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BIFEI CAO

Building Contemporary Personal Narrative through Interpretation of Traditional Chinese Visual Culture

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Declaration of Originality

I, Bifei Cao …… hereby declare that the exegesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations or paraphrases attributable to other authors.

Date:

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Contents

Abstract

Building Contemporary Personal Narrative through Interpretation of Traditional Chinese Visual Culture

This PhD project explores how the negotiation of different cultures can be reinterpreted in visual form through jewellery-based object making. Through practice-led research, I have drawn from my childhood memories of traditional Chinese visual culture. I have combined them with images and material relating to locations and cultures I have experienced. This has enabled me to explore personal identity through the shifting life experiences I have had in various multi-cultural environments. My aim has been to construct an experimental system of making that would allow me to express cultural identity through a negotiation of my original culture with other cultures. The result of my research is a series of jewellery-based and hollowware-based objects that explore precious metals and other materials such as plastic and milk powder. This inquiry locates itself within the field of jewellery and metalsmithing within the broader sphere of craft, arts and cultures.

List of Illustrations

All images not otherwise attributed are the author's own work.

Introduction

Aims and Significance

My practice-led PhD research *Building Contemporary Personal Narrative through Interpretation of Traditional Chinese Visual Culture* explores how the negotiation of different cultures can be reinterpreted in visual form through jewellery-based object making. It draws on my childhood memories of traditional Chinese visual culture and the exploration of personal identity through a shifting life experience of living in a variety of multi-cultural environments. My aim was to establish an experimental system that would allow me to explore my practice through object making, but also to express cultural identity through a negotiation of my original culture with other cultures.

I am a Chinese metalsmith and maker who has spent a large part of my working life overseas. This immersion in a multi-cultural environment has allowed me to absorb different cultural references, but at the same time has created conflicts with my original cultural roots. The search for cultural identity became significant in my research within current global flows of human-beings, concepts and cultures. A core question of this research is: what are the possible outcomes of object making that reflect negotiations of my original culture with that of other cultural references when locating my cultural identity in the global cultural environment?

Cultural Identity in the Global Cultural Environment

The first challenge was to make art that would reflect my cultural identity in this global cultural environment. This fast shifting cultural environment in which we live was first named the "cultural supermarket"[1] by Stuart Hall in his essay "The Question of Cultural Identity" in *Modernity - An Introduction to Modern Societies*. I interpreted the term 'cultural supermarket' to imply the way in which multiple cultural identities are available to be taken up in a globalised cultural environment.

[1] Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in *Modernity - An Introduction to Modern Societies* (US: Blackwell, 1995), 622.

How could I see culture? What is cultural identity? Neither concepts of culture, "the way of life of a people"[2] or "the information and identities available from the global cultural supermarket"[3] provides a sufficient description of my current cultural situation. I am Chinese but I have spent a large part of my life overseas, where my current cultural situation has been influenced by different cultural references. My situation "fits in the spectrum between having a particular cultural identity and belonging to the global cultural supermarket"[4] as cultural researcher Gordon Mathews has stated. Mathews identified that the scope of a human being's cultural situation is opened up and processed between an individual identity that is shaped by one's original cultural roots and references from the global cultural environment. Cultural identity or identification of culture is constantly shifting and never finished. As Stuart Hall noted, it is "a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption."[5] I have felt my current cultural identity is in a fluid and changing situation of accumulation and interaction between my Chinese cultural roots and cultural references from the global cultural environment. Through analysis, 'cultural identity' is an endless negotiation of cultures.

During cultural negotiation, there are limitations. Personal considerations and restrictions from one's nation and the global cultural environment have limited this process. Some scholars such as Jean-Francois Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* and Joel Forrester in his article 'Harley Dreams' in the *Eastern Express* argue that one's own clarification of oneself should be considered as the proper idea of identity. This idea emphasised personal memories and decisions, and their role in the process of constructing identity. One should interpret one's own cultural identity. These personal memories and hopes refer to the first level of cultural moulding, that is, "the way of life of a people," based on identification with one's cultural tradition and ethnic roots. Each unique reference arouses personal consciousness about one's subjective choices in relation to cultural identity in the cultural environment.

Other limitations include differences in people's perception of cultural identity as a means of communication and where it is situated within one's own social world. These

[2] Gordon Mathews, *Global Culture/Individual Identity – Searching for home in the cultural supermarket* (London: Routledge, 2000), 6.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 166.
[5] Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, eds., "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?," in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: SAGE, 1996), 3.

differences refer to people's knowledge learning, restraints from their own cultural background and cultural experiences with other cultures. Mathews interprets these choices in the global cultural environment as restrained in relation to these two points.

