is that there is no accounting for power in “anti-‘cultural imperialism’ and pro-‘cultural globalization’ writings. Hybridity has emerged as a conceptual linchpin of the latter literature. . . . the thoroughly demonized cultural imperialism thesis is giving way to a benign vision of global cultural diversity, local cultural resistance, and cross-cultural fusion. This cultural pluralism is in my view an inadequate vision for international communication and culture *because it ignores power.*” Marwan M. Kraidy, *Hybridity or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), vii, emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> This is succinctly explored in Jonathan Rutherford’s interview with Bhabha, “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207–21. There are critiques of his position, for example, in an article by Ioan Davies, “Negotiating African Culture: Toward a Decolonization of the Fetish,” in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 129. The author suggests that Bhabha’s model is essentially elitist in its concern to create “a transnational culture from an anti-nationalist nation-space” (130). Geeta Kapur, in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), has also questioned Bhabha’s thesis on these grounds; however, she concedes “that the Bhabha legacy functions best in the cosmopolitan world of the ‘twice-born’, the

immigrant intelligentsia from the third world lodged within the first world whose identity is ambivalent, restless, interrogative—though hardly in this age diasporic” (346).

<sup>5</sup> Ien Ang, in “Migrations of Chineseness: Ethnicity in the Postmodern World,” *mots pluriels*, no. 7 (1998), <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP798ia.html>, goes further by filling in that space: “The notions of ‘biculturality’ and ‘double consciousness’ . . . tend to construct the space of that in-between-ness as an empty space, the space that gets lost in the cultural translation from one side to the other in the bipolar dichotomy of ‘where you’re from’ and ‘where you’re at.’ But the productivity I am referring to precisely fills that space up with new forms of culture at the point of collision/collusion of the two: hybrid cultural forms born of a productive creative syncretism” (emphasis original).

<sup>6</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 198.

<sup>7</sup> Ulrich Beck, “The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 19, nos. 1–2 (2002): 17.

<sup>8</sup> See Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> In an excellent article by Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, “How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism But Silences Collective Expression,” *American Political Science Review* (May 2013): 1–18, <http://gking.harvard.edu/publications/how-censorship-china-allows-government-criticism-silences-collective-expression>, they discuss the implications of their research: “Our central theoretical finding is that, contrary to much research and commentary, the purpose of the censorship program is not to suppress criticism of the state or the Communist Party. Indeed, despite widespread censorship of social media, we find that when the Chinese people write scathing criticisms of their government and its leaders, the probability that their post will be censored does not increase. Instead, we find that the purpose of the censorship program is to reduce the probability of collective action by clipping social ties whenever any collective movements are in evidence or expected” (1).

<sup>10</sup> Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People’s Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 209.

<sup>11</sup> John Yau and Yun-Fei Ji, “In Conversation, Yun-Fei Ji with John Yau,” *Brooklyn Rail* (December 2006–January 2007), <http://brooklynrail.org/2006/12/art/yun-fei>.

<sup>12</sup> The exhibition *Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection* was held at the Museum of Modern Art from April 22, 2009, to January 4, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> See Gregory Volk, “The Empty City,” in *Yun-Fei Ji: The Empty City*, ed. Shannon Fitzgerald (St. Louis: Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 2004), 41.

<sup>14</sup> Susan L. Stoops, “Two Chinas: Chen Qiulin and Yun-Fei Ji,” *Worcester Art Museum Gallery Guide*, 2008, <http://www.worcesterart.org/Exhibitions/2chinas.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Melissa Chiu, “Ghosts, Three Gorges, and Ink: An Interview with Yun-Fei Ji,” in Fitzgerald, *Yun-Fei Ji*, 87.

<sup>16</sup> “Yun-Fei Ji,” James Cohan Gallery, accessed November 14, 2014, <http://www.jamescohan.com/artists/yun-fei-ji>.

<sup>17</sup> Tan Lin, “Yun-Fei Ji and the Unchanging Structures of History,” in Fitzgerald, *Yun-Fei Ji*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> See examples of Ji’s drawings of these creatures, some of which are studies for his paintings, in Chiu, “Ghosts,” 81, 82, 85, 88, 91.

<sup>19</sup> Volk, “Empty City,” 44.

