Re-appropriating Chinese Art in the Context of Digital Media:
From the Chinese Past into a Mediated ‘Presence’ Through Creative Practice

HUNG Keung

A dissertation in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

University of Plymouth

Supplemented by:
Proof of Practice of six case studies on 1 DVD and
1 DVD Appendices fully inclusive of all supporting files and software created

Word count: 83,828

Committee in Charge:

First supervisor: Prof. Dr. Jill Scott
Zurich University of the Arts (ICS) and University of Plymouth

Second supervisor: Prof. Dr. Thea Brejzek
Zurich University of the Arts (Design)

Date of Submission: June 12, 2014
Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the wonderful people who have supported, advised and inspired me during my work on this dissertation.

First of all, grateful thanks to my two excellent supervisors, Jill Scott and Thea Brejzek I have benefited from your support, ideas and good advice. Also, thank you for the inspiring conversations, which have been both helpful and enjoyable. Very special thanks to my colleagues at the z-Node group for providing a friendly and encouraging environment. Thanks also to Prof. Roy Ascott, Prof. Peter Weiber, Prof. Jeffrey Shaw, Chan Ka Kei, Eve Tam, Helina Chan, Wu Hung, Iu Chung, Bouie Choi, Kelvin Tsang, Joe Swann, Xu Chung, Dr. Kan Tai Keung and Lam Shau Yam, who in different ways have contributed to parts of this dissertation.

Copyright Statement

I hereby declare that the research in this thesis is the direct result of work by Hung Keung, and therefore no reproduction or extraction is permissible without the written agreement of the author of this thesis.

Signature:                                      Date:

June 12, 2014
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee. Work submitted for this research degree at the Plymouth University has not formed part of any other degree either at Plymouth University or at another establishment. This study was partly financed with the aid of a studentship from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Relevant exhibitions and conferences were regularly attended at which work was often presented and external institutions were visited for consultation purposes.

Publications (or presentation of other forms of creative and performing work):

Exhibitions:

Art work: ‘Upstairs / Downstairs' project

2009

WL Berlin-Hong Kong
ifa Galerie, Berlin, Germany, 26 November 2009

9th Seoul International New Media Festival,
South Korea, 1- 14 April 2009

East Side Projects
Birmingham, United Kingdom, 26 September – 8 November 2009

Subvision Kunst Festival Off
Hamburg, Germany, 26 August – 6 September 2009

Alternative Space LOOP
Seoul, South Korea, 4 July – 24 August 2009
LOOP Video Festival
Casa Asia, Barcelona, Spain, 29 – 30 May 2009

Ursula Bickle Videolounge
Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 1 – 31 March 2010

This is Hong Kong
Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts / 102 Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan, 15 January - 28 March 2010

Where to Come From; Where to Go: Retrospective: Video Works by HUNG Keung
Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Cinema Pacific and JSMA, University of Oregon, Eugene, United States, 6 April 2011

Art work: ‘Bloated City & Skinny Language’ project

Chinglish – Hong Kong Art Exhibition
Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong

Mind + Soul | Sensibility x Sensation: Straddling the Emotional/Digital Divide
Yuanfen New Media Art Space, Beijing, China, 14 June – 31 July, 2008

The “Creative Hong Kong” Pavilion
The 4th China (Shenzhen) International Cultural Industries Fair (ICIF)
Shenzhen Convention & Exhibition Canter, China, 16-19 May 2008

Four Seasons: The 3rd China Media Art Festival
China Academy of Art, HangZhou, China, 8-9 Apr 2008

Chinese Contemporary Art
Baltic, Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle, United Kingdom, 9 - 10 Feb 2008

Asian Art Biennial 2009 – Viewpoints & Viewing Points
National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art, Taipei, Taiwan, 24 October 2009 - 28 February 2010
You_ser 2.0: Celebration of the Consumer
Medienmuseum, ZKM | Center of Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany, 1 May - 30 August 2009

Uncharted: User Frames in Media Arts
Santralistanbul, Istanbul, Turkey, 21 Mar -16 Aug 2009

2011
The White Box: Hung Keung: Bloated City & Skinny Language
University of Oregon, Eugene, United States, 5 April 2011 – 14 May 2011

Art work: ‘Dao Gives Birth to One’ project

2009
RECURRENCE - Exhibition of Young Artists from Cross-Strait Regions
AFA Beijing, Beijing, China, 17 October – 27 December 2009

Former Central School Envisioning Days
Former Hollywood Road Police Quarters, central, Hong Kong, February 2009

re:animating: JAAC exhibition 09
Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre, Hong Kong, February 2009

Hangzhou Digital Art 2009
Hangzhou Peace International Exhibition Centre, Hangzhou, China, 9 -13 April 2009

2010
Time Unfrozen - From Liu Kuo-Sung to New Media Art
Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, 16 Oct 2010 – 2 Jan 2011

Hong Kong Contemporary Art Biennial Awards (HKCABA)
Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, 21 May – 01 Aug 2011

ARTHK 10: Hong Kong Contemporary Art
Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong

Legacy and Creations - Art vs Art, Shanghai World Expo 2010
Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai (SH MoCA), China, 15 October - 12 November 2010

Hung Keung: Dao Gives Birth to One (Interactive & workshop version 2012)
Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, United Kingdom, 6 July – 1 September 2012

Presentation and Conferences Attended:

(1) Title (presentation):
Insect Project: Simulation of the Crowd Behaviour of Insect / Calligraphy
International Symposium of Electronic Art (ISEA) Session Title: Bio-Mediations, Singapore, 26 July 2008

(2) Title (poster):
Insect Project: Simulation of the Crowd Behaviour of Insect / Calligraphy

External Contacts: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Word count of main body of thesis: 83,828

Signed

Date: June 12, 2014
Thesis Overview

Premise
The digital potentials of *time* and *space* can be extended and reinterpreted through an analysis of the traditional Chinese philosophy of *Dao* and a critical comparison of four disciplines: calligraphy, painting, sculpture and media arts. Through theoretical research and creative practice, an original contribution to knowledge and research – in this instance into the nature of representations of cultural identity – can be conducted.

Abstract
In this thesis, I argue that traditional Chinese thinking and its manner of approaching art can be successfully expanded onto a different platform: digital media art. My research (both in theory and practice) shows how this transformation expands the notions of time and space and forges new interdisciplinary correlations by addressing traditional Chinese culture in four different but interrelated manifestations: the philosophy of Dao, calligraphy, painting and sculpture. As a result, I claim that digital media can shift the notions of time and space from traditional Chinese thinking into contemporary digital art. Conversely, the digital concept of time and space can be interpreted by an analysis of (i) the traditional Chinese philosophy of Dao, so as to understand how ancient Chinese perceived the universe of time and space; (ii) four areas of Chinese art addressed in my theoretical and practical research (as elaborated in subsequent chapters). For example, a new understanding of ‘scroll format’, ‘play-appreciation’ and Chinese digital art has been introduced through my own practice. In fact, this direction has not been sufficiently dealt with in the past, and deserves more attention in the future. The thesis demonstrates how my practical research was heavily influenced and contextualized by my theoretical research, while the result of my practical artwork applies, expands and transforms that theory.

This thesis aims, both theoretically and practically, at providing the reader with a new experience – the perception of the notions of time and space inherent in traditional
Chinese thinking – by combining these concepts with digital technology. Many
different methods used in traditional Chinese scroll painting and calligraphy have in
their day investigated and developed new ideas of time and space – e.g. multiple
perspectives, binary visual modes, visible and invisible spaces, reversed images and
inverted vision. All of these concepts could be further extended through digital
moving images and interactive art in order to provide the audience with a new
spatiotemporal dimension as an enhancement of visual experience and knowledge.

Through my experimental practice (i.e. interactive art, moving images, workshop and
exhibitions), I have illustrated how digital art and digital technology can build on the
notions of guan (觀; ‘to observe’), and you (遊; [1] ‘to tour’, ‘to travel’; or [2] ‘to
roam’, ‘to saunter’). Furthermore, digital art can help viewers use the notions of play
and appreciation – wan shang (玩賞, ‘play-appreciation’) – in Chinese context
exhibition spaces. By exploiting this new dimension of experience, contemporary
Chinese artists will, it is hoped, be able to introduce the spirit of traditional Chinese
thinking to digital platforms, creating a guide that not only broadens the notions of
time and space for digital media artists and audiences, but also forges new
 correlations between the various disciplines of philosophy and media art.

This thesis, therefore, rests on three investigative pillars: (1) contextual analysis
through the history of Chinese art and – to a lesser extent – Western art; (2) the
possibilities of modern digital media art; (3) analysis and application of the Chinese
philosophical tradition (art theory and the notion of time and space) to elucidate and
develop the interface between traditional Chinese and modern digital art. The result of
my research has shown that what emerges from – and also motivates – the
investigation is an understanding that digital art (moving images and interactive art) is
an appropriate and effective medium for the communication and deepening of
Chinese cultural awareness.

My research structure and development is divided into six steps as follows:

Firstly, in developing this thesis, I posit that the ideas of time and space [Chinese
terms and terminologies: shi jian (時間, ‘time’), kong jian (空間, ‘space’), and yu zhou
have been handled in traditional Chinese scroll painting and calligraphy through the application of multiple perspectives, binary visual modes, visible and invisible space, the passing of time, and non-linear narratives. When these potentials are reproduced by media artists, novel insights, experiences and knowledge about time and space are re-interpreted for their audiences, while the history of time and space tends to collapse.

Secondly, I examine the idea of the ‘Yellow Box’, whose original aim was to suggest a novel approach to the understanding of the relation between contemporary Chinese artworks and museum-based exhibition space. I argue, however, that such a direction does not consider the potential of digital media art, and my practical projects demonstrate that the ‘Yellow Box’ idea still has room for further development in its application to digital art history. Moreover, the analysis of time and space offered here in the context of my own media-art production process (custom software and hardware) can benefit other researchers and artists. The attempt to illustrate Chinese art theories and to document and reflect upon different ways of perceiving the position and role of the audience can provide a unique and fruitful insight into the incorporation of Chinese thinking and manners into media art practice.

Thirdly, I analyse the correlation between traditional art and contemporary digital media art in relation to time. I first illustrate how multiple spatiotemporal experiences merge into one pictorial space in terms of non-linear narrative in some significant traditional Chinese art pieces, and then argue that digital art can actually help to re-interpret the traditional Chinese notion of time in a modern dimension. The results of my study reflect how the notions of (1) cycle, (2) non-linear narrative, and (3) ‘play-appreciation’ in ancient Chinese art correlate to the elements of ‘looping’ and ‘layering of content’ in digital art, which allow viewers to have real-time experience of ‘time passing and transitioning’. My analysis, however, also indicates that some contemporary Asian digital artworks (all relating to time transition) have not yet considered the viewer’s spatiotemporal experience in relation to such idea as ‘play-appreciation’ through viewers’ bodily engagement.
Fourthly, I examine the spatial correlations between Chinese and media art, and argue that there are many correlations between the past and contemporary Chinese art in the ways in which viewers’ virtual and physical experiences have been applied. I analyse how the idea of ‘two different positions of the viewer’, through painting, reliefs and gunpowder in China, correlates with digital media art today. Such correlation allows the artist to play with the idea of ‘multiple identities’ through digital media (e.g. dual and multiple screens). The results of the analysis reveal a strong correlation between traditional art forms and modern digital media art that permits the artist and the viewer to manipulate the idea of ‘multiple identities’ through dual and multiple screens in both real and virtual spaces.

Reflecting this, my practical project demonstrates how pictorial and virtual space function as part of one’s cultural identities through viewers’ bodily engagement. For example, in line with my experience of multiple-identities in relation to my own Indonesian-Chinese background on the one hand, and the ‘upstairs culture’ of Hong Kong on the other, I combined a series of fragmentary stills and moving images in the ‘Upstairs / Downstairs’ project (2004-2012) to demonstrate how digital technology can help visualize the notions of multiple viewpoints through multiple screens. From there I went on to ask whether my Asian cultural background could help transform traditional visual experiences onto a digital platform by integrating a sense of ambiguity and multiple identities. As neither the direction of such a topic nor the technical approach had been embarked upon before, I created the interactive installation *Bloated City & Skinny Languages* (BCSL) (2006-08) in order to invite viewers to experience multiple identities through dual screen visual representations and corresponding bodily engagement.

Fifthly, I integrate temporal and spatial aspects by examining and questioning the possibility and limitations of combining the ideas of *shu* (calligraphy) and *hua* (painting) in 2D and 4D practices today in China and Hong Kong. I first take the idea of ‘landscape-characters’ suggested by Hong Kong artist Kan Tai Keung (1942-) as a case study, to exemplify a significantly new approach to combining the relation between *shu, hua* and long scroll format through ink painting, and I then compare this
with other scroll format orientated works such as *Beijing Olympics opening; Cursive II; The Broken Window* and *The Science of Aliens*. The comparison leads into an examination of how the idea of long scroll format can be transformed into a contemporary mode by means of digital technology, which in turn demonstrates the impact of scroll format on spatiotemporal experience via digital technology in terms of viewer role shifting.

Finally, the argument of the thesis is summarized and rounded off in a further practical research project, the series *Dao Gives Birth to One* (exhibition and workshop). This provides a sense of illusory spatial and temporal experience, and suggests how a sense of ‘cycle’ could alter our conception of time and space. By including the holistic or cyclical nature (infinite space and endless time) of the philosophy of *Dao*, my creative practices and workshops demonstrate that digital technologies show potential in enhancing viewers’ physical engagement with and in their experience.

The results of the present research contribute new knowledge while making a number of suggestions and recommendations for artists and curators in, for example, translating the traditional Chinese idea of ‘play-appreciation’ from visual (2D) to virtual (4D) experience. This research and the practical art projects associated with it will, therefore, effectively contribute to the making of a new digital art history.
# Table of Contents

Thesis Overview .................................................................................................................. 1  
Premise .................................................................................................................................. 1  
Abstract .................................................................................................................................. 1  
List of Figures ........................................................................................................................ 9  
List of Tables .......................................................................................................................... 15  
Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 16  
  Aims ...................................................................................................................................... 16  
  Objectives .............................................................................................................................. 17  
  My Asian cultural background and influences ................................................................. 18  
  Methodology and Trans-disciplinary Research ................................................................. 27  
  Implementation of my creative practices ............................................................................. 28  
Chapter Overview ................................................................................................................. 29  

## Chapter 1

1.1. Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 34  
1.2. Time and space in China .............................................................................................. 35  
1.3. The perspective of hua (畫, ‘Chinese painting’) ......................................................... 49  
1.4. The perspective of zi (字, ‘Chinese character’) ............................................................. 73  
1.5. The perspective of shu (書, ‘brush writing’) ................................................................. 88  
1.6. Time and space in Chinese Relief Art ........................................................................... 111  
1.7. Chapter Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 126  

## Chapter 2

2.1. Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 128  
2.2. Wan shang (‘play-appreciation’): theory and practice ................................................ 129  
2.3. Bodily engagement and long scroll format ..................................................................... 145  
2.4. Three-way intimacies ...................................................................................................... 173  
2.5. Critical Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 186
Chapter 3

3.1. Introduction........................................................................................................... 188
3.2. Translation and meaning ..................................................................................... 190
3.3. Narrative and interaction ...................................................................................... 205
3.4. Layering of content and non-linear time ............................................................. 230
3.5. Chapter conclusion ............................................................................................... 249

Chapter 4

4.1. Introduction........................................................................................................... 250
4.2. Multiple identities and multiple spaces ............................................................... 250
4.3. Heterogeneous identity: the example of Hong Kong........................................... 259
4.4. Virtual experience, multiple vision and bodily engagement .............................. 270
4.5. Chapter conclusion ............................................................................................... 303

Chapter 5

5.1. Introduction........................................................................................................... 304
5.2. New approach to shu hua: ‘landscape-characters’.............................................. 306
5.3. Case studies: potential of digital-media applied to scroll format....................... 313
5.4. Chapter conclusion ............................................................................................... 329

Chapter 6

6.1. Introduction........................................................................................................... 331
6.2. The concept of Dao............................................................................................. 332
6.3. The idea of long scroll.......................................................................................... 333
6.4. Chinese-character writing as a 3D and 4D experience........................................ 337
6.5. Exploring the idea of ‘play-appreciation’ in digital media.................................... 342
6.6. Chapter conclusion ............................................................................................... 360

Chapter 7

7.1. Correlations ......................................................................................................... 362
7.2. Recommendations ............................................................................................... 364
7.3. Author's artwork in thesis ................................................................................... 365
7.4. New knowledge for digital art history ................................................................. 367
7.5. Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 368

Bibliography ................................................................................................................ 372
Glossary .......................................................................................................................... 409

Appendix ........................................................................................................................ 416
  DVD [1]: pdf documents and video files .................................................................. 416
  DVD [2]: Playable DVD ......................................................................................... 417
  Proof of Practice ...................................................................................................... 418
List of Figures

Figure 1. Jian written in Bronze inscriptions and Small Seal script.................................42
Figure 2. yi, da, and tian ..................................................................................................46
Figure 3. Consistent development of the contemporary character tian (天).................47
Figure 4. Pinhole camera ..............................................................................................51
Figure 5. Perspective Drawing Handbook.....................................................................53
Figure 6. Draughtsman Drawing a Reclining Woman ...................................................54
Figure 7. Draftsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Woman....................................54
Figure 8. One-point perspective and reverse perspective .............................................56
Figure 9. Travellers Among Mountains and Streams .....................................................61
Figure 10. The viewer standing on a rock.....................................................................61
Figure 11. A visual path from exterior space to interior space .....................................62
Figure 12. (Detail) Men and animals .............................................................................62
Figure 13. Travellers Among Mountains and Streams ..................................................63
Figure 14. Terror ............................................................................................................65
Figure 15. The different locations of the same ‘figure’ in this digital print .................66
Figure 16. Three different one-point perspectives......................................................67
Figure 17. The Last Judgment in Cyberspace ...............................................................68
Figure 18. Two different viewpoints ............................................................................69
Figure 19. The development of the character 見 (jian) ...................................................75
Figure 20. A line drawn between the two squares resulted in 呂 ................................76
Figure 21. Different types of Chinese-character systems .............................................77
Figure 22. Character 呂 ...............................................................................................77
Figure 23. Invisible square box ....................................................................................78
Figure 24. The English alphabet’s linear combinations..............................................79
Figure 25. The linear combination of square Chinese characters ..............................79
Figure 26. The transformation of prototypical square-centred Chinese characters ....80
Figure 27. Eight Principles of Yong ...............................................................................81
Figure 28. 人 (ren, ‘human’) .......................................................................................82
Figure 29. Structure and construction .........................................................................83
Figure 30. Chinese character 月 (yue) .........................................................................84
Figure 31. Chinese character 山 (shan) ................................................................. 84
Figure 32. To invite viewers to experience space and time virtually .............. 85
Figure 33. Close up of Dao................................................................. 86
Figure 34. Three-dimensional Chinese-character animation 西 (xi) .............. 87
Figure 35. Close up of Dao Gives Birth to One........................................ 87
Figure 36. A Trilogy ............................................................................ 101
Figure 37. Music and Dance Banquet...................................................... 112
Figure 38. (Detail) Section C of Music and Dance Banquet ...................... 113
Figure 39. The frames as bold black lines .............................................. 115
Figure 40. Analytical breakdown of the 7 frames into 3 sections .................. 116
Figure 41. Three sets of sequenced images ............................................ 118
Figure 42. (Detail) Frame nos. (4) and (5).............................................. 119
Figure 43. (Detail) The two frames comprising section 3 .......................... 120
Figure 44. (The first step) Each animal executing the entire movement ......... 123
Figure 45. (The second step) The extrapolated frames.............................. 124
Figure 46. Images captured from the desktop....................................... 125
Figure 47. Video-image sequences ....................................................... 126
Figure 48. ‘White Cube’, ‘Black Box’ and ‘Yellow Box’............................ 136
Figure 49. Project at Qingpu Village .................................................... 138
Figure 50. Traditional Chinese rowing boats in Qingpu............................ 139
Figure 51. Visitors and the guests ....................................................... 139
Figure 52. (Detail) The literary journey ................................................. 140
Figure 53. The Old Cement Factory ..................................................... 141
Figure 54. Video and animation work Lie ............................................. 143
Figure 55. Unfolding scroll, unfolding narrative, unfolding time ............... 146
Figure 56. The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai .................................. 147
Figure 57. The position of (two) ‘Han Xizai’ figures ............................... 152
Figure 58. The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai .................................. 152
Figure 59. Four scenes’ respective lengths .......................................... 155
Figure 60. Sub-scene (a) and sub-scene (b) of scene 2 ............................ 157
Figure 61. Animation clips .................................................................... 159
Figure 62. The difference between scene (a) and scene (b) .................... 160
Figure 63. (Left) Original picture ....................................................... 162
Figure 64. The lady with the pipa relative to scene .................................................. 163
Figure 65. Animation clips .......................................................................................... 164
Figure 66. (Left) scene (b); (Right) scene (a) ................................................................. 165
Figure 67. (Left) scene (b); (Right) scene (a) ................................................................. 166
Figure 68. The concept of ‘Implied Scenery’ ................................................................. 168
Figure 69. (Left) The process of making a rubbing ....................................................... 171
Figure 70. Ghosts Pounding the Wall; .......................................................................... 172
Figure 71. A Project for Writing Colophon ................................................................... 175
Figure 72. A Project for Writing Colophon ................................................................... 176
Figure 73. Ritual Prayers for a Good Harvest ............................................................. 177
Figure 74. Calligraphy writing of Lanting Xu (蘭亭序) ................................................ 180
Figure 75. (Details) Calligraphy writing of Lanting Xu; ............................................ 180
Figure 76. A postcard .................................................................................................... 181
Figure 77. Samples of e-cards on the web .................................................................... 182
Figure 78. (Detail) The Chinese texts 婚 (hun) and 分 (fen) .......................................... 183
Figure 79. (Image clip) 30 Sec of Care ........................................................................... 194
Figure 80. Still Life 02: Orchid .................................................................................... 195
Figure 81. Orchids ........................................................................................................ 195
Figure 82. The Landscape of Moon Jar ......................................................................... 197
Figure 83. The Landscape of Moon Jar ......................................................................... 197
Figure 84. A seventeenth-century screen painting by Kano Tan'yu .............................. 199
Figure 85. Flowering Plants of the Four Seasons ........................................................ 201
Figure 86. Flowering Plants of the Four Seasons ........................................................ 202
Figure 87. Flowering Plants of the Four Seasons ........................................................ 204
Figure 88. Flowering Plants of the Four Seasons ........................................................ 204
Figure 89. The two ‘Han Xizai’ figures ........................................................................ 207
Figure 90. (Right): the beginning; (Left): the end sections of the painting ............... 208
Figure 91. The beginning of the narrative of the painting .......................................... 209
Figure 92. The seemingly last scene in the hand-scroll painting ................................ 212
Figure 93. Compressed and overlapping time-space in a hand-scroll painting .......... 215
Figure 94. A Deer of Nine Colours ............................................................................. 216
Figure 95. long scroll format ....................................................................................... 219
Figure 96. The storyline of the narrative is triangular in shape ................................ 219
Figure 97. The first version of the visual journey ....................................................... 220
Figure 98. The second version of the visual journey.........................................................221
Figure 99. The third version of the visual journey..........................................................221
Figure 100. The fourth version of the visual journey.......................................................222
Figure 101. The fifth version of the visual journey..........................................................223
Figure 102. *Inopportune: Stage One* .............................................................................226
Figure 103. Jing Ke’s Attempted Assassination of the King of Qin..................................233
Figure 104. Five Stages (nos. 1-5) of *JK Assassination* ................................................234
Figure 105. Six frames ......................................................................................................239
Figure 106. Six climactic moments in the ‘assassination’ story.......................................239
Figure 107. The function of the table................................................................................240
Figure 108. (Detail) Stamps and colophon writings .........................................................243
Figure 109. (Detail) Stamps and colophon writings .........................................................243
Figure 110. The chronological order of the colophons in *Autobiography* .....................244
Figure 111. Video clips of ‘*LBITP*’ .................................................................................246
Figure 112. Video clips as a sequence ..............................................................................246
Figure 113. Video clips as a sequence ..............................................................................246
Figure 114. Video clips as a sequence ..............................................................................247
Figure 115. The last scene of ‘*LBITP*’ ...........................................................................247
Figure 116. *Admonition of the Instructress to Palace Ladies* ........................................251
Figure 117. A pair of mirror images ..................................................................................253
Figure 118. The lady’s real face .........................................................................................253
Figure 119. The opening scene of the movie ...................................................................255
Figure 120. Movie clip from *Vertigo* .............................................................................256
Figure 121. Movie clips from *Vertigo* ..........................................................................257
Figure 122. Multiple layers ..............................................................................................258
Figure 123. The visual effect of the motion sequence ......................................................258
Figure 124. Four examples ..............................................................................................265
Figure 125. Video clips of different combinations ..............................................................267
Figure 126. Division of the video screen .........................................................................267
Figure 127. Different combinations of still and moving images .......................................268
Figure 128. Different combinations of still and moving images .......................................268
Figure 129. The basic structure of the ‘Spirit Road’ .........................................................272
Figure 130. The regular Chinese characters ....................................................................274
Figure 131. Binary vision .................................................................................................275
Figure 132. *Ethereal Flowers* ............................................................. 277
Figure 133. *Morel’s Panorama / Parallel Realities* .......................... 279
Figure 134. Concept image of *Bloated City & Skinny Language* ....... 283
Figure 135. (Web clip) *Beijing Morning Post* .................................. 287
Figure 136. The word ‘love’ (愛, ai) ................................................ 289
Figure 137. The traditional Chinese character for ‘love’ ..................... 289
Figure 138. The traditional Chinese character for ‘country’: 國 (guo) .... 290
Figure 139. The word ‘country’ (國, guo) .......................................... 291
Figure 140. Video clips, in sequence of *Insect Project* ..................... 295
Figure 141. BCSL interactive system .............................................. 297
Figure 142. Different reactions to two different behaviours ................ 298
Figure 143. *Bloated City & Skinny Language* (version II) ............... 299
Figure 144. Stone tablet with reversed inscription ............................ 301
Figure 145. *Ethereal Flowers* .......................................................... 301
Figure 146. *Morel’s Panorama* ..................................................... 301
Figure 147. Three different spaces and identities ............................. 302
Figure 148. Kan’s *No Basic Rules* ............................................... 307
Figure 149. The shape of each mountain ........................................ 308
Figure 150. Detail from Kan’s *No Basic Rules* ................................ 309
Figure 151. The mountain ............................................................... 311
Figure 152. seven panels in a hanging scroll .................................. 312
Figure 153. the opening ceremony’s first scene .............................. 314
Figure 154. Video clips of the transition ......................................... 314
Figure 155. Video clips of the opening ceremony’s first scene .......... 314
Figure 156. Video clips presenting dancers ..................................... 315
Figure 157. Video clips of the centre of the scroll moving ................. 316
Figure 158. The scroll form as presented in the opening scene .......... 316
Figure 159. *Cursive II* ................................................................. 318
Figure 160. *The Broken Window* .................................................. 319
Figure 161. Holographic space ...................................................... 320
Figure 162. Spatial configuration of a cylindrical panorama .............. 320
Figure 163. Spatial configuration of a synthetic hologram ................ 320
Figure 164. *The Broken Window* .................................................. 324
Figure 165. The traditional Chinese approach .............................................................. 324
Figure 166. *The Science of Aliens* ........................................................................ 325
Figure 167: *Dao Gives Birth to One* ..................................................................... 331
Figure 168. *Dao Gives Birth to One* ..................................................................... 333
Figure 169. Screen scenario of *Dao Gives Birth to One* ....................................... 334
Figure 170. 12 videos screen with 12 different running times ................................. 337
Figure 171. Visitors sit freely at the exhibition space ............................................... 337
Figure 172. Animation sequence ............................................................................. 338
Figure 173. Animation sequence ............................................................................. 339
Figure 174. *Text Rain* ............................................................................................ 340
Figure 175. *Korean 8-fold Screen* ......................................................................... 341
Figure 176. Comparison ............................................................................................ 341
Figure 177. *Dao Gives Birth to One* ..................................................................... 348
Figure 178. *Dao Give Birth to One* ...................................................................... 349
Figure 179. Providing a sense of flexibility and freedom to the audience ............ 350
Figure 180. *Dao Give Birth to One* ...................................................................... 351
Figure 181. Merging viewers into the exhibition space ........................................... 351
Figure 182. Chinese Arts Centre .............................................................................. 353
Figure 183. Members of the audience sitting on the cushions ................................. 354
Figure 184. The scene of ‘Flip and Fly’ .................................................................... 355
Figure 185. Audience members practising in the workshop .................................. 355
Figure 186. the production of animated text sequences in the workshop .............. 356
Figure 187. Audiences are playing .......................................................................... 356
Figure 188. Chinese Arts Centre .............................................................................. 357
List of Tables

Table 1. *mu qian* (目前) and *yi shi* (一時) in relation to *shi jian* (時間, ‘time’) ........37
Table 2. *shi* (時) and *shi jian* (時間) ................................................................. 38
Table 3. *The Last Judgment in Cyberspace* ......................................................... 71
Table 4. *gu chui* (鼓吹) ....................................................................................... 92
Table 5. An analysis of the poem’s original Chinese text ........................................... 95
Table 6. Analysis of parts one and two of *Cursive II*. .............................................. 107
Table 7. Analysis of negative and positive space in *Cursive II* ................................. 108
Table 8. Information graphic regarding parts one and two of *Cursive II* ................. 109
Table 9. Comparison .................................................................................................. 110
Table 10. Comparison (sections / scenes of the painting) ......................................... 150
Table 11. Comparison of the number of scenes in the painting ............................... 153
Table 12. Comparison of art critics’ segmentation .................................................... 154
Table 13. Comparison of the number of the people in scene 2 ............................... 158
Table 14. Three short phrases (袖絕, 拔劍, and 劍長) .............................................. 238
Table 15. Comparison .............................................................................................. 302
Table 16. Critique and comparative overview of the five works ............................. 329
Introduction

The notions of *time* and *space* and their treatment in traditional Chinese art play an important role in Chinese intellectual history. Contemporary Chinese art, on the other hand, is undergoing a major shift in representation, partly, at least, due to the influence of the new media. While more evolved notions of time and space could be relevant to many types of contemporary Chinese art, the physical platforms of painting and calligraphy have always tended to be confined to the 2D approach, because painting and calligraphy writing were traditionally made on rice paper, slabs or stone tomb walls and monuments. Traditional Chinese art is also governed by the social aspects of Chinese history.

Aims

My theoretical examination and analysis of the elements of traditional Chinese art aims, therefore, to:

- Understand Chinese philosophies behind the notions of time and space.
- Compare certain Chinese terminologies that are related and relevant to the definitions of time and space. By tracing definitions from historical Chinese literature and dictionaries, I will show how the meaning of time and space has changed over the centuries.
- Study how the handling of time and space in Chinese art was influenced by and corresponded to the Chinese philosophy of *Dao*.
- Compare how the traditional ideas of time and space could be interconnected by using examples from scroll paintings, Chinese characters and calligraphies, and then use this as the foundation for rethinking and extending the possibility of these issues in the context of digital media art.
My practical steps towards the realization of these aims include the following:

- To compile a series of contextual interviews on the subject of Chinese contemporary art, collecting professional opinion about how Chinese artists are currently appropriating past references.
- To examine the limitation of, and critique the reasons why, the idea of the ‘Yellow Box’ has not yet been fully utilized for digital media technology.
- To design and formulate a series of custom-made interactive programming systems for content creators, curators and artists as applications of the concept of Dao, ‘play-appreciation’, ‘multiple identities’, ‘bodily engagement’, etc.
- To incorporate digital media art as an extension of scroll painting and Chinese calligraphy in relation to the concept of 4D experience.
- To create a series of practical and experimental art projects as a research platform for audiences, viewers, researchers and curators in order to suggest an alternative way of appreciating contemporary Chinese art.

Objectives

In this research, two major Chinese art forms (scroll painting and calligraphy) will be featured and new forms of media experimentation will be invented to attempt to answer my research questions. I posit that the meaning of time and space in these two traditional Chinese art forms can be seen as beyond the confines of their physical 2D plane, consisting instead of a 4D virtual and psychological dimension where time and space can coexist. Using new media platforms, these two art forms are transported and re-appropriated into a digital realm, where the viewer can gain, by immediate experience, a new understanding of time and space.

In pursuit of this aim, I will first examine how the notions of time and space were originally applied in the process of creating Chinese characters, and on this basis seek to mimic the relationship between Chinese calligraphy and the notion of time and space in digital media art. Relevant philosophies of time and space from Chinese scroll painting and calligraphy will be explored by building a series of artistic and
practical art projects differing with regard to the form of their media, the narrative mode of their content, and the exhibition venue or location. The ‘Chinese new/digital media’ part of this research focuses on Hong Kong, because artists in this ‘transitional city’ – a place of changing identities and multiple political, historical and cultural transformations – also represent current shifts in Chinese philosophy in relation to time and space. I believe that by combining the analysis of traditional art forms with the immersive experience of the viewer in digital media artworks, an alternative and innovative platform for new media in relation to the Chinese context can be created.

My Asian cultural background and influences

In fact, my own Asian cultural background has affected my interpretation of the idea of ambiguity, and my experience of multiple identities, extending the concepts of time and space, has inspired my approach to digital technology. My special interest in this topic has stemmed from my early childhood in China and my current backdrop of Hong Kong. In my thesis, therefore, it is relevant and important for me to illustrate the relation between my upbringing and my interests and research direction, and how my background inspired my practice. I will divide my analysis into two areas; (1) how my early childhood in China and my family triggered my sensitivity towards Chinese painting and calligraphy on the one hand and multiple identities on the other; (2) how living in Hong Kong has nurtured my interests in the issue of multiple identities and its bearing on spatial experience.

Both my mother and father were literati and painters, educated in Indonesia and Mainland China in the 1950s. They went to China to obtain their undergraduate degree in agriculture after finishing their secondary school education in Indonesia when they were about sixteen years old. In 1949, because of the call from Chairman Mao, my parents decided to leave their home-towns (my father was in Jakarta, my mother in Surabaya) and moved to China to help build the new China. Twenty-four years later in 1973 (when I was three years old), due to the ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’ in Mainland China, my family moved to Hong Kong.
My acquaintance with Chinese ink, scroll paper, seal, brush, traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting was made through my family when I was about 9 years old. In fact, I was regarded as a hyperactive child when I was in primary school and the main symptoms of hyperactivity include inattention, impulsivity and excessive activity. My mother, therefore, decided to introduce me to traditional ‘ink-related’ knowledge, and demonstrated to me all the steps of ink and seal making, calligraphy and painting in order to strengthen my level of concentration and self-discipline. Ever since that moment I was surrounded by these traditional materials, and I soon began to feel very excited with my art practice. This affection for ink painting and calligraphy has remained deeply rooted in my mind and soul, accompanying me in my later studies of design, fine art and media art.

The transition of Hong Kong from being a British colony into a Chinese city nurtured my future direction of creation in an irrevocable manner. My *Bloated City & Skinny Language* is a relevant interactive artwork in the sense that it applies dual screen technology that presents discrepancies on the two screens while interacting with the viewer to create a sense of ambiguity. The reunification of Hong Kong with Mainland China triggered rethinking of self-identities among many local people, and the ability to shift between being Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese led to much confusion and ambiguity. This is exactly reflected in *BCSL*, which provoked ambiguous and non-straightforward, non-logical interactions between the viewer and the dual screens. Since 1997, Hong Kong has been a Special Administrative Region (SAR) with its own policies, laws, financial system, passports, and so on. Hong Kong has operated under the ‘one country, two systems’ principle for almost fifteen years, and local residents have been living under the influence of Eastern and Western cultures for more than a hundred years. In fact, Hong Kong has developed a unique culture that can be seen and felt from different perspectives. One such perspective concerns the use of a uniquely local vernacular – Chinglish.

*Chinglish, noun. A language which is a mixture of English and Chinese, especially a type of English that includes many Chinese words and/or follows Chinese grammar rules. (Chinglish 2008a)*
The use of Chinglish in Hong Kong has a history spanning more than a hundred years. In fact, it is rather difficult to identify the sources of certain expressions. The term Chinglish is relevant to my study because it is relevant to my upbringing, which has affected my perception of language and identity. I tend to be more sensitive to my relation to China than many other residents of Hong Kong, because of my birth-roots in Mainland China. I wondered if I should I feel shame at using and speaking Chinglish? This feeling triggered my interests in the meaning of Chinese language items and my Hong Kong identity. As my parents were Chinese Indonesians, we had few relatives in Hong Kong. My parents, my sister and I needed to learn Cantonese but found it hard to rid our speech of its lingering Mandarin accent. Since childhood, I needed to manage up to four different languages and dialects (Mandarin, Cantonese, Indonesian, and English) at the same time, and have acquired adeptness in three cultures (those of Mainland China, Indonesia, and Hong Kong). I always encountered myriad cultural influences when interacting with my friends and family.

In 1997, Hong Kong reunited with the People’s Republic of China. Questions began to linger in my mind. Is Hong Kong a country, a state, or a city? Am I Indonesian Chinese, Chinese, Chinese-born Hong Kong person, or Hong Kongese? These issues have confused me for as long as I have thought about them. Another, closely related concern was whether after 1997 Hong Kongese and Chinese people, including those living overseas, should learn simplified Chinese or traditional Chinese. This social issue has inspired my later research direction and my practice in several different contextual layers.
My confusion surrounding the use of traditional and simplified Chinese characters was very similar to the ambiguity engraved in my identity as a Hong Kongese/Chinese. My artwork *Bloated City & Skinny Language* was founded on these elements, and an event in 2006 further triggered my decision to create this work.

In 2006, when I was staying in New York on a research scholarship, I read a news report in the *Beijing Morning Post*¹ about the United Nations’ decision to use and recommend only simplified Chinese characters (the system used in Mainland China) starting in 2008. The news came as a surprise to me because Chinese characters, particularly traditional Chinese characters, have played an incalculably significant role in Chinese history. In my opinion, simplified Chinese characters cannot effectively replace traditional ones. Traditional Chinese characters contain thousands of years’ worth of history and were used widely in China before the communist government (which established the People’s Republic of China) simplified the characters in the 1950s and 1960s. Traditional Chinese characters are still in common use today in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Malaysia, and some Chinese communities in North America, Australia, Canada, and Europe. Ever since China joined the United Nations in 1971, the United Nations has been using both simplified and traditional Chinese in its documents. The noted linguist Zhou Youguang (周有光, 1906- ) and the head of the Chinese Academy of Practical Linguistics Chen Zhangtaï (陳章太, 1932-) said that, however, the United Nations should end its use of traditional Chinese characters after 2008 and should recommend only simplified characters, as it was unnecessary to employ two sets of characters.

However, despite declarations that simplified Chinese was preferable to traditional Chinese, I found that learning traditional Chinese characters remained the best – and perhaps the only – way for current and future generations (both Eastern and Western) to understand ancient Chinese culture with sufficient breadth and depth. Traditional Chinese characters have been developing for the past five thousand years, mirroring the substance and the development of ancient Chinese aesthetics, culture, and

philosophy. I agree that a standardized form of Chinese writing (simplified Chinese) may signify China’s increasing international influence, or may encourage more people unfamiliar with Chinese to learn the language. However, in the long run, people around the world will reap greater benefits in relation to understanding Chinese culture and history through learning traditional written Chinese rather than the simplified version. This is also a statement stipulated in my thesis: that we must preserve the value of both sets of Chinese characters through the reinterpretation of traditional Chinese views of time and space – as I do in my practice in and for our present time.

Furthermore, what alerted my sensitivity about China’s current socialist economic development was caused by my trip to Shanghai in 2006. I was invited by Shanghai Zhangjiang Hi-Tech Park to create an interactive art project in celebration of this new district in Shanghai, China. Founded in July 1992, the district is located in the centre of Pudong New Area with a planned area of 25 sq. km. Zhangjiang Hi-Tech Park outlines its mission in the following terms:

*Make “integration and innovation” the development axis. Make “resource-integration control” and “service-integration innovation” the driving force. The park presents five categories of development: focused national strategies, integrated industrial development, promotion of R&D collaboration, innovation of development modes, and leadership in cutting-edge technology.*

*(About Zhangjiang 2008)*

In August 2006 I was invited to visit this new district in Shanghai. Located between Shanghai Airport and the city centre, Zhangjiang Hi-Tech Park is regarded as an

---

important and convenient area for the people of Shanghai. After arriving at the park, a representative there showed me around and we eventually went to the roof of one of the buildings, which offered a panoramic view of the whole district. While I and other visitors stood on the rooftop enjoying the scenery, the representative explained that the district had originally belonged to a small community, but the government had relocated the district’s inhabitants to other places and had then demolished the original houses. The tour guide was proud to declare that all the buildings in this hi-tech park were new. But I felt no pride in this assertion. I had mixed and complex feelings about this kind of demolition. On the one hand, I felt happy to see that my ‘motherland’ has been rapidly developing in the past ten years. On the other hand, I felt upset to learn that relatively powerless residents of an apparently disposable community had to sacrifice so much of their world for this contemporary establishment. I wondered why this country – China – could not develop in a more gradual manner. The Chinese government devoted all of its attention to promoting the purportedly excellent high-tech park, and little or no attention to the area’s original inhabitants. These conflicting feelings explain my pride in being Chinese, coupled with a sense of disquiet upon noting the devaluation of human considerations. When I have the growing strength of China’s economy in my mind, I feel proud to say, ‘I am Chinese’; but when I notice the underdevelopment of human rights in China, I would rather say, ‘I am from Hong Kong’. These two different reactions reflect the ambiguity regarding my national and social identity. From these conflicting perceptions, HongKongese like me come to wrestle with a profound sense of ambiguity and a divided mind.

The direction of China's socialist economic development has been rapidly changing since 1979, with a shift towards enhancing productivity and improving external economic relations. In the past decade, in particular, I have encountered widespread conflict and struggle stemming from urbanization, city reconstruction, rapid economic growth and unhealthy lifestyles. Severe conflicts between villages and cities, the heated debate pitting traditional Chinese against simplified Chinese, the equally intense controversy pitting Cantonese against Chinglish, and the ‘one-country, two-systems’ regime are only a few examples. In fact, with my roots deeply planted in the mainland, I would very much like to see rapid and healthy development of the people
and cities of Mainland China. When I notice the huge number of cities being destroyed to give way to new urban development, however, I wonder if such ‘progress’ is too fast or on the right track.

In pursuit of self-reflection and identity in this multivalent cultural setup, I gathered my concerns and gradually transformed the experience I described above into a series of experimental and practical interactive art projects. *Bloated City & Skinny Language* (2006-08), for example, aimed at inviting viewers to experience a dramatic situation about sense of ‘ambiguity’ – a special situation in Hong Kong, a divided self – through bodily engagement with three identities (themselves and two projections of themselves) in the exhibition space (I will further elaborate on this in Chapter 4). Furthermore, my interest in the subject of multiple spaces in relation to multiple identities and cultures was triggered by my pervious living experience in the old area of Causeway Bay, Hong Kong.

In 2000, a stream of new upstairs shops opened for business in my neighbourhood. This was caused by the high rentals in Hong Kong, which affected some operators of smaller shops. They naturally began to look for cheaper premises upstairs. Unlike the new ground-level, street-side boutiques, these new businesses started up without ribbon-cutting, choreographic ceremonies, or swanky opening-day parties. These stores, however, lacked neither excitement nor customers. My observations over the years suggest that what people could find ‘upstairs’ might not be the same as what they could find ‘on the street’. This unique upstairs culture has provided people with an alternative to the traditional way of shopping by giving them an opportunity to make unusual discoveries and engage in unexpected adventures.

In 2004, curator Anthea Fan referred to this phenomenon as ‘upstairs culture’: “the limitation of space and high rent rate give birth to the so-called upstairs business culture” (Fan 2004), and I would argue that it correlates to the phenomenon of ‘multiple cultures and identities’. Anthea’s argument was that the upstairs business culture contributed to the unique character of Hong Kong’s business culture, and her
awareness of the importance of these features in relation to Hong Kong’s identity inspired her to propose a multifaceted exhibition about the city’s upstairs culture. Touching on these themes from a more general perspective, the exhibition *Upstairs/Downstairs, A Dialogue with Hong Kong* addressed Hong Kong’s unique attributes in this respect. For this exhibition, I was invited to create a video artwork constituting a record of the life of ordinary people in Yau Ma Tei and some of the area’s most authentic characteristics. This drove me to create a series of digital photo stills integrated with moving images that expressed my artistic and conceptual impressions of Hong Kong people and their flexible approach to survival in this overcrowded and dynamic living space.

When looking into the possibility of relocating to Yau Ma Tei in 2004, which is on the Kowloon side of Hong Kong, I kept recalling my first adventures – many of which took place around the midnight hour – in the area’s upstairs stores. Yau Ma Tei is famous – or perhaps notorious is a more apt description – for its peripheral underground society: gangsters, sex workers, new immigrants, and other figures who typically live half in the shadows. Such experience and my memories of those characters intermingled with my current experience of different people carrying out diverse tasks with divided selves or identities (for example, they might be students on the ground floor but become sales persons upstairs) in the transformed upstairs areas. The combination of all these complex identities and activities created complex and illusionary spatial experiences for me, which resulted in events just as bizarre as the ones experienced and engraved in my memory years earlier. In short, the identity of citizens residing in this neighbourhood is considerably more complex than that of people in other areas of Hong Kong.

All these concerns and experiences inspired me to apply multiple screens and layering of content to the same theme, and eventually led to my experimental and practical project: *Upstair/ Downstairs: A Dialogue with Hong Kong: Stories of Human Activities Told in the 1,440 minutes of a 24-hour Stretch*.3

---

3 In 2004, the public-art project ‘Upstairs / Downstairs: A Dialogue with Hong Kong’ commissioned the video installation *Upstairs/ Downstairs: A Dialogue with Hong Kong: Stories of Human Activities Told in the 1,440 minutes of a 24-hour Stretch* (2004-2012).
While my personal cultural background and living experience in China and Hong Kong has inspired my theoretical and practical projects, my dynamic design, fine art and digital media art education background has also allowed me to stay curious about the value of my traditional Chinese art theory, my practice in terms of ink, paper, and scroll format, as well as the correlation between East and West in terms of digital media technologies.

For example, I studied both design (1992) and fine arts (1995) in two different Universities in Hong Kong, which has allowed me to remain sensitive to the relations between design practice and fine art training. On the one hand, I understand that some Chinese art practices are deeply influenced by traditional Chinese thinking, such as infinitive space and endless time experience, or the idea of ‘transcendence’ from the human being to nature (the universe) etc. However, comparatively speaking, design and digital media art training require a more scientific and logical mindset. Therefore, I feel equally interested in questioning how digital media art (video and interactive art) could interpret the traditional Chinese ideas of time and space that have been applied to Chinese art forms like scroll painting and calligraphy. Can digital media lead to a new idea of time and space in Chinese communities through theoretical research and practice?

In this thesis, I will explore how the viewer’s sense of time and space can be highlighted by animated non-linear sequences in scroll format. My digital artwork series Dao Gives Birth to One (2009-2012) will serve here as a case study and

---

4 I graduated from the School of Design at Hong Kong Polytechnic University and then continued my studies in the Department of Fine Arts at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Afterwards, I obtained my master’s degree in film and video studies from Central Saint Martin’s College of Art and Design (London, England) in 1997. Between 2001 and 2002, with my DAAD scholarship, I was a visiting scholar at the Centre for Art and Media Technology (ZKM), where I conducted a year’s worth of research at the invitation of Professor Jeffrey Shaw. Located in Karlsruhe, Germany, ZKM is regarded as one of the most significant and influential digital media research centres in Europe. Around this time, I gladly accepted an invitation to teach (BA and Master class) at the Department of Interactive Media in Designskolen Kolding, Denmark (2002). In 2006, the Asian Cultural Council (ACC) awarded me one of the most prestigious scholarships in my field – the Desiree and Hans Michael Jebsen Fellowship. This generous endowment enabled me to conduct research, teaching, and other exchange activities in the United States.
practical experimentation project furthering the analysis of how traditional Chinese ideas of *time* and *space* can be applied through digital moving images in a long scroll format incorporating elements of ‘play-appreciation’.

**Methodology and Trans-disciplinary Research**

Dr. Stephen Goddard has stipulated that creative art-based practice and experimentation should include a description of the research project, an account of the procedures and techniques utilised, a comparative contextualisation in relation to the fields of inquiry, and a series of observations based on the findings and conclusions (see Goddard 2007, p. 114).

Following these guidelines, I first set up a research lab, ‘innov + media lab (imhk lab)’, with five part-time researchers in 2005. This project aimed at examining how new experiences and theories of physical and virtual space are generated and communicated to the audience/participant through a series of practical art projects using digital media technology.

Secondly, the present trans-disciplinary study applies a combination of methods and gathers evidence at theoretical, practical and experimental levels. The theoretical part of the research is based on the study of Chinese painting, characters, and calligraphy, as well as of contemporary Chinese and Asian art. My analysis of certain extensive Eastern and Western literature reviews, a historical review, a series of contextual interviews (around Asia, Europe and the U.S.), language analysis, comparative media analysis and conference participation are also relevant. The emphasis in the practical and experimental part of the research falls on visualization analysis, driven by digital media technology (i.e. interactive software design, development and exploration), experimentation, innovative art-based projects, and workshops and exhibitions as site-specific practices, together with their exegesis.
Implementation of my creative practices

As a digital media artist who has been working since 1996 on shifting the notions of time and space, I have always been interested in how digital media could be utilised to collapse those two dimensions. In my earlier media works like Sightseeing (2001-2003), Sloping (2001-2003), and the interactive CD ROM entitled Human Being and Moving Images (1998-2001), the challenge was to explore how the viewer’s sense of compressed time and space could be highlighted by ‘animated non-linear sequences’ and ‘multiple screens’ invoking the traditional Chinese art form of the scroll format. These sequences have changed the degree and duration of audience participation, because they shift our understanding of movement over time.

In my PhD research I have expanded my focus from ‘animated non-linear sequences’ to multiple identities and the philosophy of Dao. In the works mentioned in this thesis entitled Upstairs / Downstairs: Stories of Human Activities Told in the 1,440 Minutes of a 24-hour Stretch (2004-2012) and Bloated City & Skinny Language (versions I & II) (2006-2008), an attempt was made to cause a ‘split’ in the viewer’s identity. I then further expanded my focus from ‘animated non-linear sequences and multiple identities’ to the philosophy of Dao in Dao Gives Birth to One (versions I, II, III & IV) (2009-2012). My main objectives here were to provide a sense of illusory spatial and temporal experience, and to suggest how the sense of ‘cycle’ could alter our perception of time and space. My custom software and hardware helped viewers visualise their own illusions of spatial and temporal experience in the artwork (through 12 video projections, 50 chairs and exhibition space). As a result, by including the holistic or cyclical nature of the philosophy of Dao and the idea of “the immobilization of the audience” suggested by Professor Boris Groys, my digital media art installation responded to Groys’ concern, while enhancing viewers’ physical engagement in the experience.

In order to achieve this aim, I have conducted research into various relevant theoretical contexts and applied specific theories to my art practice. These theories
included the *Dao* philosophy (Laozi and Zhuangzi), ideas about the segmentation of 'time' (*shi jian*, 時間) and 'space' (*kong jian*, 空間); Mozi’s idea about ‘duration’ (*jiu*, 久) and ‘observation’ (*guan*, 觀). Other related Chinese philosophies are similarly combined here with Western theories and researchers’ discussions of perspective, the ‘white cube’, and the immobility of moving images in the museum. These subjects are related to changing notions of time and space. During the course of my research, I have, by conducting interviews with different artists, museum directors, scholars and curators in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Switzerland, Taiwan and the United States, collected seminal information on these issues. I have also compared and reinterpreted the notions of *time* and *space* through reviews of relevant literature, theoretical analysis, and reflections on the work of other artists from Asia, Europe and the USA.

On the practical level, I have applied these findings, along with the theoretical insights into ancient and contemporary Chinese art, in my own art. Hence the video, animation and interactive projects presented here serve to illustrate, contextualize and (most importantly) embody this research. Thus I have examined various ideas such as the concept of Dao, the function of the scroll as a form, the four-dimensional construction of Chinese characters, the ‘Yellow Box’, multiple identities, etc. more closely by incorporating them into my own experimental artwork. Moreover, different ways of perceiving the position and role of the audience are further enacted and examined here, including analysing how painting, calligraphy, reliefs and society are interconnected. How, for example, does an interactive artwork involve the audience as participant, or redefine the role of the viewer? Audience and curator reactions to my experiments and the works of other artists have, in this context, also been documented and reflected upon.

**Chapter Overview**

In relation to the question of how the notions of time and space have been handled in traditional Chinese scroll painting and calligraphy, and how this compares to the same topics in media arts today, this dissertation will be structured as follows:
Chapter 1: Ancient Chinese art as a digital context

Chapter 2: ‘Bodily engagement’, ‘intimacy’ and ‘play-appreciation’ meet digital technology

Chapter 3: Correlations between the idea of time and traditional Chinese art

Chapter 4: Spatial correlations between Chinese and media art

Chapter 5: Bringing temporal and spatial aspects together

Chapter 6: Reinterpretation and ex-contextualization

Chapter 7: Conclusion, summary, recommendations and contribution to new knowledge

Following this chapter division, the body of evidence assembled in this research project can be introduced summarily as follows:

**Chapter 1** clarifies certain Chinese terms and terminologies (such as *shi jian* (時間, ‘time’), *kong jian* (空間, ‘space’), and *yu zhou* (宇宙, ‘the universe’), as well as traditional ideas of perspective, in order to gain an overview of the representation of space and time in Chinese history. My analysis illustrates how ancient Chinese philosophy is relevant to, and correlates historically with, the digital media. The results also show the importance of understanding the terminology of time and space in ancient Chinese culture if you intend to work as a digital media artist in this culture.

**Chapter 2** I analyze the ‘Yellow box’ as an idea in relation to the ideologies of ‘interaction’, ‘viewer engagement’, ‘intimacy’ and the notions of ‘play and appreciation’. However, I critique that media artworks are seldom represented on this platform. I recommend, therefore, that the ‘Yellow Box’ idea be extended to incorporate digital media, which could further enhance the sense of intimacy through bodily engagement of the viewer.

In **Chapter 3** I discusses the visual conceptualizations of *si shi* (四時, ‘four seasons’)

30
in still-life objects and how this practice has undergone reinterpretation by three contemporary Asian artists using time-based digital-media technology. Then, I investigate how multiple spatiotemporal experiences were merged into one single pictorial space in terms of non-linear narrative in ancient Chinese art, such as Han relief and hand scroll painting. Finally, it examines how digital media helps to visualise the correlation between ancient Chinese tomb art and interactive art in relation to the concept of ‘bodily engagement’. The results of this study reflect how the ideas of cycle and non-linear narrative in ancient Chinese art correlate to the elements of ‘looping’ and ‘layering of content’ in digital art, which allow viewers to have real-time experiences of ‘time passing and transitioning’.

**Chapter 4** indicates how ‘multiple identities and spaces’ were applied in Chinese painting, allowing viewers to assume different positions (identities) towards an artwork. This correlates with digital media art, which permits the artist to play with the idea of multiple identities through dual and multiple screens. I then analyse how my own Asian cultural background has affected my interpretation of the concept of ‘ambiguity’, and how my experience of multiple identities has inspired my approach towards ‘multiple screens’ through digital technology. Thirdly, I examine how the concept of ‘virtual space’ can be traced back to ancient Chinese art theory and philosophy, and show its correlation to contemporary – especially digital media – art practice, with its virtual worlds. Finally, I describe and analyse how a contemporary Chinese artist and a digital media artwork from the West have applied traditional notions of time and space, involving the dynamic spatiotemporal experience of multiple and shifting viewpoints. Chapters 3 and 4 both demonstrate that the scroll format shows a close relation between shu and hua in terms of handling the notions of time and space.

In **Chapter 5** I address the potential of combining the ideas of scrolls and shu hua, but also critiques the limitations as they appear in the contemporary art and media context. I present and analyse several case studies such as two large-scale public events and performances from two Chinese masters, Zhang Yimou and Lin Hwai-min, inquiring to what extent they have succeeded in integrating the scroll format into their
digital-media *shu hua* artwork under the aspect of extending their audience’s spatiotemporal experience. Also, by comparing artworks by media artist Jacques Desbiens and digital art group ART + COM, I analyse the idea of *you* (遊, ‘to tour’, ‘to travel’, ‘to roam’, ‘to saunter’, allied to ‘play appreciation’) in scroll format. This cannot be applied easily to hologram work, but the idea could successfully be transformed into a contemporary mode by means of interactive media technology through inviting viewers to enjoy visual experiences from multiple and shifting perspectives, as well as through bodily engagement.

**Chapter 6** focuses on my digital art project *Dao Gives Birth to One* (a series and a workshop), which demonstrates and explores the possibility of integrating the scroll format with *shu hua* through digital media. This practical project also examines the idea of ‘play-appreciation’, and Dao’s cyclical sense of time and space. These aspects can be integrated and realized through the idea of workshop, chair-installation and digital technology, by shifting the role of the viewer from passivity to activity. The central issue here is whether digital technology mediates and enhances the impact of the scroll format, providing new types of spatiotemporal experience in terms of viewer-role shifting.

Finally in **Chapter 7** I attempt to provide an overview and analysis of the previous chapters. It mainly focuses on the importance of the correlations among traditional Chinese scroll format, *shu hua* and contemporary digital media technology. I indicate how the results of the present theoretical and practical research are contributing new knowledge. I also make a number of suggestions and recommendations for scholars, artists and curators, showing how this research and the practical art projects associated with it could be generalized in the service of a new digital art history.

Both the theoretical and practical aims of this thesis attempt to provide the reader with a new experience of perceiving the notions of time and space in traditional Chinese thinking, by combining these thoughts with digital technology so as to provide new experience and knowledge for audiences, allowing them to broaden and enhance their visual, spatial and temporal experiences. Furthermore, the results of my research suggest: (1) through interactive art and media installation, digital art and digital
technology can build on the idea of guan (觀; ‘to observe’), you (遊; ‘to travel’) and
wan shang (玩賞, ‘play-appreciation’) in exhibition spaces; (2) a new conceptual
workshop with 'hands-on' methodology (my creative practices and exhibition) open
up lots of innovative and engaging exhibitionary and pedagogical possibilities,
including such different components as theoretical and conceptual lecture, practical
learning, personalized creation, participation, democratization, interactivities,
appreciation, and so on. These elements offer a more effective and innovative
pedagogical method than traditional forms of exhibition platform, and will thus help
to contribute and develop new learning experiences of time and space. The traditional
Chinese literati spirit may then be incorporated by contemporary Chinese artists onto
various digital platforms and act as an effective guide that serves to broaden the
notions of time and space for digital media artists and audiences, as well as generating
unprecedented correlations among different philosophical and media art disciplines in
the future.
Chapter 1: Ancient Chinese art as a digital context

1.1. Introduction

The research focus in this chapter contains theoretical analysis as well as literature review and practice. The purpose of the chapter is to re-examine and re-contextualize new media practice within the lost tradition of Chinese painting and calligraphy as spatiotemporal experience. This includes a number of literature reviews and related experiments in ancient and contemporary Chinese art. It is therefore important to clarify certain Chinese terminologies in order to gain an overview about the representation of space and time in Chinese history. The result will facilitate the understanding of why ancient Chinese thinking in space and time is relevant to the creation of a new digital media art history.

I will first illustrate how ancient Chinese artists interpreted the meaning of ‘painting’ (畫, hua) in relation to the verbs ‘to see’, ‘to observe’ and ‘to play-appreciate’. In fact, although traditional Chinese art and art appreciation embrace many formats, from

---

5 I use the term ‘digital media’ with reference to time-based media (digital photography, animation and moving images), the techniques of immersion and interactivity, etc. There is, however, the belief that new media is characteristically interactive, or is made of discrete units, digital samples and ‘old media’ (in contradistinction to ‘new media’) was analogue and continuous. New media theorist Lev Manovich emphasises that ‘old media’ is also “interactive” and involves discrete units (such as the frames in a film). The major difference between the new and the old is: ‘new media’ is about programmability, which is derived from the translation of media into computer data (“numerical representation”). This distinguishing characteristic of new media allows it to “exit in different, potentially infinite version(s)” tailored-made for different users; and the logic of computer data organization merges with cultural categories to produce a new “computer culture” (Manovich 2001, pp. 27-61).

6 Prof. Wu Hung’s interpretation of (traditional Chinese) paintings includes two angles: (1) To see them as a physical, image-bearing object (i.e. pictorial media). Here a painting is regarded as a concrete object, a material product of a culture: a handscroll, hanging scroll, fan, album etc. Each of these forms associates itself with particular types of people and activities, and belongs to a specific environment and situation. They can be considered as painted medium and as architectonic device. (2) To see them as painted images (i.e. pictorial representations). This offers an alternative way to define a traditional Chinese painting and encourage a different kind of contextualization. Seeing a painting as a pictorial representation is to negate its materiality – the surface sign replaces the surface and transforms it into an image with its independent (pictorial) space (Hung 1996, p. 237-243).

7 This English term derives from the “Yellow Box” context. For details, see Chapter 2.
books and miniatures to album leaves, this thesis will focus on the 'scroll' format, because it represents the idea of ‘inter-referentiality’, an essential feature of traditional Chinese painting that can be understood in terms of both ‘medium’ and ‘representation’ (Hung 1996, p. 237-243). The focus on scroll format will help to further my comparison and analysis of the ideas of ‘one point and multiple perspectives’, ‘compressed temporary and spatial experience’, ‘layers of time’, and ‘loop as cycle’. At the same time it will show how these ideas could be applied in the single pictorial space of scroll format, and correlated to contemporary artworks (digital prints, photography, installation and holographs), as well as digital media art.

The result of this research will facilitate further discussion on how the action of shu (書, ‘brush writing’, calligraphy) could generate spatial and temporal experience for both the calligrapher and the viewer. And I will, by comparing an ancient Chinese painting with contemporary Chinese digital artworks, illustrate how these experiences correlate with those sought by the digital media artist. Further, I will argue that the structure of certain Chinese characters involves the elements of time and space, which also correlate with 3-dimensional (3D) forms used in digital media art today. Finally, I will illustrate how ancient Chinese stone reliefs suggest an innovative way to explore the idea of ‘frame sequence’ and ‘scroll form’, even extending it—through software programming—into the realm of digital media art in order to reflect its correlation with the idea of ‘animacs’. This appropriation will be illustrated and examined in examples of artwork from my own practice.

1.2. Time and space in China

A clarification of some Chinese terms used in the context of ‘space’ and ‘time’ will help avoid misunderstanding during the course of this thesis. The technical and philosophical meaning of these Chinese terms may only be tangentially and formally correlated with common translations in the West, because Chinese seldom uses such specific terms as ‘space’ and ‘time’ to identify temporal and spatial experience. The clarification offered here may help the reader understand the evolution of those terms,
shedding light on how Chinese thinking in daily life and activities underwent changes over the course of the five thousand years of Chinese history. Drawing on extensive historical analysis, I will first investigate the traditional Chinese notions of ‘time’ (時間, shi jian), ‘space’ (空間, kong jian) and the ‘universe’ (宇宙, yu zhou) as these bear on the content and format of Chinese art creation.

The idea of time (時間, shi jian)

Let us begin by asking how the idea of time developed through Chinese history. In fact, the English word ‘time’ corresponds to two Chinese phrases: (1) shi (時, ‘time’) and (2) shi jian (時間, ‘time’). They represent macroscopic and microscopic perspectives of time respectively. Shi represents an overall idea of human activity in the universe, so it could be categorized as an element of the Chinese calendar. According to Shuowen Jiezi, (說文解字, ‘Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters’), the first official Chinese dictionary, shi is related to the meaning of ‘day’ and ‘date’. Further, shi means si shi (四時), literally translated as ‘four times’, referring to the ‘four different time zones in a year’. In the book Ideas of Time, the author Wu Guosheng states that in ancient China shi could indicate astronomical, celestial and meteorological etc. phenomena (Wu 2006, pp. 33-34). Also, according to Liu Wenying, who analyses the old forms of Chinese writing, shi meant ‘the sun is rising gradually’. Liu explains that the ‘duration’ of the sun’s rising could suggest both a particular ‘motion’ and ‘changes’ in sunlight (Liu 2000, p. 29). Liu’s analysis reflects the notion that shi could be interpreted in a macroscopic way (Liu 2000, p. 29). The question, therefore, arises: what Chinese character indicates the idea of time in a microscopic perspective? Shi (時) also represents ‘time’ when combined with the character jian (間) as shi jian (時間). So what precisely is the

---

8 Shuowen Jiezi dates back to the Han Dynasty during the second century CE in China.
9 The character shi (時 ‘time’) falls under the category of ri (日, ‘sun’, ‘day’) (Gui 1987, p. 576).
10 Original text: 「日部：時：四時也。從日寺聲。」《說文解字》
11 As ancient China had not yet developed a term equivalent to the English word ‘season’, the usage of si shi was the original way in which people indicated the four major changes in time corresponding to the transitions in a given year. Later, the meaning of si shi evolved into ‘the four seasons’ (spring, summer, autumn and winter).
difference between *shi* and *shi jian*? Though both terms represent ‘time’, I contend that the usage of *shi jian* rests more extensively on the microscopic perspective. This is because the meaning of *shi jian* conveys the idea of ‘a moment’ or ‘a second’ more powerfully than *shi*. In consulting another dictionary, *Ci hai* 12, I found that *shi jian* could mean (1) ‘time slots in the movement of a physical object’ and (2) ‘a specific moment in a movement’ (*Ci hai* 1999, p. 3,727). According to *Ci yuan*, another Chinese-language dictionary, *shi jian* can be explained with reference to (1) *mu qian* (目前), which can mean ‘now’, ‘at present’, ‘at the moment’, and ‘for the time being’; and (2) *yi shi* (一時), which can mean ‘for a short while’, ‘temporary’, and ‘momentary’ (*Ci yuan* 1984, p. 1433). Both *mu qian* and *yi shi* correspond to the idea of ‘temporary’. We can say, therefore, that *shi jian* emphasizes *time* as seen through a microscopic perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Literal translation</th>
<th>Common translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>目前</td>
<td><em>mu</em></td>
<td>eye</td>
<td>now, at present, at the moment, for the time being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>qian</em></td>
<td>in front of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>一時</td>
<td><em>yi</em></td>
<td>one</td>
<td>for a short while, temporary, momentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>shi</em></td>
<td>time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Literal translation of *mu qian* (目前) and *yi shi* (一時) in relation to *shi jian* (時間, ‘time’) (visualization by the author).

A comparative analysis shows, therefore, that the meaning of ‘time’ conveyed in Chinese characters can be divided quite basically along the usage of two phrases: (1) *shi* and (2) *shi jian*. The character *shi* (時) represents time from a macroscopic perspective, whereas the characters *shi jian* (時間) represent time from a microscopic perspective (Table 2). Each of the two phrases thus represents a unique way of looking at the world. This discovery has enabled me to identify and explore how the idea of *time* was applied specifically to Chinese calligraphy and scroll-form painting.

---

12 *Ci hai* is one of the most important Chinese language dictionaries in China.
in the past, and how these two perspectives of time could correlate to digital media art today.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>時</strong> (Macroscopic perspective):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>季節: season (four seasons/ four time zones)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>時辰: twenty-four hours/ earthly branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>時代: the times, an age, an epoch, an era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>時間</strong> (Microscopic perspective):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>目前: now, at present, at the moment, for the time being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>一時: for a short while, temporary, momentary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. A comparison of *shi* (時) and *shi jian* (時間) (visualization by the author).