Although there are limitations, Homi Bhabha offered some suggestions in the construction of cultural identity in the global cultural environment. He strongly declared that one should "think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference."[6] He simply highlighted those moments or processes that occur during negotiation between cultures. The construction of cultural identity not only depends on one's original cultural roots but also includes instances and developments that occur during contact with other cultures. With this assumption, Bhabha placed cultural identity in "a liminal space,"[7] a possibility of cultural hybridity or a third space as a series of interactions and negotiations of cultures. A scholar of cultural studies, Lawrence Grossberg, in his essay *Questions of Cultural Identity*, stated "Identities are always relational and incomplete, in process."[8] This was to highlight that cultural identity is an endless interaction and negotiation between cultures. Both ideas correspond with Mathews's idea that cultural identity "fits in the spectrum between having a particular cultural identity and belonging to the global cultural supermarket."[9]

Narrative Jewellery

As practice-led research, this project engaged with jewellery-based objects as a methodology that utilises object making as both the subject and mechanism of enquiry. As the Dutch writer Liesbeth den Besten clarified, "Jewellery … is … as readable as an identity card,"[10]stating:

> References to conditions of place and culture, or to descent and background, have proved to be pivotal in the appreciation and understanding of contemporary

[6] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), 1.
[7] Ibid., 3.
[8] Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?," 5.
[9] Mathews, *Global Culture/Individual Identity*, 166.
[10] Liesbeth den Besten, *On Jewellery – A Compendium of International Contemporary Art Jewellery* (Stuttgart, Germany: Arnoldsche, 2011), 24.

> jewellery. Therefore this jewellery can be interpreted as a support. It supports one's style, […] as an expression of the personality of the wearer, giving it meaning.[11]

Den Besten claims that cultural identity and place are vital concerns for contemporary jewellers and as it could reflect one's personal identity and cultural background. Cultural identity and location can be represented through the jeweller's selection of related forms, materials and patterns. Jewellery artists who have explored the concept of cultural identity and sense of locations include Warwick Freeman, Jack Cunningham and Joung-Mee Do. Each artist has created their own cultural and environmental experience through their jewellery by expressing bicultural identity by including and overlaying references to their new location with those of their country of origin. To build up a contemporary personal narrative through artistic work, the jewellery-based object became not only a practice, but also a means of enquiry in my research.

For many centuries jewellery-based objects have symbolised status, wealth, values and beliefs. They reflect personal status and group identity as well as mark stages in human life, such as adolescence and marriage. The materials carry physical and psychological value. From the early 1960's to the late 1980's, great changes in the designing and making of jewellery occurred that introduced conceptually based jewellery. Both the artist and maker used "jewellery as a means for making individualistic art."[12] Contemporary jewellery now carried personal meanings or narratives that were redefined as wearable art. Research in this conceptual wearable art functioned as an exploration of narrative jewellery that was part of the contemporary jewellery movement.

I have situated my jewellery project in the contemporary narrative or story telling art field. Narrative art provides the means to bring together texts, images and actions, as Roland Barthes declared:

> … the narrative may incorporate articulate language, spoken or written; pictures, still or moving; gestures, and the ordered arrangement of all the ingredients: it is present in myth, legend, fable, short story, epic, history, tragedy, comedy, pantomime, painting, …[13]

[11] Ibid., 26.
[12] Helen W. Drutt English and Peter Dormer, *Jewelry of Our Time: Art, Ornament and Obsession* (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), 12.
[13] Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath

Narrative offers a variety of different forms that may be comprehended by a diverse range of human-beings, like each frame of a movie. Those daily images, actions and events, as Donald E. Polkinghorne said, "provide a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions."[14] Narrative can tell the story of an object, an event, or a plan, and functions in contemporary art as a mean of revealing each artist's personal story, passion and identity. Additionally, narrative art has the ability to approach more complex subjects, such as politics and culture. As Beverly Penn explained, "In contemporary narrative, artists address the complicated relationships that exist both on a personal as well as a social-political level".[15]

Narrative jewellery served as a method for jewellery artists to express different storylines, meaning, communication, and memories. Den Besten concluded that different models "can be summarised as autobiographical, comic or cartoon, voyeuristic, philosophical, sequential, iconographical and historical."[16] For example, Bruce Metcalf created his own miniature worlds concerned with humorous and disturbing stories and Manfred Bischoff's narratives combined private and public symbols that shared a resonance. Narrative jewellery can perform a variety of these functions.