<sup>20</sup> Xu Bing returned to China in 2008 and is vice president of the China Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing. Gu Wenda maintains a studio in Shanghai. Going back and forth, or returning to their country of origin, is quite common among Chinese artists, especially since China has become a world power.

<sup>21</sup> Yau and Ji, “In Conversation.”

<sup>22</sup> See Dorothy Spears, “Part Traditionalist, Part Naturalist, Part Dissident,” *New York Times*, February 21, 2010, 32, [http://www.dorothyspears.com/assets/pdfs/art\\_world/artists/NYT022110YunFei.pdf](http://www.dorothyspears.com/assets/pdfs/art_world/artists/NYT022110YunFei.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Ji started this work on a Prix de Rome Fellowship in 2006, and *Water Rising* was completed in London. Ji describes his process in Yau and Ji, “In Conversation.”

<sup>24</sup> This exhibition at the James Cohan Gallery (February 19, 2010–March 27, 2010), traveled to Shanghai and was shown in the James Cohan sister gallery there in July and August of the same year.

<sup>25</sup> There is a rather horrific pencil drawing of Ji’s from 2003 posted on Artnet, which was recently sold to a private collector. A partially nude woman with tattoos over her body, seen from the back, is wearing a gas mask and is putting on or taking off her bra. Next to her is a mutilated body of a woman with her amputated legs spread so the viewer has a clear look at her genitals. She has no head and only stumps for arms. German expressionist artists like Otto Dix and George Grosz influenced this work. It was sold in London at a Sex Auction held by Phillips de Pury and Company on March 19, 2010. See “145,” Phillips, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.phillips.com/detail/YUN-FEI-JI/UK000110/145?fromSearch=yun-fei%20ji&searchPage=1>.

<sup>26</sup> Volk, “Empty City,” 48.

<sup>27</sup> Carnelia Garcia, “Interview: Yun-Fei Ji,” *Modern Painters* 22, no. 3 (April 2010): 1, available online at James Cohan Gallery,

[http://images.jamescohan.com/www\\_jamescohan\\_com/Modern\\_Painters\\_Garcia\\_April\\_2010.pdf](http://images.jamescohan.com/www_jamescohan_com/Modern_Painters_Garcia_April_2010.pdf). In June/July of 2012, Ji had a solo exhibition, *Water Work*, at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing. He exhibited works from the decade preceding the exhibition, including scrolls over 37 feet long and paintings dealing with the Katrina catastrophe, as well as other subjects related to the US.

<sup>28</sup> Meredith Tromble, David Salgado, and Glen Helfand, *Hung Liu: ZZ (Bastard Paintings)* (New York: Nancy Hoffman Gallery, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> Melissa Chiu, *Breakout: Chinese Art Outside China* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2007), 55.

<sup>30</sup> See Joyce Brodsky, "Re-Orientalism and Globalization: Transnational Artists from India and Representations of the 'Other,'" *Visual Studies* 30, no. 3 (2015): 264–79.

<sup>31</sup> See Liu's excellent website for images from 1969 to the present at <http://www.kelliu.com/>.

<sup>32</sup> See Steinbaum Krauss, ed., *Hung Liu: The Year of the Dog* (New York: Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, 1994), figures 1 and 2.

<sup>33</sup> See the series on Liu's website mentioned in note 29.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> The quote is from the press release for the exhibition curated by Andrea Hesse at the Mary Porter Sesnon Art Gallery in Santa Cruz, CA. I am indebted to Hesse for her insightful comments in the release (contact the gallery for an email copy of the release).

<sup>36</sup> She found these in public collections in China. Most photographs in private hands were destroyed during the revolution. See Krauss, *Hung Liu*, xviii.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, figures 1, 2, and 3.

<sup>38</sup> After I wrote this, I read that Ilya Repin was one of the artists Liu was referred to in the mural painting classes she took at the Central Academy in Beijing. See Tromble, Salgado, and Helfand, *Hung Liu*.

<sup>39</sup> This is particularly the case with the largest canvas in the show, *The Richter Scale*, which is 80 x 160 inches. The young girl with a younger child in her lap looks out at the viewer who gazes at all the beautifully painted debris that surrounds her.