However, there is another way to perceive time: by examining the function of *jiu* (久). *Jiu* is considered to be an early Chinese character expressing a sense of ‘duration’ and ‘time transition’. *Jiu* refers to the experience of a sequence of time. What does it mean to represent a sense of time in our everyday activities? If time is only a category of the mind, nothing more and nothing less than a construct of human experience, then human experience of time is a necessary—and sufficient—condition for the existence of time. Especially noteworthy among the historically significant Chinese writings that feature the character *jiu* (久) are two texts from the *Mozi* ⑬ (墨子), which is regarded as one of the most significant pieces of writing during the Warring States Period (475 – 221 BCE). In *Book 10: Canon I* (經上), the term *jiu* ⑭ is translated into English as ‘pervasion of different times’ (Graham 1978, p. 311). In *Book 10:*

⑬ The author Mozi (c. 470 BCE-391 BCE) is regarded as one of the most influential and significant Chinese philosophers during *Chu tzu pai chia* (諸子百家, ‘The Hundred Schools of Thought’ Period), a movement that took place in the early Warring States Period.

⑭ Original text: 「久，彌異時也。」卷十《經上》In the original text, (彌, ‘everywhere/ different place’); and (異時, ‘any kinds of time’).
Exposition of Canon I\(^{15}\) (經說上), the term *jiu*\(^{16}\) is translated into English as ‘combines “present” and “past”; mornings and evenings’ (Graham 1978, p. 311). A comparison of these two interpretations indicates that *jiu* can represent all kinds of time, including stretches of time from the past to the present or from morning to evening.

In order to gain a clearer picture of the differences and relations between these three Chinese terms *shi*, *shi jian* and *jiu* in relation to *time*, some basic design elements\(^{17}\) (points, lines, and planes) can perhaps be taken to illustrate and explain them:

(i) Points: The meaning of *shi jian* (時間, ‘time’) corresponds to ‘points’\(^{18}\), and a point can stand for a moment\(^{19}\).

(ii) Lines: The meaning of *jiu* (久, ‘duration’) corresponds to ‘lines’, and a line can stand for a ‘duration of time’ slightly longer than a ‘moment’\(^{20}\).

(iii) Planes: The meaning of *shi* (時, ‘time’) corresponds to planes, and a plane can stand for a general idea of time—a macroscopic perspective\(^{21}\).

Apart from these three Chinese terms, which illustrate through practical usage three different meanings of *time*, there is another Chinese term *shi* (逝) that plays an important role in reflecting how the attitudes of the ancient Chinese towards life and death affected the idea of *time* in traditional Chinese art, such as painting. *Shi* (逝, ‘to

---

\(^{15}\) Mozi explores the explanation from *Canon I* through *Canon II*.

\(^{16}\) Original text: 「久，合古今旦莫（暮）。」卷十《經說上》


\(^{18}\) A point is a coordinate without any dimensions, without any area. The defining characteristic of a dot is that it’s a point of focused attention. Dots anchor themselves in space and provide a reference point relative to the other forms and space around it’ (Bradley 2010).

\(^{19}\) “A point is a coordinate without any dimensions, without any area’ (Bradley 2010a).

\(^{20}\) “A line is a series of points adjacent to each other. Where a point has no dimension, a line has one dimension” (Bradley 2010a).

\(^{21}\) “The difference is the size of the surface has grown large enough to become an important characteristic, as has the contour defining the plane. The larger the size of the plane, the more the dot-like characteristics become secondary. This size is relative to the surrounding space and elements” (Bradley 2010b).
pass’, ‘to elapse’, ‘to die’) demonstrates how the idea of *time* influenced the ancient Chinese attitudes towards life and death. According to *Shuowen Jiezi*, the term *shi* (逝) can be synonymous with the Chinese term *wang* (往) 22, which itself is translated into English as meaning ‘to go’, ‘to depart’, ‘the past’, and ‘formerly’ (Sturgeon 2006d).

With respect to early Chinese thought, the ancient Chinese did not generally believe that *time* would disappear forever; instead, they considered time to be an element in nature, inasmuch as they believed that everything was generated by heaven and earth. Thus, the character *shi* (逝, ‘to pass’, ‘to elapse’, ‘to die’) served to describe something that had departed, corresponding to the English-language wordings ‘time has elapsed’ and ‘people have passed away’. However, in relation to the universe, the character reflected another, somewhat different point of view, which was about how everything must go on. A person’s passing was only one aspect of the universe. Prof. James Legge, one of the most significant Sinologists of the nineteenth century, states that *shi* (逝), as a Chinese character referring to a thing that “passes on (in constant flow)” (Laozi 1981), emphasizes a sense of process and duration, rather than a specific moment. But, most importantly, the process of passing on suggests a sense of going forward without any express destination. As a result, everything will come back to its origins, which is the root of the idea of *Dao* (‘the Way’). In fact, life in the universe represents a huge circle; death engenders a return back, a return to a starting point from which existence recommences—i.e. undergoes re-creation. Thus *shi* (逝) represents not only a ‘passing on’, but also the ancient Chinese mentality towards the idea of death—of passing away. In fact, many ancient Chinese conceived of life as part of a cyclical, circulating system inherent in the universe. The phenomenon of death as a kind of passing away was interpreted as only one stage among many in human life. In *Ideas of Time*, the author Wu Guosheng suggests that the ancient Chinese regarded death as part of human life. The perspective of *Dao* held that death, rather than constituting the ultimate human destination, was—absolutely rather than individually speaking—just one part of human existence in the universe (Wu 2006, p.

22 Original text: 「逝：往也。」《說文解字》
A concentrated examination of Dao in this regard can illuminate this ancient perception of death, humanity, and the universe.

In short, the idea of shi (時) in traditional Chinese thought has no single, specific explanation. Indeed, it consists of different layers of understanding and interpretation. Shi (時) can be explained with reference to macroscopic and microscopic perspectives. Further, the idea of time as treated in Dao De Jing can be regarded in terms of both jiu (久, ‘time transition’ or ‘duration’) and shi (逝, ‘to pass’, ‘to lapse’, ‘to die’). And in a philosophical way, it could even represent the idea of life-cycles in the universe.

The idea of space (空間, kong jian)

The meaning of ‘space’ in English can be translated in Chinese as kong jian (空間), which comprises two characters: kong (空) and jian (間). Firstly, according to Shuowen Jiezi 23, kong falls under the Chinese Bushou 24 category of xue (穴, ‘a cave’, ‘a den’, ‘a grave’), which represents qiao (竅, ‘an aperture’, ‘a hole’). So a general definition of kong (空) could feature the English words ‘empty’, ‘unoccupied’, ‘vacant’, ‘hollow’, and ‘in vain’. Secondly, in investigating the meaning of the character jian (間), it is relevant that both shi jian (時間, time) and kong jian (空間, space) feature the same character jian (間), which can be variously translated into English as ‘between’, ‘within a definite space’, ‘during a definite period of time’, ‘a room’, and ‘a crevice’. According to the dictionary Ci hai, the phrase kong jian could be related to the phrase shi jian, inasmuch as kong jian refers to the borderless and shi jian refers to the timeless (Ci hai 1999, p. 4809). Ci hai defines jian (間) as meaning (1) ‘the interval between two sides’, (2) ‘the relation between two sides’, and (3) ‘in between time and space’ (Ci hai 1999, p. 2339); the other significant Chinese

23 Original text: 「空，竅也。從穴工聲。」《說文解字》
24 Bushou: traditionally recognized components (or radicals) of Chinese characters.
dictionary *Ci yuan* defines the character as synonymous with the Chinese phrase *qing ke* (頃刻), which in English can be translated as ‘in a moment’ (*Ci yuan* 1979-1984, p. 3242).

In the ancient Chinese written form, *jian* (間) is composed of two components (or radicals) of Chinese characters: *men* (門, ‘door’) and *yue* (月, ‘moon’) 25. In the Chinese character *jian* (間), the image of the moon (minus the legs) appears between the sides of a doorframe. The image of *jian* (間) signals that the door is open, letting moonlight shine through (Figure 1). Hence *jian*’s primary meaning concerns a gap, and it is from this that the Chinese character derived its meanings of (in English) ‘space in between’ and ‘middle’. Further, if *jian* is used as a verb, it generally means ‘to separate’, ‘to show discord’, ‘to put a space between’, and ‘to interfere’.

![Figure 1. Jian written in Bronze inscriptions and Small Seal script (visualization by the author).](image)

After further examination of the *Mozi*’s interpretation of *jian* (間) and in line with the English version of the book, translated by Professor Angus Charles Graham (1919-2008),

---

25 Note that the image of the door consists of a doorframe occupying the vertical left-hand and right-hand sides of the radical; and that the image of the moon consists of both a square with a horizontal line through the centre and two ‘legs’ on either end of the square’s bottom horizontal line (one leg is bent and the other curved).
1991), two important aspects of this character and the complex of ideas it represents were revealed. First, in *Canon 1* of the *Mozi*, the Chinese phrase *you jian* (有間) means “having an interval” (有間中也), which can be further explained as “there is a space between two surfaces”, as in the *Exposition of Canon 1* (Graham 1978, p. 311). Secondly, according to Graham, *jian* (間) also “refers to what is flanked”, and he accordingly interprets the asymmetry of the Chinese character in the following terms: “Lengths measured from starting-point to circumference are not flanked by starting-point and circumference. The two extensions are extensions of which it is not the case that they come out level with each other” (Graham 1978, p. 311). Third, Mozi explains that the deeper meaning of *jian* (間) does not identify the *cause* of the ‘in-betweeness’; this character emphasizes only the in-between space. Because ‘space’ does not actually represent emptiness, there is something in between. Thus when *jian* (間) combines with the character *kong* (空), the joined characters *kong jian* (空間, ‘space’) can be interpreted as meaning ‘an empty in-between space’ but not a complete ‘emptiness’.

This can be further illustrated in the way the idea of space is interpreted through that of *Dao*. As Chapter 11 of *Dao De Jing* indicates, the Chinese philosopher Laozi wanted the reader to pay attention to the value of non-existence and to space, which is a type of non-existence. With this goal in mind, he proposed three exemplary cases:

(1) the space within a wheel, (2) the space within a jar, and (3) the space within a

---

26 Angus Charles Graham, Professor of classical Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, was a noted Sinologist.

27 Original text: 「有間，中也。」《經上》

28 Original text: 「有間：謂夾之者也。」《經說上》

29 Original text: 「間：謂夾者也。尺前於區穴而後於端，不夾於端與區內。及及非齊之，及也。間，不及旁也。」《經說上》

30 In fact, another Chinese word, *lu* (纑), represents the idea of ‘there is nothing in between’. The Exposition of Canon I explains the matter with the following concrete example: *lu* (纑) is like “the interval between the two pieces of wood, it refers to where there is no wood” (Graham 1978, p. 311).

31 Original text:

「三十輻，共一轂，當其無，有車之用。埏埴以為器，當其無，有器之用。鑿戶牖以為室，當其無，有室之用。故有之以為利，無之以為用。」

English Translation: “The thirty spokes unite in the one nave; but it is on the empty space (for the axle), that the use of the wheel depends. Clay is fashioned into vessels; but it is on their empty hollowness, that their use depends. The door and windows are cut out (from the walls) to form an apartment; but it is on the empty space (within), that its use depends. Therefore, what has a (positive) existence serves for profitable adaptation, and what has not that for (actual) usefulness” (Lau 2003).
room. He emphasized that although the wheel has thirty spokes, its function lies in the emptiness of the hub; in other words, it is the centre hole for the axle that makes the wheel useful. The jar is kneaded clay, whose space within creates its usefulness. And a well-ventilated room accessible to natural light and to people has windows and doors which, framed in the walls, give value to the space. In other words, it is in all three cases the holes—or, one might say, the ‘absence-contained-within’—that renders the construct useful. Laozi therefore concluded that ideas of existence conjure up visions of real value, whereas ideas of non-existence carry with them a sense of immateriality—and yet, non-existence creates value in the form of usefulness. The last sentence of Chapter 11 of *Dao De Jing* suggests, “Therefore profit comes from what is there; usefulness from what is not there” (Willis 1987, p. 6). This comment on *space* correlates to the useful-useless binary that inhabits the meaning of *kong* (空), which I therefore believe should not be translated into English simply as ‘emptiness’—after all, the emptiness imaged in its radical is demonstrably useful.

Apart from ‘time’ (時間, *shi jian*) and ‘space’ (空間, *kong jian*), which, as I have argued, can be seen to reflect the ancient Chinese attitude towards our ideas of ‘time’ and ‘space’, I also found that the Chinese term *yu zhou* (宇宙, ‘the universe’) reflects a traditional Chinese perception of the relation between human beings and nature. It is to this that I will now turn.

**The idea of ‘the universe’**

The way in which the character combination *yu zhou* (宇宙, ‘the universe’) functioned in early Chinese thought can illuminate for us today how the ancient Chinese transformed their observations of nature into notions of *time* and *space*. This can, in turn, help us to understand how these traditional notions of *time* and *space* were visualized in traditional—and can be visualized in contemporary—Chinese art through the ideas of ‘multiple perspectives’, ‘void’, ‘transcendence’, ‘non-linear narrative’ and ‘scroll format’. However, in substantiating this argument, some specific
terms that relate to the meaning of *yu zhou* must first be introduced: *yi* (一, ‘one’) and *tian* (天, ‘heaven / sky’).

In ancient China, the way in which people perceived *yu zhou* did not hinge on scientific observation or physical experience; instead, these perceptions were a process of transcendence from physical experience to spiritual projection, one that reflects how the ancients perceived both personal space and the space that surrounded them. For example, *yi* (一, ‘one’) is a character referring not only to the number ‘one’ but also to the idea of ‘beginning’. Because *yi* is the first character on the first page of the first chapter of the dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi*, I was prompted to wonder whether *yi* had a specific meaning other than its mathematical meaning as ‘page one of the dictionary’ or ‘the beginning of the dictionary’. I soon realized that *yi* had the large symbolic meaning of ‘the beginning of the whole of creation’\(^{32}\). In traditional Chinese thought the word *yi* referred to how all things came about, how *wan wu* (萬物, ‘ten thousand things’) emerged, and how *Dao* became manifest. Thus, commenting on the origin of the universe, Chapter 42 of *Dao De Jing* states: “The *Dao* (道) gives birth to One. One gives birth to Two, Two gives birth to Three. Three gives birth to *wan wu*” (Laozi 1988, p. 48).

Likewise, in modern Chinese the character *tian* (天) represents ‘heaven / sky’. But *Shuowen Jiezi* defines the character *tian* (天) as *dian* (顚, ‘the summit’, ‘the highest point above which nothing can rise ’)\(^{33}\). The written form of the character *tian* (天) comprises the written form of *yi* (一, ‘one’) and *da* (大, ‘great’, ‘big’). In terms of the visual arrangement of these two characters’, *yi* (一) rests atop the character *da* (大) to form *tian* (天) (Figure 2).

---

\(^{32}\) According to *Shuowen Jiezi*, *yi* means ‘the beginning of the universe’, from which emerges *tian di* (天地, ‘Heaven and Earth’), “which generates the whole of creation” (*Shuowen Jiezi* 2008).  
\(^{33}\) Original text: 「天：顚也。至高無上，從一，大。」《 說文解字： 卷二 ：一部》
Figure 2. The Chinese characters corresponding to the pinyin terms yi, da, and tian (illustration by the author).

But the development of the character and idea tian (天) stretches back to a time of Oracle-Bone inscriptions more than a millennium before the appearance of the first Chinese dictionary (Shuowen Jiezi). Examining this earliest phase of historical development, I found that tian (天) originally meant ‘the head of a man’. This explication reveals that ancient Chinese interpretations of tian (天) rested not on an astronomical but rather on an ideal or philosophical perspective that informed the ancient Chinese observation of personal space and its wider surroundings in general (Figure 3). This philosophical slant suggests that the ancient Chinese put the character...

---

34 This train of investigation makes sense because experts in the field regard Oracle-Bone inscription as one of humankind’s earliest written forms, dating back to the Shang Dynasty (1600 BCE-1046 BCE). However, after people ceased to use it, Oracle-Bone inscription in China disappeared and was not rediscovered until 1899; in other words, Xu Shen, the author of Shuowen Jiezi, had never encountered Oracle-Bone inscription when he edited Shuowen Jiezi in the second-century CE.

35 The author, Xie Guanghui mentions that in the early Oracle-Bone inscriptions and early Bronze inscriptions, tian (天) looks like the frontal view of a man with the head especially prominent. But if tian originally meant ‘the head of a man’ or ‘the top of a head’, it has gradually come to mean the sky above the human head and to mean, even more generally, the whole natural world (Xie 2003, p. 5).
yi (‘one’) atop the character da (‘big’, ‘great’) to indicate that there is something even higher and wider—something even more expansive in every possible direction—than just the idea of a ‘big’, ‘great’ universe.

Figure 3. The strikingly consistent development of the contemporary character tian (天), starting with Oracle-Bone inscription, through Bronze inscription, to Small Seal script (visualization by the author).

Returning now to the character combination yu zhou (宇宙 ‘the universe’), my next question was how this idea emerged in early Chinese thought. The Chinese phrase yu zhou is composed of two separate characters: yu (宇) means ‘space’, and zhou (宙) means ‘time’. I compared relevant texts 36 from the Book of Wenzi (dating from the third century BCE) and the Book of Huainanzi (dating from the second century BCE); these revealed that the ideas of time and space are inherent in the idea of yu zhou. Both the idea of time and the idea of space indicate that the character zhou (宙) entails the ideas of past, present and future. However, yu refers to the positions ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ and the directions ‘up’ and ‘down’, together with the four cardinal directions: north, east, south, and west. The combination of the two characters is developed in Mozi’s semantic interpretation of yu 37, where yu is synonymous with yi sou (異所, ‘different place’). 38 In Mozi’s reading, to have a sense of space is not to be inside a

36 Original text: 「往古來今謂之宙, 四方上下謂之宇。」《文子: 自然》
「往古來今謂之宙, 四方上下謂之宇。」《淮南子: 齊俗訓》

37 In Book 10: Canon I, the term yu means ‘pervasion of different places. (space/extension)’ (Sturgeon 2006b). In Book 10: Exposition of Canon I, the term yu means ‘East and West covers North and South’ (Sturgeon 2006b).

38 In Chinese characters, yi (異) means ‘different’, while sou (所) means ‘place’. The word yi sou (異) therefore means ‘different kinds of locations, places, and positions’.
space but to change direction in space. In comparing these texts about *yu zhou* with one another, one can glean that *zhou* (宙)—as representative of *time*—means ‘changing’, ‘infinite’, and ‘circulating’; and that *yu* (宇) refers to *space* as involving people’s awareness about the relationships between human bodies, the physical environment, and various directions. Thus the double-character phrase *yu zhou* (宇宙) reflects how ancient Chinese people perceived the relationships between *time*, *space* and the universe in highly ideal and abstract ways, and yet in ways that remained rooted in a four-dimensional spatial experience.

The foregoing discussion will, it is hoped, shed light on the way the ideas of *time* and *space* were interpreted in the course of Chinese history. There is, in fact, through the five thousand years of this history, a close philosophical relation between Chinese characters and terms and Chinese thought, whether in daily life or in artistic and scholarly activities. Thus the characters ‘one’, ‘heaven / sky’ and ‘the universe’ entail profound philosophical reflection in which the early Chinese paired up an idea of endless time with an idea of infinite four-dimensional space to explain the phenomena of the universe. These insights have had immense influence on a great deal of pictorial representation in traditional Chinese art.

After this fundamental examination of ideas of time, space and the universe in ancient China, the question that logically arises next in my discussion of Chinese art and the terminologies associated with it concerns the practical application of these ideas. Did the ancient Chinese, for instance, have any knowledge of scientific—or what today might be called ‘academic’—approaches to pictorial representation? Specifically, did they practise perspective techniques, which, historically speaking, were one of the basic visual elements taught in drawing and painting schools? What, then, did perspective mean, and what role did it play, in traditional Chinese art?
1.3. The perspective of *hua* (畫, ‘Chinese painting’)

This section illustrates how ancient Chinese artists used the ‘pictorial space of the painting’ and the ‘function of viewing a painting’ in relation to the verbs ‘multiple perspectives’, ‘to observe’ and ‘to play-appreciate’. My method is to question and examine what Chinese artists did, then to examine images scientifically, for example through our common scientific and logical approach from the idea of ‘camera obscura’ or ‘one-point perspective’? In asking this question I am looking for indications—ways in which the ideas and forms of traditional Chinese art might correlate to modern day digital-media technology.

I have divided the discussion into three parts, focusing respectively on:

1. How the ideas of ‘camera obscura’, ‘one point perspective’ and ‘reverse perspective’ developed both in the West and in China.

2. The idea of ‘perspective’, what it meant in ancient China, its theoretical and philosophical implications, and why it was not commonly used in Chinese art history.

3. Two digital artworks by the contemporary Chinese artist Miao Xiaochun as an example of digital-media exploration, tracing his interests in the traditional idea of multiple perspectives and scroll format.

Development of perspective in the West and in China

This section discusses the issue of the ‘camera obscura’ and ‘one-point perspective’. I will highlight some historical and theoretical materials that might help the reader understand why ancient Chinese artists saw, observed, and depicted scenery not for ‘scientific’ but for ‘spiritual’ purposes.

---

39 The term ‘camera obscura’ (Latin for ‘dark room, vault, or darkened chamber”) refers to a device (usually the shape of a box) that projects a scene from a lit environment through a hole onto a surface. The image typically passes through the device and may well then be inverted by a lens that projects it onto a surface, either the back of the box, or translucent paper, or the back wall of the room.
First of all, I argue that although many relationships between light, shadow, distance and image have been observed, examined, and demonstrated by the ancient Chinese, and recorded in literature that dates back 2000 years, Chinese artists and literati tended to be more concerned with status, refinement, and spiritual fulfilment through the creation and the appreciation of art rather than with formal ‘scientific’ practices. This can be seen in Mozi’s analysis of the relationship between light and shadow, as well as in the correlation between his discoveries and the optical theories developed by the early Middle Eastern scholar, Alhazen (Ibn al-Haytham) (965-1040 CE).

Mozi observed how shadows are affected by (1) changes in length or distance, and (2) the angles of the light sources concerned. In order to familiarize myself more thoroughly with these ideas, I created a series of experimental works in 2009, based on a pinhole-camera workshop in Hong Kong. There, I examined how the device worked and how it corresponded to the observations of Mozi and Alhazen (Figure 4). Mozi’s observations are highly relevant to the basic idea of ‘camera obscura’ as developed in the West. For example, in the Book of Optics, the author Alhazen explained ideas of light by applying geometry and anatomy. Using similar optical findings of his predecessors, Mozi had discovered many relative relations between objects and their reflection, and discussed at length aspects of light, size, and distance. For example, Alhazen conducted a lamp experiment where several different light sources were arranged across a large area, and he expressed his observations in five points. This correlates closely with Mozi’s findings some 1400 years earlier, which can be summarized as four points.

40 The pinhole-camera workshop consisted of eight lessons covering theoretical and practical topics. Supervised by Bobby Sham, a leading pinhole-camera artist in Hong Kong, the classes were held from May to June 2009 at the Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre (JCCAC), a Hong Kong artists’ village. In these eight sessions, Bobby Sham illustrated clearly the theory and history of pinhole cameras, and I experimented with different methods of producing pinhole cameras; indeed, we made our own pinhole-camera boxes with cardboard, cans and other containers.

41 1. light falling through two pinholes creates two images; 2. light rays generally travel in a straight line; 3. light and colours do not blend in the air; 4. when light rays reflect off a bright object and pass through a small hole in thin material, they pass through the hole and present themselves as an upside down image on a plain surface; 5. the smaller the pinhole, the clearer the image.

42 1. light (rays) are transmitted in a straight line; 2. light (rays) create and affect shadows; 3. there is a logic underlying the creation of images based on the passage of light through a small hole (pinhole); 4. the size of the images falling through a hole inside a box depends on the distance between the objects and the projected images.
Cultural Theorist Margot Lovejoy observed that “[d]uring the three hundred years of the use of the camera obscura as an optical mechanical aid before the chemistry of photography was developed, many artists used it to help them in their observation of nature” (Lovejoy 2004, p 21). These camera viewpoints even affected painters, for example Edgar Degas (1834–1917) —*Portraits at the Stock Exchange* (1879) and *Waiting* (1882)—who cut off his figures and never placed them in the centre of the painting, as if a moment had just occurred and been captured by the camera. Degas showed how technology influences ways of seeing, and transferred the science of photo-optics to art.

However, during the same period in China, ink, paper (or silk), and brush were still regarded as the major tools for ‘painting and calligraphy [brush writing]’ (書畫, *shu hua*). Thus while over the course of hundreds of years Western and Middle Eastern

---

43 Especially in Italy and France, the sciences of mathematics and optics converged with art in different ways, and many styles of ‘camera’ and optical lens were produced for various artists (Lovejoy 2004, pp. 20-22). Indeed, ever since European scientists started to curve glass into lenses during the fifteenth century, people around the world have been exploring how three-dimensional objects in four-dimensional time-space contexts can be depicted on two-dimensional platforms. Throughout this process, the view of objects and their contexts would pass through a single-point lens from a camera angle. After 1839, when the silver daguerreotype was introduced, photography became the popular medium for artistic and scientific circles worldwide, with general recognition of its high potential for society (for details, see Appendix 1.1. ‘Camera Obscura’).
intellectuals observed, theorized, and experimented with visual representation, the ancient Chinese—despite making fundamental observations and conducting fundamental analyses of optical matters as early as the Warring States Period—did not apply their findings to the world of art.

The ‘why’ question is important here—why did the ancient Chinese not apply their scientific observations to visual representation? This may well have been due to their philosophical attitude towards the idea of the universe (宇宙, yu zhou) (discussed in Chapter 1.2 above), and their belief that the pictorial space of the painting or artwork represented the artist’s spiritual projection and extension of the universe as a form of transcendence. Intimately connected with this is the fact that there was in the past no Chinese phrase for the English term ‘perspective’. Nevertheless, the idea underlying the term was not absent from either the theory or practice of Chinese art. The following section will compare what perspective means from the standpoint of the West with how the ancient Chinese perceived it (or its underlying structures) in the fifth century BCE, and how they treated perspective in relation to the activity of creating and appreciating traditional Chinese art.

One of the most fundamental components of perspective in the Western tradition is ‘one-point perspective’. However, it presumes a stationary point of view in front of a stationary (or ‘frozen’) object or scene, whereas in fact most of us see things with two eyes while our body is in motion. ‘One-point perspective’ might, therefore, be one of the more technically accurate methods of simulating what people see in a restricted context of reality, but it does not represent what ancient Chinese artists observed and depicted. The term ‘perspective’ derives from the Latin word ‘perspicere’, which means ‘to see through’, which is similar to the Chinese phrase tou shi (透視). In general, perspective is a method for visualising and transforming what we see in three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional plane. It helps to create a sense of space, depth and the illusion of three-dimensionality on a flat canvas or drawing surface. Thus the term ‘perspective’ can be thought of as referring to an attempt to take what we see and to depict it on a flat surface like paper. According to research by theorist Martin Kemp, ‘linear perspective’ was invented c. 1413 in Italy by Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446), one of the foremost architects and engineers of his day (Kemp 1990, p. 9).
I have taken a drawing by Joseph D'Amelio in order to illustrate the traditional Chinese understanding of the idea of ‘perspective’ in comparison with the views that developed in the West. In *Perspective Drawing Handbook* (2004), the author D'Amelio illustrates how ‘linear perspective’ functions from the Western artist’s point of view (Figure 5). He uses two drawings, each based on a specific method, to identify the differences between two visualizations of a scene 44.

Figure 5. [Figure 5. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.]

Even if the left-hand picture is not a perspective drawing, it reflects a method of visual representation historically characteristic of both Western and Eastern art. And this method might be closer to our experience in reality because, physically, we do not see objects and scenes from a single fixed-focus lens—from a ‘one-point perspective’. This is relevant to my discussion, as the ancient Chinese did not seek to depict objects and scenery from a single fixed-focus viewpoint. Instead, they were concerned with what should be visualized and perceived in pictorial space from a macroscopic point of view. As Wilfrid H. Wells, the author of *Perspective in Early Chinese Painting*, observed, Chinese artists thought about 3D perception and its pictorial representation in a different way:

44 D'Amelio first points out that the painting on the left-hand side was probably drawn by children, beginners, or an artist who was deliberately disregarding traditional principles of art. Comparatively, the picture on the right-hand side demonstrates how the conventional appearance of the dishes on the table could be depicted with elliptical shapes on a converging foreshortened surface (D'Amelio 2004, p. 15).
The surface of course, has a solid, material existence, but in early Chinese painting it has not an optical one. The Chinese started, not from the ideation of a plane between edges, but of emptiness between them. (Wells 1935, pp. 11-12)

In fifth century BCE China intellectuals and artists were rather selective in applying this idea of ‘perspective’ to art, and their approach has been carried right through into contemporary Chinese art.

Figure 6. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 7. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

A second Western example, soon after Brunelleschi, is Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), a German artist and theorist who demonstrated the use of a draftsman’s net—a wooden
frame covered with a grid of black threads—to enable an artist to replicate a scene onto a drawing platform (Figures 6 & 7). European artists widely adopted and developed this perspective and its optical geometry during the Renaissance (for details, see Appendix 1.2. ‘Perspective’).

Although the European methods were not evident in China at that time, one should not draw the conclusion that such methods of visualization did not exist in Chinese art. In fact a similar method had already been introduced by Zhong Bing (宗炳) (c. 375-443), a scholar and art critic of fifth century CE China. In his famous text ‘Preface on Landscape Painting’, Zhong clearly describes how to use silk as a medium for mapping scenery as it appears in reality: “One would place a translucent silk (as a 2-dimensional plane surface) over the scenery to be mapped. Then an overview of landscape scenery from a long distance could be captured and visualized through the limited space of the [silk] drawing platform” ①5. For, as the text explicitly states, “a silk-mapping method can treat height and length” ①6. Nevertheless, the artists of ancient China seem to have been reluctant to apply this method of pictorial representation. Rather closer to their spirit is what is today called ‘reverse perspective’. This will be described in the following section.

①5 ‘Preface on Landscape Painting’ (畫山水序, Hua shan shui xu). Original text: 「且夫昆侖山之大, 瞳子之小, 追目以寸, 則其形莫睹, 迴以數裏, 則可圍於寸眸。誠由去之稍闊, 則其見彌小。今張絹素以遠暎, 則昆、閬之形, 可圍於方寸之內。豈劃三寸, 應千仞之高; 橫墨數尺, 體百里之迥。是以觀畫圖者, 徒患類之不巧, 不以制小而累其似, 此自然之勢。如是, 則嵩、華之秀, 玄牝之靈, 皆可得之於一圖矣。」《畫山水序》

The idea underlying this method actually correlates to the idea underlying the ‘one-point perspective’ of the West. Today, in the same way, a person can stand in front of a window, put a piece of translucent tracing paper on the surface of the window, and trace the scenery directly outside the window onto the tracing paper. This shift in scale is then exact.

①6 In this case, the character gao (高) represents ‘height’ and jiong (迥) represents ‘length’, or ‘distance’.
Author George Rovny’s distinction between ‘one-point perspective’ and ‘reverse perspective’ (Rovny 2007) is also valuable in any differentiation between Chinese and Western attitudes about the roles of the viewer and the artist. As can been seen from this illustration, ‘one-point perspective’ represents “the [here and now] and the [what’s happening] relative to the artist’s or viewer’s immediate surroundings, from which context the artist or viewer takes in a scene through peripheral vision” (Rovny 2007). In contrast, ‘reverse perspective’ enables the artist or viewer to be an observer insofar as he or she is the object located and engaged at the vanishing point (Figure 8). Rovny’s ideation of these two perspectives illustrates why ‘reverse perspective’ rather than ‘one-point perspective’ is a common feature in early Chinese art (for details, see Appendix 1.3. ‘Reverse Perspective’).

Theoretical and philosophical implications
Chinese artists may well have understood how the silk-mapping method could help an artist depict size differences through the use of vertical and horizontal lines. However, while the purpose of the optical theory of perspective is to define or explain relationships between objects in space as observed by the individual viewer, the purpose of Chinese art has traditionally been to voice artistic, philosophical, theoretical and spiritual views and interpretations from the ‘vanishing point’ of the individual viewer (as explained above in the context of ‘reverse perspective’). And correspondingly, as Wells observed, the starting point of the Chinese artist was the emptiness between the edges of the object of vision.

Any discussion of this “emptiness” will involve an elaboration of the philosophical, theoretical and practical implications of ‘perspective’ in ancient China. This must start with the philosophical understanding of time and space which, as has been explained above, underlies the ancient Chinese way of understanding the universe (宇宙, yu zhou). This cosmology, together with the idea of Dao (‘the Way’), with its emphasis on transcendence, reflects the traditional Chinese preference for ‘perceiving details from a macroscopic perspective’, which I will elaborate in detail immediately below.

In line with this philosophical tradition, I will also introduce the idea of ‘three distances’, which is a dynamic and flexible way for artists to relocate themselves (physically or visually) into different spaces of the painting. This represents a valid alternative to Zhong’s (and, by extension, the later West’s) ideas of optical theory.

The idea of ‘transcendence’

As Hong Kong painter Wong Wucius (1936-) suggests, the idea of ‘transcendence’ can be illustrated as follows:

---

47 Wong Wucius is one of the most significant Chinese ink artists, art educators, and art administrators in Hong Kong.
We see and feel this material world through our senses. It exists outside the inner world where our passions, desires, imaginations, aspirations, fears, and dreams are nested, and it ranges from the celestial bodies of the universe to subatomic activity. (Wong 1991, p. 14)

Rooted in Dao (‘the Way’), the idea of transcendence has influenced the way traditional Chinese artists handled time and space in pictorial representation, particularly in landscape painting. Wong declares that nature appears to us (as artists and viewers of art) in three-dimensional space, with length, breadth, and height, and in this context, people normally grasp sizes and distances in relation to the typical dimensions of the human body. I would contend that the activities of landscape painting in the Chinese tradition function not to capture and record reality from the ‘one-point’ perspective of the individual viewer, but to promote the process by which a person’s own body and spirit evolve from immediate perception of an outer into an inner space—into an endless temporal and unlimited spatial experience that approaches ‘transcendence’. Chinese artists re-appropriate the space they have encountered from (‘outer’) reality into a self-made, imaginative (and thus ‘inner’) space that contains and represents their own subjective view generated in a moment of transcendence where self meets other (in that sense going out of, transcending itself) in the act of knowing. Accordingly, ancient Chinese artists may well not have used ‘perspective’ (e.g. in the sense of one-line perspective), because this method was too precise and too close to the reality that they physically perceived.

**The idea of ‘macroscopic perspective’**

A different way of ‘perceiving details’ was discussed by the Chinese Scholar Shen Kuo (沈括) (1031-1095) of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 A.D.), who wrote *The Dream Pool Essays*. He emphasized the idea of *Yi da guan xiao* (以大觀小).

48 *The Dream Pool Essays* (夢溪筆談, Meng xi bi tan).
meaning ‘to perceive details from a macroscopic perspective’. While this multi-
character phrase seems to suggest a rather unscientific approach to human perception,
Chinese art critics, thinkers and artists have adopted it and its underlying idea as a
major way of transferring perceptions of three-dimensional space onto two-
dimensional surfaces, emphasizing that all the scenery should be completely
visualized, or at least as completely as possible, rather than only partially—i.e. on the
basis of a narrowly optical perspective. This approach suggests a duration, a journey,
a spatiotemporal transition, a gaze from various viewpoints. It does so because the
ideational practice of viewing details from a macroscopic perspective can be
implemented by the application of multiple viewpoints to a single pictorial space.

The idea of ‘three distances’
The ‘multiple viewpoints’ technique will be considered in greater detail later, but
what of the closely allied idea of ‘three distances’ (三遠, san yuan), which has served
to integrate multiple perspectives into traditional Chinese landscape painting (山水畫,
shan shiu hau)? Ancient Chinese artists and theorists possessed methods and
theories concerning the depiction and the visualization of scenery whereby four-
dimensional experiences would appear on two-dimensional platforms. One of these
ideas is yuan (遠), meaning ‘distance’. In the book Lofty Messages of Forests and
Streams, the artist Gao Xi (郭熙) (c. 1020-1090 CE) of the Northern Song Dynasty
argued that landscape painting should enable viewers to walk, see, play, and live. He
suggested using the idea of yuan to perceive and interpret the relation between
painters/viewers and scenery in landscape painting. Gao identified three ways of

49 Original Text: 「大都山水之法, 盖以大觀小, 如人觀假山耳。若同真山之法, 以下望上, 只
合見一重山, 豈可重重悉見, 兼不應見其溪谷間事。又如屋舍, 豈可見其中庭及後巷中
事。若人在東立, 則山西便合是遠境; 若人在西立, 則山東卻合是遠境。似此如何成畫? 章君
蓋不知以大觀小之法, 其間折高、折遠, 自有妙理, 豈在掀屋角也。」《夢溪筆談》
50 Shan shiu literally means ‘mountain water’.
51 Gao Si (郭思) edited 'Lofty Messages of Forests and Streams' (林泉高致, Lin quan gao zhi) which
is about his father Gao Xi (郭熙)’s thoughts and sayings about the art of landscape painting.
52 Original text: 「世之篤論, 謂山水有可行者, 有可望者, 有可遊者, 有可居者。畫凡至此, 皆
入妙品。但可行可望不如可居可遊之為得, 何者? 覽今山川, 地占數百裏, 可遊可居之處十無
三四, 而必取可居可遊之品。君子之所以渴慕林泉者, 正謂此佳處故也。故畫者當以此意造,
而鑒者又當以此意窮之, 此之謂不失其本意。」《林泉高致集: 山水訓》
Case study: Travellers Among Mountains and Streams

The idea of ‘three distances’ can be accurately illustrated by examining the silk scroll painting *Travellers Among Mountains and Streams* 
54 (10th-early 11th century) by artist Fan Kuan (范寛) (Song Dynasty: 960-1279 CE) (Figure 9). First of all, the location and the size of the rock in the centre foreground of the painting leaves viewers with the impression that they are standing on top of the rock, looking up at the mountain (Figure 10). This viewing experience is regarded as the ‘higher distance’. Secondly, the rock at the bottom of the painting has the effect of inviting viewers to engage in and get close to the mountain. This viewing experience can be categorized as the ‘deeper-distance’. Finally, two men and four mules are walking along a path through the woods in the painting. They are much smaller than the mountains and the woods, giving the viewer, who looks down into the valley in the middle distance from his/her viewpoint on the rock, a further sense of depth (Figures 11-12). Moreover, this method of visual composition allows the viewer to imagine a connection between the space inside and outside the painting (which the mule train has just ‘entered’, and thus suggests a sense not only of depth but also of duration —i.e. a temporal experience. This spatiotemporal viewing experience can be regarded as ‘horizontal distance’.

---

53 Original text: 「山有三遠：自山下而仰山顛，謂之高遠；自山前而窺山後，謂之深遠；自近山而望遠山，謂之平遠。高遠之色清明，深遠之色重晦；平遠之色有明有晦；高遠之勢突兀，深遠之意重疊，平遠之意沖融而綽綽緲緲。其人物之在三遠也，高遠者明了，深遠者細碎，平遠者沖淡。明了者不短，細碎者不長，沖淡者不大，此三遠也。」《林泉高致集: 山水訓》
54 「Travellers Among Mountains and Streams」(溪山行旅圖).
Figure 9. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 10. The viewer standing on a rock (visualization by the author).
Figure 11. (Detail) A visual path from exterior space to interior space. (visualization by the author).

Figure 12. (Detail) Men and animals (visualization by the author).
A further aspect of this work is that the size of the silk scroll allows the viewer to merge easily with the pictorial space of the painting 55 (Figure 13). As this painting is taller than a typical adult human, viewers standing in front of the work would find that it engulfs their vertical line of sight. In line with Gao’s prescription that landscape painting, as a form of visual representation, should enable viewers to ‘walk, see, play, and live’ in their encounter with the artwork, this kind of traditional Chinese hanging scroll was able to spiritually immerse the viewer in a pictorial space. By enacting the ‘three distances’ idea, it created the type of macroscopic perspective outlined earlier in this chapter. Transferring these ideas to a contemporary context, I would argue that this traditional perspective could be further explored and re-appropriated onto the platform of interactive media. This will be demonstrated in the next section (in case study).

55 I have seen Travellers Among Mountains and Streams at the National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taiwan several times between 1998 and 2009.
These examples reflect that in ancient China painters (artists) traditionally sought to create artworks that could spiritually immerse themselves and viewers in a pictorial space. Chinese artists regarded viewers of an artwork as part of the scenery, but were unable to identify precisely their position in the work, so that *shan shui* ‘mountain and water’, though literally interpreted as meaning landscapes in observable nature, would come to signify the universe (宇宙, *yu zhou*). Also, the traditional Chinese phase *shen you wu wai* (神遊物外), referring to the transcendent meeting of viewer and universe in the work of art, regarded as ‘the spirit of the viewer wandering beyond the material world towards poetic realism’, was seen as one way to accomplish transcendence. It may well be the case, therefore, that the formal and scientific technique of ‘perspective’ does not facilitate the spiritual journey of the viewer effectively, or even at all, and that neither ‘camera obscura’ nor ‘linear perspective’ would, if this premise is true, contribute to what most ancient Chinese artists sought to pursue: a gateway to transcendence.

Given the above analysis, the following paragraphs will present two digital works by the contemporary Chinese digital media artist Miao Xiaochun ⁵⁶ (1964- ), as case studies, to examine how he has embodied old narrative ideas of transcendence (*shen you wu wai*, 神游物外) in new media art and to ascertain the audience’s experience of the implementation and transfer of the ideas of ‘three distances’ and ‘scroll format’ into digital print.

**Case study (I): Terror**

Miao’s work coheres closely with traditional Chinese art forms and theories in its approach to the integration of *time* and *space* ⁵⁷. Most of his digital photography

---

⁵⁶ Miao is one of the most significant contemporary digital-media artists in China, well-known in the contemporary art scene for his cityscape photographs and digital prints. He is famous for his digitally assembled panoramic views of modern Chinese city life and cityscapes.

⁵⁷ Miao is one of the most significant contemporary digital-media artists in China, well-known in the contemporary art scene for his cityscape photographs and digital prints. He is famous for his digitally assembled panoramic views of modern Chinese city life and cityscapes.
contains his signature element in the form of his own image as a figure dressed in ancient Chinese costume. This ancient Chinese scholar plays different roles in different kinds of cityscapes. A case in point is *Terror* (2003) (Figure 14).

Figure 14. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

I see the spatial arrangement and multiple perspective technique applied in *Terror* as direct expressions of Chinese tradition. Thus the work can be simply divided into three sections based on three different points of view. Images of ‘Miao, the ancient scholar’ appear in different spaces in the picture, and these images—or, more accurately, the figures—vary in size, suggesting a cascade of different visual perspectives to the viewer.

As usual, Miao has in *Terror* placed his figure in different spaces, seen from different points of view, but always in the same venue. There are seven ‘silent sculpture-like figures’ located in this digital photograph, with different sizes, positions, appearances and gestures. And the interior space of this ancient architectural edifice, presented as a panoramic view, also encompasses different visual perspectives (Figure 15). The features of these spaces are similar to and associated with one another; so the viewer can assume, despite certain variations, that the seven silent figures are all located in the same place. Such an arrangement affords the viewer the opportunity to experience a spatiotemporal illusion. The illusion arises because these seven ancient figures—as silent sculptures—appear in different timeslots, though in the same basic space. These
seven ancient figures actually look the same, come across as the same person. If the artwork were conveying a fact, then it could not present the seven figures in different interior spaces at the same time because such a presentation would be impossible outside the world of fantasy or theoretical physics (Figure 16). Of central interest here is Miao’s transformation of the multiple-viewpoint idea of ‘three distances’ from traditional Chinese art practice, and his application of the revised idea to his digital artwork. Two questions arise: How did Miao apply this idea, and how does it relate to the idea of scroll format?

Figure 15. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.
In fact, Miao integrated the idea of ‘three distances’ with ‘one-point perspective’ into this artwork in three different ways. First, starting from the right-hand side, the vanishing point appears below eye level. Second, the vanishing point is set in the middle of the scene in the centre of the picture. Last, on the left-hand side, the vanishing point is above eye level, creating in the viewer a sense of being distant from those ancient figures. Miao combined these three different vanishing points in the context of a long-scroll format, which he then placed horizontally. The effect is that the interior space of the work suggests a virtual space. The three different horizontal eye levels suggest three different viewpoints, shifting the gaze of the viewer and ultimately creating an illusory, subjective spatial and temporal experience. The visual experience embodied in the scroll form of this digital print can, I would argue, be seen as a digital extension of the idea of ‘three distances’ in Gao Xi’s theory.
Case study (II): The Last Judgment in Cyberspace

A second example of Miao’s work, *The Last Judgment in Cyberspace* 58 (2006) (Figure 17), further demonstrates how different ‘subjective viewpoints’ can be applied in a series of large-scale digital prints 59 that amplify the idea of multiple viewpoints through various ‘subjective camera angles’ 60. This technique can be regarded as a transformation of ‘multiple perspectives’.

First of all, the viewing experience in these five sets of digital prints is like watching a movie still. This effect rests on various subjective angles—or viewpoints—taken by the artist and subsequently by the viewer (for details, see Appendix 1.4. ‘Subjective Viewpoints’).

Figure 17. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

---

58 *The Last Judgment in Cyberspace* (2006) is a series of large-scale digital prints inspired by Michelangelo’s masterpiece *The Last Judgment*, a fresco on the Vatican’s Sistine Chapel ceiling (created between 1534 and 1541).

59 These five digital prints represent five different views: from the front, the rear, the side, vertically, and from below.

60 The ‘subjective camera angle’ is commonly regarded today as a standard type of camera angle.
Secondly, the idea of ‘multiple viewpoints’ has been applied in many directions, including inside and outside the pictorial space. For example, when I looked directly at this series of prints I felt that I was merging into the pictorial space of the artwork. This is both because of the different viewpoints suggested by the artist, and because of the proportionally large long-scroll format. Miao has himself suggested imagining what the painting would look like if we (as artist or viewer) could look from the back (Figure 18). The word ‘back’ does not refer here to a physical space behind the painting; it represents the imaginative space behind the space that is visible inside the pictorial space. Each digital print represents different subjective viewpoints of the figures. In fact, the title of each digital print indicates the print/viewer/figure’s viewpoint: one can view the space from the back, from the sides, from below, and

---

61 I personally visited two exhibitions of *The Last Judgment in Cyberspace*. The first time was in the Walsh Gallery in Chicago in 2006, and the second time was in the National Art Museum in Beijing in 2008. One version was exhibited as part of an immersive light-box installation with a three-dimensional projection system.

62 The titles of these five digital prints are: (1) The Last Judgment in Cyberspace—The Front View; (2) The Last Judgment in Cyberspace—The Rear View; (3) The Last Judgment in Cyberspace—The Side View; (4) The Last Judgment in Cyberspace—The Vertical View; and (5) The Last Judgment in Cyberspace—The Below View.
from different angles. As an artist, a viewer, or even just as an adventurer one can navigate the scenes behind the pictorial space and ‘snap a nice photograph’ from any angle one likes. By reinterpreting and integrating the idea of multiple viewpoints with one-point perspective and subjective viewpoints, Miao has demonstrated how digital-media technology can immerse viewers in the pictorial space of an artwork, which was precisely the effect sought in ancient Chinese art-theory and achieved in traditional long-scroll paintings.

Thirdly, Miao extends scroll format to digital prints, as his digital artwork is commonly presented in a long-scroll format. Reflecting on the topic of my research, I would ask whether or not—and if so, in what ways and to what extent—this kind of long-scroll format can enhance a viewer’s spatiotemporal experience. The following discussion will therefore be about how the scroll format invites viewers to immerse themselves in imaginative and virtual spaces.

In this regard, the rectangular shape of both Terror and The Last Judgment in Cyberspace is highly pertinent: their shape is that of a scroll painting. Terror measures 87 cm x 240 cm; that is, not only does the landscape scenery present itself horizontally, but also the multiple perspectives can come into play dynamically and effectively. The dimensions of the five digital prints of The Last Judgment in Cyberspace are shown in Table 3 below, which acts as relevant evidence reflecting the work’s close relationship to traditional Chinese scroll-form painting. Three of the prints correspond in size to a long-scroll shape, a fourth print has a square shape, and the last print has a shape similar to that of a hand scroll.

The large-scale scroll form traditionally presented viewers with a huge viewing space, and my final question in this context concerns the relation between scroll format and viewer immersion today. In the past, the dimensions of the hanging scroll Travellers
Among Mountains and Streams, for example, enabled viewers to immerse themselves in the pictorial space quite easily. Today, Miao has been applying similar methods, inasmuch as five different viewpoints are separately but simultaneously presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Last Judgment in Cyberspace</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Front View</td>
<td>280 cm x 241 cm</td>
<td>Vertical shape</td>
<td>Long scroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rear View</td>
<td>280 cm x 233 cm</td>
<td>Vertical shape</td>
<td>Long scroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Side View</td>
<td>320 cm x 120 cm</td>
<td>Vertical shape</td>
<td>Long scroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vertical View</td>
<td>120 cm x 354 cm</td>
<td>Horizontal shape</td>
<td>Hand scroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The View from Below</td>
<td>280 cm x 349 cm</td>
<td>Square shape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Dimensions, shape, and form of the prints of The Last Judgment in Cyberspace (visualization by the author).

My first impression of this work upon stepping into the gallery space was that its provocative spatiotemporal characteristics drew my attention and established my viewpoint. I would argue, therefore, that the two digital works handle spatiotemporal matters similarly: using ‘multiple perspectives’ in the scroll format, the two works multiply the number of artists involved in the project (the figures in the artwork) and relocate the artist himself in various spaces in a single scene. The space in Terror presents itself through different kinds of one-point perspective, each of which presents objects as converging on a solitary point on the horizon. However, the artist has skilfully created different methods of presenting one-point perspective by applying different eye levels of horizon within a single scroll. As a result, the viewer perceives the space not through a one-point angle but through subjective angles. While viewers stand in front of the artwork, their viewpoint seems to merge with that of the

---

The information about the dimensions was provided by Hong Kong, Osage Contemporary Art Space in 2010.
artwork’s figures. This visual experience can be illustrated as a new way to embody the traditional Chinese idea of transcendence through digital media art.

Nevertheless, I argue that in Miao’s work the role of the viewer is rather passive. He has not fully explored what digital technology can offer in terms of the bodily engagement of the viewer in line with Chinese art theory, and specifically with Gao Xi’s approach to time and space: in other words the integration of multiple viewpoints (‘three distances’) and ‘allowing the audience to be able to walk, to be able to see and to be able to play’. I spoke above, in the context of my digital media artwork, about transforming the role of the viewers from passivity to activity by harnessing the idea of ‘to be able to walk, to be able to see and to be able to play’: this will be developed later.

It may be said in conclusion that the absence of a parallel Chinese-language term does not mean that ancient Chinese art did not possess any idea of what Western art theory refers to as ‘perspective’. Mozi and Zong Bing identified a significant correlation between the idea underlying pinhole cameras and the ‘one-point perspective’ of the present day. In fact, Chinese artists prefer to treat spatiotemporal experience in the painting as a platform for transcendence, which is a realization (or process) opening up a path leading from an outer to an inner space. Miao Xiaochun has demonstrated a way of applying digital technology that integrates traditional approaches to both multiple-perspective and long-scroll practice into present-day artwork. In the following section I will turn to the question of ‘perspective’ in relation to traditional Chinese calligraphy and characters.
1.4. The perspective of zi (字, ‘Chinese character’)

A traditional saying is that Chinese calligraphy (brush writing) and Chinese painting have the same origins. And it is essential to the study of Chinese calligraphy to understand the origin of Chinese characters, because these can be treated as individual art forms. This intimate connection suggests that there may be a correlation in the way the two art forms, calligraphy and painting, handle time and space. Indeed the structure of certain Chinese characters involves the elements of time and space, and this correlates with the 3D forms used in digital media art today. The following pages will, therefore, examine how spatiotemporal experience was (and still is) created in the process of constructing Chinese characters, and how the results affect notions of time and space in Chinese thought. Furthermore, because digital-media technology is a visual representation platform, it will be argued that the transfer of Chinese characters to the digital realm may have extended effects on viewers’ understanding of time and space.

Multiple perspectives

How, then, did the process of making Chinese characters reflect the elements of time and space, and how did it affect the development of an idea of multiple viewpoints or perspectives? The term Chinese ‘characters’ is English for wen zi (文字), and the explanation of wen zi from the dictionary Shuwen Jiezi refers to the process of making characters. In ancient China, to perceive form was to perceive shapes and objects. According to Shuwen Jiezi, the First of the Three Sovereigns—Pao xi shi (庖犧氏)—created the Eight Trigrams (八卦, ba gua), which are a set of symbolic signs that serve to reflect perceptions of the universe including perceptions of (1)

---

64 Written in the early second-century, the book Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters (說文解字, Shuwen Jiezi) dates from the Han Dynasty and is regarded as the first Chinese dictionary. The preface to the book states that Cang Jie (倉頡) invented Chinese characters by visualizing the shape and the form of real-world objects, a practice called ‘form imitation’ (象形, xiang xing). In the preface to Records of Famous Historical Paintings (歷代名畫記, Lidai Minghuaji) of the Tang Dynasty, the critic Zhang Yanyuan (張彥遠) discussed the relationship between painting and writings materials. In short, to paint is ‘to imitate form’ (類, lei), ‘to visualize shape’ (形, xing), ‘to categorize and structure’ (畛, zhen), and ‘to add colour’ (掛, gua). All these aspects of painting constitute evidence that the idea of painting is highly relevant to form, shape, structure, and colour.
phenomena in the sky, (2) laws of the earth, and (3) relationships between animals and the earth. All these perceptions rest on and derive from our bodies (in a micro perspective), and can be discovered through perceptions of objects from a long distance (in a macro perspective). But these methods are also applicable to the meaning of ‘characters / texts’ (文, wen). Thus, the process of creating Chinese characters can be seen to rest both on features of our bodies and on perceptions of objects from a distance. For example, the Chinese character for the English word ‘eye’ can exemplify how the body can serve as the basis for perceptions; and the Chinese characters for such English words as ‘cloud’, ‘star’, ‘water’, ‘plant’, and ‘animal’ illustrate how distant objects can serve as the basis for perceptions. This will be explained in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

The combination of micro and macro spatiotemporal perspectives in Chinese characters was complex. Developing over time, it entailed the introduction of multiple viewpoints, and this is reflected in the historical process of their formation. A number of scholars emphasize that some characters in particular exemplify how the character-making process has been associated with multiple viewpoints, both of creators and viewers, in the perception of objects and scenes. For example, in his *Six Types of Writing*, the author Xu Shen (許慎) (c. 58-147) effectively classified Chinese characters into six categories. This classification allows us to learn and

---

65 Original text: 「古者庖犧氏之王天下也，仰則觀象於天，俯則觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物；於是始作易八卦」《說文解字序》
67 In general, the idea of multiple viewpoints can be regarded as a “scattered perspective” (Lee 2002), “shifting perspective” (Sullivan 1983, p. 156), or “isometric perspective” (*A Difference of Perspective* 2005).
68 *Six types of writing* (六書, Liu shu): Liu (六) means ‘six’; shu (書) means ‘writing’; therefore, the combination of these two characters would literally translate as ‘six types of writing’. But the term ‘six categories of character construction’ has been commonly used in English translations.
69 (1) ‘Form imitation’ (象形, xiang xing) corresponds to pictograms, (2) ‘indication’ (指事, zhi shi) corresponds to simple ideograms, (3) ‘joined / associated meaning’ (會意, hui yi) corresponds to ideogrammatic compounds, (4) ‘borrowing; making use of’ (假借, jia jie) corresponds to rebus (phonetic loan) characters, (5) ‘form and sound’ (形聲, xing sheng) corresponds to phono-semantic compound characters, and (6) ‘reciprocal meaning’ (轉注, zhuan zhu) corresponds to derivative cognates.
identify the characters in the most effective and efficient way possible. The first four classes refer to structural composition, and the last two refer to usage. About 600 Chinese characters are classified as pictograms and are simply meant to look like the things they signify. In order to discuss how Chinese characters are constructed in relation to the idea of time and space, I will focus on the first two categories, ‘form imitation’ (象形, xiang xing) and ‘indication’ (指事, zhi shi).

‘Form imitation’ involves visualizing the form of an object (e.g. the characters for sun and moon). ‘Indication’ corresponds to simple ideograms, where the meaning concerns an abstraction (i.e. an idea); this is often signified by a familiar visible pattern (for details, see Appendix 1.5. ‘Form Imitation’ and ‘Indication’). For example, 見 (jian) ‘to see’ and 宮 (gong) ‘a palace’ (Figures 19-22) indicate how the character-creation process can reflect the multiple viewpoints taken by ancient Chinese calligraphers and viewers. These two examples will now be considered in detail.

Figure 19. The development of the character 見 (jian)—meaning ‘to see’—from Oracle Bone Script (left) to contemporary Chinese script (right) (visualization by the author).

---

70 In fact, there are over 5000 Chinese characters, but this fact should not suggest that one must learn all 5000 in order to be proficient in Chinese. One should learn a smaller number of basic and independent forms, and then move on to more complex characters that reflect more than one principle.

71 Structural composition covers the structure of almost all characters; usage covers the conventional handling of characters.

72 ‘Form imitation’ (象形, xiang xing).

73 ‘Indication’ (指事, zhi shi).
The character 见 (jian), ‘to see’, dates back to the Oracle Bone Script. The upper part, 见, is an image representing and meaning the human ‘eye’; it eventually became the contemporary Chinese character 目. The lower part, 人, is an image representing and meaning ‘human’; it eventually became the contemporary Chinese character 人. The meaning that derives from the combination of the two characters is ‘to see’. Scholar Zhang Yujin suggests that the idea of ‘multiple perspectives’ underlies this combination, specifically as regards two viewpoints: (1) ‘close up’ and (2) ‘long distance’ (He, Hu, and Zhang, eds. 1995, p. 189). The eye is at the top of the character and is bigger than the lower part of the character, which is an abstract human body. This design visually emphasizes ‘seeing something closely’; by contrast, the lower part of the character indicates a view of a human body from afar (hence, the smallness of the body relative to the largeness of the eye). These two images (eye and body) reflect how different, even contrastive, points of views have been combined in a single character.

Likewise, the Chinese character 宮 (gong) supports the argument that the idea of ‘multiple viewpoints’ played a role in the structural development of Chinese characters. The character 宮 comprises two images: one of a roof and the other of a
According to Chan Hokshu, the upper part of the character, 间, is the image of ‘the roof of a house’, which is to say, the outer area of a human living space (Chan 2005, p. 45). The second part of the image is two squares located inside the house. The two squares represent interior spaces or rooms. Using the architectural terminology of the West, the scholar Zhang Yujin offers a more detailed analysis. In his view the perspective of this image 间 corresponds to the ‘front elevation’ of a building (He, Hu, and Zhang, eds. 1995, p. 189) (Figures 20-22). He goes on to discuss the visualization of 建 as 宫, which he sees as a view from high above of two rooms with a connecting corridor, a viewpoint identical with that of an architectural ground or floor plan (for details, see Appendix 1.6. ‘Multiple Viewpoints’).

Figure 21. The form of a roof in different types of Chinese-character systems (visualization by the author).

Figure 22. The character 宫 represents two rooms with a connecting corridor from a top-down viewpoint, identical to architectural floor-plans (visualization by the author).

In short, the characters 見 and 宮 both exemplify the combination of two strikingly different visual perspectives: one combination is of the ‘close up’ perspective and the
‘long distance’ perspective; another combination is of the ‘front elevation’ perspective and the ‘top view’ (‘bird’s eye’ or ‘ground plan’) perspective. A further dimension of perspective arises from the quadratic format of Chinese characters and the interplay between them.

‘Square characters’ and spatial experience
Apart from some individual characters, the general rule for writing Chinese characters is based on an invisible square structure, and this also suggests a visual dynamic and rhythm that influences the cognitive experience of perceiving Chinese characters.

Figure 23. Every single character fits into an invisible square box (here made visible) (visualization by the author).

Chinese characters are also regarded as *fang kuai zi* (方塊字), ‘square characters’, because in order to provide visual consistency and a sense of balance and visual rhythm every Chinese character is supposed to reflect an invisible square structure. So between every single character and its surrounding invisible square there is a suggested spatial experience (Figure 23). Especially in comparison with Western systems of writing, the flexible, dynamic spatial arrangement of Chinese characters
allows viewers to perceive any given character from different viewpoints. In the West writing systems are based on alphabetical letters \(^\text{74}\), which do not vary from word to word, or in Western Europe (with some exceptions) even from language to language. Chinese ‘square characters’ \(^\text{75}\), on the other hand, imply the presence of horizontal and vertical lines (brush strokes) as the basic formal elements of a complex and changeable unit set within an understood (i.e. invisible) square. In a visual sense, the structure of Western alphabetical letters is very much a linear sequence of elements \(^\text{76}\) whereas Chinese characters have been commonly understood as combinations of varyingly complex square shapes (Figures 24-26).

![Figure 24. The English alphabet’s linear combinations constructed with vertical and horizontal lines (Gao 2000, p. 9).](image1)

![Figure 25. The linear combination of square Chinese characters constructed with vertical and horizontal lines (Gao 2000, p. 9).](image2)

---

\(^\text{74}\) According to the Oxford Dictionary (2006), the noun ‘alphabet’ means a set of letters or symbols in a fixed order used to represent the basic set of speech sounds of a language, especially the set of letters from A to Z. Origin: early sixteenth century, from late Latin alphabetum, from Greek alpha, beta, the first two letters of the Greek alphabet.

\(^\text{75}\) ‘Square characters’ (方塊字, fang kuai zi).

\(^\text{76}\) The English alphabet, in a strict definitional sense, contains not characters but letters: A, B, C, D, E.....W, X, Y, and Z.
Figure 26. The transformation of prototypical square-centred Chinese characters into actual Chinese characters consisting of lines and curves (visualization by the author).

The illustrations show the vertical and horizontal lines that comprise the linear sequence of alphabetical letters, compared with which the sequence of square Chinese characters is relatively diverse. Indeed, Chinese characters go in four directions whereas visual combinations of English alphabet go in only two directions: up and down. Both systems have vertical and horizontal dimensions, but Chinese characters use area, and the situation of the pen or brush stroke within it, to a far higher degree. Therefore, both the number of Chinese characters and the combination of brush strokes can create space, whether between parts of characters, whole characters, rows, or columns. For example, the character yong ((Encoding) ‘eternity’) includes eight of the most fundamental strokes (Figure 27).

---

77 Illustrative of this element is the character 永 (yong), which means ‘permanence’ or ‘eternity’ in English. In fact, there is a saying, the ‘Eight Principles of Yong’, which refers to eight of the most fundamental strokes in Chinese calligraphy insofar as the character yong includes these eight strokes. For thousands of years it has been generally believed that a person who has mastered the Eight Principles can handle writing any Chinese character. Therefore, the mastery of yong has commonly been the first step in learning to write Chinese characters.
A different spatial experience can be visualized with each brush stroke. And this leads to another multi-perspective element of calligraphy. For even though each Chinese character in theory occupies an invisible square box, and even though rules govern the writing of characters, I would argue that each character could trigger a unique visual experience in the individual viewer. For the composition of each stroke in the writing of a single character varies, albeit only slightly, from one calligrapher to the next owing to the calligrapher’s uniquely emotional rendering of the strokes. And viewers, too, perceive individually. So a viewer’s actual spatial experience of a Chinese character will vary according not only to the individual variations between viewers but also to the individual renderings of that character.

Furthermore, even though individual strokes vary in size and intensity within the invisible square, all strokes are designed and arranged in such a way that they should express balance and harmony. A dynamic sense of space is thereby created within each square as a unit, as well as between adjacent squares (Figure 28).
Figure 28. 人 (ren, ‘human’) presents a form with two strokes: when 人 is combined with different strokes, its shape, size, and intensity adjusts in order to preserve balance—evenness and parallelism—between adjacent invisible areas of the box (visualization by the author).

Space, time and digitalization

After further discussing the spatial experience in Chinese characters and their individual structure, the following paragraphs will introduce the question of a temporal dimension and the role digitalization can play in its expression.

According to the research findings of Professor Kao Shangren, Chinese-character writing can be regarded as a process of constructing linguistic elements in visual space. He suggests that three elements are present in writing Chinese characters: (1) ‘character connection’ (結字, jie zi), (2) ‘form connection’ (結體, jie ti), and (3) ‘structure and construction’ (間架, jian jia). I would like to explore these three ideas further in relation to the idea of space as follows:

(1) ‘Character connection’: space created through the number and form of brush strokes;

(2) ‘Form connection’: space created through the combination of characters;

(3) ‘Structure and construction’: space created through the alignment of, and spacing between, groups of characters (Kao 2000, p. 28).
In fact, a single Chinese character standing alone will convey spatial experience; the unique characteristics attributable to individual characters will convey spatial experiences that differ, one experience from the other; and the combination of characters, creating space between them, and expanding into the scroll’s pictorial space, will convey still further, different spatial experiences (Figure 29). However, these three different types of spatial experience and their variations take place on a two-dimensional plane: in the past, that surface was usually silk or paper. It is hard to identify any temporal experience that people might have had on such a plane, because temporal experience in this context seems to be available only to the calligrapher. As calligraphy is a real-time activity, it would appear to engender instantaneous experience of time passing, which correlates with animation – one of the elements of the digital media.

Following up this line of thought, I investigated whether digital-media technology could help continue these temporal experiences by extending them to viewers. With
this goal in mind, I used computer software in a series of digital works entitled *Dao* (the dual-screen version) (2009), to build a 3D model of the Chinese characters 读 (shan) ‘mountain’, 西 (xi) ‘west’, and 月 (yue) ‘moon’ (Figure 30-33) (for details, see Appendix F in DVD [1]).

Figure 30. Chinese character 月 (yue) ‘moon’ built via 3D Studio Max software by the author (visualization by the author).

Figure 31. Motion sequence of the Chinese character 读 (shan) ‘mountain’ (visualization by the author).

I chose these characters because all of them involve simple constructions and simple brush strokes, resulting in basic, unfettered spatiotemporal experiences. Underlying this series of animated three-dimensional Chinese characters are four goals:

1. To examine the animated characters work in a virtual space;

---

78 3D Studio Max.

79 These three animated Chinese characters are the elements of my digital work *Dao* (dual-screen version) shown at the exhibition *Former Central School Envisioning Days* at the former Hollywood Road Police Quarters, Central, Hong Kong in February 2009.
(2) To transfer spatiotemporal experiences of Chinese characters from two-dimensional to four-dimensional platforms through motion;

(3) To invite viewers to experience space and time virtually through flying Chinese characters (Figure 32);

(4) Using a digital white screen, to simulate traditional Chinese rice paper to represent the idea of *void*.

Figure 32. To invite viewers to experience space and time virtually through flying Chinese characters (visualization by the author).

Later on, I placed two 10-inch LCD monitors inside an enclosed dark exhibition space (about 200 square feet) (Figures 33, 35). These two monitors, securely mounted to a wall, appeared to be floating in the air. I then examined different techniques, including modelling, animation, texturing, lighting, and rendering. This involved various steps:

(1) Constructing a three-dimensional model on the basis of all the brush strokes in Chinese characters.
(2) Disassembling a specific Chinese character into its component strokes and programming these to fly freely (i.e. become virtually airborne) and randomly in the white virtual space.

(3) Designing the order in which the three-dimensional elemental brush strokes would fly in different sequence.

Figure 33. Close up of Dao (dual-screen version) at the 2009 Former Central School Envisioning Days exhibition in Hong Kong.

The result of these efforts was that I could control the flying pattern of each animated character / brush stroke in virtual space. Furthermore, these animated characters / brush strokes would appear to draw closer to the screen or further away from the screen, suggesting depth through this zoom-in and zoom-out feature (Figure 34). I treated this experimental project as a first stage in examining how digital technology—three-dimensional computer programming—could trigger viewers’ spatiotemporal experiences, in this case of Chinese characters.
However, I judged these initial 3D-modelled Chinese characters too mechanical, so I sought to enhance the texture of simulated Chinese characters through ink-like visual representation and to explore hand-brushed strokes. On the basis of my findings, I developed my further projects, *Bloated City & Skinny Languages* (BCSL) (2006) and *Dao Gives Birth to One* (2009-2012).