When jewellery is connected to narrative meanings, personal stories and cultures, it reflects the culture and personal identity of the maker. Each artist or maker presents jewellery related to the notion of individual identity. In this situation, identity became more related to the things, concepts and behaviour that human-beings valued or questioned, as Helen W. Drutt English and Peter Dormer observed "rather than simply a matter of what class or culture one see when one looks in the mirror."[17]

Various approaches exist for narrative jewellery to express identity. Artists including Lucy Sarneel, Mari Funaki, Daniel Kruger and Helen Britton illustrate several ways of exploring their personal and cultural identities. I will discuss each of these artists in the following chapters.

In my project, I negotiate the gap between my original cultural roots and influences from other cultures. Especially in the global cultural environment, these negotiations

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(New York, Hill and Wang, 1977), 79.
[14] Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (New York: State University of New York, 1988), 11.
[15] Beverly Penn, "Narrative: The Impulse in Contemporary American Metal," *Metalsmith* 13, Spring 1993, 17.
[16] Besten, *On Jewellery*, 74.
[17] English, *Jewelry of Our Time*, 162.

result in the creation of a duality, an 'in-between,' a hybrid and an unfixed identity that combines the specific and the global. My approach to the narrative jewellery has been distinguished from narrative jewellery of other artists. My contribution to the field of narrative jewellery goes towards my own use of cultural theories that explain identity as a state of being 'in-between' and hybrid. My narrative jewellery-based object making reflects upon reinterpretations of tradition, interactions with references from other cultures and methodologies that use joints to connect all my memories and experience.

Approach of Tradition and Methodologies

Conceptually, my investigation began with items drawn from the traditional visual cultures from my original cultural background in China. I focused on merging aspects of traditional Chinese visual culture with items I observed in the culture I find myself in at particular moments in this global economic and cultural world.

In considering ideas about cultural roots and tradition, two essays have been important to my study. "'Cultural Roots', from *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*" by Benedict Anderson, addresses the important role of cultural roots in constructing a nation[18] and "'Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition' from *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*" by Apinan Poshyananda, underlined traditions that suggest a fixed pattern of timelessness but could be adapted and be flexible.[19] Both arguments about the importance of cultural roots agreed with Bhabha's idea of thinking beyond tradition. However, Bhabha also believes that original culture was a foundation for locating one's cultural identity. These essays provided context for highlighting tradition or cultural roots for my research as a means of reinventing traditional visual cultures in jewellery-based object making. Visual artists Xu Bing (徐冰) and Chen Chun-Hao (陳浚豪) have also been important reference points for this study because of the way in which they have used contemporary methods to interpret traditional Chinese brush painting.

As a primary form of identification in this global cultural environment, tradition has provided me with numerous resources from both traditional Chinese visual art and traditional Chinese philosophy. I will discuss those cultural references in each chapter.

[18] Benedict Anderson, "Cultural Roots," *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 9-36.
[19] Apinan Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* (New York: Asian Society Galleries, 1996), 23-53.

Approaching a working methodology and a way of fabricating materials will be considered in this research. Paul Carter stated creative research is a reflection of a series of knowledge, including creative theories, ideas, analyses and practices. This knowledge creates a foundation for future invention, which allowed me to intuitively work, analyse, make decisions and reflect on those physical objects that have become a way of conducting my practice-led research. Both Jules Prown and Thomas Schlereth said:

> Material culture properly connotes physical manifestations of culture and therefore embraces those segments of human learning and behaviour which provide a person with plans, methods and reasons for producing and using things that can be seen and touched… [The individual object] is concrete evidence of presence of a human mind operating at the time of fabrication.[20]

Prown and Schlereth stated that every object is made with a purpose that evolves with the maker's thoughts, a plan and a way of making. The created object is a statement of the maker's ideas and analyses.

I believe there is no fixed method of jewellery construction. With different approaches, each maker has their own way of thinking and analysing. Louise Bourgeois, in 'Statements from an Interview with Donald Kuspit' declares, "What modern art is [sic] that you have to keep finding new ways to express yourself, to express the problems, that there are no settled ways, no fixed approach."[21] Bourgeois stated that the artist must keep finding new and exciting ways in their practice. My practices support me with my thinking and critiquing; and through a gradual process of experimentation I have become aware of my own voice by researching my own cultural roots or tradition.

My Study of Cultural Background Related to the Research

My approach to this research was related to my cultural roots or background in terms of theory studies and practice. Cultural influences, for example the place where one was born, are deeply rooted in one's blood. I grew up in China where I had full access to Chinese traditional visual culture, such as the ancient craft of paper cutting and ancient architecture. One of my deepest memories was that of my grandmother embroidering

[20] Anna M. Fariello and Paula Owen, eds., *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), 150.
[21] Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900 - 2000* (MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 1090.

shoe pads and giving them to me as gifts every time I left home. I cherished those shoe pads and kept a few of them unused. Subconsciously I carried this Chinese cultural knowledge and it emerged in objects that I created in my own work.