<sup>40</sup> *Questions from the Sky: New Work by Hung Liu* (June 6, 2013–September 29, 2013) was "SJMA's contribution to a Bay Area tribute to Hung Liu's work that began with Mills College Art Museum's presentation of *Hung Liu: Offerings* (January 23, 2013–March 17, 2013) and the Oakland Museum of California's *Summoning Ghosts: The Art of Hung Liu* (through June 30, 2013)." See "Questions from the Sky: New Work by Hung Liu," San Jose Museum of Art, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.sjmusart.org/questions-from-the-sky-hung-liu>.

<sup>41</sup> Jerome Silbergeld, “Zhang Hongtu: The Art of Straddling Boundaries,” in *Zhang Hongtu: The Art of Straddling Boundaries* (Taipei: Lin and Keng Gallery, 2007), vii–xxv. Available online at Zhang Hongtu Studio, accessed June 1, 2016, [http://www.momao.com/reading\\_bib.htm](http://www.momao.com/reading_bib.htm).

<sup>42</sup> David D’Arcy, “Artist’s Pointed Critique is Barred from Beijing,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 21, 2008, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121928312315258939>.

<sup>43</sup> Britta Erickson, *On the Edge* (Stanford, CA: Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for the Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2004), 90.

<sup>44</sup> See Lin and Keng Gallery, *Zhang Hongtu*, a catalogue raisonné of Zhang’s work up to that time. The introductory article by Silbergeld is a source of important information about his life and work. Silbergeld, “Zhang Hongtu,” vii–xxv.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Hay, “Zhang Hongtu/Hongtu Zhang: An Interview,” in *Boundaries in China*, ed. John Hay (London: Reaktion, 1994), 297–98, quoted in Melissa Chiu, Karen Higa, and Susette S. Mins, eds., *One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now* (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2006), 64.

<sup>46</sup> D’Arcy, “Artist’s Pointed Critique.”

<sup>47</sup> In 1981 Zhang traveled to see the painted murals in the caves of Dunhuang in Northern China, a major stop on the ancient Silk Road. He says of that trip, “I was awed by paintings outside of the orthodox (Court and scholar paintings). The fusion, in early Dunhuang murals, of traditional Chinese techniques and images with those from India and Central Asia influenced my later works.” “Autobiography,” Zhang Hongtu Studio, accessed June 1, 2016, [http://www.momao.com/reading\\_auto.htm](http://www.momao.com/reading_auto.htm).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Erickson notes that “having moved to New York in 1982, the artist settled early upon the task of an artistic deconstruction of Mao, before the political Pop movement in China embarked upon the same project” (Erickson, *On the Edge*, 88).

<sup>50</sup> Silbergeld, “Zhang Hongtu,” xix.

<sup>51</sup> In 2002 Zhang also made six bottles like this one from porcelain titled *Kekou-Kele* (*Six Pack*) (ibid., 61).

<sup>52</sup> Silbergeld, “Zhang Hongtu,” xxi.

<sup>53</sup> See discussion of words and images in Joyce Brodsky, “Crossing Boundaries: The Art of Anjali Deshmukh and Rohini Devasher (In Collaboration with the Artists),” *Transcultural Studies* 2 (2014), <http://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/transcultural/article/view/15674/11497>.

<sup>54</sup> Jerome Silbergeld, “Zhang Hongtu’s Alternative History of Painting,” Zhang Hongtu Studio, accessed June 1, 2016, [http://www.momao.com/reading\\_bib.htm](http://www.momao.com/reading_bib.htm).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> See Zhang's website, <http://www.momao.com/>; and Jennifer Hattam, "Famous Chinese Artist Paints Polluted Waters," *Treehugger*, August 6, 2010, <http://www.treehugger.com/culture/famous-chinese-artist-paints-polluted-waters.html>.

<sup>57</sup> See Jerome Silbergeld, "Facades: The New Beijing and the Unsettled Ecology of Jia Zhangke's *The World*," in *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge*, ed. Sheldon H. Lu and Jiayan Mi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 122.

<sup>58</sup> Zhang in a statement to *Human Rights in China*, excerpted by Sharon Butler in "Customs Officials Give Zhang Hongtu Crit and Seize Painting," *Two Coats of Paint*, August 10, 2008, <http://www.twocoatsofpaint.com/2008/08/customs-officials-give-zhang-hongtu.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Rutherford, *Identity*, 211n5.

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