Figure 35. Close up of *Dao Gives Birth to One* (version I) at the 2009 Former Central School Envisioning Days exhibition in Hong Kong.
In conclusion, I would argue that the system of Chinese characters has not only affected the development of Chinese calligraphy: Chinese characters act as a platform for linguistic communication, but in doing so they are also a channel through which we can understand how ancient Chinese society perceived time and space. Space also makes possible the number and form of brush strokes in Chinese characters. My research and its related practices demonstrate how viewers perceiving Chinese characters can experience space from many viewpoints. Digital media, starting with the project BCSL (2006) and Dao Gives Birth to One (version I) (2009), also enable them to experience a temporal dimension in these characters.

1.5. The perspective of shu (書, ‘brush writing’)  

This section is the extension from Chinese characters to calligraphy. In Chinese, the character shu (書) could be defined as ‘book’, but also indicates the activity of ‘brush writing / to write’; but shu fa (書法) literally means ‘the way / the law of brush writing’ and is commonly translated into English as ‘calligraphic writing’. Thus the term shu fa conveys a sense of motion, but with a philosophical edge. In this section, I will illustrate how the ideas of time and space were applied through ‘cursive’ and ‘wild cursive’ writing. The section focuses on two examples that illustrate how the action of shu (書) (brush-writing / calligraphy) can generate spatiotemporal experience for both the calligrapher and the viewer. I suggest that this experience correlates with the aims of the digital media artist.

---

80 Cursive script originated in China during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) through the Jin Dynasty period (264-420 CE).

81 In the traditional context of calligraphy, cao (草)—whose literal translation is ‘glass’—meant ‘draft’ or ‘sketch’, and shu (書) meant ‘to write’ (Today shu no longer means uniquely ‘to write’: it can also mean ‘book’).

82 Kuang cao (狂草, ‘wild cursive’) was developed by Zhang Xu (張旭), who is considered one of the most significant wild cursive calligraphers in history.
The first example is the *Observations and Inspirations from Three Occasions* from the Cursive Master Zhang Xu (c. 658 -747) of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE). The second is the dance piece entitled *Cursive: A Trilogy* (2001-2005) by world-renowned Taiwanese choreographer Lin Hwai-min (1947- ). Discussion of these masterpieces will show how Lin has reinterpreted the idea of cursive writing as a unique visual representational platform, transforming it from the 2D plane into a 4D experience through human body movement and the assistance of modern digital technology.

**Case study(I): Observations and Inspirations from Three Occasions**

Zhang Xu’s cursive writing is relevant to this study because he was the first person to significantly extend people’s spatial and temporal experience of dancing and music to calligraphy. The turning point in the improvement of Zhang Xu’s cursive writing came from his *Observations and Inspirations from Three Occasions*, which was documented in his calligraphic masterpiece *Zi yan tie* (白燕帖). However, there is insufficient discussion in the current literature about how these three historical observations inspired his writing. After introducing these three occasions, I will, therefore, analyse the issues arising from Zhang’s observations and the paths that his inspiration took.

What Zhang Xu was inspired by on these three occasions concerns spatial arrangement and time transition in relation to dance and music. A masterpiece in a long scroll format, *Zi yan tie* demonstrates how Zhang Xu drew inspiration from three occasions and developed a idea of calligraphy through his observations. The occasions were:

(1) He saw a princess fighting with a porter for priority to travel on a road.

---

83 Also known as *The I’ve-Already-Said-So Manuscript* (自言帖, Zi yan tie) (714 CE), this work was written by Zhang Xu on the 15th day of the 8th month of year 2 of the Kai Yuan (開元) era of the Tang Dynasty.

84 Dimensions: 74 cm x 23.5 cm; long scroll; ink on paper.
(2) He heard the music of *gu chui* (鼓吹), which the princess’s minstrel was performing on percussion and wind instruments.

(3) He watched Lady Gong Sun, who was performing her famous dance piece ‘Sword Dance’, in which a dancer holds a sword. After these experiences, Zhang developed his well-known cursive calligraphy. In order to learn more about the events that transpired on the three occasions, I consulted the English title and translation of *Zi yan tie* by scholar Jean François Billeter, as well as the original Chinese-language historical materials. The translation of the passage in question reads:

*As I the mad drunkard have already said, it was by seeing a princess and a street-porter wrangle over the right of way, and then by hearing drums and wind instruments that I understood the art of the brush. It was by watching the woman dancer Kung-sun perform the sword dance that I grasped its wondrous power. Since then, whenever I see the cursive of Chang Chih, of the Han, the wonder of his cursive gives me anew the mad urge to write.* (Billeter 1990, p. 117).

(i) Order and balance

First of all, Zhang found a way of handling the ideas of ‘order’ and ‘balance’ in cursive writing. He first stated that he gained *bi fa* (筆法 ‘the method or rule of writing’) by witnessing a quarrel between a princess and a street-porter. The ‘quarrel’ is not as important as the manner in which they were fighting for priority to take and occupy the road. I argue that the way in which the dispute took place may involve motion and direction in the porter’s use of the palanquin, and his observation of these events inspired Zhang to consider methods and rules of spatial arrangement and temporal transition. It was in facing disarray that Zhang first learnt how to balance the spaces created through individual brush strokes of a character, between

---

85 Original text: 「見公主擔夫爭道又聞鼓吹，而得筆法」《自言》
86 Original text: 「見公主擔夫爭道又聞鼓吹，而得筆法」《自言帖》
character and character, and in the arrangement of the negative (*yin*) and positive space (*yang*)\(^8^7\) of the scroll in a certain order. This moment of enlightenment eventually evolved into the various laws and rules governing writing.

(ii) Integration of harmony and emotion

Secondly, Zhang discovered the relation between integration, harmonization and emotionalizing in cursive writing. Jean François Billeter has stated that what Zhang Xu learned from listening to music was its prompting, its stirring within him of movements that spontaneously tended towards calligraphic expression (Billeter, 1990, p. 178). Billeter analysed these two occasions separately. But I would argue that the first and second occasions—witnessing a quarrel between a princess and a street-porter, and listening to the music of *gu chui* (鼓吹)—should be combined; for Zhang Xu derived ‘the way or the law of brush writing’ from these two sets of observations together. In the text of *Zi yan tie*, Zhang Xu used the term *you* (又), which means ‘further’, ‘also’, or ‘again’, to connect these two observations to each other. The wording proves that the two sets of observations were not wholly separate but connected, and that they could be seen to merge into a single moment.

So what kind of music would the second set of observations invoke? I surmise that it might well have been military in nature, corresponding to the rank and status of the princess. This is because, according to the original text, Zhang Xi used *Gu Chui* to describe the music. *Gu Chui* could be translated as ‘rhythm and gusto’ or even ‘drums and wind’ in English. But these two characters could also be regarded from the Western musical perspective as ‘percussion and wind’\(^8^8\) (Table 4). Most of these instruments were played together, particularly for military events in ancient China.

\(^8^7\) A sense of space is reflected through the combination of *yin* (white colour–background of the paper) and *yang* (black colour–ink of the calligraphy).

\(^8^8\) The music of *Gu Chui* includes more than two types of musical instrument, including *gu* (鼓), which is the word for ‘drum’, *xiao* (簫), which is the word for ‘flute’, *zheng* (鍾), which is the word for ‘gong’, and *jia* (笳) which is the word for ‘leaf whistle’.
Accordingly, a calligrapher might have considered the principles that governed traditional approaches to using these music instruments:

1. The ‘composition’ of music;
2. The ‘integration’ of different musical instruments together;
3. The ‘harmonization’ of the different sounds coming from different musical instruments;
4. The ‘emotionalizing’ of people through musical rhythms.

_Gu chui_ reflects the various applications of these four principles to different kinds of musical instrument, but cursive script corresponds to only one activity—calligraphic writing. In other words, Zhang Xu attempted to transform complex rhythms from a sense of hearing to an experience of viewing and writing with a brush.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gu chui (鼓吹)</th>
<th>‘rhythm and gusto’ or ‘drums and wind’ (English translation) / ‘percussion and woodwind/ brass’ (Western musical terms)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Pinyin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>鼓</td>
<td>gu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>箫/排箫</td>
<td>xiao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>鉦</td>
<td>zheng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>箫</td>
<td>jia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. The meaning of _gu chui_ (鼓吹) (visualization by the author).
(iii) Choreography and vitality

Thirdly, Zhang found out the way of handling the idea of vividness and vitality through *qi* (氣, ‘inner energy’, ‘flow of energy’) in motion. Taiwanese scholar Jiang Xun (1947-) has commented that Zhang Xu originally learned calligraphy in the most traditional way, but that the choreography from Lady Gong Sun deeply influenced his understanding of calligraphy-related innovations and aesthetics (Xun 2009, p. 114). This influence, which took the form of inspiration, stemmed from the culture shock that he experienced when he perceived a motion-based way to transform a four-dimensional temporal and spatial experience (dancing on the stage) into a two-dimensional viewing and haptic experience (writing onto paper).

Moreover, Jean François Billeter suspected that Lady Gong Sun was originally from the west of China; but Zhang Xu was originally from the south of China. This geographical location of the dance’s roots may explain why Zhang Xu was so impressed with the dance piece: it was a non-Chinese dance containing a dancing style notably different from the one prevalent in Zhongyuan (中原) ‘the Central Plains of China’. There is sufficient reason to believe that Zhang Xu, as a native of southern China, drew considerable influence from dance pieces performed by a dancer from western China. The idea of culture shock could help explain this inspiration, insofar as culture shock can transform people’s experience of things, including the spatial and temporal characteristics of movement.

In this respect two further areas of analysis will support my argument: (1) analysing the original text of Zhang’s calligraphic piece *Zi yan tie*; and (2) analysing the verse composed by Du Fu, a famous poet who wrote during the Tang Dynasty. Firstly, in *Zi

---

89 A traditional belief in China is that everything does or should possess *qi*, which is regarded as a fundamental element of our inner bodies at the core of our creation of invisible inner energy. This traditional belief in China extends to more than just humans: everything possesses *qi*. Thus, *qi* is one of the most significant elements applied to cursive writing, stemming from our inner body and creating power or energy. In this context, *qi* serves to bring rhythm (time), motion (space), and appearance (emotion) together on a two-dimensional visual-representation platform: the scroll form of paper.

90 Jean François Billeter explained that the style of her sword-dance piece pointed to He Xi (河西), a region in western China, specifically around Gansu Province (甘肅省) (Billeter 1990, p. 119).

91 “Zhongyuan, the Central Plain of China” (中原) refers to the area on the lower reaches of the Yellow River which formed the cradle of Chinese civilization.

92 As in the past, the culture in Gansu is still in some respects strikingly different from the cultures found throughout much of China. The text of *Zi yan tie* also indicates that Zhang Xu was originally from the land of Wu, which is the southern area of present day Jiangsu Province. It is commonly believed that he was a native of Suzhou, a prefecture-level city in Jiangsu.
yan tie, Zhang stated, ‘I derived its shen (神) ⁹³ while watching the sword dance of Lady Gong Sun’. The meaning here is at least threefold, concerning the inner energy of qi; the relationships between the human body, time, and space; and the relationship between positive space and negative space. Secondly, the ideas of time and space were mediated to Zhang Xu from an analysis of the preface and the poem Guan gong sun da niang di ci wu jian qi hang bing xu (觀公孫大娘弟子舞劍器行并序) by Du Fu ⁹⁴. The poem recalled his childhood memory ⁹⁵ of the dancer Lady Gong Sun, specifically her dance piece ‘Sword Dance’, from some fifty years earlier. This poem is important to the current study because its content expresses the deep influence that inspirational dancing had on Zhang Xu’s successful exploration of a new approach to cursive writing. Moreover, in the context of Chinese art history, Du Fu’s poem could be regarded as an early dance review, and Du Fu himself can be seen as an early Chinese dance critic. His phrasing of ideas is intensely lively, invoking visual and auditory elements that create considerable imaginative space in which the reader can sense the performance. The strings of words suggest ‘objects in motion’ and ‘time in transition’.

To illustrate how Zhang Xu might have drawn inspiration from his temporal and spatial experiences of the performance, I have analysed this poem’s phrasing in detail – see the table below ⁹⁶ (Table 5).

---

⁹³ Shen (神) can be translated as ‘soul’, ‘spirit’, ‘divine essence’, or ‘spiritual being’.
⁹⁴ Du Fu (杜甫) (712–770) was one of the most significant and famous poets from the Tang Dynasty. In 746 CE, Du Fu is known to have met Zhang Xu in Chang’an (which was the capital of China during the Tang Dynasty and is now known as Xi’an). At that time, Du Fu was 34 years old; Zhang Xu, the calligrapher, was 88 years old.
⁹⁵ Zhang Xu himself informed Du Fu about the inspiration of his approach to cursive writing.
The phrases are placed here in three categories: (1) time, (2) space, and (3) emotion. I have attempted to examine how these phrases, which concern dancing in the context of the poem, might correlate to cursive writing. First of all, rhythm (time), motion (space), and appearance (emotion) play a significant role in choreography 98, which is

---

97 Original text: 「昔有佳人公孫氏，一舞劍器動四方。觀者如山色沮喪，天地為之久低昂。霍如羿射九日落，矯如群帝駕龍翔。來如雷霆收震怒，罷如江海凝清光。」

98 The word ‘choreography’ literally means ‘dance-writing’, from the Greek words ‘χορεία’ (circular dance, see choreia/ khoreia) and ‘γραφή’ (graphê, writing).
the art of composing sequences of movements in which space, time, and emotion are specified and integrated into one another. In fact, the term ‘choreography’ derives from Greek and means ‘written notation of dancing’; the term could be further defined as a practice that gives rise to ‘dancing in unison’. Even though there is no visual record of Lady Gong Sun’s sword dance, Du Fu’s poem-review is unequivocal in its assertion that this dance from north-western China both demonstrated a relatively high level of choreography for that period and inspired inhabitants of eastern China, such as Du Fu and Zhang Xu. In the West, choreography is regarded as a way to create ‘dancing in unison’; but from the Chinese perspective of Du Fu, the term ‘unison’ could be interpreted as having such diverse implications as speed, motion, duration, colour sound, emotion, and four-dimensional surroundings (space and time). And all of these implications are closely connected to qi and can evolve into implications relevant to cursive writing (for details, see Appendix 1.7. ‘Inner Energy’). The relation between the perception of space and time, the sword dance and qi on the one hand and calligraphic writing on the other deserves closer scrutiny.

The ch'i (qi) is a cosmic energy that, as Acker\(^99\) puts it, ‘flows about in ever-changing streams and eddies, here deep, there shallow, here concentrated, there dispersed’. (Sullivan\(^100\) 1983, p. 89)

It is a common belief in Chinese society that \(qi\)\(^101\) represents a mysterious or invisible energy inside the human body. The story suggests that Chinese calligraphers understood qi not so much from a physical perspective as from a spiritual, subjective perspective. Calligraphers treat qi as a kind of inner energy; an invisible form flowing

---

\(^99\) The scholar William Acker (1907-1974) attempted to explain his experience of qi to his friend Professor Michael Sullivan (1916 - 2013), with the result documented in a book entitled *The Art of China*, edited by Sullivan. The work contains a story detailing how William Acker, an art historian and translator, once asked a calligrapher why he pressed his ink-stained fingers so deep into the hairs of his large brush. The calligrapher replied that this was the only way to feel his own qi—his own inner energy—flow down his arm, through the brush, and onto the paper.

\(^100\) Prof. Michael Sullivan is one of the major Western pioneers in the field of modern Chinese art history and criticism.

\(^101\) “Ancient Chinese arts are based on Qi theory. Verve, or vitality of Qi is mostly emphasized. Qi in respect of aesthetics has three levels of meaning: it is Qi of universe, it is Qi of the artist, and it is inner living force if the artwork. Those Qis induct each other and are embodied in artworks.” (Wengao 2004, p. 186)
from the human body onto a surface. Against this background, historical interpretations and applications of qi can help us identify and probe the meanings of time and space in relation to Chinese painting and calligraphy. An example from the present day illustrates just how close the relationship is between the meaning of ‘sword’ and the mean of ‘qi’\(^\text{102}\). The example is the movie, directed by He Ping (1957-) and made in 1990, *Killer in Double-flag Town*\(^\text{103}\). A scene in the movie succinctly conveys the relationship between qi as one kind of strength and the sword as another kind. It contains a dialogue\(^\text{104}\) that points to qi as the strength of breath which, functioning as an energy, wells up within the human body and flows through it while remaining invisible. This idea can be examined and extended to choreography (specifically, the sword dance) and to cursive writing. Thus the choreographer (Lady Gong Sun) and the calligrapher (Zhang Xu) needed to acquire an inner energy akin to the strength of breath cited above: a strength expressed by the motion that takes place when a dancer dances or a writer writes. While the choreographer and the calligrapher draw on inner strength that translates into gestures permitting movement of a tool (a sword or a brush) qi flows from within the body to the external world. Qi is invisible, but one can sense it and indeed visualize it by engaging in such practices as sword dancing and calligraphy. As a result, it is commonly believed that calligraphy masters can absorb qi from their body and transmit it throughout their body.

A further aspect of qi is connected with the specific quality of the Chinese brush, which enabled a calligrapher like Zhang Xu to suggest a sense of temporal and spatial experience. The Chinese calligraphy brush is not a simple tool but a sophisticated instrument that converts the calligrapher’s movements, unfolding the three-dimensional space surrounding a sheet of paper into two-dimensional movements that produce calligraphic shapes when they are brought into contact with the paper. What Zhang Xu attempted to achieve was highly innovative experimentation, as he

---

\(^{102}\) ‘*Killer in Double-flag Town*’ (1990) [DVD], *Xi’an dian ying zhi pian chang lu yin lu xiang chu ban she, Xian Shi* (Time: 00:30:15 - 00:30:36). Also known as ‘*Swordsman in Double-Flag Town*’.

\(^{103}\) Chinese: 雙旗鎮刀客

\(^{104}\) The most important move is when he unsheathes his sword for his last deadly stroke. The sword possesses his strength of breath, which in turn moves the sword. You can’t tell when the sword is out of the sheath and when its tip pierces the enemy’s flesh. The swiftness all depends on the strength of one’s breath, without which it is impossible to perform this manoeuvre. (*Killer in Double-flag Town 1990*)
switched and shifted a spatial and temporal experience from multi-sensual parameters to visual parameters.

**Linear and non-linear experience in calligraphy**

Reading Chinese calligraphy can yield both linear and non-linear narrative experiences, particularly for calligraphy written in cursive script, which provides viewers with a four-dimensional visual and audio experience. In this context Jean François Billeter has explored the differences between calligraphy and music, observing that calligraphy is like visual music, as the viewer can visualize the flow and the path of the writing. He further explains that, during a musician’s live performance of music, the passing of time is irreversible; one can neither revert to a previous moment in the piece nor jump from one point in the piece to another (Billeter 1990, pp. 221-264). However, in Chinese calligraphy, viewers are free to respect the temporal order, to change it, or to ignore it. Viewers can choose between duration (i.e. how long they look at part of a work of calligraphy) and space (i.e. what parts of a work of calligraphy they look at). In music, listeners can approach that freedom only when they themselves are playing a piece.

What Jean François Billeter emphasizes is a different way of accessing narrative-oriented temporal and spatial experience. Music represents an approach to creating and experiencing linear narrative, whereas Chinese calligraphy can be considered an approach to creating and experiencing non-linear narrative. This difference exists because calligraphy, unlike music, presents a track, or path, on which viewers—by perceiving and then by imagining—can experience the process by which the calligrapher created the perceived artwork. In fact, having a ‘linear’ experience of calligraphy is like looking at a collage of movie frames presented all at once, or like looking at a still clipped from a movie; experiencing calligraphy is said to be like experiencing a linear narrative, but because the calligrapher has used ink to record all the characters on paper in a sequence, the viewer is able to step back, stop, and scan the calligraphy in ways that differ significantly from the manner in which a listener might experience music.
In other words, non-linear narrative is relevant to the idea of ‘time transition’, as most calligraphy is written in a long scroll format that allows the viewer to experience and re-experience different time slots in the writing process. Viewers can control their own reading speed: they can race through the calligraphy or peruse it, depending on their preference at that moment. And they can rest their gaze anywhere in the artwork, imaginatively placing themselves in the same position as the calligrapher, in order to experience what happened at a particular stage or moment in the calligrapher’s efforts to compose the piece.

Summing up, it may be said that just as music and dance deal with rhythm (time) and motion (space), so, too, calligraphic writing is no longer an activity restricted to scrolls of paper, but an opportunity to sense motion in space and time—in other words to have a four-dimensional spatiotemporal experience. In this way Chinese calligraphy not only manifests itself on paper in a two-dimensional visual-presentation platform but also takes on a life of its own, bringing into its fold a new dimension, and this extension of the parameters of calligraphy rests on time-based media.

Aware of this possibility, the renowned Taiwanese choreographer, Lin Hwai-min (林懷民) (1947-), and his dance group, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre \(^{105}\), have attempted to harness the link between the processes of calligraphy and the structure of written characters, and to improvise dance steps suggested by human body gestures that echo the way in which a calligrapher’s movements are embodied in the strokes of the brush. In turn, the motion of the dancers would represent audio rhythms and visual rhythms through stage performances, re-creating for present-day viewers the opportunity to have four-dimensional temporal and spatial experiences.

---

\(^{105}\) According to legend, Cloud Gate is the name of the oldest known dance in China, a ritual dance dating back some 5000 years.
Case study (II): *Cursive: A Trilogy*

*When the calligrapher starts to create his calligraphy, he is already a dancer.* (Zou 2001, p. 16)

In this section, I argue that the substance of what Lin Hwai-min attempts to bring to his viewers corresponds to the substance of what Zhang Xu drew inspiration from on the three aforementioned occasions. Lin Hwai-min’s interpretation of calligraphy is similar to Zhang Xu’s observations on those three occasions, and Lin has successfully extended the ideas of cursive script from an imaginative space (an invisible realm) to a four-dimensional world (a visible realm) accessible to present day viewers.

One of Lin’s masterpieces, *Cursive: A Trilogy*[^106] (2001-2005) (Figure 36), plays a significant role in this research project inasmuch as the piece extends the ideas of *time*, *space* and *energy* (*qi*) from Chinese calligraphy to dance-centred stage performance. *Cursive: A Trilogy* consists of *Cursive* (2001), *Cursive II* (2003), and *Cursive III: Wide Cursive* (2005). These three dance pieces represent three significantly different levels of approach to cursive writing. This sequence of masterpieces is highly relevant to my study because it demonstrates the transformation of Chinese script, with its immense tradition, into a different—and emphatically modern—medium.

[^106]: Chinese: 行草三部曲
Lin Hwai-min’s work has garnered significant attention internationally, with its innovative approaches to visualizing Chinese calligraphy and its ground-breaking style of movement in relation to traditional Chinese thought\textsuperscript{107}, such as qi\textsuperscript{108}, all of which has extended his status as one of the most prominent innovators in contemporary dance today. I will now turn to a more detailed analysis of the dance sequence.

\textsuperscript{107} In his speech ‘Searching for Identity Through Dance’ at the 2006 ISPA (International Society for the Performing Arts) Conference in Hong Kong, Lin declared his belief that Eastern dance could not effectively mimic the movements characteristic of Western dance. So he created a new dance language reflecting his views on Chinese dancers’ understanding of their own bodies, the dancers’ discovery of a new world based on this understanding, and the dancers’ transformation of this discovery into dance through their use of mind, qi, and observable physical motion.

\textsuperscript{108} Cursive: A Trilogy requires its dancers to transform their inner qi into motions and then to imitate the energy of Chinese calligraphy through dancing; a related objective was to create a dance piece with a special aesthetic: a “new motion style” (Zou, 2001, p. 19) reflecting the idea of time and space in traditional Chinese thought. Indeed, the idea of time and space surfaces in the piece through a choreographed application and execution of dancers’ qi, the theme that is fundamental to Cursive II.
In *Cursive* (2001), the dancers introduce ‘The eight strokes of Yong’ (永字八法) through breathing and motion, indicating the initial movement in writing a Chinese character. Members of the backstage crew project a video onto the stage in order to echo the motion of the dancers. In *Cursive II* (2003), the female dancers wear white skirts and the male dancers wear black skirts. They come onto the stage in a specific order and to a compelling rhythm. The piece comprises both solo and group performances. The dancers’ costumes are either a single colour or a combination of black and white. In this piece, a white panel portraying a long scroll plays a critical role: this white panel indicates the dancers’ spiritual development before and after their engagement in calligraphic writing. In contrast to *Cursive* and *Cursive II*, *Wide Cursive* (2005) presents dancers who, early on, move speedily and dynamically about the stage, dramatically reflecting the power of wide cursive. Also, in this version, there is no video projection; instead, long scrolls hang from the ceiling and extend to the stage. Contrast and tension characterize the solo and group dancing. The dancers’ breathing is audible, and the sound emanating from their gestures also evokes waves of the sea lapping against a shore, or a river’s flowing waters.

As mentioned earlier, calligraphy masters can absorb *qi* from their body and send it throughout their body. In this regard, it is relevant to examine Lin Hwai-min’s interpretation of *qi*. He emphasizes the visible flow and motion of dance sequences created through *qi*. In *Cursive*, *qi* is a major element contributing to the flow of the dancers’ gestures; even a choreographed sequence in which dancers line up to form a shape can serve as a visual path mediating a visual journey to the audience. Each dancer should focus on his or her own invisible flow of motion, which can become manifest to the senses through bodily movement. Convinced that movement can make *qi* manifest, Lin has combined this belief with his passion for dance and calligraphy, creating special workshops in which dancers use their bodies to simulate the motions of a calligrapher’s brush strokes\(^{109}\). But they do more than this: they transform their bodies into a journey of brush writing.

---

\(^{109}\) In one of Lin’s workshops, dancers use their bodies to simulate a Chinese word in front of an audience and then let the audience members guess which Chinese word is being simulated.
My own spatial and temporal experience of *qi*, which came about when I viewed Lin’s dance series, confirms the relevance of his work to the present thesis. In 1996, I attended three Hong Kong showings of the *Cursive* series ¹¹⁰. More recently I watched a video documentary of *Cursive II* from ‘YouTube’ ¹¹¹ in order to refresh my memory. Part of the video (time frame: 00:00:00 - 00:09:33) ¹¹² illustrates how this dance piece tells a story through motion – a technique that can help express the idea of *time* and *space* in relation to calligraphic writing. In order to clarify this connection it is necessary to first characterize and analyse the narrative of the dance piece, and then examine how *time* and *space* become manifest through the narrative.

**qi**

First of all, the choreographer tells a story by controlling the number of dancers on stage. The motion of *qi* stems from sequences of composed movements in which space, time, and emotion form an integrated whole. This temporal transition of the number of dancers is conveyed through a visual contrast and a sense of visual dynamics. In this way, *Cursive II* part one suggests how spatial experience evolves from intensive to extensive space and how temporal experience shifts from motion to rest (for details, see Appendix 1.8. ‘Shifting Experience’)

**void**

The idea of *void* (*空*, *kong*) also plays a key role in Chinese calligraphy—a role that sheds considerable light on viewer and audience experiences of *space* and *time* in

¹¹⁰ I attended *Cursive: A Trilogy*, presented by Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan, at the Hong Kong Art Festival on 15, 17, and 19 February 2006.


In traditional Chinese thought, the idea of *void* refers not to emptiness but to negative space. When applied to paper, the idea of void represents an invisible space consisting of infinite space and time, without borders. In fact, painters and calligraphers could harness the idea of *void* by means of a traditional Chinese technique called ‘blank-leaving’ (留白, *liu bai*), which surfaces even in music, from which tempo and rhythm derive (for details, see Appendix 1.9. ‘*void*’). Lin Hwai-min has expressed his perspective on the relationship between cursive script and the idea of *void* as follows:

*I am always fascinated by the way ink flows on rice paper. Tender and fluid, it creates rich shades, from intense black to misty white. I hope I can convey the rich dynamics of dancing characters in calligraphy and the serene and intense power of the empty space on the white paper. (Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan, 2006)*

The faculty of imagination permits one to have music-based temporal and spatial experiences, and in the field of Chinese character writing the spatial arrangement of the composition and the relative proportions of black and white serve as a visual representation of such experiences. The same faculty of bodily/mental imagination enables the reader/viewer to have spatiotemporal experience in relation to a scroll of Chinese writing and in relation to music, despite the significant differences between these two media. In light of these differences, the question arises what it is precisely that correlates these two art forms with each other. I would argue that the correlating factor rests on the idea of *void*. Music and calligraphy both essentially enact a *void*, but they do so differently, in line with the laws of their respective medium.

In choreographing these dances, Lin aimed to express the traditional Chinese idea of ‘think before you act’, which contributes to the expression of a void at the beginning of the piece. In Chinese culture, the idea of void can represent a moment before an artist begins work on a piece of art. Voids suggest silence and emptiness, which are integral to meditative states. According to my learning experience in the Department
of Fine Arts, calligrapher-artists should feel free to contemplate while lightly and gently pressing an ink stick down on stone, using slow, circular movements of the hand. Afterwards, when the artists are ready mentally and physically, they can begin their artwork. So a void can be regarded as a moment of contemplation. In this case, voids result from the Chinese idea ‘ideas before action’ / ‘think before you act’, which is the most common and foundational idea in the Chinese practice of art, emphasizing that the artist (painter or calligrapher) must contemplate deeply before starting a work of art.

The idea of ‘idea before action’ also helps explain why Lin decided to dress a single female dancer in white, to place her on stage alone, to dim all the stage lighting, and to leave the background empty. This is because he attempted to simulate a contemplative moment, which is the moment of the artist about to start to write or draw. After this contemplative moment, more and more dancers appear on the stage and their motions become increasingly dynamic. Then the spatial and temporal experience of the audience/viewers was shifted from stillness to motion. From this performance, I learned that Chinese calligraphy, particularly cursive writing, was not only an activity that takes place on paper but also a symbol of general human activity. Thus, the moments that surround the activity of writing are no less important for the act of writing than is the moment of writing itself. And the moment preceding the act of writing can be regarded as a moment of contemplation. However, audiences (i.e. the viewers of a writing process, including of an artistically rendered writing process) tend to be less concerned with the contemplative moment than with the moment of actual writing.

The motion that Lin choreographed in part one of Cursive II, as a way to create temporal and spatial experience in audience members, concerns a moment prior to the start of the calligraphic writing process. The stage represents a four-dimensional space equivalent to an imaginative space, and the audience’s general initial experience is of stillness: a moment of pronounced meditation, contemplation, planning, and idea-generation. The tenor of this stillness explains why in this moment the lighting is dimmed at the beginning of the performance; the long scroll of paper—as a
background—has not yet appeared, the black-coloured skirt has not yet appeared, the male dancers (representing yang or positive space) have not yet appeared, only the female dancer (representing yin, or negative space), wearing a white skirt, has appeared.

‘number’ and ‘order’

In comparison with part one, part two represents a moment at which the action of writing calligraphy has started. Five male dancers simultaneously enter the stage, all wearing black skirts. Their footsteps are powerful and their bodily movements speedy, all of which can reflect the power of cursive writing. Temporal and spatial experience here simulates the moment at which water and ink first soak into a piece of paper during the process of calligraphic writing. Apart from analysing Lin’s dance piece in terms of traditional Chinese ideas like *void*, I also examined how viewers can visualize its temporal and spatial characteristics through ‘number’ and ‘order’ (Table 6).

Firstly, ‘number’ has to do with Lin’s numerical use of visual contrasts and dynamics created from the gradual entrance onto the stage of varying numbers of dancers: first one, who eventually shares the stage with four dancers; then there is again only one dancer on stage; later, the stage hosts five dancers. These number differences provide a sense of tension in space. And ‘order’ concerns the varying flow of visual sequence and the varying appearances of the dancers, of the background, and of the lighting and stage colour, all of which strengthen the viewer’s temporal and spatial experience (for details, see Appendix 1.10. ‘Number and Order’).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time frame</th>
<th>Order in which dancers appear</th>
<th>Number of dancers</th>
<th>Stage Lighting</th>
<th>Colour of stage</th>
<th>Colour of Background</th>
<th>Colour of Dancers’ Skirts</th>
<th>Long Scroll White Panel</th>
<th>Period of Writing</th>
<th>Representation of Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part One</td>
<td>First dancer appears (movements are gentle and paced)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:00:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:01:15</td>
<td>Second dancer appears</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:03:25</td>
<td>Third dancer appears</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:03:47</td>
<td>Three dancers dance together</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:04:22</td>
<td>Fourth dancer appears</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:06:42</td>
<td>Three dancers leave; one remains on the stage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:07:26</td>
<td>Second dancer appears again</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:08:14</td>
<td>Third dancer appears again</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:09:24</td>
<td>Fourth dancer appears again</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:09:30</td>
<td>Three dancers leave; one remains on the stage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:09:33</td>
<td>First dancer leaves</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Dim</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not yet begun</td>
<td>Planning and Idea generation</td>
<td>yin – negative space (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Two</td>
<td>Five male dancers appear at the same time (movements are powerful and rapid)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Spotlight</td>
<td>Light blue</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black skirt</td>
<td>Appears</td>
<td>Start writing (digital projection)</td>
<td>yang – positive space (male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:09:35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Light blue</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black skirt</td>
<td>Appears</td>
<td>Start writing (digital projection)</td>
<td>yang – positive space (male)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Analysis of parts one and two of *Cursive II* (visualization by the author).
The stage décor and lighting evoke a dynamically flowing visual experience. On stage all female dancers wear white skirts and translucent leotards. Compared with the background (a long white scroll panel) and the stage lighting (dim), the combination of the colour of stage, dancers and lighting creates an intense contrast of black and white immediately related to the visual impact of traditional calligraphy. Furthermore, the dancers create among themselves yin-yang spaces, because their apparel is of two colours, marking them as belonging to one of two clearly defined groups: white and black. The effect of this contrast is the creation of a mechanism by which the audience can visualize two contrastive spaces on the stage. And the idea of negative and positive space—yin and yang—is, in fact, commonly applied to calligraphy and generally to the writing of Chinese characters (Table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spaces</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Chinese Idea</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Colour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative space</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>yin</td>
<td>Void – invisible space</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive space</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>yang</td>
<td>Solid – visible space</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Analysis of negative and positive space in Cursive II (visualization by the author).

In view of what has been said above, the further question arises how the idea of long scroll format could be integrated with this contemporary dance piece. In fact, the long scroll format of the white panel on stage helps simulate the motion of calligraphic writing. As the New York Times critic Jack Anderson commented, “Watching them was like turning pages or unrolling a scroll” (Anderson 2003). This impression perhaps stems from the dancers’ location between the background (the long scroll form of the white panel) and the viewers. Analysing this arrangement from the viewer’s angle, one could say that the dancers act like lively Chinese-language characters moving around on paper. Their bodies transform into the shapes of many Chinese-language characters flowing around the paper, prompting—throughout the 16 minutes of Parts I and II—varied temporal and visual experiences. While the dancers
were dancing, the white panel\textsuperscript{113} rose from the ground to the stage, a hanging scroll of curtains was dropped to the stage from the ceiling, and digital images of calligraphic characters were projected onto the backdrop and curtain. Different layers of space were thus created (Table 8).

Table 8. Information graphic regarding parts one and two of \textit{Cursive II} (visualization by the author) (for details, see Appendix 1.11. ‘\textit{Cursive II}’).

\textsuperscript{113} The movable rectangular shape (scroll format) of the white panel was designed as a backdrop.
As we have seen, the process of Chinese-character writing contains three levels of spatial experience. Viewers experience different spaces (negative space, positive space, three-dimensional space, four-dimensional space) created by the dancers in motion on stage, which correlate to the spatial experience of the process of Chinese-character and calligraphy writing as follows (Table 9) (for details, see Appendix 1.12. 'An Extension of Space: From 2D to 4D').

Thus, *Cursive II* demonstrates how to extend the viewer’s spatial experience from the traditional two-dimensional space of a scroll to a four-dimensional world through a combination of interacting dancers who simulate both the negative space and the positive space found in the calligraphic presentation of Chinese characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three levels of spatial experience in the process of Chinese-character writing and calligraphy</th>
<th>Lin suggests the combination of different spaces through <em>Cursive II</em>:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Sense of space created through individual brush stroke of the character;</td>
<td>(1) Space created through dancers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Sense of space visualized between characters;</td>
<td>(2) Space created on stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Sense of space reflected through combination of <em>yin</em> and <em>yan</em></td>
<td>(3) Space created through digital media technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Comparison between Chinese-characters, calligraphic writing and *Cursive II*. (visualization by the author).

In conclusion, the results of my research illustrate how Zhang Xu transferred spatial and temporal aspects of dance and music to cursive writing, giving readers/viewers the opportunity to enjoy spatial and temporal experiences. Today, in *Cursive II*, viewers experience a different dimension of time and space created by dancers in motion. Lin Hwai-min translates the spatial and temporal aspects of cursive script
from an (invisible) imaginative space to a four-dimensional world (visible space) of dance for the enjoyment and edification of contemporary audiences. In fact, these two complementary art forms, one ancient, one modern, permit viewers to have physical as well as virtual experiences of space and time, and thereby to enter into unique relationships with the calligrapher and the artwork, the dancers and the dance.

1.6. Time and space in Chinese Relief Art

The question treated in this section concerns how one of the earlier Chinese art forms—Han relief carving—explored and made manifest an idea of ‘time’ by creating a ‘time sequence’ with two elements: ‘motion’ and ‘frame’. My research has shown that the idea of what we call ‘storyboarding’ and ‘animatics’ was already considered, and its techniques demonstrated, in the Eastern Han Dynasty (114-137 CE). For example, the relief slab entitled Music and Dance Banquet 114 (Figure 37) of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) enacts an ‘animation’ through various spatial arrangements and methods of pictorial composition. My analysis involves the close study of an animal in motion, in which I have broken down the movement into chronologically linked steps. This seems close to Western viewpoints such as that taken by photographer Eadweard Muybridge in separating a movement into discrete photographic frames. Animation, however, is based on POV (persistence of vision), meaning that the human eye sees movement when there are more than a certain number of frames per second. Further exploration suggests a new way to interpret specific elements of traditional Chinese art in terms of ‘storyboarding’, extending this—through software programming—to digital media art and, specifically, to animated Chinese characters.

114 The relief slab entitled Ge wu yan leuo tu (歌舞宴樂圖, Music and Dance Banquet) from the grave of the Dai Family was originally situated and later discovered in Shandong Province, Qingping County (山東，濟寧縣) in China. The grave can be traced back to the Eastern Han Dynasty (114-137 CE). The piece is now preserved in the Rietberg Museum in Zurich, Switzerland.
Case study (I): *Music and Dance Banquet*—a relief slab from the grave of the Dai family

The Chinese scholar Li Lincan (李霖燦) has called Han relief the most treasured in art history, a privileged status that he sees as stemming from its simultaneous incorporation of four types of aesthetics from four different art forms: (1) ‘picture’ (圖畫, tu hua), (2) ‘graphics’ (圖案, tu an), (3) ‘relief’ (浮雕, fou diao), and (4) ‘ink-rubbing image’ (傳拓, chuan ta) (Li 1989, p. 14). I would further claim that the spatiotemporal arrangement of *Music and Dance Banquet* is both mature and innovative. Of special note is how it renders visual the idea of ‘animatics’ through a technique of motion sequencing, embodying the idea of moving images through ‘frame’ and ‘motion’. The stone used affects the pictorial representation engraved on it, inasmuch as the graphics engraved on the surface cannot be too complex or detailed, as layering cannot be represented on such a plain, flat surface. Because of...
the lack of layering, visual skill in managing negative and positive space on the surface through engraving is important. Thus the skill needed for spatially arranging various objects played a critical role in Han relief. In general, all the images of Han relief are represented through engraving (for positive space) and carving (for negative space). The presentation of a narrative in Han relief uses a special visual composition comprising important elements: centre of focus, partitioned or layered narratives, dynamic shapes or lines, and the like. Stories in Han relief, rather than presenting themselves in linear fashion, first provide an overall idea of the story and then present the details in different areas of the picture. *Music and Dance Banquet* is similar in its features to traditional Han relief carving, which is square in shape and clearly divided into groups of activities. Here there are three groups or scenes: (1) The sitting and gathering scene (section A)\(^\text{115}\), (2) The entertainment scene (section B)\(^\text{116}\) and (3) The third scene (section C) has been called ‘animals at a flying gallop’ (Anil De Silva 1967, p. 92). In it are seven small rectangular spaces / boxes / frames, each containing an engraving of a unique animal species (Figure 38).

---

\(^{115}\) On the upper part of the art piece are ten seated people gathered together playing chess. These ten people are separate from one another insofar as their bodies do not overlap: it is clear that they sit one next to the other in a horizontal sequence. This compositional technique is called ‘A Long Snake Composition’ (一字長蛇陣, Yi zi chang she zhen) (Li 1989, p. 17).

\(^{116}\) This is the centre of focus of the whole piece and occupies the largest space of the whole slab. The section depicts a celebration replete with acrobatics, music, and dancing. There are also some myths represented. This compositional technique is called ‘The sky is full of stars’ (滿天星斗法, Man tian xing dou fa) (Li 1989, p. 17).
The function of ‘frame’

In the following pages I will concentrate on an elucidation of section C of the *Music and Dance Banquet* relief, where the idea of ‘frame’ plays a prominent role. I suggest using the word ‘frame’ here instead of ‘space’ or ‘box’, as ‘frame’ is more suitable for and relevant to the discussion in relation to ‘storyboarding’ and ‘animatics’. But in order to clarify the idea of ‘frame’ it would be appropriate to ask about its function in film, the principal medium in which it occurs in the modern world.

Scholar David Bordwell has stated that watching a film differs from viewing a painting, a stage performance, or even a slide show. A film presents us with images in illusory motion (Bordwell 1986, p. 3). I contend that Han reliefs powerfully address the idea of illusory motion. Viewers have a sense of moving images through the manipulation of the idea of ‘frame’. For example, section C features seven rectangular frames that are actually not separate frames but are presented as a series. The frames help to separate the engravings of animal species from one another, to distinguish different stages of jumping motion, to identify different animals’ characteristics, and to create a sense of visual rhythm. It is especially noteworthy that, when these seven frames are viewed from left to right, one after the other, they create a sense of sequenced motion.

Bordwell suggests that for cinema to exist, a series of images must be displayed to a viewer by means of a mechanism that presents each image for a very short period and that inserts between successive images an interval of blackness. He also states that if a series of slightly different images of the same object were displayed under these conditions, physiological and psychological processes in the viewer would create the illusion of seeing a moving image. He also emphasizes that such conditions for “moving pictures” exist only rarely in nature, as they require specific technical devices (Bordwell 1986, p. 3). But this type of mechanism, though perhaps necessary for the execution of a movie, need not underlie all images sequenced through a
composition of frames. Examples of other ways of achieving the same phenomenon include flipbooks\textsuperscript{117}, cartoons, and storyboard drawings.

In the light of the foregoing remarks I would argue that section C of the Han relief significantly demonstrates how a series of different images of a similar object, when displayed under similar conditions, lend themselves to physiological and psychological processes in the viewer, thus creating the illusion of a moving object. Once viewers are positioned at a certain distance\textsuperscript{118} in front of this picture, they discover that the seven animals depicted there are no longer just separate units but are connected to each other as a single flowing entity. Once these seven frames are connected, they become a form like a long scroll painting. Moreover, while viewers are looking at these seven frames, the visual path that emerges is coherent, continuous, and linear. As an experiment, I attempted to highlight the frames by giving them bold black lines, and the outcome correlates to the frame sequence of a 35 mm print (Figure 39).

Figure 39. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

The next step in my argument is that because these frames are designed as units, and the viewer is expected to proceed through them in a linear way, the shape and composition of each animal plays a crucial role in producing a temporal sequence. This role comes into play partly because the shape and composition of each animal enhances the synchronized ‘motion’ for the viewer. Thus the approach to the design and composition for each animal in its own frame is important to the artist who, when working on this piece, needed to consider how to craft each shape and sequence each

\textsuperscript{117} “A series of progressive actions was drawn on successive pages. When the pages were riffled, the drawings seemed to move.” (Thomas 1991, p. 24)

\textsuperscript{118} My personal observations of this artwork in the museum have involved my standing one metre in front of section C in order to gain a comprehensive view of this work. The distance reflects the size of the entire piece (width of relief: 119 cm).
composition so that the animals would be synchronized with one another. The shape and composition of each animal is so thoughtfully designed and rendered that, taken together, these seven frames create a sense of motion sequence.

**Synchronising motion**

To facilitate examination of synchronization in this relief, I suggest dividing the seven frames into three groups: group one (frame nos. 1-3), group two (frame nos. 4-5), and group three (frame nos. 6-7) (Figure 40).

Figure 40. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Group one**

The first of group one’s three frames features a dog. This frame is on the far left-hand side of the whole series. In frame (1) the shape of the dog suggests that it is standing but ready to run. Its hind legs are slightly bent, the tail curled up and the head stretching forward, but its four legs are still firmly planted on the ground. This body language is precisely that of an animal ready to leap forward. Frame (2) pictures another dog, skinnier than the frame (1) dog. The four legs of the frame (2) dog are obviously off the ground, and the body, including the tail, exhibits graceful stress in
the form of a straight line frozen in the centre of the frame. The extended body corresponds to the moment in which a dog leaps up and forward into the air.

Frame (3) contains another animal that is obviously not the same as either of the previous ones because it has a longer neck and legs, a smaller head, and a shorter tail. The shape and posture of this animal suggests a deer. Its motion is frozen in a jumping stance. But the deer’s position is significantly different from that of the frame (2) animal. In frame (2), the front and hind legs of the dog stretch forward and backward, forming a straight line in the air. In frame (3) the deer’s hind legs are even higher than its body, and the front legs are just about to touch the ground. So the image of the deer in frame (3) also depicts a frozen moment from a forward leap. However, the significant difference between this moment and that of the previous frame is that it represents the final (or perhaps penultimate) stage of jumping, whereas the previous frame represents the middle stage. I therefore surmise that the first three frames reflect a precise composition, their respective movements being well organized to synchronize with one another. First of all, the composition of the animals’ shapes in relation to one another is accurate enough to create the visual impression of a jumping or leaping motion; secondly, each frame depicts a different stage in this overall movement; and thirdly, the movements are continuous rather than episodic. These three frames are thus interrelated, their images presenting a virtually continuous synchronized movement of two different animal species, the one chasing, the other chased, through its most basic stages.

In his book *How to Read Chinese Paintings*, the author Maxwell K. Hearn relates how in 1878 the photographer Eadweard Muybridge succeeded in taking a sequence of photographs with 12 cameras that captured the moment when a horse’s hooves were tucked under its belly. Hearn states that the resulting images were hardly more than silhouettes, but that such images, individually, “had never been seen before by the unaided eye” (Hearn 2008, p. 9). The successful case of Eadweard Muybridge suggests that ever since the technology of photography was invented and developed, people have been using it as an experimental tool for exploring sequences in objects

---

119 Eadweard Muybridge used the wet plate process, a relatively slow method of photography. The publication of these photographs made Muybridge an international celebrity in his day.
in motion (Hearn 2008, p. 9). However, it seems that similar attempts were made during the Han Dynasty through the use of sequenced images. A clear example of such activities pertaining to the study of animals is the sequence of images in section C of the Music and Dance Banquet relief. As far back as the Eastern Han Dynasty, therefore, Chinese artists were observing, recording, generalizing, visualizing, pictorially representing, and pictorially sequencing animal movements.

Figure 41. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Frame nos. (1) to (3) suggest a clear, sensitive, and precise depiction of back-to-back stages in a quadruped’s jumping movement (Figure 41). Comparatively speaking, there is little difference between these frames and Eadweard Muybridge’s sequence of photographs. This became clear when the three sets of images were digitized and stacked, with the slab sequence on top, the traced sequence in the middle, and the Muybridge photographs below 120. A glance at the three sets of sequential jumping images reveals that they closely mirror one another. Each of them could justifiably be called an ‘animation sequence’.

---

120 The first set consists of frame nos. (1) to (3). For the second set, I traced these same three slab engravings onto white paper, only slightly modifying them as drawn figures against a white backdrop. The third set consists of three pictures taken by Eadweard Muybridge of a jumping horse.
Group two

If the function of group one is to quickly present the main stage in a quadruped’s physical leap (Figure 42), the function of group two is to present similarly shaped quadrupeds that are repeating that leap. Perhaps the most exciting stage is the consistency shown in a quadruped’s leap between frame (3) and frames (4) and (5). The flow of their movement is crucial and enhances the impact of their movement on the viewer. This visual arrangement reminds one of the ways movie makers extend a martial artist’s leap in the air by using slow motion. In much the same way frames (4) and (5) suggest a sense of intensified visual rhythm and dynamism, as if the animals were frozen in mid leap.

Figure 42. (Detail) Frame nos. (4) and (5) of section 2 of the slab (visualization by the author).

Group three

Finally, group three consists of frame nos. (6) and (7). Section three features a boar that appears twice (Figure 43). In the first frame (6) the boar is presented in full side view, whereas frame (7) focuses on the head only. And frame (7) is smaller than the other frames, forming a square rather than a rectangle. This leads the viewer to focus on the head of the boar roughly in the centre of the square. The boar in these

---

121 The animal is quite clearly recognisable as a boar, given the shape of its body, legs, tail, and highly distinctive snout.
122 Frame nos. (1) – (6) are all rectangular.
two frames has just settled on the ground after a leap: the boar's large size and the angle of its legs suggest that the animal has now settled on the ground, but that it is nevertheless in a position from which it could leap again. Frame (7)—the boar's head—might be considered a close-up (zoom in) of the boar in frame (6), with an emphasis on the head to show that leaping is not just a physical activity involving the muscles of the body but also a visual activity involving perspective and focus. But there are other factors at work here: the close-up (zoom in) of the head means there is no view of the body, and the absence of the body suggests an absence of further movement, which implies 'an end to the jump'. But this visual arrangement does not represent 'the end of the narrative'; for in another sense frame (7) is not really a close-up but an indication that the viewer’s eyes have kept moving forward while the animal's body has stopped. In other words, viewers of a jumping animal must turn their gaze sideways to follow the animal, but once the animal stops jumping forward, they will keep moving their gaze sideways and begin to lose sight of the animal, first losing sight of the tail, then the body, then the head. This visual experience is like that of a camera following a leaping animal: when the animal stops moving, the camera keeps on panning across in the direction of its movement, thus losing sight of the animal. In this way the Han relief creates a special narrative experience of time and space with a visual rhythm and dynamic, and at the same time extends this experience with a comment on the role of the eye and body of both artist and viewer in its making. Thus, I would argue that the function of the animals’ tripartite leap (frame nos. 1-3), repeated motion (frame nos. 4 and 5), and close-up (frame nos. 6 and 7) is to suggest continuity and a dynamic rhythm evocative of a viewer’s perception of movement—a function that is the essence of animation.

Figure 43. (Detail) The two frames comprising section 3 (visualization by the author).
Space, time and animation in the Han relief

The term ‘animation’ has been defined thus: “the persistence of vision. Animation could be simulated as long as the eye had a brief pause between seeing the next picture in a sequence. The afterimage supplied the bridge to the next picture” (Thomas 1991, p. 24). The argument so far shows a consistency between the Han relief and the art form of animation in terms of ‘image-sequence making’, ‘anticipation’, straight-ahead action’, and ‘pose-to-pose action' (Thomas and Johnston 1984, pp. 47-69). This strongly suggests that in earlier stages of Chinese art, the visual representation of motion was emerging as an arrangement integrating both space (different frames) and time (linear movement), with the poses of those jumping animals, presented frame by frame, constituting a realistic action sequence.

Pursuing this line of thought, I would like to discuss how the maker of this artwork experimented with and explored an innovative approach to pictorial representation that rested on spatial and temporal arrangements of the sort exploited in twentieth-century animated motion sequences. For example, I will draw on the principles introduced by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston in their work Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life (1984), which presents the “12 basic principles of animation”. One of these principles is the ‘anticipation’ mentioned above: “They (sequence of actions) must be prepared for the next movement and expect it before it actually occurs. This is achieved by preceding each major action with specific move that anticipates for the audience what is about to happen” (Thomas and Johnston 1984, pp. 15-21). In applying this principle to the visual arrangement of the Han relief, I would argue that it rests on similar visual arrangement methods. The reasoning behind this similarity is that this carving successfully translates the positions of body parts into movement in each frame. For instance, the bent legs can represent an animal preparing to jump. In another instance, two pairs of legs are outstretched in opposite directions forming, along with the torso, a straight line—the animal leaping through the air. In yet another
instance, the front hooves alight on the ground, signalling the last (or the penultimate) stage in the jump. These various positions of legs and other body parts create visual references inside three frames whose contents differ significantly from one another and yet whose effect is the creation of a continuous ‘animated’ sequence.

Most importantly, however, the Han relief achieves not only the principle of ‘anticipation’ but a further, more advanced step as well. The work can be regarded as multiple characters embraced in a single spatiotemporal sequence. I would argue that the artistic rendering is even more complex and innovative than the traditional animation sequence. In general, the principles of animation concern how ‘one’ animated character can move smoothly, but the Han relief is a showcase of different animals, whose movements are compressed into one linear visual sequence. The piece creates a visual spectacle out of seven different movements and positions of legs, and does so inside seven different frames as a continuous sequence. These seven different frames consist of seven different animal gestures, yet they all contribute to one continuous movement: jumping at a flying gallop. On the one hand the artwork creates a powerfully realistic portrayal of continuous movement, but on the other hand it challenges the viewer’s visual perceptions by associating multiple characters with a single movement: the result is visual excitement.

I have conducted a small experiment to examine whether, and if so how, the relief compresses time and space through these different animal positions. The first step in my examination was to re-visualize the jumping movement of each animal, thus creating five different jumping-movement sequences, each one corresponding to a different animal (Figure 44). The second step in the experiment was to compare these five sets of jumping sequences with the original artwork in order to examine which part of each sequential jumping movement corresponds to the actual relief (Figure 45). The result shows that the Han relief features one particular jumping movement from each of the five types of animal, and then combines these different movements to form a continuous sequence. So, even though almost all of the shapes of all the

123 The original artwork features five different kinds of animal.
animals differ from one another, sometimes dramatically and sometimes subtly, the jumping movement is synchronized. In this sense, the presence of different animals carrying out a single action results in a motion sequence that is both convincingly realistic and convincingly illusory. The effect of this pointed contradiction is playful, so that the overall atmosphere of the entertainment is one of happiness and joyfulness rather than of rigid adherence to the world of fact.

Figure 44. (The first step) Each animal executing the entire movement (visualization by the author).
Digitizing the Han relief

The next step in my analysis was to use a digital-video format to examine how closely connected these seven animals’ motion was to the idea of animation. The results of my experiment suggest that these seven frames fit the general idea of animation, as their design embodies the idea of moving images and, most significantly, correlates to the idea of time sequences in animation. I first digitized these seven animals on a computer, and then transformed the images from the relief into moving images. I then grouped the seven animals together as a movie sequence lasting 10 seconds and then looping back to the beginning (Figure 46). In the final stage, the video unfolds like animation. In particular, the first three animals (frame nos. 1-3) exhibit motions that are smoothly connected to and synchronized with each other,

---

124 This experimental video work was generated and produced on Final CutPro, digital video-editing software used on a MacIntosh computer. After scanning and digitizing the frames of the seven animals, I chopped the rectangular frames out and separated the animals individually. Afterwards, I imported those animals as still images into the time sequence of Final CutPro, rendered them, and finally exported them as a movie file using the QuickTime format.

125 The speed of each still image was set at five frames per second (00:00:00:05) in the editing sequence, and the dimension of the video was set at 640 x 480. The output format was QuickTime.
creating an uninterrupted and clear jumping motion within a second (see movie file in DVD [2] of Appendix K).

I then sought to identify the connections between these seven animals by comparing the still images with the moving images. I discovered that the visual perception one would have when watching the seven still images is identical to the visual perception one would have watching the moving images—a perception of animation. For, because the shape and motion of each animal is well designed, the jumping motions are almost seamlessly connected and synchronized in a sequence. Although there are five different kinds of animal, these distinctions have no effect on a viewer's perception of motion while watching the movie (Figure 47). Indeed, the frames that contain repeated animals, such as frame nos. 4 and 5, create a sense of pause and accentuation that helps to create a sense of rhythm and dynamism—rather than just a pedestrian movement. Pause and accentuation are important elements applied typically to moving images, as well as to music.

Figure 46. Images captured from the desktop of the computer (visualization by the author).
In conclusion, my study reflects that the Han relief exhibits a high narrative quality and rests on an innovative method of exploring a new visual experience relative to motion sequence and storyboarding. Further, by framing image sequences, I have examined how the spatiotemporal effects of this artwork provide viewers with a unique visual journey. The experimental visual sequencing would challenge viewers’ visual perceptions of movement, revealing that the skill and narrative quality of the art of the Han Dynasty was advanced, innovative, and mature for its day. By synchronizing the motion, the Han relief demonstrates what the unaided eye had never before perceived. Most importantly, the results of my research reflect that, although from the past, this form of motion correlates powerfully to the idea of animation today.

1.7. Chapter Conclusion

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that it is necessary to understand the terminology of time and space in ancient Chinese culture if one intends to work as a digital media artist in this culture. The perspective of ‘painting’ (畫, hua) is relevant to digital art practice because one can learn a lot about multiple perspectives and how the viewer interacts with this perspective. The role of the maker in calligraphy (書, shu) affects
the construction and emotional impact of the result. In digital art, the viewer becomes the maker. The construction of the characters is based on 4D analysis, just as it is in digital modelling. Also, my analysis illustrates—in the form of a case study—that narrative in ancient Chinese relief art was based on storyboarding techniques that are similar to digital animation methods today. This conclusion from my historical and theoretical research will, in subsequent chapters of this thesis, be examined and demonstrated in and through my own innovative practices.
Chapter 2: ‘Bodily engagement’, ‘intimacy’ and ‘play-appreciation’ meet digital technology

2.1. Introduction

In this section, I will—through traditional and contemporary Chinese art as case studies—discuss the correlation between Chinese art and digital media art (interactive art) in terms of the notions of ‘bodily engagement’, ‘intimacy’ and ‘play-appreciation’. The research and aesthetic questions are as follows:

• Can the experience of 10th century painting find an equivalent in 20th century conceptual art or 21st century interactive art?
• Is the ‘Yellow Box’ event witnessed in Shanghai a solution to evoking the intimacies of viewers’ engagement in classical Chinese ‘connoisseurship’ in a modern form?
• Can the ideas of ‘play-appreciation’ and ‘intimacy’ be considered a way of appropriating and re-contextualizing practices through digital media art?

I will first introduce the ‘Yellow’ \textsuperscript{126} Box’ idea by incorporating the ideologies of interaction, viewer engagement, intimacy, and the notions of play and appreciation. This gives rise to the criticism that media artworks are seldom represented on this platform. Secondly, I will take two works from different periods of Chinese history to

\textsuperscript{126} ‘Yellow’ in this context symbolizes Chinese. In his lecture ‘The White Cube and the Yellow Box’ in 2008, Johnson Chang (Asia House Gallery 2008) explained that ‘The Yellow Box’ refers to a sentence from the Yi jing (易經, The Book of Changes) which states Tian xuan di huang (天玄地黃, ‘the heaven is black and earth is yellow’). The ancient Chinese people were regarded as Yan huang zi sun (炎黃子孫, ‘The descendants of the Yellow Emperor’).
illustrate how bodily engagement of the viewer can affect the reception of content, and how scroll as an art form enables viewers to perceive multiple spaces and compressed time. The results reflect the correlation of traditional Chinese art to the elements of interactive art today. Thirdly, I will examine three contemporary Chinese artworks to show that a sense of intimacy is discernible in both traditional Chinese art and digital media art.

2.2. *Wan shang* (‘play-appreciation’): theory and practice

The ‘Yellow Box’ idea has the potential to help viewers / audience members / participants feel more joyful, free and flexible when they are viewing a moving image in an exhibition space.

The ‘Yellow Box’ is not only a theory, it is also a research and exhibition practice project initiated in 2004-2005 by Professor Gao Shiming (1976-), director of the ‘Visual Culture Research Centre’ of the Chinese Academy of Art 127, together with some other Chinese curators, including Hong Kong-based Johnson Chang Tsong-zung (1951-), to investigate issues of contemporary Chinese art in traditional Chinese exhibition spaces. As a reaction to the Western ‘White Cube’ curatorial and ‘Black Box’ cinematic labels, the ‘Yellow Box’ idea and its associated project seek to develop alternative ways of exhibiting non-Western modern art—ways that are closer to the traditional experience of *Wan shang* (‘play-appreciation’) in ancient China. Johnson Chang argued that traditional Chinese fine art had never been happily presented in modern exhibition spaces, which were generally understood as constituting either a ‘White Cube’ or ‘Black Box’ (Asia House Gallery 2008). Diana Freundl, a reporter for the *Taipei Times*, stated that the ‘Yellow Box’ idea attempted to “offer an innovative way to ‘entice’ visitors to step inside the box and extend their

127 Chinese: 中国美术学院
viewing experience” (Freundl 2004). My own experience after visiting the Yellow Box exhibition (in 2006) would suggest that it might not be the only way to appropriate the idea of ‘play-appreciation’; moreover, the ‘Yellow Box’ has not yet been fully developed or adequately explored to accommodate digital media art. An analysis of various theories, interviews, personal visits and talks with curators shows both critical and supportive reactions to the ‘Yellow Box’ idea, but it is rare to find any discussion of the potential of digital media in this context. In response to this problem I created an artwork of my own. Here I will discuss this work only in relation to the exhibition in which it was shown.

In 2005 and 2006 certain relevant exhibitions and academic forums were held in relation to this concept, such as ‘The Yellow Box: Contemporary Calligraphy and Painting in Taiwan’128 (2004-5)129; ‘A Yellow Box in Qingpu: Contemporary Art and Architecture in a Chinese space’130 in Shanghai (2006)131; and an academic forum on ‘Exhibition Practice and Mechanics of Significance’, ‘China’s Traditional Culture of Connoisseurship and Contemporary Art’, ‘Chinese Approaches to Contemporary Art’, and ‘Architectural Practice and Visual Production in Contemporary China’ (2006)132.

On the one hand, therefore, the idea of the ‘Yellow Box’ attempts to reinterpret the traditional spirit of the art lover in light of contemporary art, and on the other it seeks to investigate issues in contemporary art, creativity and the culture of connoisseurship in response to modern exhibition space. Thus the ‘Yellow Box in Qingpu’ exhibition raised questions such as (1) Does the space of museums have to follow the canonical spectator regime? (2) Will the traditional culture of intimate appreciation still retain its charm in the museum system? (3) What significance does the classical experience

128 Chinese: 黃盒子: 台灣當代書畫展
129 Exhibition: ‘The Yellow Box: Contemporary Calligraphy and Painting in Taiwan’; Date: Nov. 12, 2004 –Feb. 27, 2005; Venue: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan.
130 Chinese: 黃盒子•青浦: 中國空間裏的當代藝術
131 Exhibition: ‘A Yellow Box in Qingpu: Contemporary Art and Architecture in a Chinese space’; Date: Sept. 6-October 6, 2006; Venue: Xiao Ximen (Minor West Gate), Qingpu Town, Shanghai, China.
132 Academic Forum: September 6, 2006; Xiao Ximen ‘Minor West Gate’, Qingpu Town, Shanghai.
of art appreciation have for the configuration of space in contemporary architecture?

(4) What do history and tradition mean to us in an age of virtual reality?

Chang argued that since the nineteenth century, the European tradition of art has found a ‘standard’ system of exhibition and art appreciation based upon the modern art museum—a system that has now become seemingly universal. In addition, Chang also criticized that the ‘White Cube’ is a system of partitioning space from nature, separating art works from the living world out of which they arise, while keeping the creative situation apart from the conditions of connoisseurship and separating the space of art appreciation from that of daily experience (‘A Yellow Box in Qingpu’ 2010). Chang stated, for instance, that “The new generation of Chinese ink painters and calligraphers are compelled to adjust their work to the challenges posed by such spaces in order to seek recognition” (‘Affiliated Activities’ 2010). In fact, this is actually not an issue of good versus bad, but of ways of appreciation, specifically the way in which Shuhua (書畫) ‘Chinese calligraphy and ink painting’ might interact with the traditional Chinese culture of connoisseurship. Nowadays, Western style museums and galleries provide a unique exhibition space for artists and a public audience, where the walls and partitions of the venue are normally movable and painted white, the effect being reinforced by a professional lighting system suspended from the ceiling. However, Chang suggested that curators should consider seeking out an intermediate space within the modern exhibition venue that mediates Chinese art favourably so that Shuhua can maintain its traditional nexus of aesthetic values.

Connoisseurship in the Chinese tradition

What, then, is the traditional Chinese culture of ‘connoisseurship’ or ‘art appreciation’, and how does it relate to Shuhua? There are three different levels of ‘connoisseurship’ (in relation to ‘art appreciation’) in ancient Chinese art that could illustrate why traditional and contemporary Chinese art forms might not be perfectly suitable for exhibiting in the ‘White Cube’ type of space. These are: Guan shang (觀賞, ‘observe-
appreciation’); 

Wan shang (玩賞, ‘play-appreciation’); and 

Ya ji, (雅集, ‘literati gathering’).

Connoisseurship emphasizes the relationships between the artwork, storyteller (artist) and viewer or listener. For example, the function of ancient Bianwen and Bianxiang requires intimate relation and interaction between the work (text and images), storyteller and viewer-listeners, as they employ scroll form narrative—including storytelling through text and singing—to tell sutra stories to ordinary people. Bianwen and Bianxiang can be regarded as examples of ancient writing on bamboo strips, a technique that can be dated back to the fifth century BCE and that represents an early scroll form. For before writing the Chinese characters with a hard brush, they were carved onto the surface of bamboo strips and these were tied together with strings to form a roll. Scroll format allows viewers to control what they want to see and where their gaze needs to stop; the size of the pictorial plan can be controlled, whether it is an arm’s length away or a very small pictorial plan. With this specific type of visual experience, the relationship between the storyteller, audience and work is very intimate.

In accordance with this tradition the concept of the ‘Yellow Box’, proposes a specific way of ‘appreciation’ (a term common in Chinese art history), particularly in the sense of a cultured approach to ink painting and calligraphy. It consists of three different levels of appreciation, called here 'observe-appreciation', ‘play-appreciation’, and 'literati-gathering':

---

133 Bianwen (變文) refers to a wording style adopted by monasteries and temples to deliver ideas to ordinary people. It employs forms of storytelling and singing to tell sutra stories. Bianwen and Bianxiang (變相) were developed along the Silk Road. Bianwen could be regarded as a storytelling script that employs scroll form narrative including storytelling through text and singing to tell sutra stories to ordinary people. Bianxiang refers to a narrative through pictorial representation. So, Fu Yunzi, the author of Sijiang xinkao comments that “Pictorial spatial representations are Bianxiang; and oral temporal presentations are Bianwen” (cited in Wu 1992, p. 112).

134 The scroll format is one of the major art forms of Chinese art. This art form can be dated back to an early period in Chinese art history.
**Guan shang (觀賞):** literally 'observe-appreciation' or 'to appreciate observantly'. The appreciation of the art work does not arise merely through seeing it. Rather, the artist should point out and provide particular details, aspects and dimensions for the audience to attend to observantly. 'Observe' could thus be regarded as a macroscopic viewpoint. In general, the presentation of Chinese artwork is in relation to showing, introducing, and sharing between artists, collectors and viewers, rather than displaying works silently on a table or hanging on a wall. The way of appreciation enquires physical involvement and participation, which is more important than viewing the artwork from a distance. **Guan (觀)** means ‘to observe closely’. Basically, in the past the content of Chinese art required the viewer to be an acute and involved observer rather than simply a viewer.