The Cultural Revolution in China (1966-76) ruined countless artefacts, including those folk arts that had applied patterns. My home was a small rural village that was far away from the central government and was only affected in a minor way. My memories of childhood and the knowledge acquired from various folk arts and craft masters during my college studies has allowed me to adopt some of that heritage in my work. Both my personal memories and purposeful studies have enabled me to have a solid foundation in Chinese cultural background. Initially, I accessed thoughts, ideas, concepts, theories and texts of traditional Chinese culture and through my international college studies I have delved deeper into the cultural milieu, which has given me greater understanding and a sense of responsibility to my native culture.

I also questioned myself: was China still a suitable place to conduct a project? To recreate traditional Chinese visual culture within contemporary life rather than merely copying it literally became one of the most important reasons for me to pursue further studies in the United States. I could visualise the general picture of traditional Chinese visual culture more clearly from outside China; I thought I might be able to find similar methodologies through researching other artists' exploration in their cultural background.

Research Questions and Chapter Arrangement

Areas of study, such as the location of cultural research, traditional Chinese visual culture and philosophy, narrative jewellery and objects, form the foundation of my practice-led research. To choose jewellery-based objects as a practical way of working echoed the nature of object making. The history of objects demonstrated that they have been made for certain purposes. Human-made objects, no matter who made, who owned or who consumed them, reflect one's cultural patterns. These patterns included each person's thoughts, ideas and experiences. These objects, "by extension, are the belief

patterns of the larger society of which they are a part"[22] as Thomas Schlereth has said. This practice enabled me to interact with different disciplines and cultural references.

Drawn from these areas of study, I centred my research within the boundary of the core question: what are the possible outcomes of object making that reflect negotiations between my original culture and other cultural focuses I encounter in a global world? This question provided a research scope within those areas of study, thus allowing me to answer my other research questions:

- Is it possible to reinterpret or reinvent traditional visual culture and related philosophies in the global cultural environment? If so, what methodologies would be appropriate?

- How does shifting between places impact on one's personal work when placing cultural identity in the environment of multi-culturalism?

Each chapter in this exegesis is divided into three sections. Section one introduces the key themes of the chapter. Section two explains the developments in my practice and provides the theoretical context for the work. Section three provides a conclusion for the chapter.

In Chapter One, I describe the early stages of my research. My original approach to my research initially focused on *A New Approach to Chinese Patterns in Jewellery and Metals*. However, this approach proved to be too narrow so I refined it to be more open. Chapter One explains my reinterpretation of traditional Chinese visual culture, how I established a methodology of construction for my studio process, and how I reinterpreted both the structure and philosophy of traditional Chinese architecture. It also provides a series of early outcomes for jewellery-based objects making.

Chapter Two explores the way in which I developed a detailed context from my work that was located between traditional Chinese culture and influences from other cultures. At this stage I thought of identity as a kind of duality between my Chinese culture and the Australian culture in which I found myself. I saw identity as a negotiation with shifting locations, natural worlds and cultures.

[22] Thomas Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies in America* (Lawrence, USA: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 3.

My field trip to the Netherlands exposed me to the idea of hybridity which I explored through forms and materials which are discussed in Chapter Three. In this chapter, I discuss how the negotiation of tradition and the present allowed me to develop ideas that are a combination of adaption, substitution and mimicking.

Chapter Four presents a body of work based on the assumption of identity as an on-going negotiation of different cultural relationships and interaction. I investigate how traditional methods of making from my mother culture are fused with references from other cultures that couples with my individual experience.

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe the making of a series of experimental jewellery-based objects during the first stage of my PhD studies using my traditional Chinese visual culture as a starting point. I will describe the development of early working methodologies in my PhD research, and show how this methodology assisted me in clarifying my research key points and questions.

Initially, my working methodology involved time consuming practices and conjectures that were based on trial and error explorations of making a work. It is a traditional artist's working methodology; craft labour is a way to discover opportunities. As Crafts theorist Richard Sennett emphasised, it is a form of "metamorphosis."[23] This transformation requires considerable time and labour and can be achieved through these progresses and assumptions. Craft labour became a rationale for focusing on my activities in the studio in the early stages of research. Notwithstanding practice-based assumption, I was very clear that this project should take its first step from traditional Chinese visual art, especially traditional Chinese architecture as the cultural heritage that most interested and influenced me.