**Wan shang (玩賞):** literally ‘play-appreciation’ or ‘to appreciate playfully’. The pictorial space/arrangement of the painting allows the audience to play around and inside the painting, using their outer and inner vision (eye and imagination), rather than remaining merely passive external observers. Their appreciation arises through this active, playful immersion in the painting. The concept of ‘play-appreciation’, one of the most traditional methods of art appreciation, particularly emphasizes lingering in space and time with the artwork and allowing the viewer gradually to enter “a realm of delight” (Taipei Fine Arts Museum 2005, p.5). Thus **Wan (玩)** emphasizes a sense of intimacy and interaction; and **shang (賞)** includes a value and attitude of appreciation. ‘Play-appreciation’ can either take place alone or in company in the exhibition space. When the viewer is alone, he/she may enjoy the relation between the artwork and the environment; when viewers are in company, the exhibition space could be shifted for the host to engage his guests, or for the artist to meet his/her viewers.

**Ya ji (雅集):** literally 'literati-gathering' or 'gatherings of lovers of art, literature and music’. The term was used to indicate that different kinds of cultured people gathered together to appreciate artworks. **Ya ji** is a kind of extension of ‘play-appreciation’, which is about a small group of people gathering in the company of
scholars, collectors, artists, etc., who would entertain each other with music, poetry and games. Different viewers have their different rhythm in perceiving an artwork, and the number of the viewers is normally small: a group of people appropriate to discussion and sharing, among whom a sense of intimacy can easily be created, this being one of the major purposes of *Ya ji*.

The curator, Huang Tsai-Lang has observed that cultured calligraphy/painting in tradition finds its origins in the personal expression of cultivated individuals, addressing an extremely personal audience (Taipei Fine Arts Museum 2005. p.5). For this reason exhibitions of traditional Chinese art (painting and calligraphy) were held in an interior space for small groups of people rather than in an outdoor space for the public. As a result, the relationships between the artist, the audience, viewers, and collectors were intimate. In fact, there was in the past no specific term like our modern ‘exhibition venue’; there was a space for displaying and sharing, which was like a private space for common friends and guests sharing and resting. Prof. Gao Shiming has explained that there were no galleries (in the modern sense) in ancient China for showcasing painting and calligraphy. Displaying and viewing often occurred in a scholar’s studio. Viewing works of art in China, however, was not considered a purely private activity (Gao, S.M. & Gao, X.D. 2008).

Analysing the meaning and value of ‘gathering’ in traditional Chinese culture with a view to applying the results to present-day digital media art leads me to highlight the following aspects:

First, *Ya ji* was spontaneous 135. Secondly, there was no well-defined meaning of ‘author’ and ‘artwork’. This is because the concepts of ‘author’ or ‘artwork (regarded as the end product)’ differed from our modern understanding of these terms 136.

135 The gathering often started with something that could evoke the guests’ interest, such as an object of art, scenery, a literary allusion, or a seasonal reference. Compared to the well-defined theme of today’s scholarly conferences, these evocative elements at the gathering served more as a catalyst than a guideline or an objective (Gao, S.M. & Gao, X.D. 2008).

136 During the *Ya ji* gathering, attendees responded to each other, and together they created something appropriate for the mood, the season, and the occasion. Participation, response, and sharing were the key elements of the gathering. One created something as a direct response to other participants. During this sharing experience, there was no need to interpret the poetry, calligraphy, or painting created collaboratively. Only comments of connoisseurship were made (Gao, S.M. & Gao, X.D. 2008).
Thirdly, there was no ‘curator’ and no ‘audience’. So this activity was neither private nor public; it was somewhere in between. This is because the moment of sharing at the gathering was made possible by the presence and participation of all the attendees. Also, there was no ‘public’ audience. People who did not attend the gathering were only able to have access through second-hand information, anecdotes about and traces of the gathering (e.g. things produced during the gathering). What above all transpires from these observations is the closeness of the relation between artist/author, artwork and audience and its profoundly emotional colouring. These qualities are reflected in ten keywords suggested by Gao for the literati gathering: (1) Evocation (not theme or objective); (2) Play (not artistic production); (3) Spontaneity (not design or plan); (4) Intimacy (not adulation); (5) Scene or process (not work of art); (6) Realm or mood (not art space); (7) Response (not interaction); (8) Comment and connoisseurship (not interpretation); (9) Kindred spirit (not ‘the public’); and (10) Participant (not ‘author’) (Gao, S.M. & Gao, X.D. 2008).

**White Cube’, ‘Black Box’ and ‘Yellow Box’**

Logically, my next question was whether there are specific, definable differences between the ideas of ‘White Cube’, ‘Black Box’ and ‘Yellow Box’. I have used a diagram to compare their differences in relation to the role of the audience and the level of participant interaction (Figure 48).

The ‘White Cube’ could be considered a means of displaying an artwork in a fully lit spatial environment. The behaviour of viewers in a ‘White Cube’ is an experience of ‘viewing and watching’, which relates to a sense of immobilization and mobilization, depending on the scale of the artwork and the nature of the exhibition space. As a digital artist, I personally find that the ‘White Cube’ helps to retain naturalness in the characteristic exhibition space, and allows the audience to focus on the artwork.

---

137 The modern concepts of curator, and imagined audience did not exist at the gathering. Of course, a ‘host’ had a part in organizing the event. But his role was definitely not comparable to that of a curator. The gathering often happened in a casual daily setting instead of a regulated, institutionalized space, such as is reserved for modern exhibitions. All participants at the gathering may have known each other fairly well (Gao, S.M. & Gao, X.D. 2008).
However, critic Brian O’Doherty, in his book *Inside the White Cube – The Ideology of the Gallery Space* has another viewpoint: “The white wall’s apparent neutrality is an illusion. It stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions. Artist and audience are, as it were, invisibly spread-eagled in 2-D on a white ground” (O’Doherty 1999, p.79). And he continues: “We have now reached a point where we see not the art but the space first. An image comes to mind of white, ideal space that, more than any single picture […]. Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial – the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics. Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study […]. Art exists in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of ‘period’ (late modern), there is no time. This eternity gives the gallery a limbolike status; one has to have died already to be there” (O’Doherty 1999, p.14-15). The ‘Black Box’ is almost the same as the ‘White Cube’ in this respect, as it represents an enclosed spatial environment. In comparison with the ‘White Cube’, the ‘Black Box’ involves greater immobilization, as the activities of the viewers are more or less under
constraint. In contrast, the ‘Yellow Box’ has been proposed as a viewing apparatus within the ‘White Cube’, although as a framework the concept follows the precedent of the ‘Black Box’. Johnson Chang has stated that the ‘White Cube’ represents a sense of ‘space’ and the ‘Black Box’ a sense of ‘emptiness’; in contrast, the ‘Yellow Box’ is neither spacious (space-creating) nor hollow (emptiness-creating), neither real nor virtual (Taipei Fine Arts Museum 2005, p. 9). It is an exhibition space that integrates different temporal and spatial activities generated by artists and curators on the one hand, and visitors and viewers on the other. In my own experience, its spatiotemporal impact is intense and I suggest that the idea of ‘Yellow Box’ could in future involve many of the elements of interactive art that I will discuss in the following paragraphs through several case studies.

After introducing the difference between the ideas of ‘White Cube’, ‘Black Box’ and ‘Yellow Box’ in relation to the role of audience and the level of participant interaction, I will turn to my experience in visiting the second ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition, ‘A Yellow Box in Qingpu’ on September 6, 2006, and illustrate how the concept of the ‘Yellow Box’ was delivered. I will discuss the temporal and spatial experience that I encountered there and suggest how this could in future be integrated into digital media art.

The ‘Yellow Box’ exhibitions

In the first ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition (Taipei 2004-2005) the exhibition venue was divided into five areas. The artworks were presented with more than 10 different formats based on Johnson Chang and his friends’ original yellow-box sketches.

---

138 Based on the exhibition in Taiwan, the second ‘Yellow Box’ project continued to research exhibition practice by studying contemporary art and architecture. So this second exhibition was considered more architecture-based; this is the reason why it was entitled ‘A Yellow Box in Qingpu: Contemporary Art and Architecture in a Chinese Space’. This exhibition was held at Xiao Ximen (小西門) ‘Minor West Gate’, Qingpu Town, Shanghai in 2006 – a venue that already housed a newly constructed traditional vernacular architecture project. In other words, architecture did not act merely as a space for the exhibition; it was regarded as the content – in contrast with the first ‘Yellow Box’ in Taiwan.

139 Chang initially worked with different people and institutions, such as the ‘Visual Culture Research Centre’, which is devoted to theoretical and field research into visual culture and engages in the study
Chang had set up three principles for the design of the ‘Yellow Box’: (1) the design should be as simple as possible and avoid the iconography of traditional Chinese culture; (2) it should avoid literal imitation of traditional architectural or stage-like structures; and (3) the structure should avoid direct interference in the artwork, such as digital enlargements or reductions, or video projections. In accordance with these three principles, there were a number of exhibition methods. Nineteen new forms (as propositions) were created, including (1) ‘Free-Hanging Suspended Scroll’; (2) ‘Standard Yellow Box’; (3) ‘Supplement – Paired Chairs with Tea-Table’; (4) ‘Implied Scenery’, etc (for details, see Appendix 2.2 ‘Propositions’).

In contrast, my first impression of the second ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition in Shanghai (2006) was the exhibition space itself, which was free from any temporal or spatial constraints on viewers/visitors, as it was a site-specific project that consisted of various exhibition spaces at the same time. Visitors could ‘visit’ the exhibition spaces one by one through different types of transport, such as boats and buses (Figure 49-51).

Figure 49. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

140 The curators of this exhibition included Gao Shiming (高士明), director of Visual Culture Research Centre, China Academy of Art; Chang Tsong-zung, curator and critic, guest Professor of China Academy of Art; and Hu Xiangcheng (胡項城), artist and architect of Xiao Ximen.
For example, visitors were expected to gather at the reception desk of Qingpu Hotel in the morning. Shuttle buses were arranged to deliver guests, speakers and visitors to visit the ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition space and Qingpu City experimental architecture area from 09:00 -12:00 (for details, see Appendix 2.1. ‘Itinerary’). Afterwards, visitors, guests, curators and artist(s) had lunch together. In the early afternoon the
shuttle took the visitors to ‘Minor West Gate’ for an academic forum. And then guests and visitors visited the artworks together in Qingpu City. Finally, the official opening ceremony of the show was launched in the late afternoon.

The exhibition programmes included music, video projections and mixed media performances. Guests and visitors were free to stop by or leave. In addition, exhibition spaces provided printed exhibition material to emphasize the itinerary of the exhibition. Itinerary and accompanying materials all reflected the elements of temporal and spatial experience of this exhibition in relation to ‘play-appreciation’ (Figure 52-53). As one of the visitors to this exhibition, I felt deeply engaged by this
arrangement and overall exhibition setting. The experience was similar to visiting current international exhibition events, such as the ‘Venice Biennale’ 141 or ‘documenta’ 142. Visitors could come and go freely to every interior and exterior space at numerous exhibition venues. In fact, the impression of the overall atmosphere at the second ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition is relevant to the concept of how traditional Chinese people hosted their guests in a garden, with everyone gathering together and appreciating artwork, with wine and music. For example, I met a Taiwan artist Yu Peng (1955 - ) in the garden of this architectural site. He was drawing his experimental Chinese ink painting inside the traditional Chinese kiosk and chatting with visitors at the same time. This situation correlates with the concept of ‘play-appreciation’, so that I had a feeling of entering the space of a traditional literati/scholar gathering of the past, which is not easy to experience in the modern city today.

Figure 53. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

141 ‘Venice Biennale’ is an international art exhibition held every two years in the Castello Gardens, Venice, Italy. 
142 ‘documenta’ is an international art exhibition which takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany.
And this continued throughout the long journey from one area to another over the course of a whole day, from morning to night, generating a sense of ‘play-appreciation’ in accordance with the old saying ‘to linger on with no thought of leaving’ (流連忘返, Liu lian wang fan) 143, suggesting that visitors have such enjoyment that they forget to go back home. At the end of the show, cultural exchange, cultured gathering and art sharing had emerged as part of our life, allowing individuals to have their interactions with other people (visitors, curators, guests, workers, and artists) and the environment and thereby to find the shared elements of life and art. The exhibition demonstrated, therefore, how the concepts of ‘observe-appreciation’, ‘play-appreciation’, and ‘literati-gathering’ can be executed in relation to the traditional thought of Liu lian wang fan, and thus served as an example suggesting alternative exhibition scenarios and spaces other than the ‘White Cube’ and ‘Black Box’. However, as I argue below, digital art has unfortunately not yet found an appropriate place in the ‘Yellow Box’ concept or related exhibitions.

Digital media art and the ‘Yellow Box’: an absent dimension

The Qingpu ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition also featured video installation as an art form, but I critique that the work actually displayed—for example the video animation work Lie (2006) 144 by Chinese artist Sun Xun (1980)—was rather traditional, and as such unsuited to the specific ‘Yellow Box’ objectives (Figure 54). This is because Sun’s animation was projected onto the wall in a traditional way: this is a single screen projection and the ratio of the projection was set as a traditional 4:3 rectangle. Although the artist drew some graphics on the wall in order to extend his animated images from the video screen (digital space) to the wall (physical space), the video installation setting was still limited to a traditional screening.

143 Original text: 「從流上而忘反謂之連，從獸無厭謂之荒，樂酒無厭謂之亡。」《孟子·梁惠王下》
144 Artist: Sun Xun; Title: Lie; Year: 2006; duration: 7 minutes 20 seconds; format: video / single channel.
Also, this animation contains time constraints that made me hesitate: I had to choose whether to keep on watching the work or to leave and visit other artworks. This situation was similar to the issue raised by Professor Boris Groys when he differentiated between the difficulties and behaviours of watching digital moving images (video/movie) in a theatre space and in an exhibition space (Groys 2008, pp. 82-91). Groys points out that there are two different models that allow us (as viewers) to gain control over time: (1) the immobilization of the image in the museum, and (2) the immobilization of the audience in the movie theatre. For example, when viewers stand in front of a painting, a sculpture, and even an installation, they can freely control their relation to this artwork in terms of time: they can control their viewing time freely. And they can interrupt contemplation of a particular image at any time to come back to it later and resume viewing it at the point at which it was interrupted (loc. cit.). Groys observes that both models of immobilization fail when moving images are introduced and presented in a museum, because viewers still generally carry the mindset of watching a movie (in the theatre/cinema) before entering a
museum/gallery space where digital moving images are showing. But in the museum space they are, as viewers, essentially mobile. As a digital media artist and member of the audience, I agree with this criticism. I have often undergone an unpleasant experience watching moving images in a museum space. This is because, as Groys describes it, in the museum the moving images go on moving but the audience/viewer also continues to move. In fact, the museum mindset is completely different from that of the cinema. Groys then points out that the flow of the viewers’ movement in the exhibition space cannot be arbitrarily stopped because it is constitutive of the functioning of perception within the art museum system. In addition, in a larger exhibition it is harder for viewers to go through all the videos or films from beginning to end if these are all being screened at the same time, for the simple reason that the duration of the average exhibition visit is not long enough (loc. cit.). Taking myself as a member of the audience, I can say that in my general experience of screening and exhibition venues I have no idea how many video works are showing at the same time, and have no idea how long each one lasts. So when I encounter a video work, I start worrying about whether I will still have time to encounter some other artworks, including other video works at the exhibition. And I start asking how much time I have left in this particular exhibition space, because—depending on the scale and the structure of the museum space—I might not always be able to arrive in the right place exactly when a particular video exhibit is starting. I often enter the exhibition space and find the video work has already started. So a sense of confusion, puzzle and struggle arises between the viewer and the artist over control of time—which entails control of the entire experience—of aesthetic appreciation. This was also my experience when watching the video by Sun Xun at the ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition. Prof. Boris Groys makes the additional point that “the viewer’s inability to take complete visual control is further aggravated by the increased speed at which moving images can currently be produced” (loc. cit.).

In this respect I found the idea of the ‘Yellow Box’ in relation to ‘play-appreciation’, ‘bodily engagement of the viewers’ and ‘three-way intimacy’ could appropriately be investigated as an alternative way to solve the problem expressed by Groys. It is, in other words, time to recognize and enact the correlation between media art and the ‘Yellow Box’ idea. But this has not happened to date, nor has any official suggestion been put forward for alternative digital video installations in relation to the ‘Yellow
Box’ idea. So the question of how to propose an alternative arose. My idea was to transform and appropriate the idea of traditional Chinese connoisseurship in terms of ‘play-appreciation’ through digital media art in order to reinterpret the cultural spirit of Chinese tradition in a contemporary light, and at the same time translate the ‘Yellow Box’ idea into a contemporary digital dimension.

2.3. Bodily engagement and long scroll format

The ‘Yellow Box’ emphasizes not only the idea of ‘play-appreciation’, but also the scroll format and the close relation between the artwork and its viewers. In order to examine the implications of these traditional concepts for digital media art I will first take an ancient Chinese hand-scroll painting The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai from the 10th century CE to examine how bodily engagement of the viewers can affect the reception of the content through scroll as a form that enables viewers to perceive multiple space and compressed time. Secondly, I will take an installation Ghost Pounding the Wall to exemplify how the long scroll format could compress and transform the historical and cultural heritage into the present by merging viewers into the exhibition space through their bodily engagement.

My thesis here, therefore, is that the scroll form of painting creates a close relation between the artwork and its viewers at the level of bodily engagement, and this engagement issues in a unique and characteristic perception of space and time. Specifically, hand-scroll painting is a traditional Chinese format that requires the viewers to navigate the narrative of the painting by unrolling it on a table or by having two people hold either end of the outstretched scroll. The gaze of the viewers rests on the painting and typically moves from right to left. Professor Wu Hung suggests that

146 Chinese: 韓熙載夜宴圖
147 The original painting no longer exists. The painting that we have now is a ‘surviving copy’ in the Beijing Palace Museum. It is regarded as the oldest and finest copy in the world.
this viewing experience could be called ‘sequential composition’, a ‘visual journey’, or a ‘pictorial narrative’. He further states that all these concepts imply a sense of time (Wu 1996, p. 57). Wu Hung continues,

\[
\text{Indeed, my reading of the painting has demonstrated that it is a work of both spatial and temporal art. It can combine these two aspects harmoniously in a single picture because this picture is a handscroll. (Wu 1996, p. 57)}
\]

Scholar Jiang Xun has observed that in terms of time and space the visual experience of viewing this painting can be regarded as ‘time compressed’ and overlapping (時間疊壓, Shi jian da ya,) and ‘reversed position and direction’ (前後錯置, Qian hou cuo zhi,) (Jiang 1991, p. 104). Jiang commented that these two kinds of visual experience both share a great deal with our human subconscious and constitute one of the main features of long-scroll painting (Jiang 1991, p. 104).

![Figure 55. Unfolding scroll, unfolding narrative, unfolding time (visualization by the author).](image)

This ‘time compressed’ experience is in relation to the bodily engagement of the viewers, for the direction in which one reads the painting proceeds from right to left. At the same time, the narrative (i.e. the storyline) is presented from right to left. The direction of time thus seems to unfold like a straight line, moving from right to left. Jiang Xun noted that while the viewer is unrolling the painting, time repeatedly circles a single central axis (Jiang 1991, p. 104). The result is an immovable, never-ending
cyclical focus: the painting indicates no specific time and no specific space, but ceaselessly indicates both time and space (Figure 55).

**Case study (I): The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai (I)\textsuperscript{148}**

In this section, my analysis focuses on how, in a scroll, the multiplication of a single character throughout the compressed temporal and spatial field of experience takes place against the backdrop of varied scenery and equally varied activity. This visual composition attracts viewers’ physical engagement by prompting them to ‘scroll’ forwards and backwards while reading the painting. I will return to this artwork from a different point of view – that of cyclical rather than linear time – in the next chapter.

\textit{The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai} is a traditional colour hand-scroll painting in ink on silk. The historical background of this painting involves Emperor Li Yu\textsuperscript{149}, also known as Li Hou Zhu (scroll painting in Emperor’, who did not have an opportunity to see with his own eyes the famous night-time parties held by his minister, Han Xizai. So Li Yu sent his court painter Gu Hongzhong (c. 910-980) as a ‘detective’\textsuperscript{150} to record all the activities in the party through this long scroll painting.

\textsuperscript{148} I have analysed different aspects of the painting \textit{The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai} in two different chapters (Chapters 2 and 3). In order to avoid confusion the analyses are marked as \textit{The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai (I)} and \textit{The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai (II)} respectively.
\textsuperscript{149} Li Yu (b. 937-978), historically known as the Last Emperor of the Southern Tang, reigned from 961 to 975 CE.
\textsuperscript{150} Wu Hung mentions that Li Yu sent his court painter, Gu Hongzhong (c. 910-980), as a detective to Han’s night entertainments, asking Gu to visually memorize everything he saw there. The painter is mentioned only as an invisible middle-man between the curious ruler and the libertine minister (Wu 1996, p. 30).
Scrolling time and space

In the case of this artwork, the function of the hand-scroll format helps the artist to create a kind of flexible non-linear visual diary. Gu Hongzhong’s piece not only visualizes Han Xizai’s parties for his viewers, but also leads their gaze from one scene to another through an unscrolling of painted events. The painting invites the viewers to immerse themselves in its virtual space through the movement of rolling and unrolling the scroll. In fact, there are two ways to keep the painting’s narration moving: first, the viewers need to keep unrolling the painting from right to left; second, because the figures in the painting re-emerge from one scene to the next, the viewers’ gaze follows one scene to another and back again during the unrolling.

I agree with Wu Hung’s comment that, in terms of both painting and viewing, a hand-scroll is literally “a moving picture with shifting moments and loci. (A hanging scroll or mural does not move; what moves is the viewer or his gaze.)” (Wu 1996, p. 59). I find this experience of viewing narration correlates to the experience of watching ‘storyboarding’ today. As Wu says, a hanging or open scroll does not move; what moves is the viewers’ gaze. And in terms of ‘bodily engagement’ it is not only the viewers’ gaze that moves, but their bodies, too. Rather than follow certain guidelines suggested inside the painting, some viewers will view the whole painting literally step by step depending on their personal physical or visual adjustments and preferences, or in reaction to other viewers who are physically present. It is impossible to go through the whole narrative at once; the picture must be unrolled or re-rolled. It is for this reason that Wu Hung calls a hand-scroll a series of consecutive sub-frames rather than a monolith in a single frame (Wu 1996, p. 59).

I referred above to Jiang Xun’s statement that the Night Entertainments shows how to compress and overlap time and space through the scroll format. The relevant issue here is how this hand-scroll painting’s narrative unfolds through a series of scenes. But first it is necessary to clarify the meaning of ‘narrative’. According to scholar David Bordwell (1986, p. 83), the term ‘narrative’ refers to a chain of events in cause-effect relationships occurring in time and space. A narrative is thus what we usually
mean by the less jargony ‘story’. A second issue of importance concerns how many scenes are visualized in a painting. In fact, the number of scenes determines the viewers’ bodily engagement with the scroll painting, i.e. the ways in which, and the rates at which, viewers navigate the narrative, regardless of how the painting is unrolled and re-rolled. The matter of quantity is important to my current study, because identifying the number of scenes in this painting helps one to grasp how viewers can empirically and conceptually perceive space and time and their outcomes.

Compressed time and space in scroll format: dividing the scenes

Basically, one scene in this hand-scroll painting contains one narrative. But I would argue that scene 2 actually contains two sub-scenes (2 narratives) together, and that this combination plays an important role in maintaining viewers’ bodily engagement with the painting. Different scholars, however, have different opinions in relation to this issue:

Professor Wu Hung identifies “four sections” in this painting on the basis of the composition of screens. He observes that the form of scroll painting acts like a visual journey comprising, in this case, a series of episodes distributed throughout “four sections” (Wu 1996, p. 49). Taiwanese scholar Jiang Xun states that there are five scenes in the painting (Jiang 1991, pp.101-103), and that the length of each scene is around 60 mm. For example, he states that the back of the lady who is clapping her hands represents the end of section 2. The direction of her body functions as a partition between two separate scenes. Taiwanese scholar Li Lin-can also sees five sections in this painting (Li 1989, p. 209). Critic Cui Qinzhong presents a related point of view, in agreement with Li Lin-can, asserting that there are five sections in this painting, which he identifies on the basis of five different activities: (1) Listening to music; (2) Dance appreciation; (3) Taking a rest; (4) Performance; and (5) Gathering with guests (Cui 2001, p. 62). Cui suggests grouping two figures portraying Han Xizai together in scene 3 (Figure 57). In his opinion, the two figures fall into the
same activity-based category: ‘taking a rest’ (Chi 2001, p. 62). In this respect Cui’s method is notably different from that employed by other scholars. The following table (Table 10) summarizes these different opinions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Number of Sections/Scenes in the Painting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wu Hung</td>
<td>4 (Wu 1996, pp. 49 &amp; 62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiang Xun (蔣勳)</td>
<td>5 (Jiang 1980, p. 171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan Dongsheng (楊東勝)</td>
<td>5 151 (Yan 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cui Qinzhong (崔慶忠)</td>
<td>5 (Cui 2001, p.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>4 (but scene 2 with 2 sub-scenes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. Comparison (sections / scenes of the painting).

While I also associate two of the Han figures in a single scene (see my treatment of scene 2 below), I disagree with Cui’s specific approach to this issue, and argue that the two Han Xizai figures in scene 3 are actually located in different spaces and time zones (Figure 57). In other words, each scene is well designed to contain only one Han Xizai. There are a total of five figures of Han Xizai drawn in this painting and five scenes in the painting, in each of which the Han Xizai figure plays a central role. The function of each of these figures reflects the principal moment in each scene, with each scene’s principal moment differing from that of every other scene. The activities being undertaken by Cui’s two Han Xizai figures differ completely from one another. Neither the two activities nor the two figures should be placed in the same category, because the Han Xizai on the right-hand side of the painting (the Han just finishing his drum performance) is cleaning his hands and taking a rest with all the assembled

151 Reproduction copy by Tianjin Renmin Publishing House, Tianjin (Yan 2007).
ladies, while the Han on the left-hand side is changing his clothes and sitting on a chair with his shoes off, his feet comfortably tucked up. He has taken off his outer robe and is comfortably apparet in a loose-fitting undergarment wide open to below his navel. The night is hot, and he holds a large fan, as noted specifically by Michael Sullivan (Sullivan 2008, p. 33). In fact, between these two different figures of Han Xizai we see one side of a big screen. The function of this screen is to separate the two principal figures, which are undertaking different activities in this painting. According to Wu Hung, this screen plays at least three different structural roles: (1) it helps to define an individual pictorial unit, (2) it ends the previous scene, and (3) it initiates the following scene 152. It follows that these two ‘Han Xizai’ figures do not belong in the same category (Wu 1996, p. 56).

However, an argument consistent with mine comes from Michael Sullivan (2008, pp. 33-35.), who describes one of the ‘Han Xizai’ figures (Figure 58) as looking steadily into the eyes of the young woman who stands before him, holding a set of clappers. Behind him, a young lady stands looking down with a kindly expression at a little girl who holds a very big fan. Sullivan even uses the expression ‘little group’ to describe this assembly of individuals. And, as he further observes, “This little group does not seem to be paying much attention to the consort of the flautists nearby, who are providing background music” (Sullivan, 2008, p. 35).

Figure 57. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 58. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.
The above statement proves that, in Michael Sullivan’s opinion, Han Xizai is together with the consort of flautists and they belong to one scene of the painting. However, Cui Qinzhong separates this scene into two different scenes, ‘taking a rest’ and ‘performance’ (Table 11). Cui places ‘Han taking a rest’ in scene 3 and ‘Han among the consort of flautists’ in scene 4. In contrast to the analyses of both Michael Sullivan
and Cui Qinzhong, I would argue that both Han Xizai and the consort of flautists should be grouped together in section 3 of the painting. Comparing the various positions held by Cui Qinzhong, Michael Sullivan, Jian Xun, and Wu Hung, as well as my own position, regarding the scenes and their combination in this painting, I would argue, therefore, that it contains four scenes with five narratives.

Table 12. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Table 12 presents the main positions in this matter and shows where my interpretation departs from that of other scholars, most of whom perceive five scenes in this painting, while nevertheless interpreting these five scenes in different ways. It seems clear that
scene 2 of the painting is the most critical component of these varied interpretations: this scene presents two figures of Han Xizai, and it is this scene that has stoked considerable debate among scholars.

**Re-visualizing the pictorial space through real experience**

The scholars cited above have offered different reasons for the number of sections in the painting, and these different reasons reflect different perspectives not only on the narrative itself but on space and time as well. I have attempted to simulate the way of reading *The Night Entertainments* through a ‘true size’ painting in order to examine how the viewer’s bodily engagement is affected by the spatial arrangement of this painting. For my experiment, I reproduced the first copy of *The Night Entertainments* in 2005. In 2007 I took another copy, published by the People’s Fine Art Publishing House, Tianjin, China for comparison. These two copies helped me to experience and examine how viewers might navigate the narrative of this painting in reality. The dimensions of both the first and second copy mirrored exactly those of the original.

![Diagram of the four scenes' respective lengths](image)

Figure 59. Author’s calculation and illustration of the four scenes’ respective lengths (visualization by the author).
Scene 1: (length 83 cm)
First of all, I unrolled the copy of the painting, my right hand holding the right roll and my left hand holding the other end. The first scene of the painting appeared. The length of the first scene is about 83 cm, which is the distance between the right hand and the left. My hands felt comfortable while I viewed the first scene (Figure 59).

Scene 2: (length 105 cm)
When I unrolled the painting to the second scene, my hands began to feel slightly uncomfortable because the length of the painting here is about 105 cm. This is the longest scene, and the length required that I spread my two hands wider in order to get a clearer picture of the whole scene. Also I needed to shift my gaze more obviously from the right-hand side of the scroll to the left-hand side. Therefore, I questioned whether it was the intention of the artist to require viewers of the hand-scroll painting to view the whole scene in this way. Or would it be possible to divide the scene into two episodes, as suggested by Wu Hung?

Scene 3 and 4: (lengths 84 cm and 63 cm)
I unrolled the third scene and the final scene without any problem. The third scene (approx. 84 cm) and the final scene (approx. 63 cm) are shorter— and thus a better fit for a viewer’s outstretched hands— than the second scene.

After conducting these tests and comparisons through an application of my own viewing experience to the hand-scroll, I questioned why the length of scene 2 is comparatively greater than the individual lengths of the other three sections (Figures 59-60). I noted that section 2—with a length of 105 cm—not only contains two scenes but also covers two different spaces corresponding to two different time sequences, all of which means, in short, that section 2 contains two different temporal and spatial dimensions, but that they overlap and are compressed into one pictorial space.
Drawing on my tests and comparisons, I would argue, therefore, that the painting rightly features four scenes with five narratives.

Figure 60. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Re-visualizing the pictorial space through digital animation

I then further visualized and tested my argument by using digital-media technology. Specifically, I used the computer software ‘Adobe Photoshop’ and ‘Flash’ \(^{153}\) to separate section 2 into two scenes (Figures 69-70) through animation. In this way, I sought to illustrate two clearly different temporal and spatial situations and to do so in a comprehensive animation format (see animation in DVD [2] of Appendix E). I argue that two ‘Han Xizai’ figures appear in scene 2, because this single scene

\(^{153}\) I scanned the picture of section 2 into the computer, and then divided the non-digital picture into two groups through animation.
features two overlapping events that differ from each other temporally and spatially. Scene 2’s divisions in terms of people can help to explain how it comprises two sub-scenes: scene (a) and scene (b) (Figures 61-62). I collected different scholars’ comments on this artwork, and then compared their comments to the number of people in the scene. This analysis yielded evidence reflecting different perspectives on the spatial and temporal dimensions of the work. The comparison is as follows (Table 13):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of scholar</th>
<th>Number of people in scene 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wu Hung (巫鴻)</td>
<td>16 people (in two scenes) (Wu 1996, pp. 38-49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiang Xun (蔣勳)</td>
<td>7 people (Jiang 1986, p.103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Sullivan</td>
<td>16 people (^{154}) (Sullivan 2008, pp. 1-11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan Dongsheng (楊東勝)</td>
<td>8 people (^{155}) (Yan 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cui Qinzhong (崔慶忠)</td>
<td>10 people (Cui 2001, p.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>16 people (in two overlapping scenes):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 people in scene (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 people in scene (b)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13. Comparison of the number of the people in scene 2 (visualization by the author).

According to the table shown above, some scholars (e.g. Michael Sullivan and Cui Qinzhong) treat scene 2 as one scene consisting of one narrative. If this were in fact so, then there would have to be a highly compelling explanation as to why this scene features two figures of Han Xizai. So other scholars (e.g. Cui Qinzhong, Wu Hung and Jiang Xun) treat section 2 as comprising two distinct scenes. But if this alternative to the first highly problematic suggestion were valid, then why would no artist-rendered partition separate these two scenes from each other? The method of using a

\(^{154}\) Those 16 people belong to what Sullivan calls plate 3, which is the same as section 3.

scene-based object (e.g. a screen) as a partition to separate two different scenes is commonly applied in this painting. Wu Hung stated that the screens (屏風, Ping feng) in this painting act like partitions dividing different scenes from one another (Wu 1996, pp. 56-63). Therefore, if the number of screens is an indicator of the number of sections in the painting, then the painting has four sections in all.

However, there is no screen serving as a partition between these two sub-scenes, so it is easy to conclude that these two sub-scenes are one rather long unit. I count a total of 16 people appearing in section 2, including two figures of Han Xizai—that is, he appears twice, once on the right-hand side of the section and once on the left-hand side. And let us not forget: this is a section with two sub-scenes—two separated temporal and spatial dimensions. But there’s the rub: the two dimensions overlap each other and are compressed.

I suggest that viewers distinguish these two sub-scenes from each other not on the basis of the presence or absence of a screen, but on the basis of the activities and body language of the two ladies depicted at the centre of the scene. In Figure 62, one can clearly discern that there are nine people who belong to scene (a) on the right-hand side. There are another seven people who belong to scene (b) on the left-hand side.
Connecting scene (a) and scene (b) to each other are two ladies who stand in the middle of this section\textsuperscript{156}. One of the ladies, who is holding a \textit{pipa} (i.e. a traditional stringed instrument), belongs to scene (a); and the lady who is carrying wine on a serving platter belongs to scene (b). I base my argument on three aspects:

1. the nature of the activities in this section;
2. the sound level of the activities;
3. the gestures, body language, and eye contact of the characters

(Figure 62).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>scene (b)</th>
<th>scene (a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>drinking and conversing (taking a rest)</td>
<td>playing music (reveling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>silence</td>
<td>noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>lady with a tray of wine</td>
<td>lady with a \textit{pipa}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 62. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

\textbf{(1) The nature of the activities}

\textsuperscript{156} According to Wu Hung (1996, p. 264), it has been noted that several pieces of silk form this painting, and that one joining line (i.e. a seam) appears between the two episodes in this scene. It is possible that certain images, probably including a screen, originally divided and connected these two episodes. But these images were later cut off because of damage to the material or for some other reason.
I have argued above that the nature of the activities reveals the presence of two different temporal and spatial dimensions in section 2. In Figure 62 one can see that scene (a) is about playing music and dancing, whereas scene (b) is about drinking and socializing. Scene (a) emphasizes entertainment; and scene (b) emphasizes rest. The most critical issue in this regard centres on the two ladies who are located in the middle of these two scenes. As noted earlier, one is holding a *pipa* and the other is carrying wine on a serving platter. Each lady quite clearly represents her own group of painted individuals: one group is noisy and the other is silent. However, the positions of these two ladies are drawn in such a way that they overlap each other. It is this overlap that has always led to viewers’ confusion.

In my view the painter Gu Hongzhong has demonstrated a very advanced technique in combining two human activities in one space in order to enhance the variety of the visual journey. The viewer can experience two different timeslots in a single space. The visual arrangement of different activities suggests a spatiotemporal transition from one scene to another. Moreover, this arrangement implies that the music has stopped and the performance has finished. Now the mild sound of chatting can be imagined. The visual arrangement of this section successfully evokes the sounds of festive music on the one hand and of pleasant conversation on the other.

**(2) The sound level of the activities—silent and noisy**

I would like to explore in greater depth the idea that the two scenes’ different sound levels suggest that section 2 comprises two different temporal and spatial dimensions. Even though the physical medium of painting cannot present viewers with the sounds of voices, movement, or music, the painting’s visual composition evokes all these sounds and underscores my argument. In scene (a) nine people are playing music. There are three instruments shown in this scene, including a *pipa* and a drum. This

---

157 The timeslot in scene (a) is about musical entertainment for the enjoyment of nine people, including Han Xizai himself, who is playing a drum. The timeslot in scene (b) is of seven people who are taking a break from the festivities while imbibing wine, and once again we find Han Xizai: he is sitting on a chair in the company of all the ladies.
combination of revellers and musical instruments suggests loud, festive music. In contrast, scene (b) presents only five people, and they are seated. Two servants are serving wine and the *pipa* is lying on the bed. This scene suggests relaxation and relative silence in the form of, at most, subdued conversation. Therefore, the highly contrastive difference in sound level implied in the picture also implies that in this section we are dealing with two scenes, not one.

(3) **Gestures, body language, and eye contact**

I have emphasized that the two ladies in this section play a critical role, implying that this section presents viewers with two distinct temporal and spatial dimensions. Before discussing the gestures, body language, and eye contact of the people in the painting, I would like to introduce the position of these two specific characters in the section. Of the two ladies, one is holding a *pipa* and the other (perhaps a servant) is carrying wine on a tray (Figure 63). The original composition of this section places the lady with the *pipa* on the left-hand side, and the figure interpreted as a servant on the right-hand side. However, I would argue that the painter of this piece selected this composition in order to connect two different scenes—two different spaces of people—together, rather than to represent where they are located in reality.

![Figure 63. (Left) Original picture; (Right) Digitally retouched by the author (visualization by the author).](image)

**Digital visualization analysis**

To gain evidence for my view, I divided this picture into two separate spatial environments, using a digital photo-retouch and animation technique that separates
these two ladies from each other—and thus from their proper location—so that each lady is now unambiguously in her own setting (see animation in DVD [2] of Appendix E). We can see in scene (a) the new position of the lady who is holding the *pipa* and looking intently at the host, Han Xizai, who is himself standing at the far right (Figure 64). Creating a certain amount of tension in the image is the position of this lady’s body, which suggests that she is moving to the left, even though she is directing her gaze to the right; that is, although the position of most of her body suggests a leftward movement towards the heart of scene (b), her eye contact suggests that she is more emotionally involved in the activities taking place to her right, at the heart of scene (a). For this reason I would argue that the lady with the *pipa* should be categorized as a participant in scene (a).

Figure 64. (Top) The cast glance and the physical orientation of the lady with the *pipa* relative to scene (a); (Bottom) The cast glance and the physical orientation of the lady with the serving tray relative to scene (b) (visualization by the author).
At the same time, when one turns from the lady with the *pipa* to scene (b), which is taking place to her left, one will notice the servant’s bodily gestures, which suggest that she is walking towards events taking place on her left, where people are resting and drinking (Figure 65): the servant is holding a tray of wine while walking towards them. I would, therefore, argue that the servant located on the original section’s right-
hand side should be thought of as belonging to the left-hand side of the section: scene (b).

To refine this argument further, I have drawn a ‘line’ to indicate just how close these two ladies are to their host, Han Xizai. In Figure 66, the superimposed circle demonstrates how the ladies’ body gestures and eye contact place them in a position of close physical and psychological proximity to Han Xizai.

![Figure 66. (Left) scene (b); (Right) scene (a) (visualization by the author).](image)

In scene (a), the *pipa* lady is walking towards the left, but she arches her body towards the right, perhaps in order to support the weight of the *pipa*. Most tellingly of all, she turns her face away from the apparent direction of the rest of her leftward-leaning body, making direct eye contact with the figure of Han Xizai on the right. In this way their two bodies form a boundary of unity that contains all the consistently related people together in scene (a). Conversely, in scene (b), the lady on the right is walking towards Han Xizai. She also arches her body, probably in order to support the weight of the wine tray she is carrying, but her gaze is cast to the left, so that she makes eye contact with the Han Xizai figure on the left. And again the imaginary circle drawn round their bodies forms a boundary containing all the figures in the scene. So these two individuals’ body shapes successfully create a unity that enfolds together the
people who are sitting in a U-shaped booth in scene (b). All the relevant people are actually grouped together by two invisible circles, each one invisibly formed by body gestures and eye contact (Figure 67).

Figure 67. (Left) scene (b); (Right) scene (a) (visualization by the author).

But I must now pose a question that would seem at first glance to unravel my entire argument: why are these two ladies spatially and temporally out of synch with (i.e. dimensionally removed from) their corresponding group (as identified in my reading)? Why does each lady seem to cross over into a dimension where she does not belong? The reason, I argue, is that this mixing up of scenes creates a sense of visual illusion to which viewers consciously, semi-consciously, or subconsciously respond, and that this response strengthens their engagement in the rolling and unrolling of the painting. A second and critical function of this dimensional overlap is that it helps bridge the temporal and spatial gap between the two different scenes, thereby giving viewers a sense of continuity throughout the entire visual journey. I would argue, then, that all the relevant people are actually grouped together by two invisible circles, each one invisibly formed by people’s bodily gestures and eye contact. The visual analysis proves my point that section 2’s two scenes differ from each other in their spatial and
temporal settings but are merged into one pictorial space on the scroll. The example of The Night Entertainments has shown how time and space can be compressed and overlapped on a 2D plane through scroll format. In the following section I will seek to show how the ‘Yellow Box’ concept, suggesting compressed time and space, can be applied through scroll format to create a 3D & 4D experience.

**Case study (II): Implied Scenery**

Numerous exhibition methods have been suggested and implemented by curators and artists working in the ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition with regard to methods of installation and display on the one hand and viewer perception on the other. Nineteen new terms (or propositions) have been suggested (see Appendix 2.2. ‘Propositions’ and p. 98 above). Among these propositions, I have chosen one, ‘Implied Scenery’ (喻景, Yu jing), to illustrate how the experience of compressed time and space can be applied physically in 4D space experience.

The term ‘Implied Scenery’ suggests the importance of translating or ‘inviting’ the scenery from outside into the interior space of the exhibition venue. This is because traditional Chinese artists always sought to transcend themselves through their way of perceiving nature. The method of ‘Implied Scenery’ (Figure 68) is to create a window behind the viewer with a hint of nature. The space beyond the window should allow the placing of a plant or a garden rock within it. This is expressed in a statement by the Taipei Fine Arts Museum:

*The reason to design ‘Implied Scenery’ is to hint at the association between Shu hua ‘calligraphy and painting’ and its creative surroundings. The main topic of cultured art has been nature, ranging from majestic cliffs to birds and humble plants. A window*
opens up the enclosed exhibition space to the outside, and a simple arrangement of rock and bamboo suffices to remind the viewer of the spirit of nature. (Taipei Fine Arts Museum 2005, p. 14)

This also explains why the process of creating Chinese Shu hua ‘calligraphy and painting’ could be created in a garden; the artwork could be displayed inside a dwelling house or art studio. It is because the function of the window suggests an imaginative space to the viewer, allowing the natural scene outside the house to be linked to the natural scene inside the painting. Then the space perceived and experienced by the viewer is not only the physical space inside the house or exhibition room, but also the space inside the painting and the natural space outside. This experience could be regarded as a moment of ‘transcendence’, a heightened enactment of the interplay of these three cardinal spaces within the processes of individualized perception. The following example will serve to demonstrate the issue.

158 Materials (PowerPoint’s presentation) provided by Johnson Chang, Hanart TZ Gallery, 2006.
Transforming the scenery from outside into the interior space

The installation *Ghosts Pounding the Wall* (1989) by Xu Bing, one of the most significant contemporary Chinese artists active in that decade, is a relevant artwork for the present argument. The work, which is based on the Great Wall with all its historical and political connotations, illustrates how a sense of transcendence linked to scroll as form can be explored through ink rubbing. What makes the result of ink rubbing amazing is that the life-sized, black-on-white rubbing often shows more detail than the monochromatic stone relief itself.

In 1987, Xu Bing took twenty-five days in Jin shanling to make a rubbing of part of the Great Wall of China. He first mapped the surface and the shape of the Wall through ink rubbing, and then relocated the huge sheets of paper he had used to an exhibition space in the West, at the North Dakota Museum of Art. For this project he and his co-workers used 300 bottles of ink and 1300 sheets of rice and tissue paper. During the time he worked on the Wall, photographs, videotapes and sound tapes were made. The result of all this enormous effort was 1000 square metres of rubbings.

---

159 The viewer/reader may well ask: What is the meaning of ‘Ghosts Pounding the Wall’? It is actually an old Chinese saying that means someone cannot find his/her own way in order to get out from the forest/countryside at night. Xu transformed this old saying in his artwork in order to reflect his political thought. So what ‘political thought’ is behind this work? Referring back to the original saying, I questioned who exactly could not find his/her way out from the forest? Is it the stranger from beyond the Great Wall, or someone living on the inside?

160 Xu Bing once mentioned that the intention of the Wall to keep strangers out was just as nonsensical as his own project (Van Valen 1999). This suggests the artist might disagree personally with the intention of building the Great Wall – i.e. the policy of the central Government. So this might be one of the reasons for Xu Bing to transform the images of the Wall from exterior to interior space, implying that the function of the Wall has ceased, just as the historical function and meaning of the Wall has ended.

161 The skill is using rice paper to make ink rubbing from objects such as stone. First of all, thin paper must be moistened and then laid on a surface of engraved stone, and rubbed with an inkpad. So the hollows are white and the rest is black. With a brush or inkpad the paper is carefully tamped into the engraved lines. When the paper is almost dry, ink is applied with a flat pad. When the paper is peeled off, it shows the images that are engraved in the stone in white lines against black. In this way, a negative imprint of the surface appears.

162 Jin shanling is a section of the Great Wall of China located in the mountainous area in Luanping county 120 km northeast of Beijing. This section of the wall is connected with the Simatai section. It was built from 1570 onwards during the Ming Dynasty.

163 Originally, Xu had no chance to exhibit this artwork completely when he was in China. The work was shown completely at the North Dakota Museum of Art (US) in the summer of 1993 on a permanent basis.
He combined most of the rice papers in scroll form and created a one-to-one (true size) architectural construction of the Great Wall in the East, far distant from the museum space in the north of China, in order to compress time from 2D plane to 4D space.

Stone rubbing originally developed in China as a flexible method for transporting antique but valuable information and material from the realm of the invisible to that of the visible. Xu Bing re-examined and integrated this technique from a 2D experience (on paper) to a 4D experience as an architectural installation, allowing viewers to merge into the space created by the form of the ‘printed papers’ through their bodily engagement inside the exhibition space. In this case, the ink rubbing is no longer merely medium but also content in its own right: its function is not only to record but also to carry the thought of the artist in relation to cultural change in China.

I stated above that space expressed in this way can perhaps be regarded as a sense of ‘transcendence’, which is about how to transform an experience from the physical world to a spiritual level. Xu Bing has himself explained his intention as having been to examine the possibility of transforming a three-dimensional object (the Great Wall) onto a two-dimensional surface (rice paper) in such a way that the transformation would no longer be constrained by the medium either as regards the size of the project or the module system (Gui Da Qiang – work by Xu Bing 2010). The result is his large installation *Ghosts pounding the wall* (1990), which measures about 32 x 15 m and consists of 29 rubbings of a section of the Great Wall using a traditional Chinese ink rubbing technique on Chinese rice paper. The proportion of the installation to the Great Wall is 1:1, so it can truly be regarded as a monumental work.

---

164 In his article “Chinese Shadows: Rubbings of Han Dynasty Stone Reliefs” Dr. Chen Shen, Curator of the Near Eastern and Asian Civilizations Department at the Royal Ontario Museum, points out that “Because large stone slabs are not easily transported, and can usually only be accessed at their place of origin, ink-rubbings became vitally important as the main source for the study of ancient Chinese stone relief art” (Royal Ontario Museum 2002).


166 The ‘monumental’ atmosphere is also conveyed by the installation setting.
Time compressed and reversed position

However, Xu not only demonstrated the meaning of transforming exterior space into interior space, but also suggested a sense of transcendence through what might be called a ‘time compressed and reversed position’ in which the dimensions of time and space are made to run and intersect in different directions. For the technique of stone rubbing was originally created to visualize and transform the image carved on the surface of the stone onto another platform through ink. But the transformation of the image from one surface onto another implies that temporal and spatial experience will also be transformed and compressed from one dimension into another as history is compressed from the past to the present and, conversely, the position of the viewer is compressed from the exhibition space back into the past of history. The standard everyday dimensions of time and space are in this way ‘transcended’.
From 2D to 4D spatiotemporal experience through bodily engagement

In line with the Chinese tradition of connoisseurship it would be appropriate at this point to analyse the viewer experience a little more closely. Because of the real size of this “Great Wall” sculpture, viewers feel a compressed temporal and spatial experience, which is about a sense of history. The whole atmosphere of visiting this work is that of a virtual activity. Viewers feel as if they are travelling into the past, and moving about its physically (and medialy) translated presence.

In short, *Ghosts Pounding the Wall* re-contextualises the idea of scroll format from traditional 2D planar to 4D spatiotemporal experience, allowing viewers to move into and interact with the artwork through their bodily engagement. As a result, they experience on the one hand the historical and political meaning of the Great Wall of China, ‘physically’\(^\text{167}\) transformed to the museum space in the West; on the other hand, the audience from the West is able to ‘enter/perceive’ this ‘Great Wall’ virtually through the ink-rubbed scroll form of installation. Doing so they experience the tension and ambiguity arising from a 2D ink-rubbing arranged as a 3D museum

\(^{167}\) They experience the past in the present of an American museum at the twofold level of object (the radically immovable, and in this sense untranslatable, Great Wall of China) and medium (the traditional Chinese media of ink-rubbing and scroll painting).
installation (Figure 70). Viewed holistically, the experience amounts to a tantalizing 4D interplay in which each dimension is constantly breaking on the others. It is this breaking of the representational languages of time and space within the artwork that allows one to speak of transcendence. For, in reaching beyond its limits, the artist’s language enacts a unique and untranslatable experience, one that is contained in but transcends the languages of his medium.

To sum up, the traditional Chinese scroll painting The Night Entertainment and the contemporary Chinese art installation Ghosts Pounding the Wall demonstrate how an illusionary space can be navigated through bodily engagement of the viewer, which includes compressed and immersive temporal and spatial experiences. In The Night Entertainment, the painter Gu Hongzhong combined and merged two different temporal and spatial experiences into one scene. And today, Xu Bing has extended the function of long scroll format in Ghost Pounding the Wall from a 2-dimensional experience to 4D experience, allowing viewers to move into the space of the artwork through their bodily engagement and merge into two different temporal and spatial experiences at the same time. This translates the achievement of The Night Entertainment of Han Xizai into an idiom that is totally modern but at the same time remains true to the Chinese scroll tradition.

2.4. Three-way intimacies

Apart from the concept of ‘bodily engagement of the viewers’, the ‘Yellow Box’ idea also emphasizes the essential value of ‘gathering’ in traditional Chinese culture. I argue below that a sense of intimacy (a triangular relationship between viewer, artist, and artwork) is discernible in both traditional Chinese art and digital media art. I will first introduce A Project for Writing Colophon (2004-5) from the ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition, which is an artwork providing a platform where visitors/strangers can meet the artist. Secondly, I will introduce a digital e-card entitled 30 Sec of Care (2002) in order to illustrate and compare how a sense of intimacy and bodily engagement is
created in the physical and virtual domain between sender and receiver. Finally, I will develop my argument that the ideas of ‘play-appreciation’, and ‘literati gathering’ are remarkably applicable to the sense of intimacy engendered by contemporary artworks like *A Project for Writing Colophon* and *30 Sec of Care*, which can be considered a way of appropriating and re-contextualizing traditional practices through digital media technology.

**Case study (I): A Project for Writing Colophon (題詠計劃)**

*A Project for Writing Colophon*\(^{168}\) was closely linked to the ‘Yellow Box’ idea\(^{169}\). My purpose in introducing this artwork here is to examine how a sense of intimacy worked within the contexts of traditional and contemporary Chinese art. The aim of this project was to provide a contact point at which ‘strangers’ could meet the artist. A sense of friendship through communication was then created, rather than only a relationship between the viewer and the artist. The method was to create an enclosed space with two seats separated by a painting desk where the artist came to meet visitors/ viewers/ strangers at appointed hours in ‘The Yellow Box’ exhibition space at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan (2004-2005)\(^{170}\).

The artist represented in this project was a Taiwanese Yu Peng (1955 - ), who has altogether participated in two ‘Yellow Box’ exhibitions\(^{171}\). In the first exhibition in Taiwan (2004-2005), Yu Peng set up his studio at the museum and started two

---

\(^{168}\) The term ‘colophon’ refers broadly in this context, as in the usual English sense, to a note placed at the end of a work, the difference being that the note in this case was traditionally, as explained below, an evaluative comment written by a viewer rather than printing and publication details inserted by a publisher. In *A Project for Writing Colophon* the meaning has been further extended.

\(^{169}\) *A Project for Writing Colophon* is referred to under its more general title of ‘Supplement – Paired Chairs with Tea-Table’.

\(^{170}\) The period of ‘The Yellow Box’ exhibition extended specifically from December 11, 2004 to February 27, 2005.

\(^{171}\) I personally met him at the second ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition in Shanghai in 2006. His studio was set inside a traditional Chinese pavilion at the garden of the Minor West Gate (小西門, Xiao Ximen) in Shanghai’s Qingpu Town. At the time I met him, he was creating a painting inside the pavilion and simultaneously chatting with his friends, visitors and viewers.
projects side by side: his *Paper Window Project* and *A Project for Writing Colophon*. Yu invited visitors to sit down and stand around in his exhibition space. He gave the impression of being glad to discuss any issue in this exhibition space (Figures 71-72). Visitors were treated as guests and were even invited to paint or write at the artist’s desk. Chinese brush and rice paper were made available for visitors/viewers who wished to respond to the artwork on the spot. Then each week, the artist would select some of the visitors’ writings or notes and afterwards invite the selected visitors back to the museum, where he could revamp their writings through his artwork. Using ink, Yu Peng further developed his own Chinese painting on the basis of the guests’ drawings. This process would yield artwork that would then be displayed in the artist’s room during the exhibition period. According to the exhibition statement, this kind of system would provide a filter through which—and a platform on which—strangers could meet the artist.

Figure 71. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.
The idea of colophon is rooted in Chinese cultural history, where it acts like a bridge or common platform, connecting temporally divergent people’s statements and thoughts. In the past, colophons were written traditionally by friends, collectors, or people known by their reputation in society, but never by complete strangers. In fact, colophon practices not only created a sense of intimacy in such triangular relations, but also suggested spatiotemporal experiences. In the past, visitors/collectors/viewers could, in China, freely leave their comments and statements on traditional artworks such as painting and calligraphy. Each comment left on the artwork represented a specific temporal experience; every colophon signified a particular history and memory from a particular time, as colophons provided (and continue to provide) important information about the history of the artwork, the artist, and people’s perceptions of them. Therefore, when later viewers consider the artwork including the colophon, they could sense temporal and spatial transitions. After all, the placement of colophons on a work of art could last for thousands of years. A work of art might feature more than thirty colophons, representing the evolution of an entire series of historically situated temporal and spatial experiences.
In order to illustrate what colophons mean to artwork in China in the past, I have taken the work *Ritual Prayers for a Good Harvest* by calligrapher master Wang Xizhi (303-361) as an example for elaboration. At one point, this work was in a collection belonging to Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song period (reigned 1101-1125 CE), whose slender script-calligraphy in faint gold ink appears on a title strip in the upper right-hand corner of the letter (Figure 73). Labels and numerous colophons by the Ming Dynasty calligrapher Dong Qichang (1555-1636), Emperor Qianlong of the Qing dynasty (reigned 1736-95), and others were later added, and these numerous inscriptions and seals surround the remaining two columns of Wang Xizhi’s calligraphy. These two columns constitute a total of fifteen characters written in cursive script. By referencing colophon writing, people can connect with the past spiritually and virtually. Today, Yu and his Common Room for *A Project for Writing Colophon* demonstrate this same phenomenon but in a livelier real-time context, with real-time interaction between viewers and artists, as the artist first has the opportunity

---


173 In fact, *Ritual Prayers for a Good Harvest* was originally a letter, but the original of this work was lost. The version at the Princeton University Art Museum is a copy of the letter that preserves only the first half of Wang Xizhi’s original text, and probably dates from the early Tang dynasty (618-907 CE). Actually records indicate that no authentic work by Wang Xizhi survives. The copy was, however, highly treasured by later collectors, including emperors.

174 Chinese: 行穰帖

175 Wang Xizhi is regarded as one of the most significant calligraphers active during the Jin Dynasty (265-420 CE).
to briefly get to know visitors through the texts they write; only at this point does he make the decision about whether to invite the visitor back for further communication and celebration. Of substantive applicability to colophon writing of both past and present are the concepts of ‘play-appreciation’ and ‘literati gathering’. Yu Peng’s Project, therefore, again presents a multiple spatiotemporal realization of an ancient Chinese cultural tradition.

Case study (II): Interactive e-card

In the above section, I examined how viewers’ participation in colophon writing could create a perceived accumulation of time attached to the artwork linking past and present. In this section I will propose a way in which digital technology can correlate to the concept of writing colophons today. I will introduce an interactive e-card entitled *30 Sec of Care* (2002) in order to illustrate how Hong Kong artist and designer Bruce Wan, who suggested drawing on the concept of ‘storing emotion,’ articulates his digital-media artwork in relation to a sense of intimacy between the sender and the receiver, not only virtually but also in a lively real-time context. Bruce Wan created *30 Sec of Care* specifically for a web-based platform serving interactive art. This interactive e-card incorporates a practical function that records not only the ‘written’ message but also the trace of ‘writing’ a message (text and graphics). This concept of ‘trace’ correlates with a value in traditional Chinese calligraphy.

(i) Past concepts of ‘trace’ in calligraphy

The concept of ‘trace’ can represent a mark that erases incorrect text or that adds to the calligrapher’s writing. This kind of trace rarely if ever affects the value of good calligraphy, but is usually regarded as a highly emotional bridge between the artist

\[176\] Bruce Wan is a young Hong Kong-based interactive media artist and designer, who is currently a lecturer in multi-media technology at the School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

\[177\] Interview with Bruce Wan by email, April 23, 2011, 11:23 a.m.
and the viewer—a point of contact that gives people a sense of intimacy between the sender and the receiver. In this way Chinese calligraphy serves to concretize and record a trace of the calligrapher and represent it to the viewers—a process that is regarded as one of the better and more direct ways in which viewers can perceive the emotions of the calligrapher who committed the text to paper in the distant past.

In the history of Chinese calligraphy, some valuable masterpieces are originally in the form of a letter or preface. For example, *Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion*, was originally a preface for poems and was regarded by Wang Xizhi as one of the most influential masterpieces of calligraphy. This preface consists of 324 Chinese characters in 28 lines. In terms of content, it is a mixture of scenic description and emotional expression, conveying the writer’s emotions and thoughts (Figures 74-75). Because Wang Xizhi wrote this preface while imbibing drink and stimulating his senses in the company of friends, he made a number of writing mistakes, which he then corrected on the spot, but his editing affected neither the significance nor the artistic value of this masterpiece. All these corrections, such as the erasure marks, are commonly found in everyday calligraphic letter-writing of the past, and they represent and record the precise actions of the writer/calligrapher at a particular moment. This effect coagulates, as it were, a sense of ‘duration’ (久, jiu) in the writing process, as a particular temporal and spatial experience seems to be frozen at that moment.

---

178 In the year 353, Wang Xizhi invited his sons and 42 literati friends to a party at the Orchid Pavilion beneath the Kuaiji (會稽) near Shaoxing (紹興), Zhejiang (浙江) Province, where they drank and improvised poems. In the end, 26 of the participants composed 37 poems on the spot. At the same time, Wang Xizhi completed a preface to their poems. This is the background story of *Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion* (蘭亭序, Lanting Xu).
The content of this masterpiece becomes less and less important as time passes. Its artistic value focuses, however, not on the content but on the spirit behind the text and
on the calligrapher’s emotions during the process of writing. Sometimes the feelings and thoughts of the calligrapher in the moment of writing could affect the quality of the calligraphy itself. For example, while Wang Xizhi was writing this ‘preface’, he might not have been greatly concerned about whether or not he had written a Chinese character incorrectly. He could rewrite the character, only this time correctly, either in a nearby space or directly over the incorrect one. This kind of ‘trace’ of a person’s past experience in composing a text is harder to find today than in the past, because most writers nowadays record their thoughts in the most appropriate digital way. It is precisely here, however, that an interesting question arises: Can digital technology transform the sender’s past experience of ‘writing and drawing’ into a real time visual platform?

(ii) Modern-day concepts of ‘trace’ in digital media

Today, profound developments in technology help minimize mistakes and homogenize writing. This becomes evident from a comparison of traditional postcards (through handwriting) with conventional e-cards that use digital typing (Figures 76-77).

Figure 76. A postcard drawn and written by my six-year-old niece, GaGa, in 2011, Hong Kong.
In comparison with traditional postcards, conventional e-cards allow us to send text with music and graphics. But I would argue that the ready-made graphics and typography look too cool, mechanical, and standardized in comparison with traditional postcards, which allow us (as sender) to write and draw by hand something that is irreplacably personal. With traditional postcards, recipients can feel a sense of intimacy with the sender by seeing his or her handwritten and hand-drawn text and graphics. For example, in Figure 78 is a postcard drawn and written by my six-year-old niece, GaGa, Yu, in 2011. For example, she wanted to write “wish you to get marriage quick”, and ‘marriage’ in Chinese should be 婚 (hun), but she mistakenly wrote, “to separate” 分 (fen). And the card shows that she discovered this writing mistake and then tried to erase the wrong text and added the right one beside it. I treated this as a visible ‘trace’ of her thought and I always feel heartfelt sentiment whenever I look at it. I can mentally trace her movements, her correction and her intentions by imagining how both the artwork and the text came to appear on the paper.
In comparison with this lively example of communication, conventional e-cards only provide a standardized, digitalized, custom-made template of visual information and design (e.g. text, typography and icon). But traces of the writer/sender constitute an important element in reflecting the sender’s sense of intimacy with the recipient. Thus, an interactive e-card like 30 Sec of Care is relevant to the present argument because it could help most people recall this kind of intimacy by digitally recording a trace of writing and by presenting it on a web platform.

**Intimacy through digital technology**

I have stated that a sense of intimacy is suggested by 30 Sec of Care (Figure 79) through approaches to storing and recalling specific emotions. 30 Sec of Care is a conceptually novel e-card, notably different from both conventional e-cards and traditional postcards. As mentioned above, conventional e-cards are basically a digital postcard that saves the sender the cost of both postcard and postage, and they contain
standardized visual information. In contrast, *30 Sec of Care* manages to uniquely combine both the advantages of conventional e-cards and the advantages of printed postcards by expressing the sender’s emotions to the recipient. This interactive e-card can record and play back the whole process of writing and drawing in 30 seconds, thus collecting and displaying a trace of the specific emotion of the sender in the moment of writing. Bruce Wan has stated that, upon first conceptualizing *30 Sec of Care*, he wanted to do something different from conventional e-cards, which were very popular at that time (in 2002). Conventional e-cards, he maintained, lack emotion, which should be the most important element in a greeting card. Thus *30 Sec of Care* is an experiment on how emotion could be delivered through online media.\(^\text{179}\)

Figure 79. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

It was in 2003 that I first encountered and used this interactive e-card. In this case, as a sender of the e-card, I first had to access its homepage (www.refink.net) and then choose the icon representing *30 Sec of Care*. This e-card system provided the drawing and writing tools so that I, the user, could write and draw anything on the empty space of the e-card within a space of 30 seconds. I could have erased the text or graphic that

\(^{179}\) Interview with Bruce Wan by e-mail, 20 April 2011 at 9:39 a.m.
I had already written or drawn if I wanted to start over again. After completing the message, I sent it directly to the intended recipient by email. On the other side of this transaction, the recipient who received the e-card could witness not only the final outcome of the e-card, but also (by clicking a special button) the whole process by which I had created the message.

But why make the duration 30 seconds? Bruce Wan emphasized that 30 seconds is an arbitrary value but that he wanted to challenge the sender by placing a time limit on the actual drawing and writing (Wan 2011). Although the process lasted only 30 seconds, the sender had the option of redrawing and rewriting the card again and again without any problem. Also, according to the statistic from his Internet database, senders easily spend two or three uninterrupted minutes creating their card, drawing and writing something from start to finish. In the end the recipient can enjoy two types of message: one a real message presented on a two-dimensional platform, where the final text appears to the receiver; the other an interactive narrative triggering four-dimensional experience in 30 seconds, where the whole process by which the sender had created the message is accessed by the special button.

The 30 seconds viewing experience gives the recipient a sense of intimacy with the sender, as both activities of ‘rewriting and erasing’ can be seen as signs of emotion. One could reasonably assert that 30 Sec of Care enhances the relationship not only between the sender and the recipient but between the users (sender and recipient) and the artist as well. I experienced this novel e-card as both sender and recipient, and found myself completely engaged in each role. As the sender, I strove to create a satisfactory, if not perfect, e-card by writing and drawing the card again and again; as the recipient, I uncovered the many unsatisfactory steps leading up to the final, satisfactory e-card by performing a step-by-step playback of the sender’s recorded efforts to create the message. In short, this ‘interactive e-card’ is completely different from a conventional e-card, not least because it also integrates the value of the ‘traditional post card’—a more human touch, with its special playback function.

180 Interview with Bruce Wan by e-mail, 20 April 2011 at 2:30 p.m.
181 For his personal reference, Bruce Wen created a database detailing the lengths of time that senders spent creating their e-cards before sending them.
providing the recipient with a new experience of intimacy.

Case studies: conclusion

The result of my analysis of *A Project for Writing Colophon* gives substance to the ‘Yellow Box’ idea. In these last two sections I have discussed intimacy-creating strategies in the context of the relationship between traditional Chinese art and digital media. Colophon writing is an activity that creates a connection between the viewer (guest) and the artist (host), between the present and the past, between the real and the virtual world. Yu Peng transformed and re-contextualized this traditional cultural activity by giving it a distinctly real-time, vital character. Viewers’ temporal and spatial experience of reading texts and images, deriving from the traditional colophon writing and from Yu’s project, might arguably be inherent in blog writing nowadays. The ideas of ‘play-appreciation’, and ‘literati gathering’ are remarkably applicable to a sense of intimacy from Yu’s project today. Furthermore, the innovative type of interactive e-card *30 Sec of Care* by Bruce Wen creatively demonstrates how a human touch of emotion can be traced, stored, and replayed through digital technology. A sense of intimacy between sender and receiver can rest on the special temporal and spatial experience of perceiving texts and images, all made possible by a transformation and appropriation of a traditional writing platform (colophon writing) into a digital platform (interactive e-cards). A sense of ‘play-appreciation’ is then created.

2.5. Critical Conclusion

Chapter two identifies that although the ‘Yellow Box’ idea has been significantly suggested as an alternative exhibition space and curatorial direction for contemporary Chinese artworks since 2005, the video installation setting for the ‘Yellow Box’ exhibition is still limited to the traditional screening setting, which cannot resolve
Prof. Boris Groys’s concern on two different models that allow us (as viewers) to gain control over time: (1) The immobilization of the image in the museum, and (2) The immobilization of the audience in the movie theatre. Thus, I contend that it is time to appropriate and enact the correlation between media art and the ‘Yellow Box’ idea into a contemporary digital dimension through my digital practices (installation and workshop). For example, the ‘Yellow Box’ emphasizes the idea of ‘play-appreciation’ and the medium of the scroll, which allows viewers/visitors/participants to feel more engaged, joyful, free and flexible when experiencing a digital media artwork in an exhibition space.