The first two questions to be answered were: how to reinterpret this tradition of cultural heritage through jewellery-based object making? And how could I draw reference from this heritage and its materials, forms and related traditional philosophies? Through an analysis of related artists' work which addressed influences from their cultural heritage through either using materials or a method of fabrication, I generated some experimental outcomes from my own cultural heritage. Both jewellery artists, Lucy Sarneel and Mari Funaki, source artistic language from their cultural heritage and each has created individual work that I will introduce in this chapter.

By investigating my decision-making process through the above practices and using them to explore the research questions, I was able to develop a method of fabrication which allowed me to explore these ideas from the inception of this research. I undertook a series of experiments that engaged with my childhood memories, and Chinese

[23] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2008), 120.

structures and forms, patterns and materials. These experiments also drew on my individual experiences, such as children's games, and farming events from my childhood memories which I fused with my experience of living in foreign countries. These experiments allowed me to make connections between my conceptual and theoretical work during my studio practice. This enabled me to explore other artists and cultures on my international journey and furthered my research in other directions. A detailed analysis of these experiments in which I reinterpreted traditional Chinese architecture and its related natural cosmology and philosophy will be explored.

The outline of this chapter will start with explanations of related traditional Chinese visual culture, and will be augmented with an analysis of a series of experiments. I examined different wooden structural frames and developed a series of work, titled *Something Underneath*. This series interrogated a complex combination of material, forms and ideas, but raised the possibility of exploring wooden frame joints as a way of fabrication. This idea guided a series of further experiments to generate detailed cross joints as a way of fabrication. Through investigating relevant cultural studies and theories, I was testing this fabrication technique and questioning if it is an appropriate way both to reinterpret tradition, and to imbue it with a personal narrative.

Related Philosophy and Theories

Traditional Chinese Architecture

My project began by researching the wooden structural frames from traditional Chinese architecture. My intention was to search for a method of construction and forms from traditional Chinese architecture, which formed a part of traditional Chinese visual culture. Like other cultural heritages, traditional Chinese architecture provided a space for sharing structure, history, art, philosophy and culture.

I have been attracted to this traditional style of joinery structure in traditional Chinese architecture since my childhood. This joinery structure seemed to me like children's building blocks, being held together to support the whole ceiling of all the older Buddhist temples I visited with my grandmother. These childhood memories offered me a chance to observe the wooden structural frames from different traditional architectural

groups, such as in the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven during my college studies in Beijing.

My interest in those structures stimulated me to research them in detail. For example, *QI NIAN DIAN* (祈年殿 see fig. 1), is a significant 15th century architectural structure that is located to the north of the Temple of Heaven.[24] The inner wooden structural framework completely supported the whole building, and was built without the use of nails.[25] I was fascinated by the logical construction and also attracted by the amazing configuration of the supporting pillars (see fig. 2).[26]

My research about, and appreciation of Chinese philosophy has led to my understanding of the symbolism of the numbers of the pillars and their connection with Earth and Heaven. All timber structures were painted for both protection and decoration.[27] Underlying my research of traditional Chinese architecture was a concern about how to generate a structure or form to reflect on my research question of reinterpreting traditional visual culture.

Ancient Chinese Cosmology

Along with researching wooden structural frames, the related subject of ancient Chinese cosmology was also important to my research, especially the belief that *the Earth was represented by a square and Heaven by a circle*. This belief led to a geometrical image of the Universe that influenced human space and social life, where everything was perfectly ordered. Every Chinese person is influenced by this cosmology.

Traditional Chinese architecture followed these essential principles of the ancient philosophy, such as pure geometrical forms, certain orientation and a symmetry that mirrored the seasons and hours. Examples of this system can be found in the ancient architecture of the Han dynasty (third century B.C. to third century A.D.) and it remained unchanged until the nineteenth century.[28] The Temple of Heaven (see fig. 3) adhered strictly to this ancient philosophy, which not only can be seen in the courtyard

[24] Xinian Fu, et al., *Chinese Architecture*, trans. Nancy S. Steinhardt (USA: Yale University and New World Press, 2002), 222.
[25] Fu, et al., *Chinese Architecture*, 5-9.
[26] Li, *A Detailed Dissection of Chinese Classic Ancient Architecture*, 267-269.
[27] Ibid., 267.
[28] Michèle Pirazzoli-T'Serstevens, *Living Architecture: Chinese*, trans. Robert Allen (NY: Grosset & Dunlap, INC., 1971), 10-11.

plan but also the inner construction of the three main sections of the building. This ancient philosophy is also evident in ancient Chinese coins, which have square holes inside a round shape.