The ancient painting The Night Entertainments demonstrates how scroll as a form was used in the past to mediate visual skill in manipulating the ideas of multiple spaces and compressed time. Today, Xu Bing’s Ghost Pounding the Wall explores and reinterprets the idea of scroll from traditional 2D practice to 4D installation experience. Taking such developments on to include an important segment of contemporary art experience, I recommend that digital media should be integrated with the ‘Yellow Box’ idea, not least because they could further enhance a sense of intimacy through the viewer’s bodily engagement, and could shift the role of the audience (from passive role to active role). As an example of a medium that could enrich the ‘Yellow Box’ idea, the traditional practice of colophon writing not only shows a triangular relation between artists, viewers and artwork, but also a correlation with the idea of digital media in terms of immediately experienced intimacy. For example, through digital media, such as 30 Sec of Care, a viewer’s sense of intimacy can rest on the special temporal and spatial experience of delivering and perceiving texts and images not only in their finished form but in the process of their emotional and conceptual genesis – all made possible by transforming and re-contextualizing a traditional writing platform into a digital platform. It is regrettable, therefore, that media artworks are still seldom represented on the ‘Yellow Box’ platform. It is time to recognize their outstanding aptitude for this new platform. I have outlined above a number of reasons why media art should be presented in this context.
Chapter 3: Comparisons of time

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine how different ideas of time have been applied in various Chinese art forms throughout history, and then address the question of their correlation to digital media art in terms of ‘cycling / looping’, ‘non-linear narrative’, ‘bodily engagement’, ‘layering of content’ and ‘non-linear time experience’.

In Chapter 3.2, for example, I will first discuss different artists’ visual conceptualization of si shi (四時, ‘four seasons’) as a sense of cycling of time through still-life objects and how this practice has undergone reinterpretation by three contemporary Asian artists exploiting time-based digital-media technology. I have chosen these three artists as examples in order to illustrate how artists from different regions and cities may share similar aspirations when it comes to the direction of their art. Here it is the concept of Zen that has influenced these artists, as it has artists all over the world. The last half century has seen outstanding figures like Nam June Paik and John Cage revealing the different catalytic outcomes that may appear in different eras. Indeed, for reasons that have inherently to do with the development of the critical interface between language and world in the art and philosophy of the postmodern West—above all the awareness, emerging with increasing force in the wake of the Protestant Reformation and the Romantic-Modernist movements, that we know the world only through the signs in which we encode it and the dynamics of the process of encoding and decoding—for these reasons, too, as well as the impact mediated by contemporary Asian scholars, writers and artists, oriental culture has from the 1960s onward become increasingly accessible to the western world.
While my selection of the three artists in question is not directly related to the controversial issue of 're-orientalization', the direction of their work has provoked my thinking of oriental culture and digital media art on a new level. First of all, they are all post 70s and 80s new generation digital artists from technologically advanced regions (Korea, Japan and Taiwan), and they share my own ambition to create a synergy of digital technology and images with their ancient cultural traditions—which is the thrust of the present research thesis and the creative artwork associated with it. They, too, see it as their mission to carry on their tradition and inspire later generations. The three artists presented here have all used still-life objects to conduct objective analysis, as well as subjective projections to reflect on how ancient people perceived the passage of time. This is what triggered my research interest and prompted me to compare how they have reinterpreted their views on time and space through digital media technologies.

Chapter 3.3 will focus on the way in which multiple spatiotemporal experiences merge into one pictorial space in terms of ‘non-linear narrative’ in ancient Chinese art, such as hand-scroll painting (10th century) and cave painting (5th century). I will argue that this practice correlates with digital media art in terms of ‘looping’ and ‘non-linear narrative’ which also focus on how viewers’ bodily engagement with the artwork can change the layers of time and space so that the artwork favours one part of the narrative over another.

Finally, I will examine how digital media could help visualize the correlation between ancient Chinese tomb art (2nd century) and interactive art in relation to the idea of ‘layering of content’ and ‘non-linear time experience’. The results will help demonstrate the ideas of non-linear and cyclic narrative embodied in both ancient Chinese art and digital media art in many ways.
3.2. Translation and meaning: ‘cycling/looping’

(i) Contextual analysis: When East meets West

Beginning in the early 1960s, the Korean-American artist Nam June Paik, an acknowledged pioneer of video and media art, and the influential American composer, music theorist, writer and artist John Cage, were both substantially influenced by the philosophy of Zen. For example, in Paik’s early television artwork *Zen for TV* (1963), the visual images shown on the TV screen are reduced to a narrow vertical line, presenting the monitor as a site of contemplation rather than a source of entertainment. And his other piece *Zen for Film* (1964) is an endless loop of unexposed or damaged film run through a projector, exploring the visual representation of a surface illuminated by a bright light and the appearance of scratches and dust particles in the surface of the film material. This attempt seems to match John Cage’s “silent piece” 4’33” (1952), which enacts the absence of deliberate sound in the concert hall. The musicians who presented the work did nothing (i.e. did not to play their instrument(s) during the entire duration of the piece) for about four minutes and 33 seconds. In this way Cage re-interpreted the meaning of emptiness (silence) as an integral element of sound in his music. Paik applied the idea of imageless emptiness in a similar staging of an artistic void.

The notion of Zen is concerned with awareness of life around us, particularly in a chaotic state of the universe; it is about attaining peace, stillness, endlessness and emptiness. The goal of Zen is to accept everything in life with contentment. During the 1960s Paik and Cage, exemplifying many artists in the West, set up a self-referential confrontation—and at the same time implementation—on material, spatial and temporal levels between Western technology and Eastern spirituality. This led me, among many others, to question the ideas of cultural ‘essentialism’ and ‘re-orientalization’ in terms of the connection of East and West. For example, Paik was strongly influenced by Cage’s interest in Zen Buddhism (Decker-Phillips 1998, pp.

With his Asian background, being born in Korea and having studied in Tokyo, Paik has been outstanding in re-appropriating his essential Orientalism through experimentation with electronic media, and has made a profound impact on the art of video and television by incorporating the concept of Zen. For John Cage, the meeting with Dr. Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki—a renowned Zen master, author and translator of Zen, who was also one of the key figures in the introduction of the way of Zen to the West in the 1950s—changed his work and life totally. In author Kay Larson’s words, “In Suki’s class on Zen Buddhism at Columbia University, Cage hears teachings that crack open his mind and show him a way out of suffering on a path of transformations” (Larson 2012, p. xv). Kay Larson goes on to say that Buddhist texts had been circulating in the West for a hundred years, but they were a rarefied taste for a scholarly few. In the 1950s, Suzuki arrived in New York and deepened the western world’s understanding of Buddhism and Zen. Both Paik and Cage’s artwork in relation to the ideas of chance, indeterminacy, process, and a host of other new ideas in their video, music and performance was driven by the Fluxus movement, which also shows a correlation with Zen.

I would question whether this phenomenon should be considered an example of ‘re-orientalization’. In her article “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals” (Lau 2009), Lisa Lau imagines the production of “the Orient (or ‘Asia’) by Orientals themselves—instead of by Europeans or other Westerners in positions of imperial power” (in Davis 2012, p.144), which provides a further powerful line of argument suggesting that the application of Zen by Paik or Cage—and indeed the whole intellectual and artistic re-encounter of West and East that has taken place since the 1960s—should not be subjected to the stricture of “re-Orientalism”. In the following section I will discuss how Asian digital-media artists

---

183 Nam June Paik was born in Seoul, Korea in 1932; emigrated to Japan in 1950; studied music, art history and philosophy at the University of Tokyo 1953-56; studied art and music history at the University of Munich 1956-57; first contact with John Cage 1958; worked with Fluxus artists during the 1960s; after showing his series of innovative works at the studio for electronic music at the WDR in Cologne 1958-63 and Exposition of Music-Electronic Television in 1963, he became famous and was recognized as the "father of video art." He lived in New York 1964-2006.

184 Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (鈴木 大拙, 1894-1966) was a Japanese master and author of books and essays on Buddhism, Zen and Shin that are regarded one of the important reading material to the West.

185 In Suzuki’s teachings, and in all of Buddhism, “silence” and “emptiness” are shorthand terms for the inconceivable ground luminosity—the Absolute ‘nothing’–out of which all the ‘somethings’ of the world arise in their multitudinous splendor.”(Larson 2012, p. xvi)
are using similar approaches incorporating traditional art forms and digital technology—as a time-based medium—to suggest alternative ways of perceiving and presenting time through traditional ideas that are similar across Asia—the ‘sense of cycle’ and the ‘still-life object’.

(ii) Contextual and practical analysis: translation and meaning

What is the idea of cycle in traditional Chinese thinking? I will first introduce a Chinese term *si shi* (四時), which literally means ‘four seasons’ in Chinese, but in a still-life painting could mean the ‘passing of time’. Today, in the digital era, ‘time’ means real time and ‘space’ means a combination of real and virtual space. In the past, Chinese artists used still-life objects to imply a sense of spatiotemporal transition. Such translation represent the cycle of existence in the universe and in doing so evokes a sense of transcendence. For example, an ancient Chinese artist might place his painted rendition of a bonsai in his living space to symbolize the perception of cycles in the universe. The bonsai was thought to grow as time passes and to wither when its time came, so the presence of a bonsai in a house gave the interior a livelier feel by creating a sense of spatiotemporal transition that transcended the particular moment of (sense) perception. Paintings have long been regarded as a window through which the will of viewers and artists alike can transcend the material world and enter into a spiritual and philosophical dimension. In this section, I will discuss artists’ visual conceptualizations of the ‘four seasons’ through still-life objects and how this practice has undergone reinterpretation in the work of three contemporary Asian artists through the medium of digital-media technology.

The reason for choosing three different artists from Asia is my personal experience. When I was hosting exhibitions locally and overseas, I regularly met young digital media artists from Korea, Japan and Taiwan. I came to identify the common issues among them: how to use digital media to present a sense of ‘passing of time’ through
‘still-life objects’. I then started to select and compare three of their digital artworks with traditional artwork, questioning whether digital-media technology can significantly translate traditional Chinese ideas of time and space by calling on the idea of the si shi and ‘still-life objects’, which are one of the most common elements of traditional Oriental painting. I also came to argue that the viewer’s position in relation to the three artworks in question is like an outsider’s (to be explained later), and if artists can implement a sense of ‘bodily engagement’, it can be shifted from tradition to the digital era.

Three case studies

Recently, a number of Asian artists have harnessed a combination of traditional art forms and digital technology—as a time-based medium—to suggest alternative ways of perceiving and presenting time through the similar idea: a still-life object. The content of ‘still-life’ paintings can be dated back to China’s Southern Song Dynasty, but what draws my attention here is the still-life objects treated in the three aforementioned pieces of contemporary artwork by Wu Chi-tsung (Taiwan), Lee Lee Nam (South Korea) and Mami Kosemura (Japan). So my question is whether these three digital works can trigger spatiotemporal experiences in viewers similar to the experiences viewers would have had in relation to traditional art works. I will compare the ways in which still-life objects have been animated by these contemporary artists, and critique if the kind of motion they have used corresponds to traditional Chinese and/or Asian ideas of time. I have based my discussion on my interview with one of the artists, Wu Chi-tsung, and on my observations at exhibitions of his works and works of the other two artists in New York (2006), Taiwan (2010) and Hong Kong (2010).

Case study (I): Wu Chi-tsung (Taiwan)

I will examine here how Taiwan video artist Wu Chi-tsung (1981- ) appropriates a sense of jing tai (靜態) (‘quiet’ or ‘static’)—i.e. of still life—from traditional painting to digital art. In 2009 Wu created the three-part video series Still Life 01: Pine, Still
Life 02: Orchid, and Still Life 03: Bonsai, in which he significantly transformed the concept of temporal duration (i.e. the passage of time) from its traditional Chinese form—which rested heavily on references to the four seasons—to a more contemporary view (Figure 80).
The pine in Wu’s video appears as a still image, frozen. When I stood in front of this LCD display in the exhibition venue, I observed moving images like a gliding semi-transparent mist that gradually covered part of the pine. After a few seconds, the mist entirely covered the pine, but shortly afterwards part of the pine gradually reappeared. In other words, viewers would experience the pine as gradually disappearing and just as gradually reappearing over the course of about three minutes. Thus, the movement of the mist is the most important element of this artwork; otherwise, the artwork would be frozen.

Figure 81. Title: Still Life 02: Orchid
Length: 4 minutes 22 seconds

[Permission to reproduce this video clip has been granted by the author Wu Chi-tsung]

Figure 82. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

---

186 I encountered this three-part series three times. The first exhibition was The Hong Kong International Art Fair 2010, held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. The second exhibition was Popping UP: Revisiting the Relationship between 2D and 3D, at the Hong Kong Art Centre in 2010. The third exhibition was Time Unfrozen: From Liu Kuo-Sung to New Media Art, held at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum between 2010 and 2011. I found that the installations were similar to one another (for example, in the exhibition venue in Taiwan (2010), an LCD monitor displayed an image of a pine (the size of the LCD display was about 42 inches).
In the age of digital technology, what makes Wu’s digital still-life video different from traditional Chinese still-life painting is the real-time experience that the viewers have of temporal transition (Figures 81-82). Viewers standing in front of Still Life 01: Pine focus on the relationship between the plant and the mist. Because the movement of the mist makes part of the tree appear to move slightly, viewers are likely to focus on this apparent movement. Speaking for myself as a viewer, I paid considerable attention to the duration (久, jiu) of the movement and to the changes that accompanied this brief passage of time.

In the past, Chinese painters (e.g. Orchids by the artist Ma Lin of the Southern Song Dynasty) provided viewers with an imaginative space rather than a real-time space. What the traditional painters aimed to achieve was a sense of jing tai (靜態) (‘quiet’ or ‘static’) rather than to create a work that could be described as jing zhi (靜止) (‘immobile’, or ‘frozen’). Today, Wu’s video suggests a real viewing experience like day and night passing. With its depth of colour, darkness and sharpness of silhouette against the pale blue/pink background—which is like a dawn or evening sky—the pine tree has enormous presence, what I could call ‘time-transcending presence’. This correlates to the presence or impact of the orchid in its interplay with the reed branches in the Ma Lin’s painting. In Wu’s video the mist comes into this presence, providing a passage-of-time element. It is, I would argue, the interplay of two elements in each of these artworks that makes the viewing experience. The difference is that the mist is moving. But in the silk painting there is a strong sense of ‘frozen movement’, of poised and energized stasis (jing tai). Orchid and reeds seem caught in a moment of reciprocal interaction, dancing together as if blown by a gust of wind. Depending on their mood or disposition, viewers of traditional paintings have freely and flexibly adjusted their sense of space and time to the art. In contrast, when I encounter Still Life 01: Pine, I focus visually rather than spiritually and imaginatively on the time factor.
**Case study (II): Lee Lee Nam (South Korea)**

Similarly to Wu Chi-tsung, South Korean artist Lee Lee Nam (1969-) reinterprets his traditional and significant still-life objects as the subject matter for his digital art, for example, *The Landscape of Moon Jar* (2008). In individual pieces, however, a significant difference between Lee’s and Wu’s still-life works is that Wu uses a real plant with mist to imply the change of time and space whereas Nam uses digital animation to simulate the transitions of the four seasons (Figure 83).

---


188 I saw Korean Eight Fold Screen (2007), The Landscape of Moon Jar (2008), New – Self Portrait (2009), and New – danbalryeong Mangeumgang (2009) at the Hong Kong International Arts and Antiques Fair (HKIAAF) (2008), Christie’s Spring Auction (2010), and ArtHK10 (2010), all at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong.
A weak point in *The Landscape of Moon Jar* is, in my opinion, that its focus on how a plant’s features change in line with the changing seasons is merely physical and external: it lacks an inner sense of transcendence as this has been discussed in the previous chapter. Not in blossom, the branch sits in a vase-like jar. Initially in the video that I saw, the overall images appeared frozen. However, after a few seconds, the background colour changed slightly. I sensed that the images were conveying impressions of changes in the weather. Blossoms appeared; after a few seconds, the image on the screen presented changing weather again. Snow appeared, covering the flowers and the branches over the course of several seconds. However, because the temporal transition occurred within a short period of time and most of the images were rendered in 3D animation, I did not experience any significant sense of transcendence of conventional language: the focus of the animation is on optics, not exploration, emotional impact, or spirituality. In other words the viewer was distracted by the technology—perhaps there were too many changes in too short a time.

**Case study (III): Mami Kosemura (Japan)**

Thirdly, Japanese artist Mami Kosemura (1975-) also seeks to simulate the reality of growing and dying in nature, using digital media to express the passing of time, but in her case the methods (e.g. the traditional Japanese style) chosen for exhibiting the artwork more convincingly involve the bodily engagement of the viewer and in this way act as an embedded space for transcendence. Comparatively speaking, it is harder to gain the same experience from the other two artists’ works.

In fact, her digital artwork contains different natural elements such as rocks, trees, flowers, grass, and plants, all of which play similar roles in *Flowering Plants of the Four Seasons*, a seventeenth-century screen painting by Kano Tan'yū (1602-1674)

---

189 Kosemura was born in Japan in 1975, and studied painting, both oil and mural, at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music.
(Figure 84). Kosemura has reinterpreted this traditional work in a modern idiom by combining digital photography, animation and video projection (Figure 88).

In line with the artwork of Wu (Taiwan) and Lee (South Korea), Kosemura’s *Flowering Plants of the Four Seasons* (2006) depicts the four seasons through a transformation of landscape (rather than still-life only) that takes place over time and relies on digital-video projection in a specific exhibition space. The main difference between Kosemura’s artwork and that of the other two artists is the way they handle (1) a still-life object, (2) the long-scroll form and (3) the exhibition space. The handling of these three matters affects how viewers experience the passing of time.

Kosemura’s work, using digital real-time recording techniques, first simulates the real experience of seeing a plant go through its lifecycle. Kosemura created this work of art by using video documentation: she first bought some plants and placed them in her studio in Tokyo. She planted them in clay flowerpots and grew them herself, marking their growth by shooting a digital picture via a time-lapse technique, which is like

---

stop-motion animation. When the shooting process was completed, Kosemura digitalized all the material into a computer. She then edited all the images in post-production. The digitalized footage was then presented in a traditional residential setting. In an interview, Dr. Melissa Chiu, the Director of the Asia Society Museum in New York, stated “she captures in many ways a sense of place that is a sense of not just nature, but also the idea of the representation of nature within a domestic environment”. I analyse ‘domestic environment’ as meaning that Kosemura extended the idea of scroll-format painting to the specific exhibition space—a traditional Japanese living room. In fact, the features of the exhibition space also play a significant role for her artwork: in the New York exhibition venue digital moving images (animations) were projected onto the surface of a traditional Japanese-style wall panel. The wall panel was divided into four parts, but the projected animations were synchronized and united. The effect of those four panel frames was to simulate the idea of traditional Japanese ‘fusuma’, which is to say, ‘shoji sliding doors’. The ‘fusuma’ and the exhibition spaces play a critical role in Kosemura’s artwork, as these two elements can help suggest spirituality and transcendence to viewers. But, on the other hand, the video installation’s use of ‘fusuma’ may give audiences only a sense of cosiness and comfort, not of refined spirituality, as viewers who sit or stand inside this room experience all the warm and fragrant wooden furniture, the sliding door and window, the ‘tatami’, and cushions, suggesting the cosiness of an indoor space (Figure 85). So the effect of the installation depends crucially on the detailed arrangement of the space in which it is set. As this artwork is about something from nature, suggesting a sense of outdoor space, viewers experience two different atmospheres (indoor space and outdoor space) within the exhibition room; and the room itself immerses them in an enclosed space before they see any object other than the setting.

---

191 Stop motion is an animation technique to make a physically manipulated object appear to move on its own. The object is moved in small increments between individually photographed frames, creating the illusion of movement when the series of frames is played as a continuous sequence.


193 The first time I encountered her artwork in person was at the exhibition ‘Projected Realities: Video Art from East Asia’, Asia Society and Museum, New York, 2006.

194 In Japanese architecture, fusuma (障) are vertical rectangular panels that can slide from side to side, redefining spaces within a room, or act as doors.

195 Chinese: 榻榻米
I, as a viewer, would stand in front of the screen—the traditional Japanese sliding doors that play a role in depictions of the four seasons—and would watch the screen on which images would appear representing an entire year’s collapse into itself. In the exhibition space that I visited, a note from the artist had been posted next to the work: “Please look very carefully because [the] video work contains both truth as well as non-truth” (Kaplan 2006b). In fact, through this video installation, the idea of the seasons comes and goes in the blink of an eye. Different kinds of plants grow up and die; the colour of the plants and flowers changes constantly; some objects appear and disappear. The images of rocks, trees, flowers, grass, and plants are all animated. The leaves on trees are sometimes vibrant, sometimes dying; the flowers sometimes blooming, sometimes faded 196.

196 During the interview, Dr. Melissa Chiu comments: What she created was essentially a projection onto these sliding screen doors, that is an animated scene of nature. And so, you know the convention in traditional sliding screen doors from Japan is that it would be a representation of nature, such as spring, summer, winter. And here what she has created is an animation of that season, so this moving, evolving nature [is] created and there is also a sound element (Chiu 2006).
As a viewer, I could sense the changing of the seasons, as well as the coming and going of windstorms and snowfalls. All the changes of these still-life objects reflect a sense of seasonal transition (Figure 86). These changes took place within 5 to 23 minutes. As a result, I had an intense, compressed spatiotemporal experience within a short period: the artwork had convincingly depicted the passage of time. Dr. Chiu states:

*She is playing with time, the fact that, you know, these traditional sliding screen doors are usually an idea of capturing time, a specific moment. And yet through animation, she is actually capturing an evolving sense of time.*

*(Chiu 2006)*
The utilization of everyday life elements such as the traditional Japanese ‘fusuma’ (sliding doors) as the projection site, and the ‘tatami’ to create a sense of authenticity of Japanese living room, allowed me personally to feel more immersed in the overall exhibition space as long as the installation was embedded in a traditional living room. In comparison with Wu and Lee’s works, Kosemura’s installation has considered more thoughtfully the simulation of daily-life space as one of the elements of her artwork, instead of showing her animation only through TV monitors. Unlike a conventional digital-presentation space (i.e. ‘White Cube’ or ‘Black Box’), which encourages visitors to come and go as they please within the context of a public place, the traditional Japanese room as a setting for Kosemura’s installation gives viewers three types of spatiotemporal experience: one is of a pictorial space populated by moving images of the passage of time and seasons, the second is of a traditional Japanese room, and the third type of space reflects viewers’ virtual spatiotemporal imaginations. It is in the interplay of these three dimensions that what I have called the spirituality of transcendence comes into play.

Kosemura stated, “In this exhibition, I used fusuma as a frame, which we see daily” (Mami Kosemura’s Art works 2010).

In fact, there are different installation versions of Flowering Plants of the Four Seasons. Some versions use only a wall panel or a screen (Figures 85, 87); some versions present themselves in the context of a complete traditional Japanese living room or old house (Figure 88).
Case studies: conclusion

As I mentioned above, the idea of the ‘four seasons’ is a traditional Chinese way—using a metaphor based on the natural world—to refer to the ‘passing of time’. These three young contemporary Asian artists draw on their own tradition to reinterpret the elements of temporal transition through digital-media technology. Kosemura’s artwork mirrors Wu’s insofar as they both constitute records of real plants and flowers. Wu’s work heavily emphasizes its video foundations; Kosemura’s and Lee’s, in contrast, come across as animations, but Kosemura’s work involves a specific installation setting: a daily-life spatial environment. All three artists use digital technology to suggest the passing of time. However, only Kosemura’s artwork in the 3-4 dimensional setting of the Japanese room really involves the bodily engagement of the viewer. The role of the viewer in the other two digital works is more that of an observer or outsider. Yet the objects (tree, bamboo, and flower, etc.) used in these works all tap into, and in different ways trigger, human experiences of the passage of time. Although the three young contemporary East Asian artists have reinterpreted the idea of ‘four seasons’ in relation to the technique of ‘loop’ through digital media, I have argued that viewers could more easily merge with the pictorial space and time of the traditional scroll painting through bodily engagement, and it is only Kosemura’s artwork in the domestic Japanese setting that creates a palpably
evolving sense of time and invokes such engagement. There is, then, a deficit in the way digital-media technology connects the traditional to the contemporary. Asian digital-media artists should overcome this disconnection by seriously considering viewers’ spatiotemporal experiences in relation to such idea as bodily engagement and immersive space. These factors emphasize a kind of intimacy and interaction, and there should be empathy and closeness between exhibition space, artist and viewer if the connection is to be made. The fact that the three contemporary Asian artists have relied on a similar metaphor of still-life objects to express their views on the endless cycle in the universe suggests that on the empirical as well as the theoretical level re-Orientalism—especially by Orientals—may be a rich mine for further research. However, while this direction definitely deserves extended discussion, it goes beyond the scope of the present thesis.

3.3. Narrative and interaction: cycle, non-linear narrative and bodily engagement

In this section, I will compare and analyse the correlation between a traditional Chinese painting, cave art, a contemporary Chinese installation and a contemporary digital media artwork in terms of narratives through time. The results express the way in which the concepts of (1) cycle, (2) non-linear narrative, and (3) bodily engagement in ancient Chinese art correspond to the elements of looping, layering of content, and bodily engagement of the viewer in digital art today.

I will first re-introduce the ancient Chinese scroll painting *The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai* to illustrate how viewers can experience a sense of ‘cycle’ through reading the hand-scroll painting, from persistently forwarding and reversing their gaze throughout the art piece. Secondly, the Chinese cave painting entitled *A Deer of Nine Colours* possesses natural, dynamic narrative strengths suited not only for linear
storytelling, but also for diverse alternative ways in which viewers in the cave can freely and from different perspectives navigate various storylines via their bodily interactions. Furthermore, two contemporary artworks, *Inopportune: Stage One* (2009) and the interactive artwork *Legible City* (1988-91), demonstrate how human interaction with the artwork can change the layers of *time* and *space* to favour one part of the narrative over another through installation and digital technology. I argue that through continued layering of their perceptions of spatiotemporal themes, viewers can perceive narratives as linear or non-linear, in either a physical or a virtual way. This closely correlates to the methods applied in traditional Chinese art.

**Indeterminate beginning and end**

**Case study (I): The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai (II)**

‘Time’ in the digital artworks treated in the last section means real time, and ‘space’ means a combination of real and virtual space. These works use technology to implement natural ‘still-life objects’ in motion, and thereby to imply a sense of spatiotemporal transition touching to a *cycle* of the universe and evoking a sense of transcendence. My critique, however, is that their invocation of the ‘four seasons’ often conveys only a sense of cycle in nature rather than expressing temporal transition in the universe. Before looking at further contemporary artworks I will, therefore, examine the way in which traditional Chinese hand-scroll painting embodies the concept of a spatiotemporal cycle. For this purpose I will return to *The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai*, which exemplifies how a sense of *cycle* is enacted through the concepts of *zhou* (周, ‘cycle’), *fan* (反, ‘turning back’), and *fu* (復, ‘return’). These concepts are derived from the philosophy of *Dao* as applied in the tenth century. Building on what has been said in the preceding chapter about spatiotemporal compression and bodily engagement in *The Night Entertainments*, I

---

199 I have analysed different aspects of the painting *The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai* in two different chapters (Chapters 2 and 3). In order to avoid confusion the analyses are marked *The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai (I)* and *The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai (II)* respectively.
will focus here on the way in which viewers’ interaction with the traditional Chinese scroll format can affect the presentation of narrative in artworks of this kind. Critical parameters developed on the basis of this inquiry can then be applied to contemporary digital artworks.

First of all, a sense of cycle can be enacted through the visual arrangement of a hand-scroll. As I have already argued in the previous chapter, there is no exact starting point and no exact end point in the entire painting of *The Night Entertainments*; rather than depicting his daily activities in detail the painting gives one a general idea of Han Xizai’s nightlife.

The painting’s function is not to present viewers with a complete documentation, but to give them a sense of a never-ending party by mixing up, swapping, and compressing different temporal and spatial settings and events. This amalgamation may explain why the painter, for example, swapped the contextual position of the two ladies in one of the early scenes. Extending across the whole painting, the
amalgamation helps to create a sense of continuity and unity that subsumes the initially disorienting overlap into a meaningful whole. The contextual swap in the positions of the two ladies bonds the two scenes structurally together by means of the overlapping glances, as indicated in Figure 89.

Secondly, although the painting has a physical beginning and end, a first scene and a last scene on the scroll, the narrative itself never ends (Figure 90). At the beginning of this painting viewers set off on a story-telling adventure, during the course of which they grow familiar with Han Xizai’s house, proceeding step by step through different scenes. This kind of visual journey can be regarded as a linear narrative with a logical sequence of scenes. But several features of the painting suggest that it is not meant to be read only in a linear way. Without denying the possibility or sense of a linear reading, the following analysis will focus on the cyclical or loop nature of *The Night Entertainments*, bringing out its relation to the philosophy of *Dao*.

![Figure 90](image)

Figure 90. (Right): the beginning; (Left): the end sections of the painting (illustration and visualization by the author).

For example, in this painting, the overall narrative does not clearly indicate either the exact starting point or endpoint of the ‘Night Entertainments’. The visual arrangement of the bed and the curtain in the first scene of the painting reveals that something has already happened—that something has happened before the opening scene (Figure 91). At the beginning of the painting, as my illustration shows, there is a framed opening in the wall on the right, where an untidy bed presents itself (see no. 2 of Figure 91).
Two curtains on either side of the bed are decoratively held open with ribbons; there is a red blanket (see no. 1 of Figure 91) not yet tidied up. The most important point is that there is a *pipa* (see no. 3 of Figure 91)—a Chinese musical instrument associated particularly with female players—resting on the bed, partly covered by the blanket. This visual arrangement, particularly for the beginning of the painting, is quite special, as it strongly hints at a recently completed ‘scene’, at something that took place beforehand. Scholar Michael Sullivan states in this regard: “It opens so abruptly, so suggestively, that one cannot help wondering if this is indeed the original opening of the scroll” (Sullivan 2008, p. 25). I agree with Michael Sullivan’s assessment that the *pipa* found in the couch-bed may well imply an intimate relationship between the master and the musician. However, I would argue that the relationship need not be some hidden, undercover affair. The neck of the *pipa* lying on the dishevelled bed may imply the occurrence of a recent activity just prior to the opening of the scroll. But on the other hand these two scenes could have taken place at different times: they simply present themselves for visual observation in the same pictorial space.

Figure 91. The beginning of the narrative of the painting (illustration and visualization by the author).
Two circumstantial factors may influence one’s interpretation of this matter. Firstly, these night scenes were painted from memory, not as real-time documentation. And secondly the painting was made in response to a specific desire on the part of the Emperor Li Yu to find out what his minister Han Xizai was doing. In other words there was a political motivation behind the pictorial account.

I assume, however, that the artist’s intention in producing this painting went altogether beyond documentation purposes. And in this respect the couch-bed scene also has an internal, structural connection to the second scene, which we can conveniently title ‘Han Xizai and His Guests’. For there is an important aesthetic reason why Gu Hongzhong may have chosen this opening. Rather than depicting the first events of that particular night, it simply indicates where the narrative might start, which is similar to the function of the opening scene of a movie. As the critic David Bordwell put it, “a film does not just start, it begins” (Bordwell 1986, p. 90). In this sense the opening scene provides a basis for what is to come and integrates the audience into the narrative. Bordwell further stated, “Typically, the plot will seek to arouse curiosity by bringing us into a series of actions that has already started. This is called opening in medias res, a Latin phrase meaning ‘in the middle of things” (Bordwell 1986, p. 90). Nor should it be forgotten in this context that we are dealing with a hand-scroll painting. Accordingly, when viewers unfurl the scroll, the first scene they encounter is a plain wall and an integrated couch-bed. The wall is totally plain; the untidiness of the bed and the partly visible neck of the pipa create a vast space in which viewers can use their imagination. The painter was skilful enough to stoke the interests and draw the attention of viewers through this incomplete visual composition at the very beginning of the painting. The wall, as the first element of the painting, acts like an introductory scene, directing the viewers’ gaze from the exterior space (the space outside the painting) to the interior space (the space inside the painting). The opened curtains located on either side of the messy couch-bed stimulate the viewers’ curiosity about not only what has just happened but what will happen next. Thus the first scene suggests a mood and gives viewers an overall initial

---

200 The painting was painted not on site but largely “by memory” (Wu 1996, p. 45), which means that the act of painting took place after the painter had visited the site.
impression. It serves as a clue to the viewer opening the scroll as to what might come next, in the same way, for example, that the cover of a modern novel seeks to make prospective buyers want to open the book and read it.

Just as the opening scene of The Night Entertainments is not the first scene in the narrative, so, I would argue, the last scene is not the end of the narrative. In this way the overall visual arrangement of the hand-scroll suggests a visual experience of a never-ending non-linear narrative. To visualize Han Xizai fully is to acknowledge unfinished relations among the ladies, the musicians, the guests, and their host, the master of the house. The last scene features six people. On the far left are two people: a male guest and a girl who is facing and walking towards a group of other people located on the far right of the scene. The male guest has an arm passed around the girl’s back. The group of people towards whom the girl is walking consists of three people: two standing females and one seated male. Han Xizai is standing between the party of two people and the party of three people: his back is to the party of two, and he is facing the party of three—that is, he is facing the right-hand side of the scene (Figure 92).

Michael Sullivan has analysed this particular scene and argued that Han Xizai is going to take a rest 201. But I contend, in contrast, that the last scene featuring Han Xizai exemplifies a cyclical narrative. If viewers treat the painting as a non-linear narrative, then the gesture of Han Xizai (his left hand raised) suggests not that he is tired or saying ‘good night’, but that he is bidding the night welcome: he has just started, his whole body—including his face, his hands, and his chest—is facing the interior space of his house; his upright posture suggests strength, not weariness. These aspects of his body language convey an expression of warm welcome from him to his guests. Farewells and expressions of fatigue are not in evidence in his demeanour.

201 “Beyond stands the dignified figure of Han Xizai. In his right hand is a pair of drumsticks, but he won’t be drumming anymore tonight. He raises his left hand in a gesture—is it of mild protest?” (Sullivan 2008, p. 39).
Another point in support of my argument is this: if the painter’s aim was to present Han Xizai as articulately bidding his guests a good night before heading off to bed, it would have been easier if he had simply presented Han Xizai both as moving towards the ‘end’ of the scene (i.e. towards the far left) and as turning his face and hands toward his guests to utter his parting comments 202.

Moreover, the last scene’s most important roles go to the two characters on the far left-hand side not just of this scene but of the painting as a whole. A man has his right hand pressed against the waist and back of a lady as they walk not just to the centre of the final scene but towards the centre of the painting as a whole. While the man places his right hand over the lady’s shoulder and back, his left hand gestures towards the interior space. He is stooping his body over a bit to be at the same height as the lady; his face is directed toward hers as if he is saying something to her. His overall posture and body language suggests that she is entering the heart of the party with him, and he is encouraging or maybe prodding her to agree on some matter. Whatever the subject

202. This technique, in which an individual walks in one direction while arching the body and particularly the face to look back in the opposite direction, manifests itself frequently in the painting (e.g. the lady with the *pipa*, and the lady with a tray of wine).
of discussion between the two, both of them are moving in the direction of the party. Thus, there is no implication that the event is nearing an end, even if the scene is the last one for the viewer, who opens the scroll from right to left. Thus, the last two characters underscore my assertion that the painter intended to reflect a non-stop, never-ending night party, rather than a typical party with a beginning, middle and end.

The scenes in this work of art do not flow one into the other in a perfectly linear fashion. On the contrary, the painting suggests multiple, compressed spaces and times, which encourage viewers to perceive the narrative in a non-linear way so that they might creatively navigate their way towards new and interesting spatial and temporal experiences. Hence the painting has no exact beginning and no exact end, even if (or all the more so because) it is in hand-scroll form and needs to be unrolled from the right-hand side (presumably the first scene) to the left-hand side (presumably the last). This very unrolling of the scroll (Figure 55) is a circular movement that reveals the narrative of *The Night Entertainments* in a non-linear fashion.

I take this non-absolutist position because behind this idea of order is the critical idea of *cycle*. The viewer can navigate the narrative in either a linear or a non-linear way. The narrative itself suggests circularity and ultimately a never-ending thread of events, themes, and objects. As the painting presents neither a starting point nor an end point of the cycle, it presents neither a specific time nor a specific space. The characters in this work are free to enter and exit any spatial and temporal environment. The absence of such restrictions closely reflects the notion of *time* and *space* in the philosophy of *Dao*.

The notion of *cycle* is a central tenet of *Dao*. It is believed that the concept of *cycle* defines everything that lives. In Chapter 16 and 25 of *Dao De Jing*, the terms

---

203 Chapter 25 of *Dao De Jing* treats *Dao* as “…all on its own, unchanging, all-pervading, ever-moving…. If it must be named, let its name be Great, Greatness means going on, going on means going far, and going far means turning back” (Le Guin 1997, p. 34). And Chapter 16 explains how one can
‘turning back’ (反, fan) and ‘return’ (復, fù) represent the idea of being ‘all-pervading, ever-moving’ (行, zhou xing) (Le Guin 1997, p. 34). The two expressions convey the idea of a *cycle*. In this sense, the concepts underlying ‘time compression and overlapping’, ‘reversed position and direction’, and my suggested ‘temporal and spatial experience are compressed and overlap’ all correspond to the same concept of *cycle*. I have attempted to visualize the concept of *cycle* through computer software 205 (Figure 93). My illustration, in the form of an ongoing loop, experimentally demonstrates how this painting conveys a particular conception of time and space. In this example, a digitally animated scroll painting has a circular, three-dimensional form. The painting has no definite scene; the characters and plots keep repeating, with some scenes partly overlapping each other. The gaze of the viewers can rest on any scene, without any need to consider a starting or ending point.

In fact, a loop of this sort is just one of several ways to demonstrate the concept of circularity underlying the original scroll painting. Physically, viewers actively engage in navigating this non-linear, never-ending storyline by continuously unscrolling and scrolling back. This bodily engagement of the audience can affect its reception of the content. Thus, this hand-scroll presents no specific time slot marked as the commencement or conclusion of the feast: only a sense of *cycle*. As we have seen, the positions of Han Xizai and his guests convey a powerful sense of *cycle*. Furthermore, the form of hand-scroll painting in general (as well as in this particular case) requires the viewers to put their hands and bodies to use in unrolling the scroll and rolling it back up, forwards and backwards, in order to navigate the narrative. No particular stretch of the painting presents itself as the indisputable beginning or end. The temporal and spatial dimensions of each scene can be swapped, mixed, and overlapped, and yet this dissolution of boundaries does not detract from the narrative or from the overall meaning of the painting. Viewers can merge with this virtual, illusionary work of art through bodily engagement. Their fullest experiences come not

204 Also, *zhou* (周) means ‘circle’ (圓圈, yuan quan).
205 Adobe Illustrator CS5.
just from reading the hand-scroll painting in a traditional way but from persistently forwarding and reversing their gaze through the painting in an open, unbounded way.

Figure 93. Compressed and overlapping time-space in a hand-scroll painting (visualization by the author).

Case study (II): *A Deer of Nine Colours*

I will now introduce a cave painting located in the Caves of Dunhuang 206, China (Figure 94) that I visited in 1994. One of the older caves in Dunhuang features *A Deer of Nine Colours*, a painting produced around the end of the fifth century in the era of the Northern Wei (Zhang 2007, p. 6). According to art historian Mary Tregear 207, this work reflects the traditions of Buddhist storytelling 208 and scroll format 209 (Tregear...

---

206 Dunhuang was one of the most important hubs along China’s Silk Road, which in turn was the most important route of cultural exchange between the East and the West.
207 Mary Tregear (1924-2010) was a museum curator and art historian specializing in Chinese art.
208 Scholar Mary Tregear states “the concept of narrative painting perhaps came with the Buddhist sutras and temple art, brought to China by missionaries in the first century B.C. Only a few paintings
1987, p. 94). Pursuing her analysis further, I would argue that *A Deer of Nine Colours* possesses natural, dynamic narrative strengths suited not only to linear storytelling, but also to diverse alternative ways in which viewers in the cave can, through bodily interaction, navigate its various storylines freely and from different perspectives. My contention is grounded in the fact that the narrative sequence of this work consists of overlapping layers, which can be read in both a linear and a non-linear way.

The story and the questions it poses

This cave painting presents one of the most inspiring tales from the Buddhist tradition, revolving around a magnificent ‘multicoloured’ deer that saves a man from drowning. The ungrateful man then divulges the deer’s location to the king, who orders his warriors to capture the deer. This story reflects a moral conception of human greed as well as a respectful concern for nature.

---

have survived, including paintings on brick tomb walls, in which a story is told in a series of ‘stills’, arranged in either vertical or horizontal scenes” (Tregear 1987, p. 94).

209 Tregear mentions that scroll-like compositions appear even in wall paintings. *A Deer of Nine Colours* is an example of wall painting that uses scroll-like composition to tell its story (loc. cit.).

210 This artwork is based on *Liutu chi ching* (六度集經) translated by Kan Seng Hui (康儈會) of the Wu period (229-280 CE).

211 The storyline of Cave No. 257’s Deer of Nine Colours is as follows: Once upon a time, there was a magnificent looking deer, the rarest one could find: its coat had nine colours, and its antlers were as the snow. It lived by the Ganges River with a crow as his friend. One day, a man fell into the river and, in great fright, he yelled for help. Without much thought and regard for its own safety, the Deer of Nine Colours jumped into the water and saved him. The man was so grateful that he offered to be its slave and servant. The deer only wanted him not to disclose where it lived, to avoid being hunted down and
My intention in presenting the full English translation of the original text is to discuss the order of the narrative, which directly affects the order of the pictorial narrative of *A Deer of Nine Colours*. For example, after identifying the subject matter, one might ask:

- Does the man or the deer come first in the story?
- Does the man go to the find the King and Queen right after the deer saved him?
- Did he decide to find the King after reading the news about a reward for hunting down the deer?
- What underlying reasons explain why the King and Queen wanted the deer captured?

The above questions emphasize the before-and-after aspects of the story. Before studying the overlapping layers of narrative in this work, I will first analyse the structure of the story in terms of storylines and climaxes as follows:

---

generated...
Three major storylines with seven scenes in the pictorial space

Professor Chen Pao-chen states that *A Deer of Nine Colours* is a relevant example of “achronological narration”: the work, he contends, contains six scenes within a single frieze and in a lateral layout (Chen 1995, pp. 239-285) \(^{212}\). I propose a different analysis, according to which the painting’s scenes are layered, affecting the way in which the story comes across. In my view the work tells a story consisting of three major storylines, with seven scenes. They are as follows:

- **Storyline (1):** The deer and the man
- **Storyline (2):** The king, the queen, and the man
- **Storyline (3):** The deer and the king

These three major storylines, with their seven scenes, are observable through five unique visual journeys. My aim is to examine how these seven scenes are constructed in terms of linear and non-linear narrative. The painting in the cave depicts most of the original story’s details, but does not include the last section, which is about the consequences of the narrated events for the kingdom. However, this omission does not affect the story’s overall meaning at all. The spirit of the story remains intact, because the painting illustrates the result of greedy behaviour. Each scene of *A Deer of Nine Colours* is connected to every other scene sequentially, from scene (1) through scene (7) \(^{213}\). I will examine the construction of these seven scenes in relation to five different visual journeys that one can take through the painting’s narrative and pictorial representation. My argument consists of three interconnected points: (1) this

---

\(^{212}\) This painting represents the Deer King Ruru’s betrayal by a man he had once rescued in “an achronological sequence of six scenes within a single frieze” (Chen 1995, p. 252).

\(^{213}\) The scenes are as follows:
1. The deer saves the drowning man;
2. The man expresses his gratitude to the deer;
3. The king and queen seek the deer’s capture;
4. The man provides information to the king;
5. The man leads the king to the deer;
6. The king meets the deer; and
7. The deer first kneels on the ground and then stands in front of the king.
wall painting consists of a non-linear narrative; (2) the story can be read in five different ways; and (3) the viewer’s spatiotemporal experiences of the painting can trigger various alternative experiences of the story’s situations, because the viewer can choose a variety of different starting points to navigate the storyline of this artwork, a strategy that diversifies the reading experience and the reading rhythm.

**Non-linear narrative through five different visual journeys**

_A Deer of Nine Colours_ possesses three different possible starting points, which can lead a navigator of the storyline along five different visual journeys. The viewer can freely choose which starting point he or she prefers, but regardless of the one selected, the overall spirit of the story remains.

First of all, the pictorial representation of this painting has the form of a long scroll inside the cave (Figure 95); second, the storyline is triangular; third, the narrative, as already mentioned, is constructed of three storylines: (1) the deer meets the man, (2) the king meets the man, and (3) the deer meets the king. These three storylines can be regarded as three different starting points (Figure 96).

Figure 95. The pictorial representation of this painting is long scroll format in shape inside the cave.

Figure 96. The storyline of the narrative is triangular in shape.
The first version of the visual journey

Figure 97. The first version of the visual journey.

The first visual journey invites the viewer to ‘read’ the story from right to left (Figure 97). By moving in this direction, the viewer first encounters scene no. (1) involving the king and the queen. Both king and queen, along with a detachment of warriors, follow the man in pursuit of the deer. The climax of the story takes place when all the characters meet the deer (scene no.2), at which point the deer tells the king about how it had saved the man from deep, treacherous waters (scene no.3). According to the original storyline, this scene (the deer saves the drowning man) constitutes the beginning of the narrative; however, in this visual journey, the original first scene is read as the last scene, a sequence that correlates to the concept of ‘flashback’, a frequently used term in film language today, or to that of ‘embedded narrative’ in literary studies.
The second version of the visual journey

Figure 98. The second version of the visual journey.

The second visual journey invites the viewer to read the story from left to right (Figure 98). Here the order in which one considers the events differs significantly from the first visual journey. In this case, the gaze of the viewer encounters the beginning of the story first, and then directly goes to the ending. The final step in the viewer’s visual journey leads to an explanation of why the king and queen wanted to catch the deer. This last step in the journey is again a flashback or a piece of embedded narrative.

The third version of the visual journey

Figure 99. The third version of the visual journey.
The third visual journey starts in the middle of the painting, which invites the viewer first to encounter the final stage of the narrative and then to decide freely which direction to follow (Figure 99). The viewer can choose either the left-hand side or the right-hand side as the next visual journey. I suggest that this kind of visual journey is like a storybook with three pages: the reader first reads the ending on the second page (sandwiched between the first and last pages); then he or she can choose either the first page or the third page, both of which explain what caused the deer to meet the king. This kind of visual journey radically differs from our normal habit of reading a book from the first page to the last. Viewers cannot unroll this scroll-form painting while reading the story; and in the same sense, therefore, the painting invites viewers to ‘unroll’ the plot metaphorically. However, if it were to be unrolled as a real scroll, this would be the first scene to appear.

**The fourth version of visual journey**

![Image](image.png)

Figure 100. The fourth version of the visual journey.

In the case of the fourth visual journey, the viewer can first choose which direction is the starting point (Figure 100). Eventually the viewer will return to the final stage, which is scene No. 2—the middle part of the painting. There is no absolute or correct starting point because the viewer has already encountered the ending of the story. So the next scenes to be viewed tend to be less essential, if the goal is, in fact, to find out
‘what happens at the end’. Like the previous visual journey, this journey is highly experimental, relying heavily on the viewer’s preferences, or where exactly the viewer is standing in the cave.

The fifth version of the visual journey

![Diagram of the fifth visual journey](image)

Figure 101. The fifth version of the visual journey.

The fifth visual journey is the most normal and traditional of the bunch (Figure 104). The visual path follows the original narrative storyline, unrolling in a linear way; the visual journey is smooth and the scenes appear systematically one by one.

Non-linear and diverse visual journeys

According to the analysis above, this wall painting suggests that non-linear and diverse visual journeys can give viewers dynamic narrative experiences. This cave painting’s story constitutes a visual lesson about the importance of faithfulness and integrity, as well as a warning about the pitfalls of greed and ruthlessness. When viewers first step inside the cave and stand in front of the painting, they will not be worrying about whether the narrative in this painting precisely follows that of the original story. Nor will they respond with confusion regarding which part of the
Bodily-movement involvement, different viewpoints and visual journeys

As I noted earlier, reading a text can be regarded as a linear narrative experience; the reader needs to go through the story or the information sentence by sentence, page by page. According to my experience at this cave, which I visited in 1994, I quickly discerned that viewers needed to stand in front of the wall painting, maintaining a certain distance between themselves and the artwork. This distance enabled them to take in a relatively full swathe of the painting without losing sight of the details. Moreover, the distance between the painting and the viewers created a certain physical space in which viewers could move their own bodies as they proceeded along the visual journey of the painting. In this way different viewers could enjoy their own visual journey from their own viewpoint.

Generalizing from this experience, I would argue that neither the painting nor the surrounding space controls where a viewer will stand after first setting foot in the cave. And yet the painting allows for several different starting points (five to be exact), each one capable of triggering a set of unique viewing experiences: no matter where the viewer initially stands, the story remains the same. Let’s imagine that hundreds of visitors enter the cave at the same time: they will not rush towards the same corner to read the story; instead, they will spread out in search of an open spot, which will lead them on different kinds of visual journeys. In addition, being familiar with the story already, viewers are not likely to panic on encountering unexpected narrative presentations; indeed, not a few viewers might express great joy at the prospect of embarking on an unusual visual journey, in part through a physical merging with the surrounding exhibition space.
My argument is that this kind of experience correlates nowadays to the concept of non-linear digital interactive narrative. It is notably similar to the experience that viewers have in DVD/digital movies with interactive interface, where the story sequence is divided into different episodes (in the menu) from which the viewer can choose any episode as a starting point; thereafter, computers connect all the episodes together, automatically forming a story sequence. In other words, the role of the viewer can, in this medium, be more active, with freedom and flexibility to decide their own approach to navigating the story. Viewers are no longer relegated to the passive role of accepting ready-made stories from the beginning of a production to the end. Story presentation is in this way more user-oriented than it has been up until recently.

To sum up, *A Deer of Nine Colours* demonstrates how non-linear and multi-perspective narratives can be the catalyst for viewers’ multiple spatiotemporal experiences. For example, the ending of the story, located in the middle of the scroll-form painting, gives viewers the opportunity to pursue two parallel storylines: one heading off in the direction of the left-hand side of the painting, and the other in the opposite direction; that is, viewers can freely choose one of two different parallel storylines. Also, such diversity suggests a no less diverse array of visual rhythms stemming from both linear and non-linear reading experiences. In order to have a clearer picture of the story, viewers need to shift their gaze, their minds and their bodies while navigating the whole story right there in the cave.

**Case study (III): Inopportune: Stage One**

Regarding the idea of bodily engagement of the viewer, an installation by Cai Guo-qiang (1957-), one of the most significant contemporary Chinese artists, prompted me to recall the visit I had made fifteen years earlier to Dunhuang. The whole viewing process of his *Inopportune: Stage One* (2009) involves viewer’s bodily engagement in a manner analogous to the experience of viewing the artworks—specifically the
Buddha and the *Deer of Nine Colours*—in Dunhuang’s Mogao caves. As the previous section has dealt at some length with the latter of these two works, I will add here only a few words about the former.

Walking into the Mogao caves, one sees a huge Buddha, some 5-8 metres tall. At first the 3-dimensional figure is only partially visible: I had to step back and lift my head in order to bring the full image into view. Moreover, I had to walk around the cave in order to perceive both the setting in its entirety and the Buddha sculpture from various angles. Moving around the cave I experienced a strong sense of ‘time passing and transitioning’ through my bodily movement, which created a dynamic and playful viewing experience in relation to a traditional sculpture – an experience analogous to that of my interaction with the cave painting.

My experience of Cai’s ‘Inopportune’ was again similar to my experience of viewing both the wall painting and the huge Buddha sculpture in the cave. I attended his solo show “Cai Guo-qiang: Hanging Out” at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum on November 27, 2009. It was the first time I had seen his solo work, and this struck me as being a
radical departure from any previous pieces I had seen. The show involved a vast spatial environment, compelling me to re-examine the relationships between his artwork, his audiences, and his exhibition spaces. With respect to this work I share the viewpoint of author Jonathan Shaughnessy, who refers to such a viewer/audience as an “engaged viewer” (Graham & Shaughnessy 2006, p. 42). When I entered the exhibition space for *Inopportune* (Figure 102), I found a work of art whose complexity, gigantic proportions and elevation also required me to step back and walk around for a fuller view. Even though it presented nine cars frozen in the air, the visual representation expressed motion and dynamism, just like an animation sequence. The nine cars were actually like nine sequential frames. Further, the installation did not permit viewers to stand in front of it; rather, they needed to appreciate it through multiple, shifting viewpoints and perspectives. My own movement around the work was similar, therefore, to a person’s unfolding of a scroll, because here, for the story to unfold and progress, the viewer had to move physically through the exhibit. The whole pattern correlated with watching a movie or an animated sequence. It invited viewers to immerse themselves in the artwork, and such immersion represents an experience of active—and in its own way creative—participation.

In terms of space, *Inopportune* creates an immersive experience that encourages viewers to walk around the work and perceive its message from different angles. I felt myself immersed in the exhibition space. Through my body movements, the artwork created in me a sense of spatial and temporal experience. Moreover, this experience repeatedly visited itself upon me because I found no starting point and no end point in the work. My experience corresponded exactly, it would seem, to what Jonathan Shaughnessy observed regarding an ancient form of Chinese art: “the insights offered by the art works 214 were those that resound and recur within the ‘unrolled scroll’ itself” (loc. cit.).

214 I refer here to Cai’s artworks such as *Inopportune: Stage One; Inopportune: Stage Two; Illusion and Reflection – A Gift from Iwaki.*
So in terms of time, Inopportune elicits from viewers an experience similar to that which accompanies the unfurling of a scroll. In contrast to the experience that a viewer has while looking at a Western painting, the reading of a traditional Chinese scroll yields an experience of ‘extending time’ as section after section of the scroll unfurls. Today, Cai’s artwork conveys to viewers the relationships between the settings of individual pieces and the scroll form of Chinese art. A scroll painting can always be displayed a section at a time; each section is integral in itself. The same holds for a folding screen: when the space is large, the screen can be stretched out; when it is small, it can be folded up.

Cai has already integrated the form of scroll painting, not only into the concepts underlying his work, but also into the installation settings for the display of individual pieces. When I was in one of his exhibition spaces, moving around a work of art, I noted that the moving bodies of other viewers—in combination with one another—gave me the impression of a roll of film turning and turning. If viewers had not been moving through the installation, the work itself would have been far less meaningful to me. In other words, the full meaning of the work, be it ancient cave painting or contemporary installation, is a function of and dependent on the viewer’s movement through the space created by the artist. This movement generates a multifaceted temporal experience similar—in terms of bodily engagement—to that of viewing A Deer of Nine Colours, for here too the visitor to the installation perceives the concept of cycle and non-linear narrative from multiple viewpoints. This in turn correlates onward to the elements of ‘looping’ and ‘layering of content’ in digital art that also allow viewers to have real-time experiences of ‘time passing and transitioning’.

Case study (IV): The Legible City

Another contemporary interactive work, The Legible City (1988-91) by Professor Jeffrey Shaw, could be considered a significant example of the way in which bodily engagement of the viewer affects the relation between narration and interaction. My
intention here is to inquire whether such a practice correlates to ancient Chinese cave art, with its suggestion of alternative, dynamic ways to navigate a narrative. Like the Deer, and to an even greater extent like Inopportune, Shaw’s Legible City provides real-time experiences of ‘time passing and transitioning’ and ‘looping’ and ‘layering of content’ in the form of a 2D to 4D experience.

The Legible City requires viewers to be active physical participants. They are invited to act as visitors riding a stationary bicycle through a simulated representation of a city. This is constituted by computer-generated 3D letters projected on a screen to form architectural structures of words and sentences, simulating the buildings lining the streets and encouraging viewer participation and interaction. In terms of narrative, there is no particular commencement or conclusion of this virtual journey. It is a non-linear, cyclical viewing experience in which the viewer freely and playfully—while at the same time virtually—navigates different ‘cities’ by means of the physical body movements involved in (stationary) cycling. Jeffrey Shaw demonstrates how digital media technology can involve its viewers, providing them with an active role in the perception—and indeed creation—of the artwork. In this respect Jeffrey Shaw’s practice significantly correlates with that of A Deer of Nine Colours and Inopportune. In all of these works the viewer is no longer a passive receiver but an active participant, which suggests a common idea of ‘play-appreciation’ through bodily engagement, a cyclical notion of time and a non-linear way to navigate a narrative in the form of 4D experience.

Case studies: conclusion

To sum up, the four artworks examined in this section show how non-linear narration affects the interactions between artworks and viewers in the space of the artwork both in ancient paintings and contemporary art installations. Non-linear narratives in these different art forms are over-layered so that different parts or aspects of the narrative reveal themselves to the viewers consecutively or even simultaneously. Today, a real-

215 Cities include Manhattan, Amsterdam and Karlsruhe.
time narrative interactive installation such as *The Legible City* actualises spatiotemporal experience through digital-media technology, providing an immersive spatiotemporal experience through viewers’ interaction with the work and with each other while experiencing the work. However, although *The Legible City* entails the embodied physical movement of its viewer-participants, allowing them to be engaged and integrated into the space that surrounds them virtually, I would argue that the mobility of the viewers is limited and restricted, as they need to rely on an interactive device—a bicycle—to accomplish their visual journey. In this context I would also ask whether a sense of ‘play-appreciation’ and the idea of scrolling could be further applied to interactive digital art of this kind, in order to heighten the enjoyment, freedom and flexibility of viewers / visitors / participants in the exhibition space. Based on this idea, my own series of practical digital art projects such as *Dao Gives Birth to One*, will aim to provide viewers with a more flexible and freer exhibition space, allowing them participation and interaction in a heightened cycle of non-linear narrative and bodily engagement, and hence immersion in a cyclical temporal experience. This will be described more fully in Chapter 6 below.

### 3.4. Layering of content and non-linear time

In this section I will first analyse a piece of stone slab art *Jing Ke’s Attempted Assassination of the King of Qin* (second century CE) from ancient China, in order to study how multiple spatiotemporal experiences can merge into one pictorial space in terms of the layering of content. Then I will examine how viewer participation in colophon writing also created a perceived accumulation of time attached to artworks of the past. I take colophon writing attached to an artwork as evidence that the work’s repetition of a symbol can register, in the mind of the art appreciator, a sense of the passage of time. Finally, in examining my digital media project *Layers of Bled Ink – Time passing* (2004-2010), I will seek to demonstrate how digital technology can further deepen art appreciators’ visualization of the passage of time, and how this strongly correlates to the concept of layering of content in traditional slab art and colophon writing. Through continued layering of their perception of spatiotemporal
themes, viewers can experience narratives in temporally (and spatially) non-linear as well as linear ways.

**Case study (I): JK Assassination**

This section focuses on the temporal and spatial arrangement of Han Period narrative paintings and analyses how a complex story, through such spatial arrangement, sets the stage for the viewer’s visual journey. One of the relevant examples is entitled *Jing Ke’s Attempted Assassination of the King of Qin* (here abbreviated to *JK Assassination*) engraved on a stone slab (Figure 103) of the Han Dynasty. 216

Taiwanese scholar Chen Pao-chen has observed that Han narrative paintings were naive in their narrative technique, ambiguous in their temporal progression, and simple in their spatial representation. Chen places Han narrative paintings in three categories: (1) ‘simultaneous compositions’ (同發), (2) ‘mono-scenic compositions’ (單景), and (3) ‘continuous compositions’ (連續) (Chen 1995, pp. 239-285). This is an effective categorization, as it helps to distinguish various kinds of Han-era slabs from one another. But I argue that it does not address, so cannot fully explain, viewers’ spatiotemporal experiences triggered by the visual arrangement of the work.

According to Chen, *JK Assassination* falls into the category of ‘simultaneous composition’, which pictorially summarizes completed storylines into a pictorial space in which figures and objects appear only once, but their actions and attributes indicate various incidents that occur at different times (Chen 1995, p. 241). Such a composition, however, indicates not only different times but also different spatial experiences. I would, therefore, maintain that the spatial and pictorial representation in Han narrative painting is mature, clear, precise, and skilful in handling both *time* and *space*. It is mature because it depicts a complex story visualized and presented through a single scene within a single rectangular spatial form. It is clear, because the features and forms of this artwork stem from the practice of engraving, which means

---

216 There are actually two slabs recounting the story of *Jing Ke’s Attempted Assassination of the King of Qin*: my study here addresses one of them. This work is located in the Wu Liang Shrine, Shangdong, dating from the Han period in the second century CE.
the visual arrangement and pictorial representation must be especially clear if the viewer is to follow the flow of the narrative. It is precise, because the gestures of each character and object in the painting need to be accurate so as to highlight every important narrative detail from the original story-text. That it is skilful will appear from the following analysis.

An unknown artisan created the narrative slab at the Wu Liang Shrine in Shangdong in the second century CE, engraving on it the story of Jing Ke’s Attempted Assassination of the King of Qin. Before introducing my analysis, I will first introduce the background of the narrative, as this may help readers gain a better appreciation of the work. The story recorded on this traditional stone slab art is based on a chapter entitled the ‘Biography of the Assassins’ from the book *The Historical Records* (史記, *Shiji*).

---

217 In the book *A World History of Art* Hugh Honour and John Fleming mention that the most direct expressions of Confucian ideas and ideals in early Chinese art are in shrines or offering chambers adjoining tombs that can be dated from the period of the Eastern Han dynasty (Honour, H. & Fleming, J. 1999, p. 266).

218 It runs as follows: The assassin Jing Ke was originally a guest of the Crown Prince of Dan (燕太子丹) of the estate of Yan (燕) in the Hopei area of China, which was threatened by the estate of Qin, a powerful tyranny in the Shaanxi area. The First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, named the ‘King of Qin’, demanded the head of a general Fan and a map of the Yan territory, and asked the Crown Prince of Dan to send these items to him to avert war between the two regions. After attending a meeting with the Crown Prince of Dan, Jing Ke volunteered to deliver the general’s head and the required map, and promised to assassinate the tyrant at the same time. Jing Ke was permitted to see the King of Qin with the head of the general and the maps of Yan. They met the King of Qin in his palace at the capital of Qin. While Jing Ke was armed with a poisoned dagger hidden inside the rolled-up map, Qin Wu Yang was carrying the map case and Jing Ke was holding the head of General Fan. At that moment, the King of Qin noted that matters were awry because Qin Wu Yang had appeared suspiciously nervous while entering the throne room. Jing Ke took the map case from Qin Wu Yang and, having laid it on the table in front of the King, started to unroll the scroll map. Suddenly he seized the dagger and plunged it towards the King while grasping his sleeve. The King of Qin leaped to his feet immediately and raced to the opposite side of the table; in pursuit, Jing Ke could only rip part of a sleeve off the King’s attire. Around the audience hall Jing Ke chased the King, who tried to brandish the sword that was slung at his side; however, this was a ceremonial weapon which had been made especially long to impress onlookers, and so the King was at first unable to unsheath it. The King of Qin finally managed to draw his sword, and he stabbed Jing Ke with it nine times. Fully aware that his last chance was slipping away, Jing Ke whipped his dagger towards the King but missed. A bodyguard rushed into the hall and apprehended Jing Ke, who decried his misfortune and was killed by the guards.

219 Chinese: 刺客列傳
Visual analysis in terms of spatiotemporal experience

Traditional approaches to studying a painting’s narrative often involve numbering to indicate the order of the story’s various segments. For example, Prof. Chen Pao-chen has suggested using numbering, starting from 1 through 5, to track the flow of the narrative (Figure 104). Chen has stated that the narrative of the picture is arranged in a non-linear way and the path of the viewer’s visual journey is jumpy and erratic. In his reading, scene no. (1) represents the first stage of the story, which is about a box containing the head of a general; scene no. (2) represents Qin Wu Yang prostrate on the floor shivering; scene no. (3) represents the King of Qin escaping from the assassination attempt; scene no. (4) represents Jing Ke being pulled away by a guard; and scene no. (5) provides a focus on the dagger (Chen 1995, p. 243).

But I would first question whether the narrative of this work can be appropriately perceived through logical numbering, even if this is clearly non-linear. In my opinion this method cannot fully explain the spatiotemporal experience triggered by the visual arrangement of the slab. In fact I would argue that the objects and characters in the
The engraving do not exist in the same spatiotemporal setting at all: the pictorial space of this artwork consists of multiple spatiotemporal themes. So I suggest dividing the two-dimensional plane surface of the work into different layers in order to demonstrate how spatiotemporal themes are overlaid for narrative effect.

Secondly, I disagree with Chen’s comment that, in this slab, “no spatial depth is represented” and that there is no “decipherable temporal progression” (Chen 1995, pp. 243-244). On the contrary, I would argue that the maker of this artwork created a complex spatial and visual arrangement through layering, which was then merged into a single frame. The work highlights certain important moments in the assassination of the King of Qin so as to invite the viewer to concentrate on and get involved in every highlight of the story rather than perceive an endless stream of details leading in a linear fashion through the story. In fact, the story is fully presented and satisfactorily comprehensive. In order to show this I will illustrate the engraving’s presentation of temporal progression and its use of spatial depth through mature visual arrangements. To this end I will pose the following four questions:
Question (1): What are the features of Han relief carvings, and their relation to time and space?

On the whole, silhouettes have been considered one of the most significant features of Han relief carving (Honour, H. & Fleming, J. 1999, p. 266). Prof. Chen interpreted the silhouette form of this particular carving, with all the figures and objects shown in silhouette against a blank background, as meaning that no spatial depth was represented (Chen 1995 pp. 243-244). Against this opinion I would argue, however, that the stone carving of its very nature features shapes endowed with negative space. If the engraving’s objects and characters had overlapped one another, viewers would have had difficulty in identifying them and their relationship to each other. In fact the careful arrangement of negative and positive space plays a critical role in Han relief carving. Such reliefs are difficult to read from a distance, as the two types of spaces (positive and negative) are of the same colour—the original colour of the stone. So ink rubbing was a traditional method in this genre that enabled artists to attain a clear picture. The effect produced by rubbing ink with a towel onto a silhouette is to bring out the spatial depth—the *yin yang* (positive and negative space)—of the artwork, engendering a compressed and multiple spatiotemporal visual experience. The spatial depth of the work is now shown not through the silhouette as such but through the composition of the objects and characters compressed into *time* and *space*. This enables viewers to process the flow of the engraving’s storyline, to identify relationships between the individual characters, and to perceive the climax of the narrative.

Question (2): Should viewers be familiar with the storyline before viewing the engravings?

In general, the answer is yes. Thus, this answer also helps to understand why the visual arrangement of the slab could be even more diverse and creative in relation to the issue of the layering of content through compressed multiple spatiotemporal experiences. This is because, when engravings recount stories with which the general public is familiar, there is no reason for the engravings to pictorially depict all the details of the stories. Moreover, as Wu Hung has observed, when a story was
transformed from the written or oral tradition into a pictorial representation on a three-dimensional structure, both the form and the meaning of the story changed (Wu 1989, p. 70). He made the same assertion regarding the original story of the Han carving:

*The creator of the artwork assumed that the viewer, who would have been familiar with the well-known Confucian legend, would reconstruct the rest of the plot. An understanding of the plot would lead the viewer to comprehend the symbolic meaning of the picture in a larger pictorial composition. (Wu 1989, p. 70)*

In the case of the *JK Assassination* some inscriptions are carved next to the figures in the engravings, helping the viewer satisfactorily grasp the story. Nevertheless, because the general public would be familiar with the story, the artisan responsible for the engraving would have greater flexibility in visually depicting the events it related, particularly with regard to compressing a multiple spatiotemporal visual experience within a rectangular form. The challenge to the artisan is to set the objects and figures in a new visual arrangement in order to obtain the best rhythm and dynamism in such a limited space, enabling optimum development and exploration of relationships between negative and positive space.

**Question (3): What outcomes can we identify concerning the transfer of the story from written text to pictorial depiction?**

The priority in this relief form of art is how to arrange the storyline clearly and precisely: no priority is assigned to coming up with a faithful replica of the original textually rendered story. In pursuit of this objective, compressed and multiple spatiotemporal experiences of the ‘assassination’ story are transformed and merged into a single pictorial space. I would argue that the importance of recounting the story rests not so much on the transfer of the story from the text as on the arrangement of the story’s visually stimulating events in a rectangular space. To depict images on a
relief is different in essence from depicting events in a text, which presents the details of a story sentence by sentence and page by page. The length of the story on paper is flexible and, for all intents and purposes, unlimited; however, the space on a square relief is ‘pre-allocated’ and distinctly limited.

**Question (4): How does this artwork correspond to the text from ‘Biography of the Assassins’?**

The climaxes emphasized in the original text correspond to the climaxes visualized in this artwork, which expresses in compressed details all the tension expressed in the original written text.

**i. The transformation of three sets of two-word phrases**

First of all, in *Biography of the Assassins* the historian Sima Qian used three sets of two-word phrases 袖絕 (‘The sleeve was cut’), 拔劍 (‘The sword was lifted’), and 劍長 (‘The sword was too long’) to describe the critical moment of the assassination (Table 14). These are the shortest phrases in the whole written text and they consequently enhance the reader’s sense of tension and excitement. All of these events unfold in a few seconds, and are compressed by the sparse phrasing. The corresponding artwork compresses the same details to express tension in a similar way.

---

220 Original text: 『荊軻奉樊於期頭函，而秦舞陽奉地圖柙，以次進。至陛，秦舞陽色變振恐，群臣怪之。荊軻顧笑舞陽，前謝曰：「北蕃蠻夷之鄙人，未嘗見天子，故振懼。願大王少假借之，使得畢使於前。」秦王謂軻曰：「取舞陽所持地圖。」軻既取圖奏之，秦王發圖，圖窮而匕首見。因左手把秦王之袖，而右手持匕首揕之。未至身，秦王驚，自引而起，袖絕。拔劍，劍長，操其室。時惶急，劍堅，故不可立拔。荊軻逐秦王，秦王環柱而走。群臣皆愕，卒起不意，盡失其度。而秦法，群臣侍殿上者不 得持尺寸之兵；諸郎中執兵皆陳殿下，非有詔召不得上。方急時，不及召下兵，以故荊軻乃逐秦王。而卒惶急，無以擊軻，而以手共搏之。是時侍醫夏無且以其所奉藥囊提荆軻也。秦王方環柱走，卒惶急，不知所為，左右乃曰：「王負劍！」負劍，遂拔以擊荊軻，斷其左股。荊軻廢，乃引其匕首以擿秦王，不中，中桐柱。秦王復擊軻，軻被八創。軻自知事不就，倚柱而笑，箕踞以罵曰：「事所以不成者，以欲生劫之，必得約契以報太子也。」於是左右遂前殺軻，秦王不怡者良久。」《史記》《卷八十六》《刺客列傳 第二十六》
Table 14. The historian Sima Qian’s skilful use of three short phrases (袖絕, 拔劍, and 劍長) in Biography of the Assassins.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>袖絕</td>
<td>‘The sleeve was cut’</td>
<td>拔劍</td>
<td>‘The sword was lifted’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>劍長</td>
<td>‘The sword was too long’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'sleeve' (袖, xiu): noun
'pull' (拔, ba): verb
'sword' (劍, jian): noun
'cut' (絶, jue): verb
'long' (長, chang): adjective

ii. The extension to six climactic moments

Secondly, the artwork depicts six climactic moments from the original text, presenting each one as a single graphic in a single frame and then further combining these six frames into a single overall frame. The purpose of merging different spatiotemporal happenings together into one viewable scene is more than just a retelling of an historically significant story: the merging suggests alternative narrative experiences through layering of content. Viewers’ interest in the familiar storyline may give way to surprise as they re-experience a series of well-known events in a novel way.

I have divided the pictorial space of the engraving into six frames in my illustration (Figure 105). The result shows that the most significant feature of each of the six frames is a character or an object. Looking at the details of the picture, the viewer sees that every character and object is located in a defined position, faithful to the original text. But the experience of viewing, rather than invoking a linear chain of events in a logical order, evokes layers of associations sparked off by the six discrete frames. In its temporal dimension, and in its effect on the viewer, this layering process is closely related to the equally associative cyclical concept of time experienced in the encounter with the works treated earlier in this chapter: The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai, A Deer of Nine Colours, Inopportune, and Legible City.
iii. Pictorial depiction through six climactic moments

The six frames, based on six climactic moments in the ‘assassination’ story, exemplify how multiple and compressed spatiotemporal experiences merge into one pictorial space (Figures 105-106). In fact, the division of this relief into six frames corresponding to six spatiotemporal situations clarifies the differences between these six climactic moments. The six frames can, for example, be arranged in an order similar to the one found in the original written text, which follows a sequence of events comparable to the following sequence of frames, beginning from the left: frame (a) is the opening scene of the assassination, in which Qin Wu Yang, struck by desperate nervousness, kneels down; frame (b) depicts the opened box containing the head of the general; in frame (c) a dagger is flying over a table towards the King of Qin; in frame (d) the King of Qin leaps to his feet and flees over the table; frame (e) presents the table separating the King from the assassin; and finally in frame (f) guards capture and arrest the assassin, Jing Ke.

Figure 106. (Detail) I have divided the pictorial space of this slab into separate frames based on six climactic moments in the ‘assassination’ story.
This analysis shows that the characters and the objects in the artwork can be successfully broken up into separate items that correspond to sequential, linear events in the story. The flow of the story proceeds step by step, from the left-hand side to the right-hand side. And the artwork presents every climactic moment in a clear, step-by-step fashion, with well-articulated time slots corresponding to events in the narrative. Here, the artwork features time zones compressed into a single frame. We may conclude that the purpose of creating the artwork is not just to transform the written text into pictures but also to operate on a visual platform that is independent of the original text.

**iv. Pictorial depiction through the table**

The table plays a very important role in this work. It helps to connect different spatiotemporal moments together (Figure 107). After comparing these six pictorial frames with one another, I concluded that the position of the table actually plays a key role in frames (a), (b), (d), and (e). In frame (b) the table represents the moment at which Qin Wu Yang, having arrived at the hall, kneels down. In frame (e) it represents the moment at which the dagger is flying through the air over the table; moreover, the box has just been opened. In frame (a) it represents the moment at which the King’s sleeve has just been cut; and in frame (d) it represents the moment at which the King runs away from the pursuing assassin. These four frames represent different time-slots in the story, so one may conclude that the table functions to connect these four different time zones together, as it were stereoscopically.

![Figure 107. The function of the table (images retouched and visualized by the author).](image-url)
Furthermore, the table has a vertical shape as drawn—a shape that is optically inconsistent with the theory of one-point perspective, but this inconsistency carries symbolic weight by portraying the King of Qin as safely shielded from the assassination attempt. This example demonstrates that the table functions not only to immerse different time zones into one amalgam, but also to symbolize the assassination’s prospects. The table exemplifies how six different narrative climaxes corresponding to six distinct moments are drawn together into one pictorial space. Through the table, the viewer can better perceive those six different time zones as creating a single meaning—that of the traditional story.

In sum, my visual analysis illustrates how in ancient China compressed and multiple spatiotemporal aspects of narrative could be merged into one pictorial space in terms of layering of content. Non-linear narratives in ancient Chinese art could be overlaid so that different aspects of the narrative revealed themselves to the viewer, both associatively (the six frames as discrete entities) and stereoscopically (the unifying role of the table) in a single spatiotemporal perspective.

Case study (II): Colophon writing

I examined earlier (see Chapter 2 above) how viewer participation in an artwork could, over the years and centuries, create a perceived accumulation of time attached to the work. I then further took colophon writing and seals as evidence that the repetition of a symbol through time can register, in the mind of the art appreciator, a sense of the transition of time, and indeed of the nature of time in terms of changing human activity and creativity. Throughout much of Chinese history colophon writing and seals have been vivid components of the artwork, generating meaningful visual experiences of images superimposed on and illuminating the images of the work itself.

I first stated that the activities of colophon writing help to suggest an experience of time’s passage. It was a common cultural practice for ancient Chinese people to
engage in colophon writing, complete with seals, on the same pieces of art over the course of decades and centuries. The Chinese art of scroll painting and calligraphy carries with it powerful symbolic meanings attributable to history, and these meanings stem largely from the activities involved in colophon writing and seals in artwork. These activities reflect, for example, the authority of ownership and the aesthetic tastes of the collector, while acting as a bridge between the spirit of the past and that of the present. This cultural practice also helped to convey a personal relationship between the artwork and the viewer, as he or she must be the owner, a privileged friend of the owner, or the actual creator of the artwork. Johnson Chang has observed that this tradition demonstrates the importance literati attached to the history surrounding the appreciation of art and connoisseurship in the past. It also implies a radically different attitude to the “completeness” of an artwork: art is incomplete by itself, it becomes whole only with the accrual of appreciation (Chang 2005a, pp. 8-9).

In the following paragraphs I will take a work from the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), *Autobiography* by the calligrapher Huai Su (懷素) (c. 737-799), as an example to illustrate the relationship between colophon practices and temporal as well as spatial transitions. As shown in Figure 108 and 109, the beginning and end of this work of calligraphy bear numerous inscriptions and seals made by different kinds of collectors over the course of a thousand years. And Figure 110 presents a table from *Connoisseurship in Chinese Calligraphy: A Clinical Diagnosis of Huai Su’s ‘Autobiography’* (2004), created by scholar Fu Shen (傅申) (1937-). Using an annalistic approach, the table identifies the chronological order of the inscriptions and seals on *Autobiography*.

---

221 See Chapter 2 above.
222 Title: Partial image of ‘Autobiography’ (自敘帖); Calligrapher: Huai Su (懷素) (c.737-799); Format: Handscroll, ink on paper; Entire scroll size: 28.3 x 755 cm; Year: Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE).
The table helps transform the calligraphy from a two-dimensional to a four-dimensional work, shifting the viewer’s temporal and spatial experience from a compressed, non-linear visual platform to a systematic platform. Fu Shen’s table suggests that viewing colophon writings is like entering a time machine, enabling the viewer to see the overall timeline of the colophon chronologically and rationally. There is a spatial element here, too, for different colophons with different timeslots may be placed in the same space on the surface of the artwork. Viewers can check the
colophon by year or by content; they can ‘read into’ various written histories
inhabiting the messages left at different moments and time slots in the past, and they
can do so synoptically, generating a sense of time and of different stories seen
together and through each other in a single space.

Figure 110. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Specific individualized meanings and experiences of time and space have in this way
been integrated into traditional Chinese scroll painting and calligraphy by the practice
of making colophons. As the surface of a piece of art can display colophons and seals
from different epochs in a linear fashion, later viewers have access through these
different marks to diverse stories and histories. In terms of time and space, different
temporal and spatial experiences signified by colophon writing and seals from
different epochs are all compressed onto a two-dimensional platform—a scroll of rice
paper (or silk) acting as a virtual platform, without temporal or spatial constraints,
allowing the viewer or reader a stereoscopic experience of time in relation to the
appreciation of this artwork spanning some 1200 years.
By comparison, the platform of digital media has sufficient potential to create analogous experiences today among viewers of digital-media art. With this in mind, I will ask specifically in the following section whether digital technology can stimulate reinterpretations and revisualizations of concepts concerning the passage of time and the sense of interface between *time* and *space*.

**Case study (III): Layers of Bled Ink – Time Passing**

The work *Layers of Bled Ink – Time Passing* (2004-2010), here abbreviated to *LBITP*, is a performance and digital animation that I completed in 2010 in order to demonstrate how moving images created by digital technology could help viewers visualize and experience the passage of time. A white digital screen simulates the concept of *void* in the material of rice paper; and the virtual space created by the digital screen represents a compressed temporal experience. Through animated images, I visually depicted layers of passing time in order to influence viewers’ perceptions of *time*. Before making my animation, I first set up and completed the performance in my studio and then recorded the whole process. Finally I created an animation to simulate the process (see animation in DVD [2] of Appendix G).

In this section, I have attempted to analyse the content of my animation work by using clipped images as a visual sequence (Figures 111-114). The digital animation presents a sheet of rice paper on which one can practise Chinese calligraphy with an ink brush. My digital animation presents a square sheet of rice paper. Before I can write anything on it, the paper divides into 16 pieces, which then form themselves into a stack. The animation shows these 16 smaller sheets of rice paper stacked one on top of the other. Next, Chinese ink and a brush become available. A Chinese character for ‘ten’ (十, shì) is written on the small square sheet of paper at the top of the stack. Then the animated character or hand simply leaves the paper for 10 minutes.
Figure 111. Video clips of ‘LB1TP’ as a sequence with time markers added to illustrate the time frame of each clip. Artist: HUNG Keung; Hong Kong (2010).

Figure 112. Video clips as a sequence with time markers added to illustrate the time frame of each clip.

Figure 113. Video clips as a sequence with time markers added to illustrate the time frame of each clip.
Finally, these 16 sheets of rice paper are arranged face upward in a square measuring four sheets up by four sheets across: the sheet at the top of the stack went in the upper left-hand corner, and the subsequent sheets followed from left to right to the end of the given row. After reaching the far right side of any of the first three rows, the process continues like a typewriter, dropping to the far left of the next row down and proceeding from left to right until the last sheet of rice paper is positioned in the far right hand corner of the bottom row. All the sheets then appear to be mounted on a wall, and viewers can see the gradations of ink markings: the ink will have bled through the top sheet of rice paper leaving fainter and fainter ink markings on each subsequent sheet of rice paper down the stack all the way to the last sheet, where the ink is barely visible. The completion of these wall postings marks the end of the animation.
In this performance and animation my aim was to demonstrate that we could have the spatiotemporal experience of ‘ten minutes’ in ‘one second’ through real time and digital-representation platforms. This type of experience simulates the experience one has while appreciating slab art, calligraphy \(^{223}\), and in particular colophon writing with seals from different epochs, all of which are compressed onto a two-dimensional platform but suggest a sense of layering of content. This is because, firstly, although traditional Chinese slab art and colophon writing are in a two-dimensional visual platform, within their two dimensions different experiences of time are enacted. Secondly, these two platforms can create spatiotemporal experiences outside the experiences generated by the artwork itself. For example, as observed above, to view colophon writing and seals is analogous to entering a time machine in which one can travel from era to era, arriving at and departing from various points of historical interest along the way. In such an artwork, a two-dimensional plane has compressed spatiotemporal dimensions that act as a bridge between the past and the present and that create, for the viewer in the present, a sense of intimacy with the past. In this way \(LBITP\) demonstrates not only that digital-media art can present and shape conceptions of the passage of time, but also that digital technology can trigger 4D experiences on a 2D plane.

To sum up, here in the digital era, I have created a piece of experimental digital art \(LBITP\) to examine how digital technology can help people further visualize conceptions of the passage of time in relation to the traditional concept of layering of content. \(LBITP\) is an example that demonstrates how Chinese character writing and digital technology can separately and together express and trigger a unique spatiotemporal experience. The process of experimenting with \(LBITP\) inspired me to further explore this theme in terms of simplified and traditional Chinese character writing combined with digital technology. This inspiration served as the foundation on which I developed my interactive projects \(Bloated City & Skinny Language\) (2006 -2008) and \(Dao Gives Birth to One\) (2009-2012).

\(^{223}\) The process of Chinese calligraphy writing can create in the writer a significant experience of time passing as well (see Chapter 1).
3.5. Chapter conclusion

The results of my investigations in this chapter reflect the idea of non-linear, cyclic narrative embodied in ancient Chinese art. I have also shown how this is commonly overlaid so that different parts of the narrative reveal themselves to the viewer in a manner that correlates with the elements of loop and layering of content developed by digital art today. Through digital-media technology viewers can have real-time experience of time passing, and of the imprint left by the past on the present and by the present on the past.

However, the analysis of a number of contemporary Asian digital artworks suggests that digital-media technology does not find it easy to connect the traditional to the contemporary, particularly with regard to viewers’ engagement. In order to overcome this lack of connection it is crucial that artists should seriously consider viewers’ spatiotemporal experiences in relation to such ideas as ‘play-appreciation’ through bodily engagement. I recommend the ongoing exploitation of the possibilities of digital technology in ways like those indicated above, so that the traditional Chinese notion of time can continue to be translated into a modern idiom and realized on a modern artistic platform.
Chapter 4: Comparisons of space

4.1. Introduction

The theme of this chapter is the relation between heterogeneous identities and spatial experience. I aim to illustrate how multiple identities and spaces were applied in the past in traditional Chinese painting, allowing viewers to assume various different positions (identities) in relation to the artwork, and I will argue that this correlates with contemporary digital media art, which allows the artist to play with the idea of multiple identities through dual and multiple screens. Secondly, I will indicate how my own Asian Hong Kong cultural background has affected my interpretation of the idea of 'ambiguity', and how my experience of multiple identities has inspired my approach to digital technology. Thirdly, I will examine how the experience of ‘virtual space’ can be traced back to the ancient Chinese theory and philosophy of art, which also correlates to contemporary art and digital media-art practice, inasmuch as it gives viewers the impression that they are inside a virtual world. Finally, I will discuss how a contemporary Chinese artist and a digital media artwork from the West have applied the traditional idea of handling time and space to their work through the experience of multiple and shifting viewpoints.

4.2. Multiple identities and multiple spaces

In this section, I have taken an episode, ‘The Toilette Scene’, from the ancient Chinese scroll painting Admonition of the Instructress to Palace Ladies 224 (317 - 420 CE) (Figure 116) as an example to illustrate how multiple identities were applied through multiple viewpoints and spaces to a female character with the idea of ‘binary

224 Chinese: 女士箴圖卷
vision / visual mode’ (Wu 1995, pp. 256-271), allowing viewers to assume three different positions (identities) towards the work. This multifaceted approach has always relied on groundbreaking visualization technique in terms of visual composition and spatial manipulation, providing the viewer with compressed layers of optical experience in a two-dimensional visual platform.

Figure 116. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

‘The Toilette Scene’ is categorized as episode 7 of the scroll painting *Admonition of the Instructress to Palace Ladies* 225, attributed to the painter Gu Kaizhi (c. 344-406) of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420 CE). It illustrates episodes 226 from an eighty-line poem about Confucian ethics composed in 292 CE by the savant and courtier Zhang Hua (張華) (232-300) to admonish Empress Jia Nanfeng (賈南風) (256-300), the ruthless wife of Hui Di (惠帝) (290-306), the young emperor of the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316 CE). According to historical sources Zhang Hua’s ‘Admonitions’

225 This painting is generally believed to be a copy dating from the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), or even a later 11th century copy. Nevertheless, the painting is still regarded as an outstanding and significant example of how Chinese artists in the fourth century were able to use single pictorial representation for narration and to do so with considerable skill.

226 In fact it was originally a long-scroll painting containing twelve episodes; however, the original painting was, over time, cut into 12 square pieces. Each piece contains one episode, and today nine of these (episodes 4-12, the ‘Toilette Scene’ being episode 7) are in the British Museum, London; the rest have been lost.
poem was highly treasured at that time. It was illustrated in the form of a series of images accompanied by text in a long-scroll painting that is regarded as one of the most significant examples of scroll painting in Chinese art history. The ‘Toilette Scene’ reflects a creative visualization and skilful drawing technique in terms of the usage of multiple viewpoints and spatial manipulation. What viewers see is a complex layering of optical elements. Two ladies are apparently sitting in front of mirrors, but their pictorial representations are strikingly different. Regarding the lady who sits on the right with her back to the viewer, the viewer sees her face through a mirror reflection, and the lady’s face as reflected in the mirror becomes the focal point of the entire scene. On the right, behind her back, a Chinese text (part of the poem) is written in two vertical lines. The lady on the left sits in front of the mirror with her face towards the viewer and the mirror set in front of her. The viewer can see the back of this mirror but not the image reflected in it; here the pattern of the back of the mirror becomes the focal point. Behind this lady stands a servant, and beside the servant is the text of a poem, also written in two vertical lines. The poem in ‘The Toilette Scene’ contains two layers of meaning: (1) A person knows how to adorn his or her face, because the face constitutes an easy means by which to observe and to account for change. (2) It is difficult to know how to adorn one’s character, because the value of a cultivated character is invisible, unaccountable and hard to visualize. It is rooted in belief rather than action.

Thus ‘The Toilette Scene’ features two different viewpoints that illustrate two different levels of value, each focused on the meaning of beauty. Level (1) addresses the beauty of the face or surface; level (2) indicates the inner beauty of the human character. According to Professor Wu Hung’s visual analysis (Figure 117), each group is itself a pair of mirror images, and together the two groups again form a reflecting double (Wu 1995, p. 268).

227 ‘Admonition of the Instructress to Palace Ladies’ is regarded as a narrative-type painting – one of the most common narrative formats of early East Asian scroll art (McCausland 2003, p. 32).

228 The English translation is “Men and women know how to adorn their faces; But there is none who knows how to adorn his or her character; Yet if the character be not adorned; There is a danger that rules of conduct may be transgressed” (McCausland 2003, p. 63).

229 The English translation is “Correct your character as with an axe; Embellish it as with a chisel; Strive to create holiness in your own nature” (McCausland 2003, p. 63).
In Wu’s interpretation ‘The Toilette Scene’ offers the viewer a binary perspective on one and the same event: that of a lady attending to her appearance with the aid of a servant and a mirror. In the left-hand image the viewer is situated behind the mirror and looks directly towards the lady’s face; in the right-hand image he or she is situated behind the lady (the position of the servant in the first image) and looks over the lady’s shoulder at her mirrored reflection (Figure 118).

Figure 118. (Left) The viewer sees not only the lady’s real face but also the reflection of her face in the mirror. (Right) At the same time the viewer seems to be invited to see what the lady is seeing (visual analysis by the author).

This leaves the further question: what is the effect of such an optical illusion? Perhaps the chief effect is the viewer’s experience of multiple spatial layers as reflecting multiple layers of meaning. In its multiplicity of viewpoints, the visual narrative in
‘The Toilette Scene’ takes the form not of a single linear thread, but of a repetitive cycle resting on the concept of ‘binary vision’ through motion sequences, and of a parallel cyclical multiplicity in the concept of meaning. For the situation as depicted reflects the traditional Chinese saying 230 ‘An outsider often sees more clearly than the participant of a game’ 231. This saying indicates that if one is personally involved in a matter, it is easy to blind oneself to the truth; however, if one is not involved in the matter, it is possible to see things more clearly and objectively. Thus the text beside these two ladies identifies the consequences implicit in the binary vision illustrated by the painting: that when it comes to adorning one’s character, one knows nothing.

I would, therefore, conclude that such a visual arrangement transforms the role of the viewer from outsider to participant: viewers can take the role of the lady or of another character inside the pictorial space, and they will then have the opportunity to witness the entire situation closely and virtually and to draw their own conclusions with the wisdom and cultivation traditionally required of the art-lover. The relative positions of the ladies and the mirror(s) functions, therefore, not just to help viewers directly visualize the content of the text but also to enable them to form multiple layers of meaning through multiple viewpoints and spatial experiences.

What is most significant in this context is, therefore, to note that the two mirrors and two ladies in the painting are in fact the same mirror and lady with different positions in the pictorial space. This visual representation method is similar to that of ‘The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai’. The lady on the right-hand side of the painting seems to invite viewers to see what she is seeing, as shown in Figure 118. And the left-hand side of this painting presents another lady who seems to be sitting in front of the mirror, facing the viewer. The function of the mirror is to get the viewer involved in the scene of the scroll’s pictorial space, so that no viewer remains a merely passive third party. The back of the mirror signifies the thing that is missed—that is beyond the mirror’s capacity to reflect. Indeed, the back of this mirror represents an

---

230 Original Text: 「當局稱迷，傍（旁）觀見審。」《舊唐書·元行沖傳》
231 Chinese: 旁觀者清，當局者迷
alternative space in which the viewer can play a participatory role. The viewer sees the back of the mirror, which implies that he or she is able to see something that the lady might have missed—again indicating the (hidden) meaning of the painting in relation to the text it also incorporates.

In a bold transition from ancient China to modern movies, Professor Jerome Silbergeld has taken *Vertigo* (1958) (Figure 119), directed by Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980), as an example of how mirrors can imply two identities, an interpretative key he then applies to ‘The Toilette Scene’ (Silbergeld 2004, p. 89). Silbergeld first observes that the painting’s text does not mention a mirror, so that the scene comprising a pair of court ladies making themselves up in front of a mirror functions as a ‘metaphoric linkage’ of inner character and moral scrutiny. He notes that similar scenes appear in movies nowadays: “One experiences the same thing in Vertigo, seeing Judy [Judy Barton] at her mirror making herself up as someone she isn’t” (Silbergeld 2004, pp. 89-90).

Figure 119. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

In the movie Kim Novak (1933- ) plays the roles of young working-class Judy Barton and allegedly upper-class Madeleine Elster, ‘who appears in her [the Barton

\[232\] Jerome Silbergeld is a Professor of Chinese art in the Art and Archaeology Department of Princeton University.
character’s] makeup mirror as double-doubles, particularly unreal[ized] people who need—or for whom the audience needs—to discover her “true”self” (Silbergeld 2004, p. 89).

An examination of *Vertigo* in the light of this statement reveals several scenes relating to ‘mirror reflections’ (Figures 119-121). First, there is a scene in which Madeleine Elster is combing her hair as she looks at herself in the mirror, with her back facing not only John 'Scottie' Ferguson 233 but also the viewer. Secondly, in Figure 121 scene no. (1) shows Judy Barton facing the mirror, and scene no. (2) shows her facing Ferguson with her back to the mirror, which therefore reflects her back. This visual composition also implies the audience as being outside the scene. As viewers we observe and discover a reality that John 'Scottie' Ferguson perhaps does not realize at that moment.

---

233 Played by actor James Stewart (1908-1997).
Judy Barton in the movie and the ‘Palace Ladies’ in the painting correlate to each other insofar as they imply the concept of binary vision through a mirror-reflection doubling of images; the role of the viewer expands in both cases into implied involvement in the pictorial space of the movie (Figure 121).

 Accordingly, the visual composition of ‘The Toilette Scene’ suggests a motion sequence that, consequently, is similar to storyboarding for a movie (which features different viewpoints from which one can observe a scene). Viewers can set their vision in motion by shifting their gaze from one viewpoint to another. In fact, the position of the lady is like an axis around which the viewer’s viewpoint can head off into the pictorial space in different directions; the visual effect of this motion sequence is a virtual 360-degree viewing experience. The viewer is challenged by the painting to take up a flowing—and as such virtually infinite—series of virtual standpoints (rather than simply two). Or to put it another way, moving from the lady
on the left to the lady on the right, the viewer becomes immersed in reflection on reflection of reflection—a process that is virtually infinite (Figures 122-123).

Figure 122. Multiple layers of meaning created by multiple viewpoints and spatial experiences (visual analysis by the author).

Figure 123. The visual effect of the motion sequence amounting to a 360-degree virtual viewing experience (visual analysis by the author).

In terms of space, the artwork thus creates a sense of transition by shifting the viewer’s gaze from one viewpoint to another. The work invites viewers to be a third
person or a participant closely immersed in the pictorial space and in the reflection on levels and layers of meaning that it entails. With four different viewpoints (two from the ladies, and two from the viewer) emerging simultaneously, ‘The Toilette Scene’ triggers and at the same time reflects a spatiotemporal experience that can virtually shift the viewer’s identity both inside and outside of the pictorial space. Such a virtual experience is made possible by the skilfully executed visual composition combining, in its essence, just a lady and a mirror.

In conclusion, ‘The Toilette Scene’ not only provides two different positions from which viewers can explore various viewpoints, but also creates opportunities for viewers to have dynamic spatiotemporal experiences in the virtual domain created by the painting. Through the position of the two ladies the painting leads the viewer’s gaze in various directions, ultimately creating the possibility of a 360-degree viewing experience. Every aspect of my encounter with this work, encapsulated in the foregoing analysis has enriched my depiction of multiple identities and my promotion of viewers’ unusual illusionary and shifting spatiotemporal experiences in my own digital art projects.

4.3. Heterogeneous identity: the example of Hong Kong

I will now turn to the way in which my own Asian cultural background has affected my sensitivity and interpretation of multiple identities, and how my experience of ambiguity has inspired my artistic approach toward digital technology. I will further illustrate how the layering potential of digital-media technology has helped me to transfer a multiple identity experience to an audience.

I have long been interested in examining and exploring the Hong Kong identity, which should be regarded as multiple identities that gradually developed in one of the world’s more curious political zones. My special interest in this topic may stem from my early background in China and my current backdrop of Hong Kong (as mentioned
in the Introduction). I always encounter myriad cultural influences when interacting with my friends, family and living neighbourhood – ‘Upstairs Culture’. These issues have confused me for as long as I have thought about them. Am I Indonesian Chinese, Chinese, or Hong Kongese? Referring to Anthea Fan’s curatorial statement (as mentioned in the Introduction), I also argue that the ‘upstairs culture’—“the limitation of space and high rent rate give birth to the so-called upstairs business culture” (Fan 2004)—correlates to the phenomenon of ‘multiple cultures and identities’. This drove me to create a series of digital photo stills integrated with moving images that express my artistic and conceptual impressions of Hong Kong people and their flexible approach to survival in this overcrowded and dynamic living space.

My experiences of ‘multiple identities’ and ‘Upstairs Culture’ act like a mirror reflecting each other and at the same time reflecting Hong Kong’s benefits from the intercultural environment and its people’s ambiguous sense of what it means to be Chinese and Hong Kongese. All this tumult has enabled me—a Chinese born Hong Kongese with Indonesian Chinese family background—to consider the possibility of presenting various takes on ‘a sense of ambiguity’ and ‘multiple identities’ through digital media art. On the basis of this background, I created Upstairs/Downstairs project (2004-2012) and Bloated City & Skinny Languages (2006-2008).

**Case study: Upstairs/Downstairs Project**

Since the 1980s many theorists have discussed and made statements about the function of multiple screen experiments. One example worthy of note is Prof. Peter Weibel, who stated, “Many film artists carried out radical experiments with the screen itself. It was explored and multiplied, either through division into multiple images

---

234 Anthea Fan’s argument was that the upstairs business culture contributed to the unique character of Hong Kong’s business culture, and her awareness of the importance of these features in relation to Hong Kong’s identity inspired her to propose a multifaceted exhibition about the city’s upstairs culture (Fan 2004).  
235 In 2004, the public-art project ‘Upstairs / Downstairs: A Dialogue with Hong Kong’ commissioned the video installation Upstairs/Downstairs: A Dialogue with Hong Kong: Stories of Human Activities Told in the 1,440 minutes of a 24-hour Stretch (2004-2012).  
236 Jerome Silbergeld (Silbergeld 2004, p.89); Peter Weibel (Weibet 2002, pp 42-43); Gregory Markopoulos (Weibet 2002, p.43)
using split-screen techniques or by placing screens on several different walls.”
(Weibel 2002, p.42) Today, digital technology enables artists to play with the idea of multiple identities and identity transitions, because dual or multiple screens allow split identities on the one hand, and motion and stillness on the other, to be presented simultaneously to the viewer. In this section I will exemplify these processes in one of my own experimental digital video installations from the Upstairs/Downstairs project.

**(i) Multiple identities in time and space: the artwork**

In relation to *time*, the project uses the notion of duration to exploit colour differences, and addresses the viewer’s sense of change and motion by initiating colour-transition effects, creating an illusionary temporal experience through a combination of moving images and stills. In relation to *space*, these same fragmentary moving images and stills present viewers with illusionary spatial experiences based on Hong Kong’s ‘upstairs/downstairs’ culture. Both elements are combined in the idea of the multiple spatiotemporal identities of the protagonists of this culture, and in this respect I found another key element for the artistic transformation of the ‘upstairs/downstairs’ experience in *Dao* thinking, which is about the ‘one’ representing ‘all things’ in the universe, and all things standing in a generative, dialectical tension between the opposite but complementary principles of *yin* and *yang*.237 I inquired whether and in what way *Dao* could inform and facilitate these multiple identities and the multiple spatial layers of my video art, anchoring them in the Chinese artistic and philosophical tradition. I will now go on to explain and comment on this unique culture and its artistic transformation in and through digital media.

***(ii) Multiple identities in time and space: the city***

Hong Kong’s Causeway Bay is an area with both old and new buildings, both residential and shopping areas. Walking along old streets there and climbing the stairs

---

237 “The *Dao* generated One; One generated Two; Two generated Three; Three generated the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things, carrying yin and embracing yang, used the empty vapour to achieve harmony” (Huang 2003, p. 76). Huang’s version is based on the Silk Texts A and B unearthed from the Han tombs near Changsha, Hunan Province in China in 1973.
to the upper floors of the old buildings can draw from people like me, who experienced these parts of Hong Kong years earlier, memories stretching from childhood to adulthood. Memories of tutorial classes, private parties, clinics, bookstores, cafés, sexual activities etc., are powerful associations many Hong Kong residents have with the upstairs culture of that area. In 2000, while I was still living in Causeway Bay, a stream of new upstairs shops opened their doors for business around my residential area. Unlike the new ground-level, street-side boutiques, these new businesses started up without cutting ribbons, choreographic ceremonies, or swanky opening-day parties. However, these stores lacked neither excitement nor customers. My observations over these years suggested that what people could find ‘upstairs’ might not be the same as what they could find ‘on the street’. This unique upstairs culture provided people with an exception to traditional shopping by giving them an opportunity to make alternative discoveries and engage in alternative adventures.

Before starting my video shooting, my first step was to identify the identities of the people who are related to this ‘upstairs culture’. My second step was to investigate what kind of people were living in and hanging around the Yau Ma Tei area. I sought to determine their different identities, then I examined how different identities could be experimentally applied to, and represented by, one single character in a video work.

Firstly, my research team and I took two months to study and observe different types of people who were living in the Yau Ma Tei area. We visited a number of streets in and around the area, observed people we met in the street, and collected data about them. After carefully reviewing the statistical work from our research, we identified twelve representative categories—or ‘groups’—of people corresponding to the area’s population (residents and visitors). These groups are (1) female salesperson (‘salesgirl’), (2) female homemaker (‘housewife’), (3) recent immigrant (male and female), (4) sex-worker (male and female), (5) construction worker (male and female), (6) student (male and female) and (7) visitors from Hong Kong / the mainland of China (male and female). Within these seven categories some of the people we met in the Yau Ma Tei area sometimes had two to three roles (yin and yang) in their daily life. For example, there might be students in the daytime who wait tables at night; and there might be housewives in the morning who work as salesgirls in the afternoon and night-time. Moreover, some people who worked outside the household did so in
second-floor or third-floor shops. These multiple functions were attributable not just to people but to interior spaces as well: some upstairs shops that might be a CD music and DVD shop in the daytime would transform into a café at night. These variations, with their many ramifications, can be regarded as multiple identities, accounting for the total of twelve categories mentioned above. I found it unnecessary to cover the entire spectrum of different people living in Yau Ma Tei; instead, I simplified the number of people by drawing symbolically on the relationship between the ‘one’ and ‘the whole’: the application of this relationship to my video work was one of the main concepts underlying the work. And, as the basic artistic strategy for my video work, I invited a young woman actress to represent these twelve identities.

(iii) Multiple identities and Dao

It was at this point that I had recourse to the Dao definition from Dao De Jing, for the meaning of the number ‘one’ in traditional Chinese thought has always been richly conceptual:

The Dao (Dao) gives birth to One. One gives birth to Two. Two gives birth to Three. Three gives birth to all things. All things have their backs to the female and stand facing the male. When male and female combine, all things achieve harmony. (Dao De Jing, Mitchell, 1988, p. 48)

According to Dao De Jing, the meaning of ‘one’ involves much more than the number one: ‘one’, originating from Dao, generates all things. This reflects the traditional Chinese philosophy of the universe (time and space): the ‘whole’, the ‘one’ represents ‘all things’ in the universe, and all things stand in a generative, dialectical tension between the opposite but complementary principles of yin and yang. Here seemed to be a key to the understanding of how digital technology could contribute to portraying—and creating experiences of—multiple identities. I set out to present the twelve groups of people by resting my presentation on the Dao’s philosophical extension of ‘the one’ to the ‘ten thousand’. With this in mind I restricted the shooting
of the video to one day—24 hours—which would represent all the things that could happen in this area over the course of a given day. Thus, the title phrase ‘1,440 minutes’ (equal to ‘one’ day) suggests a series of unconnected but relevant single scenes playing out at every moment in every conceivable place. My intention was for this intensive ‘one-day’ shoot to symbolize the philosophical idea of the ‘one’. So the adjective ’24-hour’ in the subtitle *Stories of Human Activities Told in the 1,440 minutes of a 24-hour Stretch* need not represent the exact number of temporal units in one particular day; it simply signified the daily life of the Yau Ma Tei area’s residents.

From my initial researches I drew the following conclusion: the *Dao’s* core reference to the evolution of one into multiplicity—i.e. into the whole—should underlie the making of my proposed video work, which would use one actress with 6 pairs of costumes, 6 make-up styles, and 6 hairstyles for 12 identities. Each costume (and its corresponding make-up style and hairstyle) was split into 2 parts: one on the left, and the other on the right, representing *yin* and *yang*, which also refer to characteristics that are hidden from and appear in reality. Thus two identities would be combined into one character with each costume (Figures 124-126), and the actress completed the series by constantly changing her costume throughout the day of shooting. The shoots in the Yau Ma Tei area took place at six spots, and I estimate that the process took about twelve hours, including the walk that the actress took from the first location at Langham Place to the final one at the Broadway Cinematheque. I chose these two spots as starting point and end-point because they symbolize this old district’s historical relevance. Langham Place, Office Tower, and Langham Place Hotel are a 3-in-1 renewal project completed in 2004. Both Langham Place and Broadway Cinematheque are regarded as alternative new locations, so their choice reflected a transition from old to new space.

---

238 *Yin* (negative) refers to characteristics that are hidden from reality; *yang* (positive) refers to characteristics that appear in reality.
239 Built in 1996, Broadway Cinematheque is regarded as an alternative cinema house that offers cutting-edge concepts on the screen, with a diverse and unique selection of internationally acclaimed movies, and offers one-stop service by tying together a cinema, a café, a bookstore, and a CD & DVD store, all of which allow movie lovers to experience diverse consumption at a single location.
240 The three structures have a height of 32 stories, so from these heights, we could have—at the outset—a bird’s-eye view of the surrounding Mongkok neighbourhood and the Yau Mei Tei area.
(iv) Multiple identities and divided selves

The next step in the process was to examine how the idea of ‘split frames’ (as divided selves) incorporating a series of fragmentary stills and moving images could suggest multiple viewpoints through the division of spatiotemporal experience. This preoccupation with fragmental images reflected my childhood experiences in the lobby of a favourite movie theatre. When I was between 8 and 12 years old, I seldom had a chance to watch movies at movie theatres; instead, I would hang out in the lobbies of the theatres just to be close to the action. I had long been attracted to film stills, lobby cards, posters, and bulletin boards that would advertise the latest releases around the ticket office just inside movie theatres. Usually, I would imagine the storyline of the movie by mapping together a series of film stills. When guessing the overall plot of a movie portrayed only in film stills, which were fragmented by their very nature, I obviously had to fill in the blanks by calling on my imagination. The real pleasure in this task of the imagination was not so much accurately inferring the storyline from sparse evidence as engaging in the process of imaginative mapping, which provided me, as a young boy, plenty of space for experiencing limited and non-linear sceneries and scenarios—all based on either a single still image or a series of relatively independent single images. With this basis in my own biography, I
transformed the experience of mapping a series of still images into one of the elements of my video work, first creating about 1000 still images and a series of videos footages about the daily activities of the actress in the Yau Ma Tei area, and then manipulating over 80% of the still images and 20% of the moving images to create the work. In line with the idea "Be broken to be whole. Twist to be straight. Be empty to be full" from *Dao De Jing* 241, the idea of fragmental images may be regarded both as radically broken and as the starting point of the journey.

It is important to recall that, in the video work, the splitting takes place at several levels: the actress was first split into different characters, and then the pictorial space of the video screen was split along the lines of two types of image (still and moving images); moreover, the LCD screen was split into two sections (an upper and lower part) (Figure 127). First I rotated the LCD screen 242 and then split the video images into two sections (upper and lower) on the LCD screen. The visual representation of this video work was achieved through different split frame combinations: divisions in space, time, character, and so on, through the combination of motion and stillness as a sequence.

241 *Original text:* 『曲則全，枉則正；窪則盈，弊則新；少則得，多則惑。是以聖人抱一為天下式。不自見，故明；不自是，故彰；不自伐，故有功；不自矜，故長。夫惟不爭，故天下莫能與之爭。古之所謂「曲則全」，豈虛語？故成全而歸之。』 Chapter 22 of *Dao De Jing* states "Be broken to be whole. Twist to be straight. Be empty to be full. Wear out to be renewed. Have little and gain much. Have much and get confused" (Le Guin 1997, p. 31).

242 The setup of the LCD screen was turned 90 degrees (the screen still facing forward) and mounted with an up-down emphasis, which meant the ratio of the LCD screen format was 9:16. This setting helped avoid squishing the combined video images (upper and bottom) and made full use of the screen’s visual space.
The visual arrangement of the video images was split into three spaces: (1) upper space, (2) lower space, and (3) whole space (i.e. full screen) (Figure 128). The split frames generated four different combinations of still and moving images (Figure 129 - 130): (1) still/moving images in the upper part and moving images in the lower part; (2) still/moving images in the lower part and moving images in the upper part; (3) still/moving images (two, different from each other) in both upper and lower parts; (4) still/moving images occupying both upper and lower parts as one still image.
My intention was that by perceiving these fragmentary still and moving images viewers would be enabled, and feel welcome, to link their different personal experiences to the non-linear narrative of the video. In the end, viewers would participate in the creation of their own spatiotemporal experiences.

(V) Implementation of multiple identities with editing and visual effect

These combinations of still and moving images were then edited so that they differed from one another in their visual treatment—e.g. speed control, colour, lighting transition—in order to create a sense of temporal and spatial transition which
correlated with the traditional Chinese sense of ‘duration’. In this way people could have spatiotemporal experiences in terms of passing time. For example, to better understand the capacity of still images to give viewers the visual experience of movement, one can consider the effect of watching colour and light change at sunrise. The still images in my video work are like the sky, which acts as backdrop, but changes in colour, temperature, and other elements creating a sense of motion. However, a necessary variable—without which the apparent movement could not present itself—is ‘duration’ (久, jiu) 243 (for details see Chapter 1). The visual effect is similar to the time-lapse effect (time appears to be moving faster and thus lapsing) in film and video technologies. In fact, an extensive explanation and demonstration of similar methods have been made by the film-maker Gregory Markopoulos 244, who is famous for integrating fragmentary editing, intercuts and complex cross-fading techniques for his film works. According to the statement he made in *Filmculture* no. 31, Winter 1963-4, Markopoulos suggested proposing a new form of narration as a combination of classical montage technique with a more abstract system. He commented that this system incorporates the use of short film phase that evoked thought images. Each film phase comprised a selection of specific images similar to the harmonious unity of a musical composition. The film phases determined other interrelationships among themselves in classical montage technique, and a complex mirage of different images was then created (Shaw, J. & Weibel, P. eds. 2003, p.116-117).

Comparatively speaking, although I am using fragmentary images, my aim is to adapt this idea to my video-making in order to suggest a sense of temporal and spatial transition and ‘duration’. At the same time, I have sought to demonstrate how changes in a still image’s lighting and colour could suggest changing human moods according to the characters’ different identities in different occasions. A single video shot (i.e. a still image) allows viewers to have their own imaginative space regarding the object

---

243 The meaning of jiu (久, ‘duration’) corresponds to ‘lines’, and a line can stand for a ‘duration of time’ slightly longer than a ‘moment’ (see details in Chapter 1).

244 Gregory Markopoulos(1928-1992) is regarded as one of the significant early masters in the evolution of the New American Cinema of the 1960s, who developed unique forms of camera work and editing that created ravishing imagery and complex patterns of what he suggested as “thought-images.”
of the image; they can feel and guess what may have happened and what might happen next to the object (for details, see movie files in DVD [2] of Appendix H).

In conclusion, the *Upstairs/Downstairs* project addresses Hong Kong’s unique attributes of ‘multiple identities’ in the city’s upstairs culture, which also demonstrates how digital technology can help translate the idea of multiple identities and ‘divided selves’ of Hong Kong through applying the *Dao* idea of the ‘one’ and the ‘whole’. The ‘split (divided) frame’ method and the combination of a series of fragmentary stills and moving images enriches the depiction of multiple identities and identity transitions, as well as the promotion of viewers’ unusual illusionary spatiotemporal experiences. Viewers can see that the actress represents not herself but a conceptual identity or number—she represents the ‘one’, thereby standing for and generalizing a multiplicity of identities as a ‘whole’. And these multiple viewpoints, with their roots—as demonstrated earlier in this chapter—in the Chinese artistic and philosophical tradition, enact both in and into the present the continuum of Chinese cultural identity as played out in the politico-cultural living space of Hong Kong.

### 4.4. Virtual experience, multiple vision and bodily engagement

I will next examine how the idea of ‘virtual space’ can be traced back to ancient Chinese art. In ancient China, as in the modern world of art, viewers were encouraged to imagine themselves in a different reality and provided with representations of that reality. I will argue here that the ancient Chinese explored the idea of virtual experience and endowed artefacts with a capacity to trigger virtual experiences in people, usually for artistic and religious purposes.
Here I will first introduce the ideas of ‘binary vision’ and ‘reversed vision’ which have been applied to the role played by the imagination in viewers’ experiences of tombs through the Spirit Road; and I will examine how a contemporary gunpowder and firework performance, Ethereal Flowers (2002) could also give rise to such virtual experiences to the audience through ‘reversed vision’. Further, I will analyse the correlation between these two artworks and digital-media technology, which can give viewers the impression that they are inside a digital/virtual world. I will take the interactive installation entitled Parallel Reality (2003) by the Japanese digital media artist Masaki Fujihata (1956– ), along with my own ‘BCSL’ digital art project, to exemplify this capability of digital-media technology.

**Case study (I): The Spirit Road. A transparent platform for virtual experience**

In what follows, I will explore Prof. Wu Hung’s conception of “binary vision” and ‘reversed vision’ (Wu 1995 p. 251), applying it to the role played by the imagination in viewers’ experiences of the Han Dynasty tombs. I will introduce the ancient Chinese use of ‘binary vision’ to perceive ‘binary spaces’ (invisible and visible space), and discuss the matter in terms of bodily (spatial) engagement.

Wu proposed the term “transparent stone” to illustrate the material and symbolic functions of stone tables in ancient Chinese tombs (Wu 1995 p. 251). This ‘transparent stone’ enabled different kinds of viewer to navigate different spaces, travelling forward and backward between real and virtual worlds. Back-and-forth shifting of this kind took place, for instance, through the ‘reversed inscription’ engraved on the tomb of Emperor Wen Di (梁文帝) of the Liang Dynasty (502-557).

Prof. Wu Hung has suggested using ‘binary vision’ to illustrate how the tombs of the Han Dynasty gave visitors many perspectives of the ‘spirit road’ that varied according to differences between the visitors themselves (Wu 1995, pp. 251-280).
According to Wu Hung, leading up to all ancient Chinese tombs is a path whose sides feature sculptures (animals, humans, columns, and so on). At the entrance of the path, there is always a pair of creatures, known as bixie (or qilin), facing each other. Further ahead is a pair of columns with stone tablets bearing inscriptions. Two stone tablets stand opposite each other. A pair of stone-carved turtles form a memorial slab bearing epitaphs recording the profession and merits of the deceased (1995, pp. 251-280).

Figure 129. The basic structure of the ‘Spirit Road’, China, Liang Dynasty.

---

246 These Southern Dynasty creatures have been called “the most noble creatures to guard any tomb in Asia”. To be appreciated fully they must be seen in their natural habitat, for, like all Chinese monumental sculpture, their size and stance depend on the distance between them and the length of the spirit road. An analysis is given in Paludan, A. (1991), The Chinese Spirit Road. The Classical Tradition of Stone Tomb Statuary, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 55.

247 Bixie means ‘repeller of evil’.
Wu has stated that, according to common belief, this sequence of paired stones defines a central axis or ritual path leading to the tomb mound (Figure 131). This path, which is generally regarded as a way to heaven or other spaces for the deceased, is consequently built not for the living but for the departed: for souls travelling from their ‘old space’ to a ‘new space’. In Chinese, the path is generally called *shen dao* (神道), which translates as ‘the spirit road’ (Wu 1995, pp. 251-280). In the same sense the scholar Ann Paludan (1928- ) interpreted the sculptures built along the sides of the spirit road as symbolizing the boundary between life and death (Paludan 1991, p. 38). For example, the original Chinese characters inscribed on the stone tablets on the tomb of Emperor Wen Di are 太祖文皇帝之神道 (*tai zu wen huang di zhi shen dao*) (Figure 132), which can mean ‘the spirit road of Grand Supreme Emperor Wen’ in English. A particularly striking feature of these inscriptions is the ‘reversal’ or ‘binary vision’ mentioned above, for while the inscription on the left tablet consists of normal, recognizable Chinese characters, the one on the right features characters that are reversed—a mirror reflection. Commenting on this reversal, art historian Alois Riegl (1858-1905) stated, “it would become not only legible in content but normal in form if the reader could invert his own vision to read it from the “back”—from the other side of the column” (cited in Wu 1995, p. 254). As Wu noted, visitors have mentally transported themselves to the other side of the gate. They have forgotten the solid, opaque stone material, which has now become ‘transparent’ (Wu 1995, pp. 254-255). Given this ‘transparency’ and the allied concept of ‘passage’ associated with death, I suggest using the word ‘door’ (門, *men*) to represent the function of these stone tablets. I would argue that these two inscriptions (regular and reversed) do not so much make viewers forget about the original material of the stone as suggest a way of viewing two different and opposite spaces or zones along the spirit road. Through the ‘doorway’ of the reversed inscription viewers can draw a connection between life and death. To the viewers, these two stone tablets are solid visually and physically, but the ‘reversed inscription’ reminds them that the space they now occupy is unlike any space they have ever

---

248 “The links between Chinese monumental sculpture and architecture are obvious and close; indeed, the dividing line is often blurred and many stone monuments belong to both categories” (Paludan 1991, p. 38).
249 The words ‘mirrored’ or ‘reversed’ tend to have vague or ambiguous meanings; thus, I here re-examine mirrored or reversed inscriptions in Chinese art, and then on the basis of the results, I suggest
come across. This approach may imply that the two tablets acted as a door, allowing two groups of viewers from two different spaces to see things (texts/scenes) from opposite sides of the spirit road, and by the same token allowing the individual viewer to assume two different roles, this side and that of the doorway into death. Although different spirit roads may have different types of reversed-inscription combinations (for details, see Appendix 4.1. ‘Re-examinations’), they all invite viewers to immerse themselves virtually in the spirit road’s status as a crossroads between the familiar world of daily life and a world beyond.

The text etched in Chinese characters on the surface of these two stone tablets thus suggests both a virtual experience and a role-play involving its viewers. For Wu these ‘reversed inscriptions’ can be seen to target three groups of viewers: those that exist in reality, those that do not exist in reality (the deceased), and those that can position themselves in virtual space (Wu 1995, pp. 525-576). The ‘reversed inscriptions’ of the stone tablets thus act as a visual platform connecting the virtual world and reality. In this sense the experience of accessing the spirit road can, I would argue, be called a

Figure 130. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

using the term ‘reversed’ rather than the terms ‘mirror’ or ‘mirrored’ (for details, see Appendix 4.1. ‘Re-examinations’).
virtual experience. This is confirmed by Ann Paludan’s statement that the reversed writings were thought to be more legible to spirits (Paludan 1991, p. 75).

Summing up, we can, therefore, say first that the reversed inscriptions postulate the existence of viewers from a partly or wholly different space, world, or plane. Secondly, the experience of viewing these inscriptions provides viewers from the conventional world with an opportunity to view matters from either side of the divide of death, assuming various perspectives and identities, including those that come from spaces, worlds, or planes foreign to them. This ‘binary vision’ thus enables viewers to have two different spatiotemporal experiences at the same time, one real the other virtual.

Figure 131. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

A similar approach has been applied in contemporary artworks such as Cai Guo-qiang’s gunpowder and firework performance, which also incorporates diverse viewer roles and spaces (the latter both visible and invisible). An analysis of this work follows, focusing on the question how Cai Guo-qiang’s *Ethereal Flowers* (2002) implies and depicts virtual space.
Case study (II): *Ethereal Flowers*. Experiencing virtual space through binary vision / reversed vision

*Ethereal Flowers* is an artwork through which viewers are able not only to perceive reality at specific moments, but also to experience an imaginary spiritual realm that requires them to ask who and where they are. *Ethereal Flowers* is a three-and-a-half hour performance (from dusk to midnight) involving gunpowder and fireworks presented, in the instance examined here, at the City Cemetery in Trento, Italy 250 (Figure 134).

*Ethereal Flowers* primarily expresses the passing of time. When one views exploding gunpowder, the duration of the scene is brief, but the aspects of the explosion—colour, light, flame and odour—linger for varying stretches of time, and all eventually become a haze of dust weighing heavy in the air some time after the explosion. *Time* is generally regarded as a phenomenon that passes in a flash, as something that can be neither captured nor perceived as a discrete dimension. *Ethereal Flowers*, however, presents time as a connection to the past, the present, and the future by making use of smoke, fire, flame, sound, light, and the like, which outline the features of time in the sense of a structured sequence in which the main ‘event’ of the explosion is prolonged by a multi-sensual series of ‘echoes’. In general, the explosion of gunpowder lasts only a few seconds. However, such ordered moments before and after the explosion suggest a visual journey (narrative) of impacts fading, of experiencing an object’s disappearance—in other words what we call ‘time passing’.

The venue of this performance art is site specific, and in Trento the site was the city cemetery. Here the audience 251 correlated to the types of audience viewing reversed inscriptions in the ‘spirit road’: both the engraved tablets and the gunpowder and firework performance reflect a world that connects to what we can conceive as

---

250 The Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea Trento (Trento, Italy) invited Cai to present this work in 2002, and on September 6 at 9:00 pm, he began the presentation at the City Cemetery. The performance lasted about 3 hours and 30 minutes.

251 I categorize the types of the audiences as follows: (1) Audiences that exist in reality and witness the show on-site; (2) Audiences that have passed away, and hence do not exist in reality—but that are believed to reside in another space (an invisible space). In this respect the ‘residents’ of the cemetery are also considered as viewers.
different spatial dimensions—and thus dimensions of bodily engagement at the same
time. Further light can be shed on this by comments of the artist himself. In a 2008
newspaper interview with Cai he recalled an experience he had had the day after a
performance of *Ethereal Flowers*. He was crossing a street when he met some people
who bowed in gratitude to him. Stepping in front of him, one of the passers-by
expressed his deep gratitude for the artwork, and mentioned that his mother—though
she had passed away (to another space)—would have taken delight in the previous
night’s performance. Cai was touched by the compliment, which reflects how his
artwork, even though its highlights only last for a few seconds, could place an
audience, through bodily engagement and multiple vision, in two different spaces, one
of them real, the other virtual—or, to put it slightly differently, could connect two
audience groups in two such spaces—simultaneously.

Figure 132. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

On the basis of my analysis of multiple visions in two Chinese works, one ancient and
the other modern, I was led to consider whether these concepts might play a role in
digital media technology and/or in other Asian cultures. Hence my next case study is

**Case study (III): *Morel’s Panorama***

**Multiple spatiotemporal experiences**

Both ‘reversed inscriptions’ and *Ethereal Flowers* correspond to the idea of virtual worlds because of the tablets’ and the cemetery’s capacity to give viewers an immersive experience, to reverse the positions of visible and invisible (or imaginary) space, and to forge a connection between the past and the present. These characteristics readily correlate to digital-media artwork, and an appropriate example is the interactive media project *Morel’s Panorama*, by Prof. Masaki Fujihata (1956-), which gives viewers the opportunity both to perceive themselves virtually and to have real-time as well as multiple virtual spatiotemporal experiences (Figure 133). Digital technology enables viewers to undergo an abstract and real visual experience in relation to two different spaces at the same time.

Technically speaking, according to Dr. Lawrence Auld, virtual reality (VR) can be thought of as three-dimensional, using the x, y, and z axes typically associated with Cartesian space. VR requires computers, appropriate software, and sometimes special apparatus (Auld 2000). The digital artist and historian Margot Lovejoy has also observed that “the computer’s capacity to “see mathematically” enables us to see more completely than we can with the human eye alone”, the result generated by the computer—depending on the level of its (semiotic) transformation—being either a ‘simulacrum’ (假象) or a ‘simulation’ (模仿). In this sense VR can be regarded

---

252 *Morel’s Panorama* is also referred to as *Parallel Realities* (Interview with Masaki, National Museum of Art, Singapore, July 30, 2008).
253 “Simulacrum refers to a copy of a copy of the real […] through mechanical reproduction copies of copies of the original circulate in the culture in a way that changes their meaning” (Lovejoy 2004, p. 159).
as “virtual precisely because it is both abstract and real” (Lovejoy 2004, p. 156-159)—i.e. it inhabits two different cognitive realms simultaneously. Lovejoy goes on to quote the critic and scholar Andrew Menard on this issue:

Even if we are never able to resolve the opposition between real and fake, copy and model, technical developments now take us into a territory where a parallel reality exists – one that resides within reality – where the perfection of mathematical modelling creates a reality which has been called “virtual reality”. (Cited in Lovejoy 2004, p.160)

Figure 133. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Menard’s “territory where a parallel reality exists” is a function of the relation between the notion of ‘reality’ and the cognitive processes that give rise to it. It is this relation that Fujihata set out to explore in Morel’s Panorama. He himself explained the connection when he first introduced this artwork to me in his Tokyo studio in

254 “Simulation is a system of computerized mathematical instructions which can be made to imitate or approximate a kind of reality we can term “virtual” because it does not in fact have an existence as an object nor is it a copy of the object in the sense that it is a photographic trace of it. Simulation is a mathematical model of the real, a new kind of representation” (Lovejoy 2004, p. 159).
2004. In 2008 I conducted a further interview with him in Singapore. He explained that *Morel’s Panorama* was not one of his personal pieces of art; instead, it was actually a ‘lecture project’ initiated by Dr. Takemochi Ishii, in relation to ‘quantum theory’. It was against this background that Dr. Takemochi Ishii invited Fujihata to examine whether digital-media art could help illustrate the ‘many-worlds’ idea.

The result was *Morel’s Panorama*.

When viewers enter the exhibition space presenting this work in the InterCommunication Centre (ICC) in Japan, they see a series of cylindrically shaped moving images projected onto a wall. A panorama camera installed in the centre of the exhibition area captures the surroundings by recording real-time images reflected by a hemispherical mirror. The exhibition statement from ICC is as follows:

*In another cylinder that appears on and off, pre-recorded footage of the artist himself is also mapped in the same way. The camera lens is pointed towards the photographic subject as a surrogate for our line of vision, but in the case of a panorama lens that can shoot a range of 360 degrees, there is no such thing as being ‘behind the camera’. That is to say, people are made to be the photographic objects at the same time as they are the viewers and are transformed into the viewed. In this regard the panorama camera can be said to have properties that are very close to those of*
mirs, but unlike with mirrors, the line of sight is not directly in front of the lens.  

In this case, Fujihata has remarked that the viewer’s experience is like that of a person standing in front of a large mirror, except for the fact that digital media are recording, digitizing, transmitting, and reproducing exhibition visitors’ real-time images, relocating the images in a virtual space possessing unique spatiotemporal characteristics. This process involves the superimposing of multiple layers on one another. The work features cylindrical shapes generated by digital projection, and superimposed on the sides of the cylinders are images moving round and round, suggesting a cycle—an endless spatiotemporal process. The result is at one and the same time a ‘looping’ and an ‘ongoing’ scene in real-time visual experience. The same person (the viewer) appears in different space in a single temporal experience with different layers. The relevance of this body of art thus extends outside the domain of art to theories of reality, and it may be said in conclusion that Morel’s Panorama inhabits the interface between art, physics and philosophy. In relation to the argument of this chapter, Fujihata’s work has relevance to (1) viewers’ immersive experiences of virtual space, (2) reversals of visible space and invisible space, and (3) connections between the temporal dimensions of past and present. Pursuing these ideas, I attempted to examine if a similar effect could be obtained through my own interactive ‘BCSL’ project, which visualized and simulated the experience of ambiguity by projecting viewers into two different spaces with the assistance of digital media technology. A detailed discussion of this project follows.

261 ibid.
Case study (IV): BCSL

Shifting the role of the viewer

The aim of my interactive installation *Bloated City & Skinny Language (version I & II)* (BCSL) (2006-08) is to invite viewers to encounter two different identities through dual screen visual representations and bodily engagement. As mentioned above (see Thesis Overview and Chapter 4), I have long wrestled with three identities that have instilled in me a sense of ambiguity. This informed my *Upstairs/Downstairs* video project on Hong Kong identities. In discussing this project I will first recap my experience of ‘multiple-identities’, as it is important to line up my further discussion on how it affects my interpretation of the idea of ambiguity, particularly with regard to the move that my family and I undertook from Mainland China to Hong Kong in 1973. I drew inspiration for the idea from my own multicultural, multidimensional childhood experience 262, which I have been confronting and puzzling over ever since. In particular, I have wrestled with three identities (Chinese, Indonesian & Hongkongese) that have instilled in me a sense of ambiguity. So these factors, in relation to ‘a sense of ambiguity’ and ‘multiple identities’, underscore the BCSL project and its use of a dual-screen installation setting, helping viewers to encounter various ways of changing and not changing, moving and staying put, being and not being.

BCSL represents a further attempt to visualize and simulate my personal experience of ambiguity, this time exploiting the possibilities of interactive media technology. In terms of technology, BCSL simultaneously creates and compresses two separate digital (virtual) spaces on two video projection screens, simultaneously presenting two different spatiotemporal experiences through scroll format by combining two

262 As mentioned previously, I was born in Kunming, which is the capital city of Yunnan Province in southwestern China. My parents are Indonesian Chinese: both of them were born in Indonesia in the 1930s. Because of the ‘political call’ from Chairman Mao, they came to China separately, beginning in 1960 to help build a great China for the future. At the time they were about 23 years old and had not yet met each other. They met in China eventually and then got married. But because of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (commonly known as the Cultural Revolution), a sociopolitical movement that took place in the People’s Republic of China from 1966 through 1976, my father and mother decided to move to Hong Kong in 1973, when I was 3 years old.
16:9 screens together to form a long scroll. This combination of ambiguity and compression is close to the idea of role shifting through viewers’ bodily engagement as discussed above.

![Concept image of Bloated City & Skinny Language (versions I & II); Artist: HUNG Keung, Hong Kong, 2006 (visualization by the author).](image)

(i) ‘Chinglish’: multiple and divided identities

I have faced multiple identities in Hong Kong since my immigration there at the age of three. My undefined position and my fluid mindset in relation to identity have been part of my life. In Hong Kong, I would hear Mandarin in family circles but had to speak Cantonese and a little English in school, as well as elsewhere outside my family. I learned to read and write traditional Chinese in Hong Kong, but the Hong Kong public-examination system allowed candidates to write their answers in simplified Chinese so that candidates could write longer responses to exam questions. It was generally believed that simplified Chinese was a faster and simpler way to write Chinese. In 1998, a year after the handover of Hong Kong to China, and the same year I started to teach university courses at Hong Kong Polytechnic University’s School of Design, I observed that, although university students had to learn Chinese philosophy and culture as part of their general-education subjects, the Chinese professors were officially ‘requested’ by the university to speak English while
lecturing on these same subjects. Personally, I found it was a very unusual situation, as the meanings of some Chinese characters and word phrases are not at all readily translatable into English. Simple observation revealed that, even if all the students in a class were ‘Hongkongese’, the university policy requesting English-language classes would still not budge or bend. Of course, this practice would give students more opportunities to speak English (namely, in class), in turn, enabling them to strengthen their English; however, both my students and I discovered that, as a practical matter, we would automatically and unconsciously wind up speaking three different languages in class: (1) Cantonese, (2) English, and (3) Chinglish.

This situation has remained unchanged, according to my own observations, since the start of my teaching career. Furthermore, I have encountered many similar cases in Hong Kong and found that Hong Kong people have acquired a unique identity as well as a sense of ambiguity about ‘what is our own language’ in response to the area’s special historical background. On the one hand, Hong Kong people might feel shame when speaking Chinglish, because of official pronouncements on the matter; on the other hand, there is a phenomenon observed by, among others, Larry Feign 263, an animator from overseas who has lived for a long time in Hong Kong and is familiar with the Chinglish situation. He made the following comments:

Instead of being ‘bad translation’ or ‘misuses’ of English, ‘Chinglishisms’ consist [of] ‘beautifully clever bilingual slang constructions’. It is not a language that needs to be ‘corrected’ for it is neither ‘random mistakes’ nor ‘signs of lazy learning’. ‘Chinglish’ is ‘a distinct language’ that does not confine itself to ‘conservative linguistic criteria”. (Cited in Tam 2007 264)

263 Larry Feign is an American humourist, cartoonist, and animator based in Hong Kong. He is the author of award-winning comic strips and books, and the director of an animated television series.
In one sense, Eve Tam stated that the merging of the two ‘mega-languages’—Chinese and English are the most widely used languages in the world—has rendered *Chinglish* perhaps ‘the most powerful language in human history, uniting billions of speakers in mutual comprehension’ (Tam 2007). In this case, it seems that many people from overseas could come to share this special viewpoint on this special language, replacing shame with positivity. In fact, I have been encountering these conflicting views since 1997. Hong Kong people have grown deeply worried about the value of Hong Kong multiple identities, and my observations of this worry have helped shape my current ideas on the topic. After discussing it with me, Eve Tam concluded that my *BCSL* corresponds to the mindset—the divided mind—of contemporary Hongkongese:

*To HUNG, this is another form of human reformation. In his multimedia interactive work, Chinese characters come into contact with the human body in a virtual space. Visitors, whose image is doubled, interact with the characters in two opposite ways, on one hand engaging, on the other hand disengaging, just like the divided mind of the people and of the era. (Tam 2007)*

At the time, I strongly believed that the world was developing according to unusual time-space parameters, as exemplified by the transformation of Chinese cities. In Hong Kong, people speak a mixture of Chinese and English: *Chinglish*. Like the fine arts and culture, language is an organic entity, and *Chinglish* is a language that the Hongkongese could develop and share with each other. But as a child, I always felt shame speaking *Chinglish*, as it seemed to be a language created by a people unable to handle a foreign language properly. While growing up, I started to question whether or not I, or indeed we as Hongkongese, could or should ever feel proud of this *Chinglish*. In Hong Kong schools, students are forbidden to speak *Chinglish* and are encouraged to speak proper English in the classroom. However, outside the classroom, *Chinglish* is one of the most common dialects spoken in Hong Kong. Two important factors go far in explaining this phenomenon: the many new immigrants that Hong Kong has received from Mainland China since the 1950s cannot speak proper
Cantonese; and Hong Kong society is filled with people who, having travelled or resided overseas, speak English well. Owing to its colonial history, and as a place of mixed culture and multiple identities, Hong Kong has continuously developed its own style of language, composing, recomposing, borrowing, and modifying linguistic elements day after day.

This background has also led us—as Hong Kong citizens—to develop two different emotional responses to Mainland China, one of conflict, the other of identity. As a China-born citizen of Hong Kong, I feel strongly that the Hong Kong people generally wrestle with two quite different emotional responses to Mainland China. On the one hand, Hong Kong people are proud of their colonial history under the British. In contrast to most Mainland Chinese, Hongkongese learn and speak Mandarin, Cantonese, and English in school, enjoy a Western education system, a high degree of independence, and a relatively pronounced sense of democracy. In the early 1960s and 1970s, many Mainland Chinese people were regarded—and regarded themselves—as ‘underdeveloped’ citizens. Some Hongkongese even looked down on and made fun of Mainland Chinese people during those decades. In the past, some Hongkongese claimed that the people of Hong Kong constituted a community apart, a local population distinct from the diverse peoples of Mainland China. On the other hand, particularly in the last decade, the Hongkongese have grown more familiar with China, and some feel proud of their Chinese heritage.