I wanted to explore this ancient philosophy and investigate further possibilities with this method of construction of wooden frame joints. The PhD research gave me opportunity to question how to introduce my traditional heritage into the contemporary world. This research would also allow me to examine and learn about the different construction methods of the wooden structural frame. This study of traditional Chinese architecture became an early focus of my research.

Referenced Artists

To reinterpret traditional Chinese visual culture and explore a way of construction from this culture, I researched several artists who worked with similar themes in the jewellery and metalsmithing field. Those artists included Pavel Opočenský, Mari Funaki and Lucy Sarneel.

Pavel Opočenský

Pavel Opočenský is a jeweller from the Czech Republic who undertook an exploration in wooden furniture joints during his time in jail. I found a series of his projects, titled *Brooches behind Bars* (see fig. 4) when I was searching for a way of construction using traditional Chinese architecture. In the series, he joined different types of timber together to create geometrical forms by using plywood and other wooden materials that came from cutting up table legs or finding prepared peg legs of elm or beech.

In these brooches, the joints were very clear in each piece and connected directly by being jointed together. The detailed joint structure and the inherent qualities of the materials combined to tell a story, and seemed a reminder of the jail window that locked him in during his difficult time behind bars. These works symbolized his predicament during his time in jail.

Opočenský's depiction of the details of joint structure and their symbolic meanings persistently stimulated me to look at wooden frame structures from traditional Chinese architecture. These geometrical forms, symmetrically or asymmetrically jointed together, in Opočenský's work and traditional Chinese architecture, intrigued me. They inspired me to believe I could explore a way of construction based on traditional Chinese architecture.

Mari Funaki

Moved to search for a way of construction taken from traditional visual culture, I found a similar theme in Mari Funaki's work (see fig. 5). Funaki was a Japanese jewellery artist who lived in Australia, and in my view, she reinterpreted traditional paper folding or Japanese Origami to construct a metal-based jewellery object.

Paper folding or Japanese Origami is the traditional craft of folding paper to make models of animals, people, and objects. Funaki reinvented this methodology with another material, mild steel sheet, which gave durability to each construction.

With a material such as sheet metal, which she then folded and blackened, in her hands each piece evoked familiar forms such as insects, animals, grass, and plants. The spatial expression of each piece also created dialogue between the inside and outside, between volume and space. Each folded shape reminded me of both Japanese Origami and of calligraphy. In fact, Otto Künzli described her work as 'Cubist Calligraphy.'[29] Both the way in which she referred to and reinterpreted traditional Japanese visual culture in her work, built my confidence in researching the methodology of wooden frame joints from my own Chinese culture.

Lucy Sarneel

Dutch jewellery artist Lucy Sarneel also reassessed her traditional Dutch culture through her jewellery making. In an interview with *Art Jewelry Forum*, Sarneel stated that "My work derives from a fascination with the ways people express their energy and

[29] Otto Künzli, "Cubist Calligraphy?," in *Mari Funaki* (Australia: Gallery Funaki, 1997), 5.

canalize this energy through traditions, rituals, treating, and dealing with objects, and in particular jewelry or jewelry-related objects."[30]

Some of her work addressed the issue of the endangered traditional Dutch costumes and applied this folk art into those pieces through a "symbolic seduction,"[31] heightening awareness of the disappearance of traditional textiles in contemporary life. She recreated those traditional textiles with other materials. Zinc, for example, is a material used by Dutch people for objects used daily such as buckets, and also for architectural elements, such as dormer windows. Sarneel used it as her signature material that linked with her Dutch cultural heritage. A piece of her work titled *Ashore* (see fig. 6), created floral metal constructions made of zinc on a traditional textile band, thus creating a harmonious combination of materials by using ornamental embroidered bands, thread, silver and zinc. This way of reinterpretation of traditional visual culture and traditional material inspired me to research my own cultural heritage.

Something Underneath (2013)

The first series of jewellery-based objects made during my PhD research, titled *Something Underneath*, was an investigation of those frame joints from traditional Chinese architecture in order to find methods of fabrication and a way to reinterpret tradition.

This series included four pieces: *Longevity*, *Samshu* (Rice Wine) *Making* (see fig. 7a-b), *Fishing #1* and *Fishing #2* (see fig. 8a-b). Each object was divided into two parts: one part that could function and be worn as a jewellery item (see fig. 9), but with an enamelled image that was set underneath. This image was reflected on a mirror at the base of the work to build a connection between the two parts. In *Longevity* for example, I created a small metal table and put the wearable brooch part on it; the bottom of the table incorporated a mirror. Underneath the brooch, there was an enamelled decal image of Chinese brush painting that depicted a wondering child. This image could be reflected on the mirror, like a hidden memory that is revealed.