(ii) Traditional and simplified Chinese: multiple and divided identities

The turning point for me in my shift from identifying as Hongkongese to identifying myself as Chinese began in 2006, when I was staying in New York on a research

265 This is well expressed by Sik Hung Ng, social psychology professor at Hong Kong’s City University: "Earlier this year, a University of Hong Kong survey found that just 37% of Hong Kong residents said they were proud of having become Chinese citizens in the aftermath of the city’s 1997 handover from British to Chinese control, the lowest figure since 2001. But when it comes to occasional tensions between mainland China and Hong Kong […] it helps to have a common goal. Sometimes it may seem there’s conflict between the identity of being a Hong Konger and being a Chinese, but there’s little conflict when it comes to situations when there’s another [party] confronting you" (Cited in Te-Ping Chen 2012).
scholarship. I read a news report about the United Nations’ decision to use and recommend only simplified Chinese characters (the system used in mainland China) starting in 2008 (Figure 135). This news affected my self-evaluation about my role and identities in the space-time between China and Hong Kong, and this became a statement stipulated in my thesis: that we must preserve the value of both sets of Chinese characters through the reinterpretation of traditional Chinese views on time and space in the present practice of art and language.

**Top News**

**UN to use only simplified Chinese after 2008**

*(Updated: 2006-03-23 13:38)*

The United Nations will only use simplified Chinese characters after 2008, the Beijing Morning Post said today, citing linguists. The UN is currently using both versions of Chinese characters -- simplified characters and the original complex form. But the UN has decided to rule out the complex form after 2008, said Chen Zhongtao, chief of the Chinese academy of practical linguistics.

Another noted linguist, 100-year-old Zhou Youguang, also said the UN is preparing to use only simplified characters in all its Chinese files, as it is unnecessary to employ two kinds of characters.

"Meanwhile, the number of people learning Chinese is rising due to China's increased international influence," he said. "This will also make simplified characters the unique criterion of Chinese speakers gradually."

Experts also said simplified characters are also spreading among overseas Chinese people. Although the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government hasn't issued a special policy, it is popularizing simplified characters. In Taiwan, a number of people are also using simplified characters.

Chinese ranked second in the world's most widely used languages in 2005, the Post said.

Figure 135. (Web clip) *Beijing Morning Post*, 23 March 2006, China.

For me, the development of traditional Chinese has been evolutionary, whereas simplified Chinese is revolutionary. From this perspective, the two languages have arisen in history in two entirely different contexts and for two entirely different reasons.

---

First of all, what are traditional and simplified Chinese characters? Traditional Chinese characters are referred to by several different names within the Chinese-speaking world. The government of Taiwan officially calls traditional Chinese characters ‘standard characters’ (正體字, Zheng ti zi); Hong Kong, Macau, and overseas Chinese communities, and also users of simplified Chinese characters, call them ‘complex characters’ (繁體字, Fan ti zi); and some people refer to traditional characters simply as ‘proper characters’ (正字, Zheng zi). Simplified Chinese characters are officially known as ‘Simplification Chinese’ (簡化字, Jian hua zi) or (簡體字, Jian ti zi). The reason for this naming rested with Chairman Mao Zedong (1883-1976), who started the simplification movement, arguing that the process of simplification should embody both structural simplifications of character forms and substantial reductions in the total number of standardized Chinese characters. The government of the People’s Republic of China in Mainland China has promoted simplified Chinese characters for use in printing since the 1950s and 1960s in an attempt to increase literacy. Simplified Chinese characters are now officially used in the People’s Republic of China and Singapore.

Viewed under the aspect of the relationship between culture, mentality, and character-design, the differences between traditional and simplified Chinese characters are significant. Professor Jao Tsung-I has observed that all old languages in the world evolve from pictographs to alphabet letters (Jao 1998, p. 174). Chinese characters seem to have evolved even further, extending their function to art and literature and elsewhere. In other words, Chinese characters have long been a core element of Chinese culture. But this cultural function has not been carried over into the new system. This can be illustrated by means of two examples, the character for ‘love’ and the character for ‘country’.

The traditional Chinese character for ‘love’, (愛, aì), means ‘love’ (Figure 136-137), includes the traditional Chinese character for ‘heart’ (心, xin), and this inclusion visually indicates the close relationship between one’s heart and the sentiment of love. However, simplified Chinese has removed the traditional Chinese character for ‘heart’
from the traditional Chinese character for ‘love’, leaving behind a new, simplified character for ‘love’. This embrace of simplification has profoundly damaged the spirit of Chinese characters.

Figure 136. The word ‘love’ (愛, ai) in traditional and simplified Chinese (visualization by the author).

Figure 137. The traditional Chinese character for ‘love’ includes the traditional Chinese character for ‘heart’: 心 (xin) (visualization by the author).

Another relevant example is ‘country’ (國, guo) (Figure 138-139). The image of 畝 is actually a traditional Chinese character that means ‘region’ or ‘land’; and those four lines (two horizontal and two vertical) visually represent the borders of the region. Now, the traditional Chinese character 國 means ‘using a weapon to protect one’s territory’. Moreover, nowadays the traditional Chinese word for ‘China’ consists of two Chinese characters, 中國 (zhong quo), meaning that the city of the kingdom
occupies the centre, as the Chinese character 中 (zhong) means ‘centre’. Therefore, from the perspective of visual analysis, the ‘weapon’ is located inside the ‘border of the territory’, so, the idea of ‘country’ (國, guo) implies the aspect that ‘the weapon is used to protect itself from outside attack rather than attack the others’. The function of the Great Wall in China is a significant example reflecting how the ancient Chinese attempted to protect their nation through building a border physically and visually. The analysis of traditional Chinese reflects how Chinese emperors have for thousands of years considered their ‘nation’ as the centre of the world. But in simplified Chinese characters, the ‘weapon’ is replaced by ‘jade’. It is completely different from the original meaning, which reflects a longstanding political tradition and mindset.

Figure 138. The original meaning of the traditional Chinese character for ‘country’: 國 (guo) (visualization by the author).
So these two Chinese characters, ‘love’ and ‘country’, aptly express how a mentality and philosophy could be reflected through the process of creating and forming traditional Chinese characters. Because simplified Chinese characters were created through decreasing the number of brush strokes, and simplifying the traditional forms, much of the meaning of the traditional characters has been lost. In my opinion, the process of simplification has yet to be satisfactorily examined. Perhaps the process has a certain cookie-cutter aspect to it. I find that traditional Chinese characters are easier to learn because of the function of indication, which I explained in Chapter 1. Moreover, as Professor Jao Tsung-I put it, “The Chinese character, with its feature of ‘continuity’, is considered a significant phenomenon in the world” (Jao 1998, p. 174). As a Hong Kong-based Chinese, I have felt upset that simplified Chinese has disrupted this ‘continuity’. I have worried about whether or not—and if so, how—people from overseas and our own future generations can, by learning simplified Chinese, deeply grasp the history and the culture of China. However, my worries should not suggest that I oppose simplified Chinese. In truth, I, like most citizens of Hong Kong, am multi-lingual and even wrote in simplified Chinese for my Hong Kong A-level examinations (Hong Kong public examinations) in order to quicken my pace and score a higher mark. Thus my feelings towards this country and its linguistic development are complex: on the one hand, I argue that simplified Chinese would have been helpful in my exams; on the other hand, simplified Chinese was a reflection of ‘continuity’.

Figure 139. The word ‘country’ (國, guo) is in Traditional and Simplified Chinese (visualization by the author).

267 While attending my public examinations when I was in secondary school, my classmates and I were self-trained in the skilled use of simplified Chinese characters. The public examinations require candidates to attend three hours of examination per section and two to three sections per day. In other words, candidates need to write a great deal in order to gain high marks. Simplified Chinese characters help candidates write many more words in a fixed period of time than is possible with traditional Chinese.
characters contain insufficient historical and cultural value; on the other hand, I treat simplified Chinese as an efficient tool for practical purposes.

(iii) Hong Kong & China: a sense of ambiguity and a divided mind

Later on, I encountered widespread conflict and struggle stemming from city reconstruction, rapid economic growth, unhealthy lifestyles, sometimes severe conflicts between village and city, the heated debate pitting traditional Chinese against simplified Chinese, the no less heated debate pitting Cantonese against Chinglish, the ‘one-country, two-systems’ system, and so on. In fact, as a Chinese-born Hongkongese, I wish to see the people and the cities in Mainland China develop faster and more healthily. Witnessing the rapid development of China nowadays, I find myself feeling more excited than ever. However, when I notice the huge number of cities being destroyed as sacrifices for new urban development, I wonder whether such ‘progress’ is too fast or on the right track.

As mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, in 2006, I was invited by Shanghai Zhangjiang Hi-Tech Park to create a digital art project in celebration of this new district in Shanghai, China. This project led me to become more sensitive in observing the development of China in terms of severe conflict, of which the tension between villages and cities, the heated debate pitting traditional Chinese against simplified Chinese, the equally intense controversy pitting Cantonese against Chinglish, and the ‘one-country, two-systems’ regime with respect to Hong Kong are only a few examples. In fact, with my roots deeply planted in the mainland, I would very much like to see rapid and healthy development of the people and cities in Mainland China. When I noticed the huge number of cities being destroyed to give way to new urban development, however, I wondered if such ‘progress’ is too fast or on the right track. In pursuit of self-reflection and identity in this multivalent cultural setup, I have taken my concerns and gradually transformed the experiences I have just described into a series of experimental and practical interactive art project BCSL (2006-08).
(iv) Title as metaphor: ‘Bloated’ and ‘Skinny’

I have used the term ‘Bloated City’ as part of the title of my interactive work in order to reflect such unhealthy social development policies in China. First of all, I observed a correlation between the social pheromone of the equation ‘weight reduction = beauty’, which was prevalent in 2006, and the economic and cultural situation that I was facing in China at that time. It then occurred to me to use ‘breast augmentation’ as a metaphor for ‘the construction of many new hi-tech buildings’ and to use ‘weight reduction’ as a metaphor for ‘the simplification of Chinese characters’. From my personal point of view, the city should gradually develop and should not demolish villages or small cities in the name of such projects as new hi-tech buildings; similarly, women should strive to be physically and spiritually healthy rather than superficially beautiful through, for example, excessive weight reduction or breast enlargement. Simplified Chinese is a skinny—maybe even an emaciated—version of traditional Chinese. From this material, I created the title of my interactive BCSL project (2006-08).

The BCSL project

I will now turn to a discussion of the way in which this interactive project about simplified and traditional Chinese characters could visualize and simulate my experience of ambiguity, as described above, through digital media technology. Although some contemporary Chinese artists, such as Xu Bing, have already created relevant artwork focused on Chinese characters, such as *A Book from the Sky* (1987-1991), there is still considerable potential with regard to Chinese characters for

---

268 In 2006, almost all Hong Kong TV advertising was related to breast augmentation, weight reduction, or fat removal. Similar themes were announced in titles for newspapers, magazines, and outdoor billboards.

269 Xu Bing has undertaken several language-related works of art in the last twenty years, among which is the famous *A Book from the Sky* (天書, 1987-1991).
further research and exploration through digital media technology: for example, digital moving images, animation, and custom made interactive programming.

The *BCSL* project aims to invite viewers to experience a sense of ambiguity through their bodily engagement with three identities (themselves and two projections of themselves). My method was based on the desire to discover a new approach to traditional interactive artwork, and the dual screen experience seemed to present the difference I was looking for. In its traditional sense, ‘interactivity’ could be explained as “acting upon or in close relation with each other; interacting”; or, from the electronics and computer science perspective, it represents “allowing or relating to continuous two-way transfer of information between a user and the central point of a communication system, such as a computer or television” (*Collins English Dictionary* 2006). However, “two-way transfer of information” was not up to the task of illustrating or representing the concept of ambiguity, particularly in my case; instead, the most appropriate method seemed to be interaction achieved through ‘dual screens’ with two different (reserved) interactive reactions. In its concrete realization, this method may constitute Asia’s first experimental interactive art project using dual screens.

**(i) Transcending cultural boundaries**

This project was created with a context that goes beyond cultural limitations. When I was invited by Dr. Bernhard Serexhe, the curator of ZKM 270, to present the project for the exhibition ‘Uncharted: User Frames in Media Arts’271 in Turkey in 2009, it was very well received by the local participants, who informed me that the older generation in Turkey was stuck between two language systems: Ottoman Turkish and modern Latin Turkish. My assertion on multiple identities triggered by the use of multiple languages was instinctively felt by the Turkish audience, who

---

270 The exhibition was realised with the contribution of ZKM Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany.
271 The “Uncharted: User Frames in Media Arts” exhibition was presented between 21 March-16 August 2009 at the Main Gallery of santralistanbul, Istanbul.
enthusiastically invited me to organise a Turkish version of BCSL. Their very encouraging response gave me assurance that my project was not merely a kind of indulgence on a personal level, but that it actually transcended cultural boundaries and reached the hearts of people from totally different backgrounds.

(ii) Developing the technology

Figure 140. Video clips, in sequence of Insect Project (2005-06); Artist: HUNG Keung, Hong Kong (visualization by the author).

The interactive software system for BCSL was developed from my research project entitled Insect Project: Simulation of the Crowd Behaviour of Insects/ Chinese
Calligraphy (Dual Screen) (2005-06) (Figure 140). The aim of Insect Project was to simulate the crowd behaviour of small flying insects, giving viewer-participants a feeling of hopelessness (for details, see Appendix 2.3. ‘Insect Project’). This feeling would arise because regardless of their reactions to a flying insect, the insect would still chase after the participant on the dual screen. The insects would have two flying and chasing behaviours in order to confuse the participant. Because of Insect Project’s dual screens with two flying and chasing behaviours, I had the idea of exploring this idea in relation to simplified and traditional Chinese characters in the BCSL project.

In the BCSL exhibition space viewers see two projections of themselves: a digital camera captures the image of the viewer and projects it onto two different virtual spaces at the same time. Viewers quickly notice that their two images on these two virtual spaces are not mirror reflections of each other. These images present themselves in a single virtual space divided into dual screens. The second interactive element is constituted by the interactions of the ‘Flying and Animated Chinese Characters’ (FACC) 272, which follow the ‘two viewer reversal’ principle, depending on the movement (or the stillness) of the twice-projected viewer. Viewers who interact with ‘FACC’ encounter two different reactions. Meanwhile, viewers grow puzzled because they wonder whether they should move or freeze. This puzzlement is the feeling that I aimed to bring to the audience and the participant; the puzzlement translates into a sense of ambiguity. In order to achieve this, I first of all applied two different flying and chasing behaviours on two different screens.

Secondly, I attempted to simulate an experience of ambiguity in virtual space through double images. I set up two screens in the exhibition space of BCSL in which, through real time digital video recording and transmitting, the participants (viewers) can simultaneously see two images of themselves, one on each of the dual screens (Figures 141-142). Technically speaking, the targets for the ‘FACC’ to detect can be

272 Flying and Animated Chinese Characters (FACC) involves creating brush strokes and Bushou (Chinese radical) through 3D modelling. In this endeavour, I have revitalized the three-dimensional forms of Chinese characters by using such digital technologies as 3D modelling and interactive programming.
either (1) foreground objects (the viewers) or (2) moving objects (the viewers). Moving objects are identified by an algorithm based on the papers ‘Motion Segmentation and Pose Recognition with Motion History Gradients’ (Bradski 2002) and ‘The Representation and Recognition of Action Using Temporal Templates’ (Davis 1997). Once the foreground or moving objects have been detected, they are segmented into different regions for the ‘FACC’ to trace. Because they trace different regions, ‘FACC’ can be evenly distributed on the targets. The ‘FACC’ in the left hand screen were designed and programmed to chase foreground objects. The ‘FACC’ in the right hand screen chase after moving objects. The core code of this interactive work is programmed by C++, developed by imhk lab (for details, see Appendix 2.3 & Appendix 4.2). In the exhibition space, people encounter a very rare situation: the more one runs away, the more one is chased. When viewers wave their hands or shake their bodies to get rid of the pursuers, more pursuers appear and they move in even closer on their target. Viewers start to notice the pattern and perhaps strategize alternative or opposite behaviours (e.g. remaining motionless) to get rid of the Chinese characters. However, because two chasing behaviours have been applied to this dual screen, it seems that no matter how hard participants try, they face a highly ambiguous situation.

Figure 141. BCSL interactive system, developed by imhk lab, Hong Kong, 2006 (visualization by the author).

innov+media lab (imhk lab) was founded by HUNG Keung (the present author) in 2005 to focus on new media art and design research in relation to Chinese philosophy and interactivity.
Figure 142. Visualization: Different reactions to two different behaviours.

(Left) ‘FACC’ chasing motionless target; (Right) ‘FACC’ chasing target in motion (visualization by the author).

The two opposite ways in which participants interact with ‘FACC’ in the BCSL exhibition space—engagement and disengagement—reflect the Hong Kong people’s divided mindset and the dividedness of the era. With the behaviours and reactions of these Chinese characters on the left screen differing significantly from those on the right screen, viewers have simultaneously oppositional experiences about ‘change and continuity’, ‘movement and stillness’, and ‘being and not being’. Immersed, so to speak, in the interactive project, viewers have a feeling that their body is between two untenable positions. They can see two of themselves at the same time: when, on the right, they move, the ‘FACC’ follow them, and the more movement there is, the more the ‘FACC’ follow them; yet at the same time, those who remain completely still find that the ‘FACC’ although unable to follow the right screen’s projected image, now beset the left screen’s image. These two dissimilar situations unfold simultaneously before participants’ eyes, and their bodies feels a contradiction, which is exactly the experience of wanting to widen and at the same time to narrow the gap between the self and the Chinese characters flying and floating in space, like bugs around them (Figure 143).
Demonstration of how the Chinese characters move from left to right.

Demonstration of how the Chinese characters move from right to left.

Figure 143. Artwork: *Bloated City & Skinny Language (version II)*; Artist: HUNG Keung; Venue: the Hong Kong Museum of Arts; Hong Kong, 2007.

In today’s digital era, virtual experience, multiple vision and bodily engagement in digital media technology can give the viewer a profound sense of ambiguity. In the case of my *BCSL* project, viewers can experience the idea of ‘time and space compression and overlapping’ and ‘reversed position and direction’ by being ‘attacked by’ and interacting with animated flying Chinese characters (simplified and traditional) on a long-scroll dual-screen virtual-space platform. They cannot extricate themselves either from ‘their’ Chinese culture in its ancient and modern politico-cultural manifestations, nor from language itself, which immerses them immediately in both past and present. Temporal dimensions are in this way compressed, overlap, and run backwards and forwards at once; spatial dimensions, too, in the form of the viewers’ multiple identity in their evasive, interactive movements, both real and
virtual. A sense of ambiguity is then created due to the audience perceiving two completely different and reversed virtual experiences at the same time.

**Case studies: critique and comparison**

Comparative speaking, firstly, in terms of *time*, the four works studied in this section invite viewers to enjoy simultaneously a virtual and real-world experience. Secondly, in terms of *space*, all the artworks presented and discussed here—the set of two stone tablets, the gunpowder and fireworks, the set of two digital cylindrical shapes and the dual projection screens—can function as an axis connecting physical and virtual space with each other, while at the same time inviting viewers to reposition themselves, on the basis of personal experience, from a real-world spatiotemporal setting to a virtual one. Furthermore, all four artworks share aspects of binary or multiple vision. In particular, their sense of multiple identities and viewpoints shifts the role of the viewer, who can have spatiotemporal experiences as if she or he were immersed in the other side of the artworks. For example, ‘reversed inscriptions’ and *Ethereal Flowers* enable viewers to have a virtual experience through their bodily engagement in the spirit road and the city cemetery respectively. Likewise, *Morel’s Panorama* and *BCSL* enable viewers to see through their real-time images on both sides, as it were, of the digital projection and undertake real-time bodily engagement in virtual space. In addition, most of these artworks invite viewers to participate in some sort of communal virtual experience—one can see oneself and simultaneously see others seeing themselves. Viewers see themselves being viewed by themselves and by others (Figure 144-147). In other words, viewers play two roles: an active role (viewing) and a passive role (being viewed). Combining the two roles, these four artworks lead their participants/viewers into a multiply virtual visual space within the reality of the exhibition space (Table 16).
Figure 144. (Left) Stone tablet with reversed inscription (Wu 1995, p. 260); (Right) an abstract presentation of the dynamics of the reversed inscription (visualization by the author).

Figure 145. (Left) Ethereal Flowers; (Right) an abstract presentation of the dynamics of the binary viewing experience (visualization by the author).

Figure 146. (Left) Video clip of the multiple viewing experiences in Morel’s Panorama; (Right) an abstract presentation of the dynamics of the multiple viewing experience (visualization by the author).
Figure 147. Three different spaces and identities of the viewers of BCSL project (visualization by the author).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artwork</th>
<th>Platform as axis</th>
<th>Vision</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reversed inscriptions of the Spirit Road</td>
<td>Stone tablet with normal and reversed inscriptions</td>
<td>Binary vision: from real-world to virtual</td>
<td>Stone carving</td>
<td>Experiencing present and past at the same time</td>
<td>Real &amp; virtual space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethereal Flower</td>
<td>Gunpowder and cemetery</td>
<td>Binary vision: from real-world to virtual</td>
<td>Gunpowder</td>
<td>Experiencing present and past at the same time</td>
<td>Real &amp; virtual space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morel’s Panorama</td>
<td>Digital cylindrically shaped moving images</td>
<td>Multiple viewing experiences: from real-world to virtual</td>
<td>Computer software and hardware through digital video projection</td>
<td>An ongoing experience (past, present &amp; future)</td>
<td>Real &amp; virtual space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCSL project</td>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple viewing experiences: from real-world to virtual</td>
<td></td>
<td>An ongoing experience (past, present &amp; future)</td>
<td>Real &amp; virtual space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15. Comparison of the Spirit Road’s reversed inscriptions, Ethereal Flower, Morel’s Panorama and the BCSL project (design by the author).
4.5. Chapter conclusion

In terms of comparison of ‘Space’, this chapter has shown how the ‘binary vision’ entailed in paintings like the ‘Toilette Scene’ and in the ‘reversed tomb inscriptions’ of ancient China provided two different positions from which viewers could explore various viewpoints, creating opportunities for them to shift their roles and enjoy dynamic spatiotemporal experiences in terms of multiple identities. Specifically, the reversal could generate (1) immersive experience (2) reversals of visible and invisible space, and (3) connections between the past and the present—allowing the viewers to have different roles outside or inside the pictorial space. This practice correlates closely to my digital videos in the Upstairs/Downstairs and BCSL projects, which integrated the idea of multiple visions, multiple identities and multiple spaces by combining different (virtual) spaces through digital media that enriched the depiction of multiple identities.

One may conclude from this evidence that inviting viewers to have a virtual experience through binary or multiple viewpoints has been applied very effectively in both ancient and contemporary Chinese art. For example, in the realm of contemporary art, Ethereal Flowers exemplifies how one medium (gunpowder) could illuminate two dramatically different spaces. Similarly, the interactive digital installation of Morel’s Panorama uses the superimposition of digital moving images to trigger and sustain viewers’ engagement in virtual space, suggesting an endless spatiotemporal experience. Both these works correlate with contemporary digital media art practice, which aims to give viewers the impression that they are inside a virtual world. Finally, my own Asian cultural background, and the specific geopolitical and cultural position of Hong Kong today, have led me to further consider the possibility of transforming traditional visual experiences onto a creative digital platform, integrating a sense of ambiguity and multiple identities through custom-made digital media technology. In Bloated City & Skinny Language the scroll format further clarifies how bodily engagement can affect approaches to presenting a narrative on traditional (paper) and on digital platforms, suggesting that in both of these media one can have new spatiotemporal experiences—experiences that translate the achievement of The Night Entertainment of Han Xizai into an idiom that is wholly modern but at the same time remains true to the Chinese scroll tradition.
Chapter 5: Bringing time and space aspects together

5.1. Introduction

After summarizing the ways in which the concepts of time and space have been applied to Chinese art in previous chapters, I will suggest some steps introducing new knowledge in the form of a further innovative practical project.

Chapter 3 and 4 suggested how notions of time and space have been applied to classical Chinese art in various ways, and showed their correlation with digital media technology in the dimensions of cycle, bodily engagement, non-linear narrative, multiple viewpoints and spaces, etc. In Chapter 3 I analysed the correlation between traditional art and contemporary digital media art in relation to time. The results expressed the way in which the ideas of (1) cycle and (2) non-linear narrative, layering of content and (3) bodily engagement in classical Chinese art correlate to the similar elements in digital art today. Through digital-media technology, viewers can have real-time experience of the transition, compression and duration of time. But my analysis also critiques that some digital artworks in relation to traditional thinking about ‘cycle’ have not yet considered the viewer’s spatiotemporal experience in relation to such ideas as ‘play-appreciation’ through bodily engagement. In Chapter 4 I argued that classical Chinese arts could provide two different positions from which viewers could explore various viewpoints and create opportunities for role shifting and dynamic spatiotemporal experience in terms of multiple identities and virtual space. The results of the analysis reveal a strong correlation between traditional art forms and modern digital media art that allows the artist and the viewer to play with the idea of multiple identities through dual and multiple screens in both real and virtual space. In line with my experience of a multiple-identities background on the one hand and the ‘upstairs culture’ of Hong Kong on the other, I translated the idea of
multiple visions, multiple identities and multiple spaces by combining different (virtual) spaces through digital media that enriched the depiction of multiple identities in the *Upstairs/Downstairs* project. From there I went on to demonstrate whether my background could help to creatively give a new approach through cultural re-interpretation by integrating a sense of ambiguity and multiple identities. As neither the direction of such a topic nor the technical approach had been embarked upon before, my interactive *BCSL* project was then created through dual screen in scroll format.

Previous chapters have, then, examined how scroll format 274 shows a close relation between *shu* (書) ‘brush writing [calligraphy]’ and *hua* (畫) ‘painting’ in terms of handling notions of *time* and *space*. Chapter 5 will now ask how the notion of *time* and *space* can be re-interpreted and re-contextualized by combining *shu hua* as a single integrated idea involving and exploiting traditional scroll format through digital media technology. I will address and examine the potential of combining *shu* and *hua*, for example, the idea of *Shanshui zi* (山水字, ‘landscape-characters’) suggested by Hong Kong artist Kan Tai Keung (1942-) 275, but also critique and question the limitations as they appear in the contemporary art and media context. To answer this question, I will first examine various case studies, including (1) The Opening Show at the Beijing Olympics Stadium (2008); (2) The idea of scrolls as applied in Cursive II (2006); (3) Holographic space suggested by Canadian artist Jacques Desbiens (2006) and *The Science of Aliens* (2005-2010), created by ART+COM, a Berlin-based interactive-design consultant and interdisciplinary group.

---

274 In fact, both *shu hua* that go into scrolls and the form of scrolls have enabled artists to express their spirits and conceptions regarding various matters including *time* and *space*.
275 Dr. Kan Tai Keung, one of the most significant designers and artists in Hong Kong, founded Kan Tai Keung Design and Associates Ltd in 1988. Kan’s designs range from postage stamps to cultural icons to brand logos. His work has won much acclaim, and over three hundred awards. Kan’s ink-brush paintings and poster designs are also well known and have been exhibited in the Minneapolis Museum of Art and the Paris Art and Decoration Society.
5.2. New approach to shu hua: ‘landscape-characters’

The use of Chinese characters to provide pictorial structures exists early in traditional Chinese art. (Pi 2008 p. 13)

In fact, the idea of combining shu and hua has been discussed by many scholars and artists. This is illustrated by critic Prof. Pi Daojian who claims that the method of combining perceptions of animals, insects, plants, architecture, people, and objects in general with art forms such as literature, painting, and calligraphy has been a tradition in Chinese painting and calligraphy since the Yuan and Ming Dynasties (Pi 2008 p. 13). But in Hong Kong today, the idea of ‘landscape-characters’ suggested and demonstrated by Dr. Kan Tai Keung exemplifies a significant new approach to exploring the relation between shu hua and long scroll format, however, at the same time reveals the limitations of using a traditional 2-dimensional platform such as paper. My question remains, therefore, whether digital technology—a distinctly contemporary tool in art—can strengthen the exploration and utilization of the traditional Chinese scroll-form. To answer this question, I will first examine the handling of time and space in Kan’s experimental artwork in his ‘landscape-characters’ series (Figure 148), whose visual presentation platform is in traditional scroll format – eight hanging scrolls panels, which reflects the potential of translating the idea of multiple perspectives through spatiotemporally expressive art that (1) merges seven hanging scrolls into one long scroll, (2) merges the style of Chinese calligraphy with the style of landscape painting. However, it remains questionable in this context whether digital media—a distinctly contemporary tool in art—can really strengthen the exploration and exploitation of the traditional Chinese scroll-form.

Kan specifically articulates the combinatorial idea of shu hua through his experimental painting series, which can be read as painting or calligraphy—or indeed as a combination of the two. He suggested calling this style Shanshui zi (‘landscape-
characters’). Although combining shu and hua has been discussed in many ways by different artists in the past (Pi 2008 p. 13), Kan has a different perspective on the matter, as he demonstrates the interrelations between painting and calligraphy not only through paper, brush, ink, and inkstone, but also through the format of the scroll. He explores new techniques in combining traditional styles of Shuhua by using such traditional Chinese painting media as long-scroll rice-paper with brush and ink.

Figure 148. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

For example, No Basic Rules (2007) is one of his ‘landscape-characters’ series, a painting/calligraphy comprising seven panels (a hanging-scroll format). The blending of tradition and innovation in Kan’s ‘landscape-characters’ can be seen in the way they reinterpret the traditional saying ‘brush writing [calligraphy] and painting have the same origin’ (書畫同源, shu hua tong yuan). In No Basic Rules, the Chinese-character style is no longer a traditional style, either regular or cursive; nevertheless it reflects the brush style of traditional painting.

---

277 Interview (#2) with Dr. Kan Tai Keung, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong, August 19, 2011.
278 In Chinese literature these four art-making components have been called the “four precious items in a library”.
279 Chinese Shuhua traditionally comprised the relationships between ink, brushes, paper, and the space and time in which people viewed works of art. The ink was regarded as yang, infiltrating the rice paper actively, while the paper was yin, absorbing the ink passively. The art critic Ben Willis states, “So yin and yang are not merely alternating rhythms of nature—they depend on one another, each is the complement of the other, providing a unified whole and a creative universe between the two” (Willis 1987, p. 64). Thus, the white paper is not regarded merely as a plain white physical surface but acts as a medium of infinite space and unlimited time.
When viewers first see the artwork close up, they see a traditional Chinese landscape painting in each panel. But when they view the work from a distance, they find that the shape of each mountain actually resembles one of seven Chinese characters, all of which are legible and in a style akin to semi-cursive or cursive (Figure 149). In fact each panel contains a landscape image (mountains, clouds, travellers) (Figure 150). There are seven types of landscape drawn separately one next to another. But when the seven panels are combined, they become one long scroll of ‘landscape-characters’.

Figure 149. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Viewers can appreciate these ‘landscape-characters' from different viewpoints just as they would view a real sculpture, a mountain, or even a work of landscape architecture. In Kan’s art, Chinese calligraphic characters are no longer flat images written on a plane surface; instead, their shape and form are dynamic and lively, and each character provides viewers with a different three-dimensional spatiotemporal

280 Lam Suet-hung, curator of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, declares that Kan’s works of art, “all chronicled the path through which Kan transcended Chinese calligraphy into moving clouds and flowing rivers amid the mountains, combining the artistic and literate characteristics of Chinese characters, similar to the fusion of art and design, but in another level of execution” (Lam 2008, p. 17).

281 Every character represents a different mountain form: some of these character-mountains seem to be a long way off, whereas others appear to be close by. Viewers look at the character-mountains either from a relatively horizontal position or from a bird’s-eye view; some of the character-mountains give the impression of being covered in fog, dotted with trees, or graced with waterfalls.
experience. Moreover, if viewers read these seven characters as a single sequence, their visual journey becomes an act of entering into a virtual space. The different kind of three-dimensional experience and different viewpoint provided by each character gives viewers the feeling that they are flying inside the space of this artwork.

Finally, the sequence of these seven Chinese characters suggests a work of landscape architecture that viewers might stop and gaze upon in passing at any of several distinct locations, or which they might simply observe while passing through. In all of these respects the ‘landscape-characters’ of Kan’s No Basic Rules emerge as a new version of the traditional ‘literati spirit’. Kan’s innovation consists in his subtle and restrained combination of the calligraphic (literary) and painting traditions—there is nothing exaggerated about his execution of the creative steps in this work—and in his realization of fundamental notions of Chinese thinking (space and time) in the shu hua medium. On the one hand, Kan’s ‘landscape-characters’ remain extremely subtle, thereby making room for a new vision of the traditional ‘literati spirit’, which is
concerned with the preference for, and emphasis on, using paper, brush, ink, and inkstone. On the other hand they demonstrate an innovative way of applying the notion of space and time to the concept of cycle as drawn from the philosophy of Dao. In Chapter 25 of Dao De Jing, Laozi emphasizes that ‘the way’ is ‘all-pervading; ever-moving’ (周行而不殆) and declares that ‘going far means turning back’ (遠曰反). Applying these concepts to No Basic Rules, the viewer notices that the mountain in each panel has its own form and space, which reflects and indeed makes possible the relationship between the mountain’s own space and the surrounding space. This dynamic relationship embodies the larger underlying dynamism of the relation between viewer and viewed, knower and known, for it is this that gives rise to the being of the mountain conceived in terms of its situation and role in its own and in the human world (Figure 151).

In fact, the content as well as the title of these seven Chinese texts suggests that there are no basic rules for creating a spiritual experience through clouds and mountains. Each panel of Chinese text suggests its own temporal and spatial experience. When seven of them combine as a scroll form, this reflects different spatiotemporal experiences, each generated in its own way—like a sense of the cycle of human life. The concept of ‘the way’ from the Dao De Jing is in this sense a metaphor for the ‘way of knowing and perceiving’ that interprets and defines the meaning of the world. Kan combines two different forms of visual representation and experience of shu and hau, allowing us to perceive the message of the texts —that there are no basic rules for the way in which the mountain, or indeed any object, expresses itself—through different perspectives.

---

282 Dr. Kan has been deeply influenced by Daoist thought (interview with Kan Tai Keung, 2011).
283 For example, in Chapter 25 of Dao De Jing, Laozi speaks of the origin of Dao (‘the way’): There is a thing confusedly formed. Born before heaven and earth. Silent and void. It stands alone and does not change. Goes round and does not weary. It is capable of being the mother of the world. I know not its name. So I style it ‘the way’. (Lao Tzu 1963, p.30)
Figure 151. The mountain in each panel has its own form and space; the form of a given mountain reflects and indeed makes possible the relationship between the mountain’s own space and the surrounding space. (Visualization of a hanging scroll’s treatment of space.)

When the seven ‘landscape-characters’ panels are combined together in the form of a long scroll, they become a unit expressing different spatiotemporal circumstances that keep circling unendingly, thus creating a self-contained temporal dimension in which the viewer passes from one spatial, pictorial and calligraphic representation to the next. In this way, to have a visual experience of a sense of cycle is equivalent to exploring the traditional Chinese-art idea of multiple perspectives (Figure 152). In the past, expressions of this concept generally took the form of a scroll. Kan has created a modern version of the scroll that fulfils its traditional dimensions of calligraphy, painting and classical idea of cycle.

284 Such as scroll paintings, long-scroll paintings, and hanging-scroll paintings.
However, a question-mark hangs over the role of the viewers— their lack of bodily engagement, three-way intimacy and interaction— when confronted with Kan’s ‘landscape-characters’. For there is no need for the scroll format to be confined to a visual platform on which artists can ‘present’ and viewers can ‘receive’; it can also be an opportunity for artists and viewers to interact with each other. With its restriction to a traditional 2-dimensional plane platform, Kan’s ‘landscape-characters’ series is not appropriate for a full-scale implementation of ‘play-appreciation’ of contemporary Chinese art, which emphasizes bodily engagement of the viewers and three-way intimacy and interaction. To illustrate this issue, I will now turn to an examination of four contemporary digital media projects: two from China (two large-scale performances from two Chinese masters, Zhang Yimou and Lin Hwai-min) inquiring to what extent they have succeeded in integrating the scroll concept into their digital-media ‘calligraphy and painting’ artwork under the aspect of extending their audience’s spatiotemporal experience. And, as scroll-form visual presentations with multiple viewpoints are a recognized art form in the West as well as in the East, I will
also elaborate on two Western examples by such digital-media artists and groups as Jacques Desbiens and ART + COM.

5.3. Case studies: potential of digital-media applied to scroll format

Case study (I): The ‘Opening show of the Beijing Olympics’

The ‘Opening show of the Beijing Olympics’ (2008), directed by Zhang Yimou (張藝謀) (1951 - ) illustrates how digital-media technology can enact the idea of scrolls in a 4D space (namely, a stage) as opposed to a traditional 2-dimensional surface (typically paper). This opening show suggested an innovative way of creating opportunities for viewers to reinterpret actual and possible relationships between landscape-painting, calligraphy, and motion through digital technology. Part of the opening show took place on top of the stadium through a video projection, and the other part of the show took place on the floor of the stadium’s central arena in the form of a dance performance together with digital-media technology (video, LED, hanging scroll)—for details see Appendix 5.1 ‘Scenario’.

From the point of view of content narration, the opening scene was a series of digital moving images depicting China’s 5000-year history, beginning with a video projection entitled ‘Scroll Painting’ that introduced how traditional Chinese artisans had crafted paper and brushes and then explained the development of the Chinese scroll. These images were projected onto a 25 x 100 m circular scroll-form screen located on top of the stadium (Figure 153). In the final scene, the centre of the screen presented a close-up of a hand-scroll painting (Figure 154 &155).

285 Zhang Yimou is an internationally acclaimed Chinese filmmaker and former cinematographer. He made his directorial debut in 1987 with the film Red Sorghum.
Afterwards the director skilfully transferred spatiotemporal patterns from the realm of video work to a real-time stage performance through digital-media technology. After the hand-scroll had unfolded in the video projection on top of the stadium, another
huge hand-scroll was unfolded on the floor of the stadium. A huge blank, white canvas appeared in the centre of the scroll, and onto it flowed a stream of images depicting porcelain pottery, bronze vessels, and other cultural icons in China’s historical advancement. After the presentation of cultural icons, dancers (whose hands were hiding ink-dipped brushes) spread themselves across the space of the scroll, where they danced while drawing giant painting-like and calligraphy-like images (Figure 156).

Figure 156. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Within just a few seconds of the commencement of the dancing, the dancers had completed drawing numerous lucky clouds on the scroll paper. Next, the scroll served as a screen for a video projection presenting examples of Chinese art’s millennia-old heritage, including cave paintings and one of China’s most celebrated early paintings\textsuperscript{286}. The most striking moment took place after the dancers had completed their drawing, when the centre of the scroll\textsuperscript{287} rose until it was suspended just above the ground in the centre of the stadium (Figure 157). The digital-video images concluding the ceremony’s opening scene depicted the thousands of miles that the

\textsuperscript{286} Wang Ximeng’s masterwork ‘A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains’, dating from the 12th century Song Dynasty.

\textsuperscript{287} The sides of the scroll continued to rest on the floor of the stadium.
Olympic flame had travelled on its way from Mount Olympus in Greece to Beijing, China (Figure 158 [right]). The images were projected onto screens ringing the top of the stadium.

Audiences who saw this presentation had access, I would argue, to alternative perspectives of Shuhua due to the presentation’s extraordinarily innovative combination of two particular devices: long scroll format and dancer-artists’ real-time bodily creation of Chinese ink-and-brush drawings. I contend, in particular, that these two devices encouraged viewers to explore novel relationships between at least three major variables: digital technology, calligraphy, and motion in landscape painting.
Case study (II): Cursive II

Apart from the ‘Opening show of the Beijing Olympics’, the earliest example of a partially digital show in relation to Shuhua that I have encountered was the dance performance Cursive II by Lin Hwai-min in 2006, which drew heavily on the idea of scrolls. I take this performance as an example of the long scroll form’s function as a visual-representation platform in relation to the process of animation, and will comment on it here. I first analyse that the backdrop in this stage is not only a huge movable panel (white in colour and rectangular in shape), but it also functions as a long scroll that slowly unfurls upwards. During the performance, the white panel gradually rises from the stage. It acts like a sunrise; like a new page of narration. It also acts like an animated storyboarding series, allowing the dancers to dance in front of it. A series of digital video images of Chinese calligraphy is projected onto the panel after it has completely risen. The motion of this rectangular white panel simulates the motion of an unrolling scroll (Figure 159). Lin Hwai-min successfully translated the traditional idea of scroll from 2D platform to a 4D performance platform, corresponding to the features of scroll format, which allows the depiction of a continuous narrative or journey: the viewing of a handscroll (painting / calligraphy) and dance performance is both a progression through time and space—both the narrative time and space of the images.
Case study (III): The Broken Window

Canadian artist Jacques Desbiens’s hologram work *The Broken Window* (2006) (Figure 160) is another example of transformation of the scroll form and of the viewer’s multiple viewpoints. What must be discussed, however, from a Chinese viewpoint, is the absence in his artwork of spatiotemporal viewer engagement.

Jacques Desbiens is a specialist in three-dimensional computer-graphic imaging, stereoscopy, projections, optics, and computer-generated holography. Since 2006, Desbiens’s work has attracted my attention because of its compelling three-dimensional imaging based on transformed ideas of traditional Chinese hand-scroll painting. *The Broken Window* is a computer-generated holograph whose three-dimensional images can be visualized from different viewpoints (Figure 161).

---

288 For almost 25 years he has been using drawings and holography to develop visual-display devices for visualization. At the International symposium on Display Holography (2009) in Shenzhen, China, he recently received the ‘Nick Phillips Award for Innovation in Holography’. 
First of all, although Desbiens attempted to apply the classical Chinese idea of scroll format—oriental horizontal scrolls (Desbiens 2009b)—through synthetic hologram, I critique that the ideas of ‘travelling’, ‘viewers’ movement’, and a sense of intimacy (all regarded as the elements of viewer engagement) have not yet been considered.

My analysis is as follows:

According to Desbiens’ visual analysis of the synthetic hologram (Figure 162), the holographic space creates three spatial zones. He has noted the differences between cylindrical panoramas and synthetic holograms. In a cylindrical panorama, visual distortion will appear; however, curving the image can result in adjustments to the distortion, and viewers can manipulate their position to perceive the scene from a central point of view. In other words, the location of the viewer is like the centre of the world. All points of view other than the viewer’s central pivot point will cause distortions. But in a synthetic hologram, the artist has stated, the field of view is widened: the viewer is displaced from the central pivot point; the hologram becomes the central point around which the whole spatial configuration rotates (Desbiens 2009b).

---

289 (1) the hologram plane itself, which is the surface of the plate (inside the brown frame); (2) the area behind the hologram plane (in blue), which is a fictitious or virtual space; and (3) the area in front of the hologram plane (in yellow), which is real space (Desbiens 2009a).
Figure 161. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 162. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 163. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.
Desbiens has explained that synthetic holograms are advantageous insofar as they enable viewers and artists alike to move in space for the purposes of viewing the entire spatial representation (Figure 163). The holographic system, he emphasizes, not only involves ‘multiple points of view’, but is also dynamic, with variations of the observer’s position echoing in the perception of content. This approach to three-dimensional representation enables the observer to walk actively through the artwork. The artist has suggested integrating this approach with computer-generated holographic panoramagrams, and then linking the result with oriental representations of space as seen in horizontal scroll paintings (Desbiens 2009b). According to Desbiens, "Synthetic holography can offer a solution to the age old distortion problem of occidental linear perspective. [...] Movement of the eyes obviously, but also movement of the body, free wandering of observation, nomadism of points of view” (Desbiens 2009b). However, phrases such as ‘to walk’, ‘to be active’, ‘movement of the eyes’, ‘movement of the body’, ‘free wandering of observation’, and ‘nomadism of points of view’ are all consistent with the idea of ‘multiple viewpoints’ which, however, in this digital era can perhaps be fully applied and implemented through interactive devices and technology other than synthetic holograms. ‘Multiple viewpoints’ do not depend on the possibility of three-dimensional experience or stimuli, but on viewers’ immersion in space, suggested in other contexts—as examined in earlier chapters—by the proposal that viewers should engage in ‘play-appreciation’ when ‘travelling’ around an artwork.

(i) The absent concept of ‘travelling’

Desbiens has formulated his own ideas about inviting viewers “to travel” around an artwork. In this respect he drew his inspiration from Gao Xi (Desbiens 2006). But I

---

290 “Synthetic holography can offer a solution to the age old distortion problem of occidental linear perspective, the addition of a wide field of view and dynamic observation of the oriental horizontal scrolls, gaining that way unprecedented potential of narrativity and spatial illusionism […]. It has to present images that the optical structure gives rise to [through] multiple observations in movement and time. Movement of the eyes obviously, but also movement of the body, free wandering of observation, nomadism of points of view” (Desbiens 2009b).

291 One of the most significant Chinese landscape painters, Gao Xi lived during the Northern Song Dynasty. Attributed to him was the book ‘The Lofty Message of Forest and Streams’ (林泉高致, Lin quan gao zhi ), which covered different topics about the appropriate way to paint Chinese landscapes.
would maintain that ‘to be a traveller’ is different from being ‘travellable’ in the sense originally suggested by Gao Xi. Desbiens has stated that even though people use the term ‘panoramagram’, the camera movement used here is not a ‘panoramic rotation’, but a kind of ‘travelling’. The observer acts as a camera that can move in space (Desbiens 2006). But for Gao Xi great painting should be ‘travellable’—it should allow viewers to travel around it, allow itself ‘to be travelled’. The phrase ‘to be travelled’ is not equivalent in meaning to the phrase ‘being a traveller’ or the phrase ‘to move in space’. ‘Being travellable’ involves spiritual and imaginative experience; it is an inherent quality of a painting. But ‘being a traveller’ primarily involves physical experience. In Chinese culture, the phrase ‘travellable’ contains a sense of duration. A pictorial space that can be travelled is one that can be stayed in, lived in, played in, and wandered through. In traditional landscape painting this idea is at the heart of ‘travelling’ (遊, you). By contrast, the phrase ‘being a traveller’ represents a changing of position from one point to another: it is movement towards a destination. With these terms in mind, one should consider the effect of holographic panoramagrams or synthetic holography, which encourage viewers’ movement in space only so that the viewers might perceive an imaginary three-dimensional object. The devices mentioned above do not provide viewers the opportunity to have new spatiotemporal experience from multiple viewpoints, all of which translates into ‘travelling’ within and ‘play-appreciation’ of the painting.

(ii) The absent concept of ‘viewers’ movement’

I would also argue that the three-dimensional imaging in holography uses the movement of viewers to provide an illusion of three-dimensional objects 293. However, the size of Desbiens’ synthetic-holography work restricts viewers’ movement. But the pictorial space in the landscape scenes of a Chinese scroll suggests a virtual and spiritual space rather than a merely physical space. Thus people who view traditional

292 Original text: 「謂山水有可行者，有可望者，有可遊者，有可居者。」《林泉高致·山水訓》
293 Jacques Desbiens has explained that in this three-dimensional imaging process, the geometrical parameters of the three-dimensional scene are determined by the optical characteristics of the imaging system and the size of the hologram. The image of three-dimensional objects appears behind and in front of the hologram plan, in full volume, and a large panoramic view of the scene is offered to the observer (Desbiens 2006).
Chinese landscape painting from ‘multiple viewpoints’ can have multi-dimensional spatiotemporal experiences. Viewers standing in front of a scroll experience greater flexibility of movement than do viewers of synthetic-holography because they can enjoy spatiotemporal experiences in imaginative and virtual space, as well as in the physical dimensions of their own movement.

(iii) The lack of a sense of intimacy

Furthermore, the traditional unrolling of a Chinese painting is closely related to the space surrounding the artwork and the viewers. Two viewers should unroll the painting, with one viewer holding the right hand end of the scroll while the other controls the speed of the unrolling by holding the left hand end of the scroll and moving in synchronicity with the person on the opposite side. This process of unrolling gives viewers a sense of intimacy, insofar as the artwork requires the bodily engagement of the viewer. However, Desbiens’ contribution to this topic is unrelated to a sense of intimacy between the viewer and the artwork.

(iv) The flow of narrative is limited

Most importantly, I would argue that The Broken Window only simulates the form of a scroll, not the concept behind the scroll. With reference to the video animation of The Broken Window (2006), I critique that its method of unrolling images does not correlate with traditional Chinese practice. The artist has himself asserted that his synthetic-holography exemplifies how the observer’s movement represents space: as the viewer moves from right to left, the unrolling of the scroll is simulated (Desbiens 2006). However, watching the animation of The Broken Window, I observed that in the opening sequence the beginning and end rolls of the painting opened and closed in the centre of the painting (Figure 164). This is not how a Chinese scroll is

294 The 2006 synthetic hologram Broken Window measures 140 x 38 cm. Jacques Desbiens did its design, and Yunjeung Yang did its calligraphy: [http://www.j-jacques.com/BrokenWindowMovie_en.html](http://www.j-jacques.com/BrokenWindowMovie_en.html). A smaller version of this hologram (70 x 24 cm) was presented for the first time at the International Conference on Virtual Systems and Multimedia (VSMM) in 2006 in Xian, China.
traditionally opened. The traditional Chinese approach to unrolling a scroll is to do so from right to left (Figure 165). A scene that unfolds from one end to the other creates the possibility of depicting the passage of time, whereas a scene that unfolds from the centre of a screen is essentially unfolding in two opposite directions at the same time, so it cannot present one event after another in a standard linear sequence.

In other words, the scroll that unrolls in two opposite directions beginning in the centre gives viewers only a sense of motion, not a sense of the passage of time. Thus, even though the animated three-dimensional mountain in *The Broken Window* is moving, the viewer perceives the motion only through a ‘one-point perspective’. But traditional Chinese landscape painting operates differently: it creates a visual journey for viewers according to the principle of *you* (遊), which means (1) ‘to tour’, ‘to travel’; or (2) ‘to roam’, ‘to saunter’. We may conclude, therefore, that the notion of *you* is not easily applied to hologram work.
Case study (IV): The Science of Aliens

Another digital-media project, The Science of Aliens (2005-2010) (Figure 166) by ART+COM (Germany) is highly relevant to appropriating the combination of the scroll format and the you (遊) idea of travelling and roaming inside a work from traditional Chinese art practice to digital interactive media. I would in fact suggest that the long-scroll form of visual presentation is one of the most significant formats for presenting information graphics and moving images today, because this form encourages audiences / participants / viewers to stay in a given exhibition space for a much longer time than normal, thus helping to realize the notion of ‘play-appreciation’ as applied to digital art.

Figure 166. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

ART+COM is Berlin-based interactive-design consultancy and interdisciplinary group.

295 ART+COM is Berlin-based interactive-design consultancy and interdisciplinary group.
The Science of Aliens is a designed and constructed interactive room where a long, curved table connects to the ceiling and where visitors are encouraged to touch animated aliens. In the exhibition space, many animated aliens were projected onto a long-scroll form multi-touch table. Generated in real time through computer software, the animated aliens were designed as creatures living on one of two planets: Aurelia and Blue Moon. During the exhibition, ‘they’ (these creatures) moved about (and, indeed, flew) in a virtual landscape, which was a video projected onto the area of a long-scroll table (2 x 7.5 m). This exhibition space featured various prompts encouraging viewers to participate actively: to touch and thus interact with the animated objects. This was the structure of the narrative, which unfolded in a long-scroll form of visual platform that allowed viewers enough space to stand, look, wander around and interact simultaneously with each other and the work.

Critique and comparison of the case studies

The long-scroll form of painting is one of the most traditional and significant elements of Chinese art. It invites viewers to have visual experiences from multiple and shifting perspectives. And it can be transformed into a contemporary mode by means of digital technology.

Looking at examples of the ways in which this has been attempted, Kan’s new approach to integrating painting and calligraphy in the form of ‘landscape-characters’ stands out both for its originality and for its faithfulness to the Chinese tradition. But today, in the digital era, viewers’ experiences of scrollwork are no longer limited to the two-dimensional platform of paper: the four-dimensional platform is a viable alternative. The ‘Opening show of the Beijing Olympics’ and the performance-art Cursive II demonstrated how experiments in technology have led to new narrative and visual experiences for audiences viewing calligraphic scrollwork. Kan, Zhang and Lin hail from different Chinese regions (Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan). All of them have significantly reinterpreted the idea of scrolls, as well as Shuhua practices, and some of them have taking these notions from a traditional 2D surface to a 4D
space. However, I critique that their new approach is deficient in the areas of viewers’ bodily engagement, three-way intimacy and interaction.

Secondly, both *The Broken Window* and *The Science of Aliens* simulated the function of long scrolls. A major difference between the two works is that *The Broken Window* cannot create an opportunity for viewers to view the artwork from multiple perspectives whereas *The Science of Aliens* opens itself to multiple perspective viewing, and does so by appropriating —through digital media—the traditional long-paper platform of the scroll into a contemporary long-table platform. Now, even though this long-scroll form of a table cannot be unfolded or unrolled in a traditional physical way, it attracts the attention of audiences to such an extent that they ‘travel’ around this table, constantly shifting from one perspective to another. The large size, in itself, encourages many audience members at any given time to stay for an unusually long time in the exhibition space. The shape of the table provides audience members with a sense of flexibility: as they stand at the table, they find themselves in front of, and above, the work. In fact, this practice is similar to traditional ways of holding a scroll painting. Viewers can act either as outsiders or as observers. Viewers who decide to interact with the artwork can play with the animated images. Moreover, viewers who are standing opposite each other at the table can interact, at the same time, with images on the table. As a result, a large number of viewers can be completely and simultaneously engaged in the environment. By contrast, viewers of *The Broken Window* can move only slightly in relation to the artwork and can perceive it from only one viewpoint.

Furthermore, in *The Broken Window*, the duration of the synthetic hologram is insufficient to encourage viewers to spend any considerable length of time with the work. In contrast, the long-scroll form of the table in *The Science of Aliens* can accommodate streams of viewers in the exhibition space, and it encourages them to explore the artwork freely from different viewpoints. Traditionally, people would view scroll-form paintings in a group rather than alone. There would normally be two viewers handling the scroll: one would hold the immovable end in a fixed position

---

296 The length of this interactive long-scroll form of table is about 7.5 x 2 m.
while the other viewer would hold the movable end, either unrolling it from the beginning of the painting or pausing at some point in the painting; this second viewer could also re-roll the painting by moving towards the first viewer, who would still be holding the immovable end in one place. Other viewers could stand or move freely around the painting, perceiving its content from different viewpoints. Similarly, viewers can wander around, stand in front of, look at, and freely touch The Science of Aliens, owing in large measure to the artwork’s long-scroll form (i.e. the interactive table). These viewers will be fully engaged in interacting with an independent non-deterministic system. The non-linear narrative, in this case, proceeds through viewers’ touching of the interactive table (as an interface). The faster the viewers’ physical contact with the table, the faster the narrative proceeds.

Finally, both Kan’s ‘landscape-characters’ and The Science of Aliens induce more audience mobility and involvement than do the Beijing Olympics opening show or The Broken Window. Desbiens’s holographic panoramagrams feature only the form of long scrolls, not the conceptual underpinning of the scrolls, involving the important functions of multiple perspective, ‘travelling’ (you) and ‘play-appreciation’. The long-scroll form of ART+COM’s interactive table, in contrast, acts as an enduring narrative platform with which viewers can engage in the exhibition space. The Science of Aliens is more effective than the other four works at giving its viewers time to evolve from their initial role as outsiders in a foreign setting to comfortable, interactive participants in a familiar setting. While The Broken Window has no significant multiple-viewpoint function—it possesses only a central viewpoint—the traditional Chinese long-scroll form of painting and The Science of Aliens are closely related in terms of their handling of viewer mobility, the passage of time, the multiplicity of viewer perspectives, and viewers’ bodily engagement. All of these facets can be seen as enactments of the idea of you. Table 16 provides a comparative overview of the five works.

Furthermore, my critique of these five cases studies is that for all its professionalism might help to suggest the new approach of combining shu and hua, but it could not solve the problem of ‘immobilization’ raised by Boris Groys in relation to the role of the viewer, and to the consequent limitation of showing video work in contemporary exhibition space. Groys criticizes that “the immobilization of the image in the museum, and the immobilization of the audience in the movie theatre, are two
different models that allow them to gain control over time", and he observes that the audience finds it hard to appreciate video work in the exhibition space (Groys 2008, pp.88-89). In response to this problem, the specific goal of my own digital practice (exhibition and workshop), especially in the *Dao* project (to be discussed in Chapter 6), has been to examine whether digital technology can help to translate the idea of *shu hua*, and suggest a new type of spatiotemporal experience based on scroll-form art involving the idea of ‘play-appreciation’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artwork / project</th>
<th>Scroll as a form of visual representation</th>
<th>Allowing audience participation and interaction</th>
<th>Audience perceptions of images through multiple viewpoints</th>
<th>Elements of traditional Chinese ‘calligraphy and painting’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Landscape-characters’</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing Olympics opening</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cursive II</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Broken Window</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Science of Aliens</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16. Critique and comparative overview of the five works.

5.4. Chapter conclusion

These five exemplary works demonstrate in their variety that traditional Chinese *Shuhua* is an art form whose component parts are as separable as they are combinable. Yet all rest on the scroll format as a spatial-visual presentation platform. The scroll format has the capacity to draw from viewers a host of spatiotemporal experiences through the activity of rolling and unrolling, which creates a sense of ‘play-appreciation’. Nevertheless, some of these works reveal shortcomings. For example, both Kan’s ‘landscape-characters’ work and the ‘Opening show of the Beijing Olympics’ is not appropriate for a full-scale implementation of ‘play-appreciation’ of contemporary Chinese art, which emphasizes bodily engagement of the viewers and
three-way intimacy and interaction. Desbiens's *The Broken Window* shows the absence in his artwork of spatiotemporal viewer engagement. Furthermore, the critique of ‘immobilization’ raised by Prof. Boris Groys in relation to the role of the viewer has not yet been resolved. Following on his analysis, my further question, therefore, is whether and to what extent my *Dao* project represents an attempt to re-contextualize the idea of ‘play-appreciation’ through digital media. Chapter 6 will, therefore, examine the central issue of whether digital technology can mediate and appropriate the context of scroll format from a traditional to a contemporary context, suggesting new types of spatiotemporal experience in terms of viewer role shifting.
Chapter 6: Creative Practice: 
*Dao Gives Birth to One*

6.1. Introduction

My digital interactive artwork series *Dao Gives Birth to One* (2009-2012) (Figure 167) consists of two components: exhibition and workshop, which will serve here as a case study and practical experimentation project furthering the analysis of how the traditional Chinese notions of *time* and *space* can be applied through digital moving images in a long scroll format. In this work I attempted to demonstrate that (1) The concept of *Dao*, (2) the function of the scroll as a form, and (3) the four-dimensional construction of Chinese characters can create temporal and spatial experiences similar to those found in traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy. I am interested in integrating these traditional concepts via digital media technology so as to transform the role of the viewer away from the ‘play-appreciation’ idea of the ‘Yellow Box’ into an interactive video exhibition and workshop platform.
6.2. The concept of Dao

My artwork aims to visualize the cycle of vigour and vitality\(^{297}\) of Dao in the universe with the assistance of digital media technology—a topic that has not been broached before in relation to the idea of the ‘Yellow Box’ and digital media.

In addressing this issue I first explored and reinterpreted the notions of *sheng* (生 ‘gives birth’) and *yi* (一 ‘one’) as used in Chapter 42 of *Dao De Jing* and the question how they could be and re-contextualized and visualized through digital media technology. With reference to the research materials, translations made by different scholars generally reflect their different linguistic perspectives. Thus there are actually different interpretations of *sheng* (生 ‘gives birth’), including ‘to create’, ‘to give birth’\(^{298}\), and ‘to generate’\(^{299}\). In fact, the notion of *sheng* tends to be even more abstract, spiritual and philosophical than any available translations. This led me to question how *sheng* could be reinterpreted and extended through visual representation in this digital era. To answer this question, I referred back to *Dao De Jing* and the ancient Chinese dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi*. According to *Dao De Jing*, *yi* (一 ‘one’) reflects a philosophy of how the universe was created, namely through *yi* and Dao.

Secondly, the most interesting issue that drew my attention was the Chinese character 一. This is placed as the first word in the first chapter of *Shuowen Jiezi*, which states that the 一 originally created heaven and earth and then generated the whole universe\(^{300}\). *Yi* (一 ‘one’) thus represents the ‘unity’ of the universe. And this unity, according to *Dao De Jing*, generates ten thousand things which form their tracks in the universe.

---

297 *Dao* is regarded as the ‘primordial natural force’ in nature and it contains unlimited ‘potentiality’ (潛藏力) and power of creation. But there will be an end, inasmuch as life is growing. However, ‘the end’ suggests the advent of another new life (Chen 2007, p.63).
298 “The *Dao* (道) gives birth to One. One gives birth to Two. Two gives birth to Three. Three gives birth to all things. All things have their backs to the female and stand facing the male. When male and female combine, all things achieve harmony” (Mitchell, 1988, p. 48).
299 “The *Dao* generated One; One generated Two; Two generated Three; Three generated the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things, carrying yin and embracing yang, used the empty vapour to achieve harmony” (Huang 2003, p.76). Huang’s version is based on the Silk Texts A and B unearthed from the Han tombs near Changsha, Hunan Province in China in 1973.
Everything (ten thousand things) grows in the beginning and will disappear in the end. This approach has not yet been considered as a visual representation platform using digital media.

6.3. The idea of long scroll

I aimed to apply 12 story lines into 12 screens as a storyboarding sequence in order to enact the process in which ‘one’ could be created / generated into ‘ten thousands things’ through interaction with human beings as expressed in the texts of Chapter 42 of *Dao De Jing* quoted above. In this endeavour, I first created 12 white digital screens and then inserted my custom-made ‘Flying Animated Chinese Characters’ (FACC), composed from my animated brush strokes. The basic narrative sequence is as follows:

The scene in ‘screen 1’ represents the beginning of the universe. I animated the three-dimensional ‘one’ as a ‘FACC’ flying alone in the universe (white virtual space) after serving as a function to divide the universe into heaven and earth (Figure 168).

![Screen 1 – Screen 4](image)

Figure 168. The first three scenes from screen 1 – 4 which indicate how the concept of ‘one’ is generated to ‘two’ and ‘four’ through its interaction with the human. Screen scenario of *Dao Gives Birth to One (version II)*; Hong Kong, 2009 (visualization by the author).
How, then, was ‘two’ (二, er) created? The answer is that once human beings appeared in this universe, the form of the characters (‘form imitation’ [象形, xiang xing]) was expanded and created through their interaction. Thus ‘screen 2’ shows how, whenever any part of a human being (such as limb, nose, head) interacts with the ‘FACC’ — (yi, ‘one’), this — will generate another and become 二, because (Chinese) linguistic characters are meaningless without human involvement. Furthermore, in ‘screen 3’ and later screens, numerous ‘FACC’ are generated in such a way that they become brush stocks. Once these animated and flying brush stocks come across each other, they may associate certain combination of Chinese characters, word phases such as ‘king’ (王, wang), ‘new’ (新, xin) and ‘big’ (大, da), etc. In the last scene — ‘screen 12’, thousands of animated Chinese brush strokes and Chinese characters are flying in this universe, which is used to simulate the concept of ‘a thousand things in the universe’ (Figure 169). Even though there are a large number of ‘flying animated Chinese characters’ in the last screen, they move on their own track with a certain system, which simulates our human activities in the chaos of the universe. The last few seconds of ‘screen 12’ (the last scene of this long scroll) is about everything returning to white (void) again with only one Chinese brush stock left, which implies the system of our human life cycle in this universe (for details, see 'DAO Animation Sequence' in Appendix D ’DAO' in DVD [1]).

Figure 169. The last three scenes from screen 10 – 12 which indicate how the concept of ‘a thousand things in the universe’ suggested by Dao is transformed through digital visual representation. Screen scenario of Dao Gives Birth to One (version II); Hong Kong, 2009 (visualization by the author).

301 According to Shuowen Jiezi, one of the processes of creating Chinese characters can rest on the features of our bodies or on perceptions of objects from afar (see Chapter 1).
Furthermore, in *Dao Gives Birth to One* I attempted to transform the 2D plane surface to a 4D virtual space by reinterpreting the concept of *void* through digital technology, transforming the concept of empty space into a concept of virtual space. Traditionally, the white colour in the pictorial space of Chinese rice paper has been regarded as a *void*—an empty space rather than a colour. Although paper is physically a two-dimensional plane, it is regarded as an infinite space with endless time. When these Chinese characters fly about in that virtual space, one almost has the impression of real beings racing back and forth in the universe. This virtual experience has a 4D sense to it.

I also sought to open a new approach for video and interactive art. As mentioned in Chapter 2, I questioned whether a long scroll format video installation could suggest a new direction for digital art in relation to the ‘play-appreciation’ idea. The result might help solve the problem raised by Professor Boris Groys, who has observed that viewers find it hard to appreciate video work in the exhibition space. In Groys’ view

*The images go on moving – but the audience also continues to move. One does not remain sitting or standing for any length of time in an exhibition space; rather one retraces one’s steps through the space again and again, remains standing in front of a picture for while, moves closer or away from it, looks at it from different perspectives, and so on.* (Groys 2008, p. 87)

Groys further argues that the viewer’s movement in such an exhibition space cannot be arbitrarily stopped because it is constitutive of the way perception functions within the art system: “An attempt to force a visitor to watch all of the videos or films in the context of a larger exhibition from beginning to end would be doomed to failure from

---

302 The concept of *void* in traditional rice paper suggests not only a sense of endless time, but a sense of infinite space as well.
the start – the duration of the average exhibition visit is simply not long enough” (Groys 2008, pp. 87-88). He sees this not as a problem of the length of the video, but of the expectations of the audience: the expectations of the visitor in relation to a video in the exhibition space are totally different from those relevant to the cinema/movie theatre. The visitor to a video installation basically no longer knows what to do. Should he stop and watch the images moving before his eyes as in a movie theatre, or, as in a museum, continue on in the confidence that over time, the moving images will not change as much as seems likely? (Groys 2008, p. 88). We (as artist and viewer) face both problems. In order to solve them in an innovative manner I first created and combined 12 digital video screens together to create a long scroll format. Each video screen displays different kinds of interactive and animated Chinese characters. The detailed method of the video installation is as follows:

I first invited different people to come to my studio to interact with my flying Chinese characters in front of my artwork. In the studio I could shift my focus to different parts of their bodies for the shooting. I then edited all the footage into different lengths and set all of these into the 12 videos as a long scroll screening format, creating 12 video screens with 12 different lengths of running time. Each screen shows how flying Chinese characters interact with humans. The first video lasts 3 minutes; the second lasts 8 minutes; the eighth lasts 21 minutes; and the last video lasts 5 minutes. Because the loop length of each video is different (Figure 170), various narrative combinations are automatically created. Viewers need not worry about the time restriction of the video work, or which part of the videos they have missed, because the video loops run in overlapping phases anyway. In other words, people can come and go freely. They are encouraged to perceive this long scroll video installation from different perspectives, viewing the screens one by one closely or from a long distance; the most important point is that every one has his/her own time to observe and take in the video narration. The free and relaxed atmosphere encourages viewers to enter into the spirit of this video work and merge their minds in the exhibition space as a whole (Figure 171).
6.4. Chinese-character writing as a 3D and 4D experience

(i) Time in character-writing

The ‘Dao’ project used digital technology to simulate the reality of Chinese calligraphic characters in terms of time and space. The first step sought to give viewers a temporal experience by having them visualize the entire process of creating...
these animated characters as a flying sequence. Traditionally, calligraphy has been a completed work of art that gives the viewer neither a physical nor a temporal experience. In general, therefore, viewers who face a work of calligraphy should try to imagine the process underlying the creation of the characters: for example the characteristics of the first brush stroke, the sequence of brush strokes, and the flow of movement connecting one character to another; this will enhance their appreciation of the work. However, my new approach for the digital era was to invite viewers to ‘witness’ and ‘experience’ the whole process of character writing through digital animation sequences.

To better understand this process, let’s take a simplified Chinese character, ‘horse’ (马, ma), as an example. I not only animated the motion of the form of 马, but also visualized the character’s underlying process of writing through sequenced images (Figure 172). In other words, the viewer can see how this character was created from the first brush stroke to the final stroke in real time. At this point, the appreciation of Chinese calligraphy is no longer centred on a completed work of art; instead, comprehensive appreciation includes the notion of time, creating a sense of growth and duration, a temporal experience.

Figure 172. Animation sequence of the writing process from one brush stroke to the final Chinese character 马 (visualization by the author).

(ii) Space in character-writing

The second method that I used to engender a 4D experience of my artwork in viewers involved creating Chinese brush strokes (and characters) through digital technology. In this endeavour I revisualized the characters’ three-dimensional forms by using such
digital technologies as 3D modelling, interactive programming and video making. I contend that Chinese-character writing contains the seeds of 3D and 4D experience, which become manifest only when a traditional calligrapher controls the volume of ink and the pressure of brushes on a 2-dimensional writing platform. According to a visual analysis by the Koiso Design Institute, Nippon Design Centre (Japan), standard script in the early Tang Dynasty was characterized by the Wan Xizhi movement’s emphasis on vertical lift, which was regarded as the most significant aesthetic model in history. The results of his analyses show that in the early Tang Dynasty some Chinese characters were originally treated as three-dimensional rather than flattened forms (Hidden Principles of East Asian Character Universe 2006). I would, then, argue that such three-dimensional forms can be revisualized and translated through digital technology. Here, I took the Chinese character for ‘mouth’ (口, kou) as an example of how a flying Chinese character could be visualized through a 360° view (Figure 173). I designed the flying sequence of this character as a shape that, while in motion, flips from left to right. When the viewer watches this character zooming around in virtual space (void), the character’s motion suggests a three-dimensional form, rather than a flattened, 2-dimensional image. When the characters ‘mouth’ (口, kou) and ‘horse’ (马, ma) are flying together, a distinct sense of spatiotemporal experience is engendered.

Figure 173. Animation sequence of a Chinese character 口 as visualized through a 360° view (visualization by the author).

303 For example, the character shu (書, ‘brush writing’) shows how the shape of Chinese characters has evolved since the Tang Dynasty from a dynamic flow to a subtle and balanced visual presentation (Hidden Principles of East Asian Character Universe 2006).
(iii) Case studies: critique and comparison

Apart from my own ‘animated flying Chinese characters’, a number of different styles of digital text artwork have surfaced around the world in the last two decades. Several contemporary artists, such as Camille Utterback (1970-), Romy Achituv (1958-) and Lee Lee Nam (1969-) have applied motion to a text; but this—as opposed to creating a 3D temporal aspect—does not typically evoke a spatiotemporal experience. I saw *Text Rain* (1999) at Utterback’s studio in San Francisco in 2006 and Lee’s *Korean 8-fold Screen* (2007) at HKART Fair10, Hong Kong, in 2010.

Figure 174. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

*Text Rain* is an interactive installation with falling English letters forming lines of a poem about bodies and language (Figure 174). Participants and viewers can play with those falling letters by gesturing with their bodies. *Korean 8-fold Screen* is a digital video installation with 8 different LCD displays arranged vertically to simulate the appearance of traditional Asian folding screens (Figure 175). These 8 videos show Korean and Chinese textual elements flying from left to right on the screen. However, although the textual elements (whether English, Chinese, or Korean) in these two works of art are animated, they lack literal depth; in other words, the animated textual
elements are in motion but their shapes remain flat, on a 2D plane. This indicates that the artists did not consider connecting the textual elements to viewers’ spatiotemporal experience.

Figure 175. has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.


In contrast, Chinese characters always have a dimension of time and space (for details, see Chapter 1), but this seems to be missing from the work of such contemporary
artists. In this sense, my ‘animated flying Chinese characters’ in the ‘BCSL’ and ‘Dao’ projects show a new approach to viewing time and space in character writing, with 3D Chinese characters that enable viewers to have an interactive spatiotemporal experience as well (Figure 176). The following paragraph demonstrates that, apart from my animated Chinese characters, traditional Chinese chairs, both as visual form and practical function, could also help to suggest a sense of 4D experience to the viewers through my Dao series projects.

6.5. Exploring the idea of ‘play-appreciation’ in digital media

6.5.1. Contextual analysis

(i) Fluxus: Triangular relationship among artwork, artist and audience

In fact, the emphasis on the interrelation between artwork, artist and audience (the presence of the artist / the artist’s responsibility for the context of the artwork / the role of the audience in completing the artwork) is not only found in traditional Chinese art practice, a similar idea (which I shall call ‘triangular relationship’ in this thesis) in performance and media arts has also been established in the West at least since the 1960s. Here I will take Fluxus\textsuperscript{304} as an example to enhance my discussion in discovering new cultural equivalents for translating new media practice within the ‘literati’ Chinese tradition.

\textsuperscript{304} Fluxus began in the 1960s as a small but international network of artists and composers, etc. The first Fluxus event happened in 1961 at the AG Gallery in New York.
All aspects of Fluxus contained elements that mitigated the traditional relationship in art of the passivity of the viewer and the domination of the object. [...] Most Fluxus works involved interaction with a participant, who in other forms of art would be called a viewer. (Smith 1998, p. 240)

The name Fluxus was used by artist George Maciunas 305 to refer to collective activities of the group, such as concerts, festival, and actions. The art movement in the 1960s and 70s mainly advocated social communication and collaboration, indeterminacy, open-endedness, and audience participation. According to Owen F. Smith, some Fluxus works emphasize the value of the art work as being determined by the participant. Smith quotes Fluxus artists Dick Higgins 306 and Ben Vautier 307:

*The artist gives you [the audience] the structure: you may fill it in yourself*” and “Fluxus, since 1963, brings “the participation of the audience into the action. Not a phony participant, that is, the play going on in the audience, but a real wish to transfer the responsibility. (Smith 1998, pp. 229-241)

For example, in her *Cut Piece* (1964), one of the most significant masterpieces of the 1960s, Fluxus artist Yoko Ono 308 sat kneeling on the concert hall stage, wearing her best suit of clothing, with a pair of scissors placed on the floor in front of her. She invited members of the audience, one at a time, to cut a bit of her clothes off—which they were allowed to keep with them. Yoko remained motionless throughout the piece. The piece ended at her option. Another example is *4’33”* (1952) by John Cage 309, which is performed in the absence of deliberate sound in the concert hall. Finally, the

305 George Maciunas (1931 – 1978) was a Lithuanian-born American artist. He was a founding member of Fluxus, an international community of artists, architects, composers, and designers.  
306 Dick Higgins (1938 – 1998) was a composer, poet, printer, and early Fluxus artist.  
307 Ben Vautier (b.1935 -) is a French artist, who joined the Fluxus artistic movement in the 1960s.  
308 Yoko Ono (小野洋子, b. 1933-) is a Japanese performance and conceptual artist, singer-songwriter and peace activist.  
309 John Milton Cage Jr. (1912-1992) was an American composer, music theorist, writer, and artist.
audience notices the sounds of the environment are actually the art work itself. 4’33” demonstrates that the viewer’s role (as audience) is no longer passive and observational but active and interactive. Meanwhile, Korean artist Nam June Paik \(^{310}\) brought his *Robot K-456* (1964) to perform on the street. This performance also corresponded to the idea about how the audiences (in this case the people walking in the street and driving in their cars) reacted to this ‘electronic robot’ appearing in their daily life environment. Through the video documentary of *Robot K-456*, the artist not only examined how he could perform or play with his ‘robot’ in the street, but also how the artist and artwork could interact with the people there. In his *Zen for Film* (1964), audiences are also encouraged to contemplate a sense of nothingness from the idea of *Zen* and concentrate on the light and dust rather than focusing on and absorbing sounds and images normally associated with film (moving images). All these artworks demonstrate that the viewer’s role (as audience) is no longer passive and observational, but active and interactive. Although the audience may not have taken part directly in the physical creation of the art piece, they could interact with it in such a way that they brought life to the art. It was a life that would have been absent without their participation.

(ii) Digital media art: “The visitor as user” and “consumer-generated content”

Audience participation has also been an important element in other digital media art—apart from Fluxus—since the early 1980s. Academic critics have also emphasized the importance of audience participation, and there has been wide discussion of this issue. Michael Rush, for example, states that beyond the ‘clicking’ and ‘surfing’ activities of the Web, which are, indeed, forms of interaction with computer technology, several artists towards the end of the century created works, often on a larger scale, that are truly participatory (Rush 2001, p. 201). Michael Rush also comments that interactivity is a new form of visual experience that extends beyond the visual to the tactile. Viewers are essential and active participants in this art. No longer mere viewers, they

\(^{310}\) Nam June Paik (1932-2006) was a Korean American artist, who is regarded as one of the first video artists to experiment with electronic media and made a profound impact on the history of video art.
are now users (Rush 2001, p.216). Digital media artist Masaki Fujihata emphasizes that to understand is to invent.

*In an art interactivity, one must be simulated by interaction and enjoy having one’s imagination activated. Interactivity is a stimulation of the power of imagination. By the power of imagination, one tries to see what will happen a few milliseconds ahead. This brings a future to the present. It is a bridge between a past and a future. [...] All events are real time and interactive. It is entirely common to the human that when we are talking to each other, both react interactively. Further, the creativity of a system, constructing interactive art, is designing the structure / function of the medium. It is not about creating oneself (content). While creating the system, the person emerges. It is a kind of magic, a participant invents himself in that interactive system. There needs to be invention of a new language of interactive systems. (Fujihata 2001, pp. 80-82).*

I strongly agree with Masaki’s proposal that an interactive system is insignificant without human participation and, therefore, my *Dao Gives Birth to One* workshop corresponds to his concept as described in the following paragraphs. My workshop may be simple in terms of its structure, it, however, requires interaction between the audience and the artist. Participants are required to attend a lecture and use the Chinese brush to create animated characters. They need to wait for over a week and then return to the venue to combine their output with the artwork of the artist. This process is an effective reflection of Fujihata’s proposition that the magic of the interaction is for the participant to invent himself in the interactive system. Frank Popper, too, states that the term ‘interaction’ has a more recent history in this area and refers to a more comprehensive involvement. The term ‘participant’, in the context of contemporary art, refers to a relationship between a spectator and an already existing open-ended art work (Popper 1997, p.8). My workshop, for example, would be incomplete without active participation of the audience and the definition of a ‘complete’ work is open-ended. *Dao Gives Birth to One* has been run in Manchester and Hong Kong, and while the infrastructure is the same, the outcome was totally
I am deeply impressed by these comments, although my angle on the visitor may be different. From my perspective, digital media art has shifted the visitor’s role from being the traditionally passive to an active one. From Weibel’s angle, however, the visitor may be deemed the user and the center of the exhibition. Japanese digital media artist Itsuo Sakane says that “As its name implies, interactive art is artwork that from the beginning conveys meaning and enjoyment when you participate in it. If you only stand still the whole time, nothing happens. The unique character of interactive art, even if we take only one work as an example, is that its progress depends on the artist’s or the audience’s attitude toward participant. This is a crucial difference from previous artworks” (Sakane 1999, p.12). His comments also echo my idea of interactivity as presented in Dao Gives Birth to One. My random arrangements of the chairs, in itself, may be seen as an interactive artwork (to be discussed further in the following paragraphs), and I called on the participants in this work to take different perspectives or even move the chairs around. The chairs by themselves are not interactive in the setting, and therefore the chairs being moved around exemplifies Prof. Andrea Witcomb’s idea that 'dialogic interactivity exhibitions' tend to make an

Since 1960, the art world had anticipated and prepared for a change in consumer behaviors. Artists handed over creativity to the beholder, giving him or her the rules of behavior. Interactive artworks no longer exist autonomously; but rather, they exist only through their use by the receiver, the user. [...] Following on the heels of participatory and iterative media art, visitor as user now generate or compile the content in the museum. Exhibition visitors can act as artists, curators, and producers. The visitor is at the center of the exhibition as user, as emancipated consumer. (Weibel 2008, pp. 140 - 142)
effort to connect with visitors by representing aspects of their own cultural background and using open-ended narratives (Witcomb 2006).

Finally, Professor Boris Groys comments that “the artists themselves demand an active participation, and to that end have prepared a program waiting for your engagement. Many works offer you a stage on which you are the actor of the moment— the artists have anticipated your responses, and concentrate on creating works that will evolve as cooperative efforts” (Groys 2008, pp.82-91). In my project ‘BCSL’, the dual screens may not be part of the interactivity. The interactivity is showcased in the movements of the Chinese characters. Without the participants seeing themselves in the two screens, such interactivity is also deemed meaningless. Their participation is not simply interaction with the animation, but their appearance on the dual screens is critical in the presentation of their dual identities. The active engagement of the audience therefore gives life to my project.

All the above examples from Fluxus, and the quotations from different scholars and artists, reflect the fact that elements of audience involvement and participation have helped to blur the lines among artworks, artists and audiences. Comparatively speaking, the idea of incorporating audience involvement with the artwork and the artist contributes to the examination of a new direction for appropriating traditional Chinese thinking into modern media practice in terms of the role of the audience through the viewers’ experience of ‘play-appreciation’.

---

6.5.2. Theoretical and Practical analysis

Creative practice (I): *Dao Gives Birth to One* (version III)

Figure 177. Installation setting: *Dao Gives Birth to One (version III)* at Taipei Museum of Art, Taiwan, 2010-11.

In the exhibition space of *Dao Gives Birth to One* (version III), I have illustrated how the use of long scroll as a form of visual representation, together with Chinese chairs, applies and enacts the viewers’ experience of ‘play-appreciation’. *Dao* (version III) invites visitors to merge into the exhibition space through forty different styles of traditional Chinese chairs, which are placed right in front of the long scroll video screen (Figure 177-180). I take the shows in the Hong Kong Museum of Art (2010) and the Taipei Fine Art Museum, Taiwan (2010-11) as exemplifying how the form of these chairs plays a significant role in my video installation in relation to viewers’ temporal and spatial experience. The form of the chairs serves three functions: (1) to connect the virtual space (on the screen) to physical space (in the exhibition venue); (2) to build up a close and comfortable relation between viewers, artist and artwork in relation to the concept of ‘play-appreciation'; (3) to merge viewers into the exhibition space.

---

*Dao Gives Birth to One* (version III) was also invited to be shown for another exhibition *Time Unfrozen (A white steed flitting past a crack): From Lau Kuo-Sung to New Media Art* (白駒過隙・山動水行—從劉國松到新媒體藝) (2010) in the Taipei Fine Art Museum, Taiwan, from November 2010 to Jan 2011.
Figure 178. *Dao Give Birth to One (version III)* at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, 2010.

‘Play-appreciation’

First of all, the function of these forty chairs helps to bridge the connection between the virtual space (on the screen) and physical space (in the exhibition venue) for the viewers. The spatial arrangement of Chinese chairs correlates to the empty space left in Chinese characters. Chinese characters and Chinese traditional style chairs seem to be incompatible elements, in which Chinese characters are regarded as 2-dimensional virtual images while the chairs are 3D solid objects. However, the concepts of 'solid' and 'virtual' are not necessarily contradictory. This is because both Chinese characters and traditional Chinese chairs are presented as unified and completed ‘objects’ with concrete sculptural structures and systems; and their visual form is considered as the matching point between empty space (negative space – *yin*) and solid structure (positive space - *yang*), depending on the direction of one's perceptions. The empty space left by the chair and the characters in both cases comes from their solid structure. In other words, when we perceive the chairs and ‘FACC’ in the exhibition space, both *yin* and *yang* spatial experience is involved. In contrast to the ‘animated flying Chinese characters’, the form of the chairs exists in a real space, and the Chinese characters are realized and visualized in virtual space.
Moreover, these traditional Chinese chairs help to extend the feeling of intimacy and interaction between viewers, artwork and artist. The chairs allow viewers to feel free to come and drop by the exhibition space without any time restriction. Viewers are welcome to sit anywhere depending on which video sequence they are viewing. Also, some kids always rearrange the chairs depending on their preferences. So I have had to come back to the exhibition venue to rearrange the chairs once a week, in order to ensure that the visual arrangement or flow of the chairs correlates to the flow of the Chinese characters on the screens. This fact alone indicates that viewers feel more comfortable and willing to spend time with this kind of interactive installation setting.

Finally, through physically touching the old Chinese chairs viewers can feel closer to the exhibition space. And the longer they sit on the chairs, the closer the empathy they feel with the material object. The materiality and function of the chairs reflects the relation between the human being and a natural object, corresponding to Zhuang zi’s concept of Dao “Heaven, Earth and I were created together; All things and I are...”
unified as One” 313. Viewers can merge into spiritual and material space through this embraced environment (Figure 181).

Figure 180. Dao Give Birth to One (version II) at Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre, Hong Kong, 2009 (visualization by the author).

Figure 181. Merging viewers into the exhibition space (visualization by the author).

313 Original text: 「天地與我並生，萬物與我為一。 」《莊子·齊物論》
Rita Chang, the curator of the *Time Unfrozen* exhibition \(^{314}\) (2010), has made the important observation that new technologies such as computers, video, projectors and LCD displays, have broken through the flat surface of paper or canvas, deconstructing the elements of brush and ink, monopolizing light and shadow, dividing the landscape, breaking “time” from hiding in its set grid, stepping into new experiences of aesthetic perception, such as speed, flow and light. She sees this kind of integration (new media technology and viewers’ participation) as suggesting some alternative oriental viewpoints (interview with Chang 2010). I interpret such ‘oriental viewpoints’ specifically to include the idea of ‘play-appreciation’, which is one of the elements of the ‘Yellow Box’. The idea of using long scroll as a form of visual representation, as well as the idea of using Chinese chairs, applies and enacts the viewers’ experience of ‘play-appreciation’.

**Creative practice (II): *Dao Gives Birth to One* (version IV)**

*Interactivity is a new form of visual experience. It is a new form of experiencing art that extends beyond the visual to the tactile. Viewers are essential, active participants in this art. No longer mere viewers, they are now users. (Rush 2001, p.216)*

**(i) Inviting audience participation**

In this sense, my latest interactive version of *Dao Gives Birth to One* (version IV) could be taken as an example of appropriating the idea of 'play-appreciation' through shifting the role of the audience in the disparate spaces of exhibition, lecture and workshop.

---

\(^{314}\) My *Dao Gives Birth to One* (version III) was invited to participate in the *Time Unfrozen* exhibition in the Taipei Fine Art Museum, Taiwan (2010-11).
First of all, I created a tunnel (Figure 182) with openings in two directions (one on the right, and the other on the left) which served both as entrance and exit, with dim lighting, in order to correlate the concept of the cycle from the installation—which is that there is no end or beginning of the audience’s visual journey. So they could choose to navigate the artwork either from the left or right hand side. Secondly, I put the 12 monitors on the floor of the exhibition venue rather than hanging on the wall. At the same time, I designed and custom-made six sets of rectangular shaped cushions—soft seats, with sackcloth (hessian) material in order to provide a comfortable and cosy feeling to the audience, allowing them to sit or lie down in front of the artwork (Figure 183), in order to create a sense of proximity and three-way intimacy: (1) with the artwork, (2) with each other as audience viewing the artwork and interactive screens, (3) in the activity of playing the interactive ‘FACC’ on the screens. Thirdly, I allocated four screens (out of the 12) to real-time interaction with the audiences in this cosy environment. Thus, on the one hand the audience could simply enjoy the spiritual atmosphere created by the video installation through viewing the movement of the flying characters. On the other hand, they could also act as participants, merging into the virtual space and interacting with the flying Chinese characters.

Figure 182. The right hand entrance of the tunnel towards the exhibition venue; Venue: Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, UK, 2012 (The other entrance is opposite – on the left hand side of the tunnel.)
(ii) Immersion and experience

Furthermore, I organized a public lecture and workshop (Figures 184-186) inside the exhibition venue for the audience a week after the opening of my solo show ‘Hung Keung: Dao Gives Birth to One’ in the Chinese Art Centre, Manchester, UK (2012). First of all, in the lecture session, I introduced and demonstrated how the idea of multiple viewpoints is applied in Chinese characters, and how Chinese characters are closely related to the human body and to objects that are themselves related to the human body. Then in the workshop session, I invited the audience to create their own text base of the philosophy of time and space in relation to Chinese characters. Afterwards, I took another two weeks to digitalize all their drawings into animated texts, and then programmed and integrated those new texts into my interactive artwork. Then all the audiences were invited to come back to the exhibition venue to play with their 'artwork' (Figures 187 -188).

---

315 Title: HUNG Keung: Dao Gives Birth to One; Venue: Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, UK; Date: 5 July 2012 – 1 Sept 2012.
Figure 184. The scene of ‘Flip and Fly’ - digital animation workshop of Chinese writing. Venue: Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, UK; Date: 05 July 2012.

Figure 185. Audience members practising the production of animated text sequences in the workshop. Venue: Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, UK; Date: 05 July 2012.
Figure 186. Audience members practising the production of animated text sequences in the workshop. Venue: Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, UK; Date: 05 July 2012.

Figure 187. (Video clip in sequences) Audiences are playing with their ‘animated & interactive characters’ at the exhibition space. Venue: Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, UK; Date: 28 July 2012.
The term ‘participant’, in the context of contemporary art, refers to a relationship between a spectator and an already existing open-ended artwork. (Popper 1997, p.8)

In fact, some theorists such as Andrea Witcomb, Bettina Messias Carbonell, Boris Groys, Frank Popper, Graham Black, Michelle Henning, Michele Rush and Wu Hung have discussed the issue of the role and the relation between audience (as participant)
and museum. For example, for Andrea Witcomb 'interactive displays' are not a new idea. They have a long history and can be traced back to as early as 1889. However, Witcomb argues that "interactivity is too often understood as simply an outcome of interactives; [...] it is much more important to develop a clear idea of the possibilities inherent in the notion of interactivity. Its application may or may not include interactives, but it will involve thinking of the museum audience first; [...] interactivity is something that all museum professionals should be engaged in developing” (Witcomb 2006). My Dao project can be used to examine if the direction of my practice (workshop and exhibition mode) could contribute to a new experience for the audience through appropriating the idea of interactivity. In Witcomb’s opinion, interactives are not only about providing "fun", but also allowing visitors to be "active" and to exercise choice. In other words, in the broader sense, interactivity, choice, and democracy are far more important elements of digital media art compared to the mere fact of things being computerized and programmed. Also, she states that this idea “could offer a more effective pedagogical tool than traditional forms of exhibition making, which is also able to inspire and provoke exploration, and to tempt people to look more thoughtfully at traditional museum displays” (Witcomb 2006).

In the Dao project, I reinterpreted the idea of “hands-on interactives” through an experience of ‘duration’ that was not similar to traditional interactive learning experiences such as ‘every action generates a reaction’ or the ‘control idea’—a stimulus-response model in which the aim is to transmit knowledge by emphasizing repetition and rewarding correct answers. It focuses instead on involving a sense of time passing through learning, contemplation, discovery—an experience of learning that is not limited to one space, but is spread both inside and outside the exhibition venue. A week after the workshop, audiences could come back to the exhibition venue and start playing with their own artwork together with the artist.

---

316 Andrea Witcomb discussed that interactivity seems to be generally understood as a process that can be added to an already existing display and the most often involves some form of computerized technology.

317 The discovery model, based on a realist epistemology and constructivist learning theory, is, perhaps, the most popular current framework for developing interactives and understanding interactivity in the context of the museum (Witcomb 2006).
fact, this attempt corresponds to Andrea Witcomb’s idea of "dialogically interactive exhibition" which offers opportunities and rights to visitors to interact with the works inside the exhibition space according to their own cultural backgrounds. The result of such play-appreciation is like an open-ended narrative without any pre-set answer.

In my *Dao* project, there is an opportunity for audiences to transform their own culture and story through the process of making their own hands-on animated letters (English/Chinese characters). A tangible touch is created through an appeal to their own experience, which allows audiences to express their own meanings and then encourages them to play (interacted) with these together with other members of the audience later in the exhibition. This exhibition space is no longer a white cube, black box or yellow box; it works through participation, immersion, creativity, and gathering hands-on experience. I claim that this could be considered a new translation for ‘play-appreciation’ in the future. Furthermore, the feedback and response of the audience and the public reflects the direction of my *Dao* project as successful and well-recognized. For example,

*Obviously, the Dao philosophy is becoming the one of the most popular topics in China. Therefore, a suitable interpreting will benefit delivering the messages to the west. Therefore, I think your interactive exhibition is significant important for China, such as a growing up new power, in this critical economic era. (Email message from Dr. Shengke Zhi to the author 6 / 07 / 2012)*

*The piece is an incredibly interesting take on space, time and philosophy that stems from a reflection on Chinese culture….On the surface Dao Gives Birth To One feels like a new age, media heavy take on meditation, space and religion. Seemingly simple effects transform the space, begging the audience to become one with the work. Letters, sounds, colours and time all blend into a single entity and from them internal reflections hopefully spring. For most this is an incredible aesthetic experience … The technology and presentation*
forces us to take a logical approach to deep philosophical issues raised, which to the artist is exactly what he wants people to do when considering China’s place in the world....However not only does this work make you engage with China, you also begin to reflect upon your own place in the world. Dao Gives Birth To One is an incredible installation; on some level it engages on a ‘spiritual’ plane, causing reflection and self-engagement that is rare amongst art works on this scale. The thought behind it is so deep and well-constructed that it’s hard to draw criticism from it on any level. An international piece well worthy of its high praise. (Balderstone, T. 2012) (see Appendix 5.2. ‘Response’).

These significant responses from the public underpin the claim that in this new direction the meaning of ‘participant’ has been extended from someone who plays with an artwork through interaction to someone who creates their own artwork with the artist. The audience is no longer passive, but is actively engaged in creating and then playing with its own and the artist’s work (see video documentation in Appendix L in DVD [2]). Most importantly, audiences went through various steps: visiting the exhibition, attending the lecture, participating in the workshop, creating their own artwork, revisiting the exhibition and reunion with other participants. Such experience constituted a new and innovative platform of ‘play-appreciation’ connecting old and new experience with respect to the traditional concept of Chinese art and modern digital practice.

6.6. Chapter conclusion

The analysis undertaken in this chapter reflects the limitations of using and exploring Shuhua in both 2D and 4D practice today. The practice centres on the format of the scroll as commonly applied in both Chinese shu ‘brush writing’ (calligraphy) and hua ‘painting’. In Chapter 5 I discussed that ‘landscape-characters’ suggested a new approach to combining Shu hua in a long scroll format as a visual representation platform. The ‘Opening show of the Beijing Olympics’ demonstrated how digital
technology could implement the concept of long scroll format. However, the notion of ‘play-appreciation’ and a sense of intimacy through viewers’ bodily engagement have not been considered deeply or realized to any significant extent in these works. So I embarked on my creative practice Dao Gives Birth to One project in order to demonstrate how the traditional idea of handling time and space could be translated through an interactive video sequence in a long scroll format. Moreover, through re-contextualizing the function and the materiality of those old Chinese chairs to the exhibition space, the Dao project suggests a sense of intimacy between human beings, Chinese characters and the universe. Most importantly, in comparison to ‘landscape-characters’ and the ‘Opening show of the Beijing Olympics’, Dao Gives Birth to One suggests a new visual representation platform for digital media art through applying the idea of ‘play-appreciation’. The role of the viewer has shifted from observation (passive role) to participation (active role) or has even assumed part of the artist’s role, from where it has become truly interactive. My research has, therefore, demonstrated how the traditional Chinese idea of time and space can be applied and re-contextualized, and has shown a broad spectrum of connections between Chinese art and digital media. The results may open a new way of perceiving notions of time and space through shifting the role of the viewer from passivity to activity, and from there to interactivity.
Chapter 7:
Final Overview & Conclusion:

7.1. Correlations exist among traditional, contemporary Chinese artworks and digital media art

The result of my research demonstrates that digital notions of time and space can be reinterpreted through an analysis of traditional Chinese philosophy of Dao and a critical comparison of four disciplines: calligraphy, painting, sculpture and media arts. An original contribution to knowledge and research arises through the interface of theoretical and creative practices. The various chapters in this thesis have been developed in order to investigate the correlations between classical Chinese art and current developments in digital media art in terms of how the notions of time and space can be expressed and enacted through theoretical and practical research. A chapter by chapter outline of these correlations follows.

Chapter 1: Ancient Chinese art as a digital context: This chapter highlights three correlations between ancient Chinese art and philosophy and the potentials of digital media: the use of one-point perspective and of multiple perspective tricks, the application of 4D and the actual process of storyboarding. Furthermore, when the processes of ‘animatics’ are stitched together to form similar sequences to those used in ancient China, the sense of space and time changes. These correlations show how traditional Chinese artists, influenced by philosophy, were already thinking about novel ways to present information to their audiences.

Chapter 2: ‘Bodily engagement’, ‘intimacy’ and ‘play-appreciation’ meet digital technology: I argue that the ‘Yellow Box’ idea should be opened up to include digital technology. Today, digital technology artists are seriously considering the challenges of multiple spaces, compressing time and creating a sense of intimacy by asking viewers to be physically engaged. As in the interactive e-card, a viewer’s sense of
intimacy relies on the perceptual, temporal and spatial experience of delivering and perceiving texts and images simultaneously. I argue that digital media artworks are underrepresented in connection with the idea of ‘play-appreciation’ in the ‘Yellow Box’.

**Chapter 3: Correlations between the idea of time and traditional Chinese art:**
This chapter posits a set of correlations about the idea of time and compares Chinese art and digital media art in this regard, exemplifying looping, bodily engagement and layering of content (non-linear narrative). Several case studies illustrate how digital art can re-appropriate ancient Chinese artwork and transform it into a temporal experience.

**Chapter 4: Spatial correlations between Chinese and media art:** This chapter analyses spatial relationships, focusing on the impact of ‘binary vision’ and dual screens on perception, the use of multiple identities and cultural differences, and the way viewer-roles, together with bodily and spatial engagement, have changed. Many correlations appear in the ways in which such spatial experiences and physical concepts have been applied from the past to the present in China. The results of my research show that digital media can form a direct relationship between real and cultural spaces.

**Chapter 5: Bringing temporal and spatial aspects together:** Temporal and spatial aspects expressed in ‘landscape-characters’ illustrate how time and space can be considered as overlapping and inseparable components.

**Chapter 6: Reinterpretation and ex-contextualization through creative practice:**
This chapter finally combines the ideas of scrolls, *Shuhua* and ‘play-appreciation’ with my own digital art practice. My intention in doing so is to suggest a new direction for digital art in the Chinese context based on the concept of *Dao*. The *Dao Gives Birth to One* project strives to give viewers more complex levels of temporal and spatial experience in relation to the idea of ‘play-appreciation’.

My conclusion is that digital technology allows for more complexity in issues of time and space such as: *Shuhua*, scroll as a form, a sense of cycle, interactivity, non-linear narrative, multiple viewpoints, intimacy, virtual space, compressing time and ‘play-
appreciation’ etc. In other words, the very integration and re-contextualization of traditional Chinese notions (Dao, scroll format and Shuhua) into digital media could lead to new and significant ideas about handling time and space in the development of digital media art in China. As can be seen above, many correlations exist among traditional, contemporary Chinese artworks and digital media art (for details see Appendix: Summary Overview). Throughout this thesis I have attempted to construct a new approach to the development of Chinese digital art history: one that can reappropriate traditional Chinese ideas of time and space to modern technologies and the concept of art. In this respect, the present thesis provides a transdisciplinary perspective between the disciplines of calligraphy, painting, sculpture and media arts, and in doing so develops the perspective of the practising digital artist as an art historian.

7.2. Recommendations

The results of my study could be considered as a constructive recommendation for artists and curators to further their focus on exploring the relation between traditional Chinese culture and digital media art today.

Firstly, the result of my theoretical and practical research suggests a new way of translating and reinterpreting traditional Chinese thinking from visual (2D) to virtual (4D) experience through digital media technology. This can help reappropriate traditional Chinese notions of time and space from the past into the present. As a digital media artist, I recommend that Chinese artists working with digital technology should consider these correlations when they attempt to make new work for a contemporary cultural setting, particularly the Chinese setting. As the results of my research and practical experiments show, digital technology can appropriately enact complex notions of time and space of the sort that are essential to any visual representation of traditional Chinese thinking and philosophy.

Secondly, the results of my study suggest a platform for contemporary Chinese digital art through the process of bodily engagement in relation to time and space, as well as a discourse of ‘play-appreciation’ in contemporary Chinese digital art. I strongly
suggest that digital interactive media art be added to ‘Yellow Box’ idea. Although video works have been shown in ‘Yellow Box’ exhibitions in the past, video has not so far fitted neatly into the ‘Yellow Box’ idea. Curators staging an exhibition overseas might consider how people from different cultures interact with digital environments. They might also consider people’s relationships to their own cultural history before inviting artists or curating an exhibition in this direction. Different cultures are endowed with different philosophies and these philosophies contain traditional thinking in relation to time and space, so alternative and innovative platforms from traditional to new media addressing these cultural identities should be included. As a matter of fact, audiences steeped in traditional Chinese culture often request that visual representation relate to the temporal and spatial experiences they are familiar with from their own past. As I have shown, some of these experiences are appropriate to digital media art. For example, the intimate triangular relationship between viewer, artist and work helps people to navigate the storyline of the narrative in the artwork in the real space of an exhibition. Images presented in a dynamic virtual experience with multiple spaces convey the experience of compressed time. For example, this experience can help people perceive the uniqueness of Hong Kong as a new cultural space (see my ‘Upstairs/Downstairs’ project). My recommendation to both artists and curators is, therefore, to think seriously about extending the ‘Yellow Box’ to digital media, as this would deepen real as well as cultural space for our audiences.

7.3. Author’s artwork in thesis

Throughout this thesis I have cited my own artworks because these are all experiments in the combination of traditional Chinese theory and practice with contemporary digital media art. In Layers of Bled Ink – Time Passing (2004-2010) I demonstrated how digital technology could deepen art appreciators’ visualization of the passage of time by adopting the function of traditional Chinese colophon writing. Through a series of animated images, I showed the passing of time and influenced the viewer’s perception of time. In the Upstairs/Downstairs project, I explored how colonial history in Hong Kong and China over the past hundred years has shifted the development of different identities, particularly the dual and mixed identities of the city’s Chinese residents. This work inspired me to apply multiple screens and layering
of content to the same theme. So I integrated the concept of Dao into a new digital video project and addressed the philosophy of transformation of the one into the whole by combining a series of fragmentary stills and moving images. All of these methods have enriched the transfer of concepts like multiple identities to my audience, as well as promoting an unusual illusionary and shifting spatiotemporal experience for them. This reaction can be seen in the video documentation (see the author’s archive: DVD [2]).

In Bloated City & Skinny Language I began by using my own Asian cultural background, which is very diverse, as a foundation to develop this interactive project. I have experienced the different modes of modernity associated with the great political, social and cultural transformations that have taken place in China and Hong Kong in the past few decades, and this has resulted in the questioning of my own identity, languages, and writing. I used these issues as diverse bridges to connect different transitional times and spaces in Hong Kong history. I have sought to transform traditional visual experiences from a 2-dimensional platform onto the 4D platform of digital media technology. This has also required the incorporation of ‘a sense of ambiguity’ in my work.

In the Dao project, I have extended this potential by transposing traditional Chinese Shuhua onto a 4D platform and integrating the idea of ‘play-appreciation’ with digital technology, so as to allow the audience to perceive notions of time and space from different perspectives. The role of the viewer has thereby shifted from being passive to an active interactive engagement, encouraging viewers to change roles while viewing the project. Furthermore, the new conceptual workshop with ‘hands-on’ methodology suggested by my research (including my creative practice and exhibitions) has led to many innovative and engaging exhibition and pedagogical possibilities, including different components: theoretical and conceptual lecture, practical learning, personalized creation, participation, democratization, interactivities, appreciation, and so on. New understandings of time and space are created through the use of effective and innovative pedagogical practices like these, which demonstrate their superiority over a monotonous reliance on traditional exhibition
platforms. This direction corresponds with the approach of museum curators today as stated by Michelle Henning: “Advocates of new media celebrate its democratizing potential, its ability to make multiple viewpoints available, to turn visitors into authors, and to engage people in the production of their own stories” (Henning 2006).

This research and my creative projects have garnered considerable local acclaim and acquired international praise and recognition for not only meeting but also surpassing commonly accepted standards of excellence—e.g. the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (in conjunction with Cinema Pacific) (2011), the White Box Exhibition (University of Oregon in Portland) (2011), the UNESCO Creative Cities Network International Conference (Shenzhen, China) (2010), the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (2009-2011), Siggraph (2007), the 34th International Conference and Exhibition on Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques (2007), the Hexagram Institute for Research and Creation in Media Arts and Technologies Summit (2007), and the Pacific Rim New Media Summit (2006), among others. I have gained a number of significant awards, including Achievement Award of Hong Kong Contemporary Art Biennial Awards from Hong Kong Museum of Art (2010)\(^{318}\). These events and awards demonstrate that my research and creative practice have gained a certain international profile and recognition for their cultural relevance and innovative courage.

### 7.4. New knowledge for digital art history

To my knowledge, research into these issues has not been conducted before, either from the academic or practical perspective, particularly in China and Hong Kong. I have also constructed a new approach to digital art history: a new understanding of traditional Chinese ideas of *time* and *space* has been achieved through my practice. In this sense, the thesis provides a transdisciplinary perspective involving the disciplines of calligraphy, painting, sculpture, art history, and media art. Both research and

\(^{318}\) For a complete list of exhibitions and awards see Appendix A ‘Exhibitions’ and Appendix B ‘Awards’
practice show that digital technology fosters more complex notions of *time* and *space* than are available in other contemporary media.

The result of my theoretical and practical research suggests and contributes new knowledge in seven areas: (1) a platform for contemporary Chinese digital art through the process of bodily engagement in relation to time and space; (2) a discourse for the idea of ‘play-appreciation’ in relation to contemporary Chinese digital art; (3) a new way of translating (reinterpreting) traditional Chinese thinking from visual (2D) to virtual (4D) experience through digital technologies; (4) a recommendation to scholars, artists, as well as curators to re-appropriate the ‘Yellow Box’ idea through digital art; (5) a new development of Chinese media art; (6) the development of a new learning experience of *time* and *space* through hands-on methodology (my creative practice 319); and (7) exploring the ‘triangulation’ of practice through a new conceptual workshop moving between Chinese character writing and learning, creation, participation and audience appreciation.

### 7.5. Conclusion

I could conclude that one of the major aims of this research is to investigate the extent to which relevant correlations between traditional Chinese art and digital media could construct a new theoretical platform for other researchers in the future. From my seven years of research, I understand this to be a unique approach, and I might be the only practising digital media artist, scholar and Chinese art historian to contribute, both on practical and theoretical levels, to the development of this new direction. My research could also offer insights to other researchers, artists and scholars in the digital arts field in the future. Hopefully this thesis may also benefit digital artists on a more practical level and help them to look back into their own history in order to be inspired by various approaches to viewer participation and to discover new correlations between the past and the present. Furthermore, I have tried to lay relevant groundwork for others (artists, curators, researchers and scholars) to explore issues of

---

319 This refers to my Dao Gives Birth to One project series (lectures, exhibitions and workshops, etc.)
space and time on theoretical and practical levels. The resources I have discovered through my own research have certainly helped me redefine my own innovative practices. Other digital media artists might take the theoretical analysis I have offered as a frame of reference for developing their own future artwork and research projects.

Re-approaching and reinterpreting traditional texts anew in the light of these theories, and the correlative possibilities of the digital media art platform, not only opens the path to new understanding of the old, but also constitutes an alternative approach to digital media art in the future. It is to be hoped that the viewing public, experiencing the traditional notion of time and space as realized in Chinese art through a digital media artwork, may deepen their appreciation of traditional Chinese philosophy. Time and space are vitally important in traditional Chinese thinking and philosophy, and my thesis suggests that digital moving images and interactive media could lead to new ways of handling time and space in the development of contemporary Chinese art (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas). I claim that digital media are in fact perfect vehicles for addressing these changes, because they present a comparison between ancient and contemporary notions of time and space in an interactive and intuitive way, collapsing the real with the virtual.

I have continued to pursue my research on some of the questions raised in this thesis by organizing a series of workshops entitled ‘Flip and Fly’, a digital animation workshop of Chinese character writing that aims to offer an opportunity for the audience/participants to collaborate with the artist in creating animated characters. In the process of designing and implementing such creative workshops to re-contextualize and reinterpret the idea of wan shang (‘play-appreciation’), I have been at pains to provide an open-ended narrative for the participants (visitors/audience) and to shift the role of the audience from passivity to active participation and creativity. A workshop-based exhibition has become part of the installation Dao Gives Birth to One (version IV) since 2012 and has been widely and successfully shown in different public events in Hong Kong and the UK consequently. My digital media art practice which incorporated innovative elements of Chinese characters, drawings and scroll
format provided effective platforms (exhibitions and workshops) to facilitate triangulation among artist, audience and artwork.

Last but not least, my study will, I hope, encourage artists, scholars and curators to conduct further research and extend the correlations between traditional Chinese art and modern technology. It may benefit particular digital artists on a more practical level and help them look back into their own history in order to be inspired by various approaches to viewer participation and discover new connections between the past and the present. Furthermore, curators may consider people’s relationships with their own cultural history before inviting artists or staging exhibitions. It is also to be hoped that the evidence and facts that have evolved from my investigation may trigger an innovative direction for Western art historians and provide them with further insights into Chinese art.
Bibliography

A


Archicreation (2008), *Collecting the Memory of Beijing* (收藏北京記憶), Tianjing University Press, Tianjing.


B


Beyond Art of Technology (黃明川的飛越科技藝術) [DVD], Cai tuan fa ren gong gong dian shi wen hua shi ye ji jin hui fa xing, Taipei.


C


Chang, T.Z. (2005), ‘The Yellow Box: Thoughts on Art before the Age of the Exhibition’, *Yishu*, vol.4, no.1, viewed 1 September 2010 <http://yishu-online.com/browse-articles/?329>.

Chang, T.Z. (2005a), ‘The Yellow Box: Thoughts on Art before the Age of the Exhibition’ (黃盒子：思考沒有展覽的時代), *The Yellow Box: Contemporary Calligraphy and Painting In Taiwan* (黃盒子：臺灣當代書畫展), Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei.


Chen, G.Y. (1940), Zhuang zi zhe xue (莊子哲學), The Commercial Press, Taiwan.


China Calligraphers Association (2010), *Selected Articles by Contemporary Scholars on Chinese Calligraphy* (當代中國書法論文選), Rong Bao Zhai Press, Beijing.


*Ci hai* (辭海) (1999), Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, Shanghai.

*Ci yuan* (辭源) (1984), The Commercial Press, Hong Kong.

Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan (2006), *Cursive: A Trilogy*, Hong Kong Arts Festival, Hong Kong, leaflet.


Connolly, M. (2009), The place of artists' cinema: space, site and screen, Intellect, Bristol.


Duan, W.J. & Fan, J.S. eds. (2005), *Zai xian DunHuang* (再現敦煌), The Commercial Press (H.K.) LTD., Hong Kong.


E


F


Fan, D.A. ed. (2009), *Time Lapse* (延時), Media Art China, Beijing.


Fang, W. (1991), ‘Zhongguo Shan shui hua de tu jie xing biao xian’ (中國山水畫的圖繪性表現), *Yunduo* (朵云), Issue no. 3, Shanghai Shuhua Publishing House,


Fominaya, A.R. & Abbas, N ed. (2010), *This is Hong Kong: 15 Video Artists*, Para/Site Art Space Ltd., Hong Kong.


Fujieda, A. (2005), *Han zi de wan hua shi* (漢字的文化史), trans. Y.B. Li, Chung Hwa Book Co. (H.K.) Ltd., Hong Kong.


---

**G**


GermanGirly013 (2008), *Whitney Houston – I will always love you – Lyrics*, viewed


Goethe-Institut (1995), *Art and Electronics* (藝術與電子多媒體展覽), Goethe-Institut, Hong Kong.


**H**


*Han yu da ci dian* (漢語大詞典) (1997), Han yu da ci dian Chu ban she, Shanghai.


Huang, C.C. (2003), Tao Te Ching: A Literal Translation with an Introduction, Notes, and Commentary, Asian Humanities Press, California.


Huang, G. S. (1990), Putonghua, Yue yin shang wu xin ci dian (普通話，粵音商務新詞典), The Commercial Press (H.K.) LTD., Hong Kong.


I


J


Jin, D.C. (1991), *Zhongguo dong tai de yi shu zhe xue* (中國動態的藝術哲學), Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Shanghai.


York.

K


*Killer in Double-flag Town* (雙旗鎮刀客) (1990) [DVD], Xi’an dian ying zhi pian chang lu yin lu xiang chu ban she, Xian Shi.


L

No.4, Hong Kong.


Laozi (2005), *Tao Te Ching* (道德經), SLSbooks, Xian.


梅洛龐蒂的觀點及其批評), Master thesis, Sun Yat-sen University, Taiwan.


Li, B.L. (2006), Zhongguo shan shui hua yu ou zhou feng jing hua bi jiao yan jiu (中國山水畫與歐洲風景畫比較研究), Rong Bao Zhai Press, Beijing.

Li, C.Q. (2007), Hanzi yu Zhongguo she ji (漢字與中國設計), Rong Bao Zhai Press, Beijing.

Li, D.Y. ed. (2005), DunHuang Shi ku zi dao zi shang (敦煌石窟自導自賞), The Commercial Press (H.K.) LTD., Hong Kong.


Li, Z.Y. (2007), *Dun Huang gu dai ying bi shu fa* (敦煌古代硬筆書法), Gansu Renmin Chu Ban She, Gansu.


Liu, D.G. & Jiang, Q.L. (2004), 'Historical Influence of Han Paintings’ Composition'.


Lu, Y. (2009), *Xue yi ming dao* (學易明道), Joint Publishing (H.K.) CO., LTD, Hong Kong.


N
Nagin, C. & Hotchkiss, B. eds. (1997), Tales from the Land of Dragons: 1,000 years times Painting, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.


Newton: Graphic Science Magazine (2009), Quantum Media, August 2009, issue no. 22.


O
O'Doherty, B. (1999), Inside the white cube: the ideology of the gallery space, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.


394
P


Q


Qiu, Z.Z. (2005b), *Writing and Reflection: About the Creation of Calligraphy*,
Statement and Critique (書寫與觀照:關於書法的創作陳述與批評), Chinese Renmin University Press, Beijing.


R

Radtke, O.L. (2007), Chinglish: found in translation, Gibbs Smith Publisher, Layton, UT.


S
Sakane, I. (1999), An Invitation to Interactive Art, the Interaction’99: Expanding Human Interface. World Forum for Media and Culture Committee, IAMAS.


Shang, H. (2008), 'Spatial Depiction of Western Paintings and Its Evolution' (西方繪畫的空間表現及其流變), Master Thesis, School of Arts, People's University of China, Shandong.

Shao, H. (2005), Yan yi de "qi yun": Zhongguo hua lun de guan nian shi yan jiu (衍義的“氣韻”：中國畫論的觀念史研究), Jiangsu Education Publishing House, Nanjing.


Shi, J. (2008), Gou Tu : yi ge xi fang guan nian shi de ge an yan jiu (構圖：一個西方觀念史的個案研究), China Academy of Art Press, Zhejiang.


Shinya Watanabe (2011), Shinya Watanabe, viewed 6 February 2010,
Shuowen Jiezi (2008), 3guo, viewed 11 August 2008,


Stocker, G. & Schöpf, C. eds. (2003), Code: the language of our time, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Germany.


Sturgeon, D. ed. (2006h), ‘Geng-sang Chu’, *Zhuangzi, Chinese Text Project*, viewed 24 March 2008, <http://chinese.dsturgeon.net/text.pl?node=2712&if=en&searchu=%E6%9C%89%E5%AF%A6%E8%80%8C%E7%84%A1%E4%B9%8E%E8%99%95%E8%80%85>.


Taipei Fine Arts Museum (2005), *The Yellow Box: Contemporary Calligraphy and Painting in Taiwan*, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan.

Tam, E. (2007), *Chinglish*, Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong.

Tang, H. (2009), *Tu Shuo Han Zi* (圖說漢字), Jilin Chuban Group, Changchun.


Taipei Fine Arts Museum (2005), *The Yellow Box: Contemporary Calligraphy and Painting in Taiwan*, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan.


*Ten Years of Outdoor Installation Art* (裝置藝術10年) [DVD], Huang Mingchuan dian ying shi xun you xian gong si, Taipei.

The Feast of Han Xizai: Han Xizai ye yan tu (韓熙載夜宴圖) (2002), [1DVD, 2CDs], Chinese Public Television, Taipei.


Townsend, M.A. ed. (2003), Beyond the box: diverging curatorial practices, Banff Centre Press, Canada.


Tse, T.L. (2002), Xianggang mei shu zi de fa zhan (香港美術字的發展), Si Ke Chu Ban She, Hong Kong.


U


Wang, R. ed. (2005), Liu xing yin feng zuo pin ji (流行印風作品集), Hebei Education Publishing House, Shijiazhuang.


Wang, Y.T. (2008), Conference on Founding Paradigms: papers on the art and culture of the Northern Sung dynasty, Gu gong bo wu yu an, Taipei.


Wear, E. (2005), ‘Three yellow boxes - varied by time and degrees of acquaintance (三個黃盒子─新知舊雨的變奏), *Conference for The Yellow Box: Contemporary Calligraphy and Painting in Taiwan* (黃盒子 -- 台灣當代書畫展), Taipei Fine Arts Museum (台北市立美術館), January 2005, Taipei, Taiwan.


Weng, N.N. ed. (1987), *Shan Hai Jing* (山海經), Jin Feng chu ban you xian gong si, Taipei.


Wong, Y.F. ed. (2008), Feelings of the Brush: Paintings by Kan Tai-Keung (畫字我心：靳埭強繪畫), University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.


Wu, Y.B. (2002), *Shu fa Chang he* (書法長河), Forward Book Co., Hong Kong.

Wu, Y.B. (2001), *Xia bi ru you shen* (下筆如有神), Forward Book Co., Hong Kong.


X


Y


畫：正史與小說中的畫家，Jiangsu Education Publishing House，Nanjing.


Yang, Z. (2009), Yi she fang tan lu (藝術訪談錄), Shanghai Renmin Publishing House, Shanghai.


Yeh, C. J. (2003), Art in digital age (藝術語言@數位時代), Artco Books, Taipei.

Yeh, C. J. (2005), The History and Development of Digital Art (數位藝術概論：電腦時代之美學、創作及藝術環境), Yi shu jia chu ban she, Taipei.

Yeh, C. J. (2008), Digital aesthetics? (數位美學? 電腦時代的藝術創作與文化潮流剖析), Yi shu jia chu ban she, Taipei.


Yin, G.J. (2008), Fu hao Di Guo (符號帝國), Chongqin Publishing House, Chongqin.


Yuan, Q.Y. (2006), Ruo jian zhu: cong "Tao Te Ching" kan Taiwan dang dai jian zhu (弱建築：從《道德經》看台灣當代建築), Garden City Publishers, Taipei.

Yue, Z. ed. (1986), Zi Yuan (字源), Shanghai Books, Shanghai.


Z


Zhao, G.C. (2000), Bu Zhi Zhongguo mu jian zhu (不只中國木建築), Joint Publishing (H.K.) CO., LTD., Hong Kong.

Zhao, G.C. (2003), Bi Zhi Zhongguo Hua (筆紙中國畫), Joint Publishing (H.K.) CO., LTD., Hong Kong.

Zhao, G.C. (2004), Bi ji Qing ming shang he tu (筆記清明上河圖), Joint Publishing (H.K.) CO., LTD., Hong Kong.

Zhao, G.C. (2005), Da Zi jin cheng: wang zhe de zhu xian (大紫禁城：王者的軸線), Joint Publishing (H.K.) CO., LTD., Hong Kong.


Zheng, M. ed. (2005), Huisu xiao cao qian zi wen (懷素小草千字文), Shanghai Brilliant Publishing House, Shanghai.


Zhou, G. (2008), 'Huo Yao Rang Tai Han Shi Jie Dui Hua' (火藥讓他和世界對話), The International Chinese Newsweekly, 7 September.

Zhu, L.Z. (2006), Zhongguo mei xue shi wu jiang (中國美學十五講), Peking
University Press, Beijing.


一，惟初太始道立於一。造分天地，化成萬物。凡一之屬皆從一。


## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2D</th>
<th>two-dimensional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3D</td>
<td>three-dimensional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4D</td>
<td>four-dimensional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### A
- **ART+COM**
  - is a Berlin-based interactive design consultant and interdisciplinary group.
- **A Book from the Sky**
  - (天書, ‘Tian shu’)
- **A Project for Writing Colophon**
  - (題詠計劃, Tiyong jihua)
- **Accentuation**
  - is one of the music theories, which can be symbolized above or below a note.
- **Admonition of the Instructress to Palace Ladies**
  - (女史箴圖, Nushi zhen tu)
- **Ai**
  - (愛, ‘love’)
- **ARTHK**
  - The Hong Kong International Art Fair.

### B
- **Ba gua**
  - (八卦, ‘the Eight Trigrams’)
- **Bi fa**
  - (筆法, ‘the method or rule of writing’)
- **BCSL**
  - Bloated City & Skinny Language (Version I & II) (2006-08)
- **Bianwen**
  - (變文)
- **Bianxiang**
  - (變相)
- **Book 10: Exposition of Canon I**
  - (經說上, Jing shuo shang)
- **Book 10: Canon I**
  - (經上, Jing shang)
- **Bushou**
  - (部首), ‘section header’ / ‘semantic’ component of Chinese characters.

### C
- **C++**
  - is a statically typed, free-form, multi-paradigm, compiled, general-purpose programming language.
- **Cai Guo-qiang**
  - (蔡國強)
- **Cang xie**
  - (倉頡)
- **Chang Tsong-zung**
  - (張頌仁)
- **Cao shu**
  - (草書, ‘Cursive’)
- **CD**
  - The Compact Disc, is an optical disc used to store digital data.
- **The China Academy of Art**
  - (中國美術學院, Zhongguo meishu xueyuan)
- **Chen Zhangtai**
  - (陳章太)
- **Chinglish**
  - (中式英語, Zhongshi yingyu) Spoken or written English, which is influenced by the Chinese language.
- **Cui Qinzhong**
  - (崔慶忠)
Cursive: A Trilogy (行草三部曲, Xingcao san bu qu)

D
Da (大, ‘great’, ‘big’)
Dao (道, ‘the way’)
Dao De Jing (道徳經)
Dian (巓, ‘the summit’, ‘the highest point above which nothing can rise ’)
Du Fu (杜甫)
Duan Yucai (段玉裁)
DVD is an optical disc storage format, which was invented in 1995. DVDs offer higher storage capacity than Compact Discs while having the same dimensions.

E
e-card Electronic-CARD (e-card), a digital greeting card or postcard created on the Web and sent to someone via e-mail.

F
FACC represents ‘flying and animated Chinese characters’.
Fan (反, ‘turning back’).
Fan Kuan (范寛)
Final CutPro A digital video-editing software used on a Macintosh computer.
Fu (復, ‘return’)
Fusuma (襖) are vertical rectangular panels that can slide from side to side, redefining spaces within a room, or act as doors.
Fu Shen (傅申)

G
Gao Xi (郭熙)
Gao Si (郭思)
Gao Shiming (高士明)
Gao Xindan (高昕丹)
Gewu yanle tu (歌舞宴樂圖, ‘Music and Dance Banquet’)
Gong (宮, ‘palace’)
Ghosts Pounding the Wall (鬼打牆, Gui da qiang).
Gu chui (鼓吹, ‘rhythm and gusto’ / ‘drums and wind’ [English translation] or ‘percussion and woodwind / brass’ [Western musical terms])
Gu Hongzhong (顧閎中)
**Guan gongsun díngzi wǔ jian qì hang bìng xu** (觀公孫大娘弟子舞劍器行并序)
**Guan shang** (觀賞, ‘observe-appreciation’)  
**Guo** (國, ‘country’)

**H**

**Hanxizai yeyan tu** (韓熙載夜宴圖, ‘The Night Entertainments of Han Xizai’)
**Hau** (畫, ‘painting’)
**Huajuan** (畫卷, ‘Scroll Painting’)
**Hexi** (河西)
**HKMA** Hong Kong Museum of Art (香港藝術館, Xianggang yishu guan)

Holography is a technique that enables the image changes as the position and orientation of the viewing system changes in exactly the same way as if the object were still present, thus making the image appear three-dimensional.

**Huai Su** (懷素)

**I**

Ink rubbing is the practice of re-visualising an image of surface features of a stone on paper.

Insect Project *Insect Project: Simulation of the Crowd Behaviour of Insects/ Chinese Calligraphy (Dual Screen) (2005-06)*

**J**

**JACCA** Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre (賽馬會創意藝術中心, Saima hui chuanyi yishu zhongxin)
**Jin shanling** (金山嶺)
**Jian** (見, ‘see’)
**Jiang Xun** (蔣勳)
**Jiu** (久, ‘duration’)
**Jian** (間, ‘in between time and space’)
**Jing tai** (靜態, ‘quiet’, ‘static’)
**Jing zhi** (靜止, ‘motionless’, ‘immobile’, ‘frozen’)

**Jing Ke’s Attempted Assassination of the King of Qin** (荆軻刺秦王, Jingke ci Qinwang)

**K**

**Kan Tai keung** (靳埭強)
**Kong** (空, ‘void’)
**Kong jian** (空間, ‘space’)

411
**Kuang ca**  
(Kuang ca, ‘Wild cursive writing’)

**L**

**Lanting Xu**  
(蘭亭序, ‘Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion’)

**The Last Judgment in Cyberspace**  
A series of digital works by Chinese artist Miao Xiaochung in 2006.

**LCD**  
Liquid-crystal display

**LED**  
A light-emitting diode (LED) is a semiconductor light source.

**Li Hou Zhu**  
(李後主, ‘Emperor Li Yu’ or ‘the Last Emperor’)

**Li Lin-can**  
(李霖燦)

**Jing tai**  
(靜態)

**Jing zhi**  
(靜止)

**Liu bai**  
(留白, ‘blank leaving’)

**Lidai Minghuaji**  
(歷代名畫記, ‘Records of Historical Famous Paintings’)

**Lin Hwai-min**  
(林懷民)

**Liulian wangfan**  
(流連忘返, ‘to linger on with no thought of leaving’)

**Linquan gaozhi**  
(林泉高致, ‘Lofty Messages of Forests and Streams’)

**Liu shu**  
(六書, ‘Six types of writing’)

**M**

**Ma Lin**  
(馬麟)

**Mantian xingdou fa**  
(滿天星斗法, ‘The sky is full of stars’)

**Men**  
(門, ‘door’)

**Mengxi bitan**  
(夢溪筆談, ‘The Dream Pool Essays’).

**Masaki Fujihata**  
(藤幡正樹)

**Mengxi bitan**  
(夢溪筆談, ‘The Dream Pool Essays’)

**Mozi**  
The book of Mozi (墨子) / Mozi (墨子 'the philosopher')

**Mu qian**  
(目前), which can mean ‘now’, ‘at present’, ‘at the moment’, and ‘for the time being’.

**N**

**No Basic Rules**  
(雲山意造本無法, Yun shan yi zao ben wu fa)

**P**

**Pangguan zheqing, Dangju zhemi**  
(旁觀者清，當局者迷, ‘An outsider often sees more clearly than the participant of a game’)

**Paoxi shi**  
(庖犧氏, ‘The First of the Three Sovereigns’)

412
Ping feng (屏風, ‘screen’)

Q
Qi (氣, ‘air’, ‘inner energy’)
Qing ke (頃刻, ‘in a moment’)
Qianhou cuzhi (前後錯置, ‘reversed position and direction’)

QuickTime is an extensible proprietary multimedia framework developed by Apple Inc., capable of handling various formats of digital video, picture, sound, panoramic images, and interactivity.

Quantum theory is the theoretical basis of modern physics, explaining the nature and behaviour of matter and energy on the atomic and subatomic levels.

R
Ri (日, ‘sun’, ‘day’)

S
San yuan ‘three distances’ (三遠, ‘three distances’): (1) ‘higher distance’ (高遠, gao yuan), (2) ‘deeper distance’ (深遠, shen yuan), and (3) ‘horizontal distance’ (平遠, ping yuan)

Schrödinger's Cat is a thought experiment, sometimes described as a paradox, devised by Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger in 1935.

Semibreve is one of the music theories: (i.e., a whole note) is a note whose duration is twice as long as that of a minim (i.e., a half note)

Shan (山, ‘mountain’)
Shan shui zi (山水字, ‘landscape-characters’)
Shen dao (神道, ‘the spirit road’)
Shen Kuo (沈括)
Shiji (史記, ‘The Historical Records’)
Shijian daya (時間疊壓, ‘time compressed and overlapping’)
Shuangqi zhendaoke (雙旗鎮刀客, ‘Killer in Double-flag Town’)
Shu (書, ‘brush writing’ [calligraphy writing])
Shu fa (書法) literally means ‘the way/ the law of brush writing’ and is commonly translated into English as ‘calligraphy writing’.

Shi (時, ‘time’)
Shi jian (時間, ‘time’)
Shi (逝, ‘to pass’, ‘to elapse’, ‘to die’)
Sima Qian (司馬遷)
Shuowen jiezi (說文解字, ‘Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters’).

Simplified Chinese characters
are officially known as Simplified Chinese (簡化字, Jianhua zi) or (簡體字, Jian ti zi).

**Si shi**
(四時, 'four seasons' / ‘four different time zones in a year’)

**Standard Chinese characters** (正體字) is also regarded as traditional Characters. Hong Kong, Macau, and overseas Chinese communities, and also users of simplified Chinese characters, call them ‘complex characters’ (繁體字); and some people refer to traditional characters as simply ‘proper characters’ (正字).

**Staccato**
One of the music theories: refers to a note that is played as briefly, or as pointedly, as possible.

**T**

**Tatami**
(榻榻米) is a type of mat used as a flooring material in traditional Japanese-style rooms.

**Terror**

**Tianxuan dehuang**
(天玄地黃, ‘the heaven is black and earth is yellow’)

**Tian**
(天, ‘the heavens’, ‘the sky’)

**Tou shi**
(透視, ‘perspective’)

**V**

**Void**
(空, kong)

**VR**
Virtual Reality

**W**

**Wan shang**
(玩賞, ‘play-appreciation’)

**Wan wu**
(萬物, ‘ten thousand things’)

**Wen zi**
(文字, ‘Chinese characters’)

**Wu Chi-tsung**
(吳季璁)

**Wu Hung**
(巫鴻)

**X**

**Xi**
(西, ‘west’).

**Xiang xing**
(象形, ‘form imitation’).

**Xiao Ximen**
(小西門, ‘the Minor West Gate’)

**Xing rang tie**
(行穰帖, ‘Ritual Prayers for a Good Harvest’)

**Xishan xinglu tu**
(溪山行旅圖, ‘Travellers Among Mountains and Streams’)

**Xu Shen**
(許慎)
Y

Ya ji (雅集, ‘literati gatherings’)
Yan Dongsheng (楊東勝)
The Yellow Box (黃盒子) is actually a series of research projects to question and examine how contemporary Chinese art practice could be implemented with traditional exhibition Chinese space today.

Yi (一, ‘one’)
Yi jing (易經, ‘The Book of Changes’)
Yi shi (一時, ‘for a short while’, ‘temporary’, and ‘momentary’)
Yin Yang (陰陽)
Yizi changshe zhen (一字長蛇陣, ‘A Long Snake Composition’)
Yong (永, ‘eternity’)
Yu jing (喻景, ‘Implied Scenery’)
Yu zhou (宇宙, ‘the universe’)
Yue (月, ‘moon’)
Yu Peng (于彭)

Z

Zhang Yanyuan (張彥遠)
Zhang Xu (張旭)
Zhang Yimou (張藝謀)
Zhong yuan (中原, ‘the Central Plains of China’)
Zhou (周, ‘cycle’). Also, zhou (周) means ‘circle’ (圓圈, yuan quan)
Zhou xing (周行) represent the idea of being ‘all-pervading & ever-moving’.
Zhou Younguang (周有光)
Ziyan tie (自言帖, ‘The I’ve-already-said-so Manuscript’)
Zixu tie (自敘帖 ‘Autobiography’)

415
Appendix

DVD [1]: pdf documents and video files

Appendix_All Document (for printing).pdf
  Appendix 1.1. ‘Camera Obscura’
  Appendix 1.2. ‘Perspective’
  Appendix 1.3. ‘Reverse Perspective’
  Appendix 1.4. ‘Subjective Viewpoints’
  Appendix 1.5. ‘Form Imitation’ & ‘Indication’
  Appendix 1.6. ‘Multiple Viewpoints’
  Appendix 1.7. ‘Inner Energy’
  Appendix 1.8. ‘Shifting Experience’
  Appendix 1.9. ‘void’
  Appendix 1.10. ‘Numbers and Order’
  Appendix 1.11. ‘Cursive II’
  Appendix 1.12. ‘An Extension of Space: From 2D to 4D’
  Appendix 2.1. ‘Itinerary’
  Appendix 2.2. ‘Propositions’
  Appendix 2.3 ‘Insect Project’
  Appendix 4.1. ‘Re-examinations’
  Appendix 4.2. ‘Configuration Program’ & ‘Source Code’
  Appendix 5.1. ‘Scenario’
  Appendix 5.2. ‘Response’

Appendix_A_Artworks & Exhibitions
Appendix_B_Awards
Appendix_C_DVD_BCSL
Appendix_D_DVD.DAO
Appendix_E_DVD_Animated Han Xizi
Appendix_F_DVD_3 Steps of Creating 3D Chinese Characters
Appendix_G_DVD_Laying of Bled Ink
Appendix_H_DVD_Upstairs/Downstairs
Appendix_I_DVD.DAO_Manchester
Appendix_J_Interviews
Appendix_K_Anis at a Flying Gallop
Appendix_L: Workshop in UK
DVD [2]: Playable DVD

Appendix C: Bloated City & Skinny Language
Appendix E: Animated Han Xizai
Appendix F: Steps of Creating 3D Chinese Characters
Appendix G: Laying of Bled Ink
Appendix H: Upstairs / Downstairs
Appendix I: Dao in Manchester Exhibition
Appendix K: Animals at a Flying Gallop
Appendix L: Workshop in UK
Proof of Practice

New Concepts of Time and Space
From the Chinese Past into a Mediated Presence

HUNG Keung

DVD [1]
"Supplementary DVD for a PhD, University of Plymouth 2013"
Appendices fully inclusive of all supporting files and software created

New Concepts of Time and Space:
From the Chinese Past into a Mediated Presence

HUNG Keung

DVD [2] Playable DVD
"Supplementary DVD for a PhD, University of Plymouth 2013"
Video documentation
Video Link

Appendix_C_DVD_BCSL

BCSL_Video_01.mov
  •  http://youtu.be/4bqTFohDgdg
  •  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlR_RePcaAg&list=PL13A48E88BE0F8CDC
  •  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftpaxQk10YM&list=PL13A48E88BE0F8CDC&index=2

BCSL_Video_02.mov
  •  https://vimeo.com/51657749

BCSL_Video_03.mov
  •  https://vimeo.com/107228254

Appendix_D_DVD.DAO

DAO_Video_Beijing.AVI
  •  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vaSBddMfxA&list=UUPhH0DFRYVFjYlgKo2BMV

DAO_Video_HKMA.mov
  •  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCouqwyN7mQ&list=UUPhH0DFRYVFjYlgKo2BMV

DAO_Video_Intro.mov
  •  https://vimeo.com/49098261

DAO_Video_Sequence.mov
  •  http://youtu.be/vmc3RiE1zm0

Appendix_E_DVD_Animated Han Xizi
  •  https://vimeo.com/107229186
Appendix_F_DVD_3 Steps of Creating 3D Chinese Characters

Step 1
  •  https://vimeo.com/107129232

Step 2
  •  https://vimeo.com/107129379
  •  https://vimeo.com/107129850

Step 3
  •  https://vimeo.com/107129939

Appendix_G_DVD_Laying of Bled Ink
  •  https://vimeo.com/61673963

Appendix_H_DVD_Upstairs/Downstairs
  •  https://vimeo.com/48540731
  •  https://vimeo.com/48414706

Appendix_I_DVD.DAO_Manchester
  •  http://youtu.be/SS2tN8LY3ow
  •  https://vimeo.com/49590032

Appendix_K_Animals at a Flying Gallop
  •  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pCq7GANEas

Appendix_L_Workshop in UK
  •  https://vimeo.com/49096978