[30] Art Jewelry Forum, "Lucy Sarneel: Soulmates," accessed 11 June 2014, http://www.artjewelryforum.org/ajf-blog/lucy-sarneel-soulmates.
[31] Ibid.

I intentionally imbued each construction with my narrative of childhood memories. These memories of my childhood life experiences, a combination of the two parts of structures and forms, and a connection between these patterns and symbols created a narrative jewellery-based object. I explored ways for those memories to be incorporated with traditional Chinese structures and forms, patterns and materials.

Childhood Memories

In *Something Underneath*, each piece described a narrative, an event from my childhood. *Longevity* represented the occasion of celebrating my grandmother's birthday. *Samshu Making* (Chinese rice wine making) revealed a scene from Chinese rice wine making, and *Fishing #1* and *Fishing* #2 expressed my reminiscence of fishing with my father.

The content of each piece was combined with my childhood memories to suggest personal narratives. Growing up in a mountain village, I always recall farming events, such as samshu making (see fig. 10), fishing and harvesting. Tools associated with these farming activities were comparable to traditional Chinese architecture forms, volumes and even ways of construction. Those childhood experiences were cemented in my mind and could not be repeated, but they could be reported through a visualised language of the narrative. Starting with the forms of farming tools, I reinterpreted and redesigned them into *Something Underneath*.

By imbuing my jewellery with personal narratives of childhood memories, I intended to search for my Chinese identity through tradition. Stuart Hall stated that "identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from'…."[32] My Chinese roots have allowed me to recall those traditional events, but have also allowed me to access many traditional patterns and symbols.

Patterns and Symbols

I applied a variety of patterns and symbols to the four pieces. Using patterns that suited my initial approach to my PhD proposal, *A New Approach to Chinese Patterns in*

[32] Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?," 4.

Jewellery and Metals, I also infused the work with my own personal narrative interpretation. These patterns were either pierced through the metal or carved on plastic and painted red. They built up a metaphoric resonance and assisted my explanation of childhood memories by using symbolic meanings.

In these pieces, I was searching for a method of reinterpreting traditional patterns and symbols and combining them with my personal stories. *Longevity* depicted a seniors' birthday celebration. The Chinese character, 寿, means long life (traditional 壽, pinyin Shòu) and the pattern of the character was written on red paper and put on anything that could be labelled, such as a door, window or container.[33] Based on the four patterns from the history of *Shou* writing, I pierced each negative form of the pattern into the sterling silver to build the construction. The four patterns symbolised the evolution of *Shou*. I measured these four layers with a plastic ruler that lacked numbers, symbolising long life. The personal reinterpretation of the *Shou* pattern implied an eternal blessing for seniors. This pattern did not depart from the traditional meaning but I built up a layer of personal meaning to create a memorable event. By reusing and reinterpreting these traditional patterns I was able to explore their meaning and create a deep understanding of my national and personal identity through these jewellery-based objects. In *Fishing #1* and *Fishing #2*, I morphed Chinese patterns and symbols such as the lucky fish pattern from papercutting and Chinese characters together, to build up each construction using piercing and soldering techniques.

Structure and Form

In each piece, I intentionally applied different wooden frame joints and reconstructed forms based on familiar objects from my childhood. Each work explored ways of joining as is evidenced in traditional Chinese building structures. For example, sheet metal was joined by round or square wire, and thin sheet metal was inserted into thick sheet metal. I pierced different square holes or round holes into a sheet of metal, inserted a square wire or round wire through the holes in the sheet metal and built constructions that were similar to the wooden frame joint. I had to be very aware of the exact size of each wire and each hole during this process as any mistakes would mean I was not able to make the hole fit the wire perfectly, so I would be unable to solder them

[33] Lusheng Pan, *Chinese Paper-cut Folk Art* (Beijing, China: Beijing Arts and Crafts Press, 1999), 13-14, 364.

together easily. In *Longevity*, the brooch part was created by four square sterling silver wires that represented the supporting poles of a building, and this was joined with four flat shapes constructed from sheet metal. Similar to the wooden frame joints found in architecture, this structure created the basic form for the brooch part.

The construction of the basic form (see fig. 11) allowed me to visually explore more details of Chinese traditional architecture. I calculated each size of metal wire when making these structural joints in my work and this posed a few questions concerning ancient architecture: how do these mathematically and logically constructed wooden frame joints fit together perfectly? These changeable and modular components did not guarantee success in constructing architecture forms. These structures required persistence and perseverance in craft making and thinking. They were so valuable both for their craftsmanship and heritage, which were the two avenues that I wanted to explore in more depth.

I also investigated the structure and forms of farming objects. The two-part form in *Samshu Making*, were drawn from traditional Chinese architectural practice, such as the use of a square foundation in the architecture and a full wall that contained opened windows (see fig. 12).

Material

Each visual journey, in the form of jewellery, was built up from various materials. Combining these materials in my artworks helped me to infuse Chinese cultural references with metaphoric resonance. I discovered that this was a complex yet extremely worthwhile challenge for my PhD research. The materials I used included metals, enamel, plastic, mirror and decal paper. I had used some materials such as enamel and plastic in my previous work. Plastic has a characteristic of transparency and can provide a contrast between positive space and negative space. When it is painted red, the transparency makes the plastic resemble a Chinese paper cut. *Fishing #2* (see fig. 8b), depicted a childhood memory of catching fish. By painting a fish pattern on the plastic and setting it in metal, I endowed the work with a meaning of good luck and freedom that is evident in traditional Chinese visual culture. I then overlaid this with my own interpretation and personal narrative, providing a balance between control and confinement versus escape and freedom.

In this series, I did not attempt a working methodology of analysis and assumptions that flowed from one finished piece to the next piece. This working methodology seemed too logical for me. Instead, I made four different interrelated pieces that each addressed one idea that related back to key points of my research.

I tested wooden frame joints in each piece as a way of construction or that explored forms suggesting a wooden frame joint, however, the wooden frame joint was not emphasised in the four pieces. The pieces seemed to have too many components and details rather than highlighting the joint structures in each small-scale piece. The complexity of each piece interfered with my idea of exploring the wooden frame joint as a construction method.

I brought traditional Chinese patterns and symbols to the contemporary world as a way of reinterpreting tradition. These layers of meanings were working when I constructed large sculptural objects, but they seemed too complicated for these small-scale jewellery-based objects. Each pattern became an interruption and a distraction to the construction of the wooden frame joints in each small-scale piece.

I also questioned my use of various materials. These were familiar materials that I had used to construct large sculptural objects or hollowware over the past few years. Within small-scale jewellery-based object making, those materials created different meanings and negotiations that were a disruption to my idea of reinterpreting traditional Chinese visual culture. The forms and patterns that were created by these materials were extremely intricate so that each piece became too complicated. How to simplify these multiple ideas became a challenge in my continued research.

When reflecting on this series of jewellery-based objects, I drew some conclusions. My first thoughts were that the wooden frame joint could be emphasised in my next exploration. Secondly, that it would be a good idea to explore these patterns as a way of reinterpreting traditional Chinese visual culture, and I will explore this later in Chapter Three. The use of materials in the making of small-scale jewellery-based objects was a major consideration in my research work. Should I establish rules and limitations for the selection of materials for future use? Since I was investigating construction methods, this material limitation offered me the opportunity to set up rules for my further research. By grouping this series of work together, I analysed the dialogue and

construction methods that had been used for this series of work. I began to make my decisions and created different assumptions for my next experiments.

Joints Experiment (2013)

Through my analysis of the first series of *Something Underneath*, I had a clear idea that all my effort should be focused on exploring wooden frame joints as a construction method. This decision allowed me to only experiment with different constructions techniques of wooden frame joints without any reference to the physical world, such as narrative input of my childhood memories. It also allowed me to reduce the selection of materials and to limit it to the use of metals as a construction material.

I began by making a series of joints in metal (see fig. 13). Base metals, for instance copper and brass, are usually the material used by beginning jewellery makers because they are considered less expensive and yet suitable for a variety of construction techniques. I also considered it a good material to use for the exploration of different wooden frame joints. By cutting, fitting and soldering, I constructed finger joints, cross joints, and straight joints along with a silver-ingot joint. From these experiments (see fig. 14), each sample provided a much clearer idea of how a wooden frame structure could be transferred into metal construction. Like a preliminary sketch, each sample offered me an understanding of the details of traditional Chinese architecture. Through each joint, I grasped the idea of the technique that was used to construct the joints. It was a modern day learning process using knowledge acquired from traditional Chinese architecture.

This deeper understanding of basic wooden frame joints provided a useful link to my next step, where I made more complicated structures by cutting, inserting and joining two forms together. Those forms were either similar or different structures in each experiment. When joined together, each experiment built up a miniature three-dimensional form of an architectural structure.

These architectural structures reminded me of Pavel Opočenský's *Brooches behind Bars* series, which led me to review his work in great detail. In his work titled *Brooch* (see fig. 15), each joint was polished to be perfectly smooth and each section was matched extremely well before being inserted into the edge of each frame. The gap

between two frames created a hole and then the inserted textural plywood made a spiral shape that emphasised the joint structure.

With continual experimentation, development and research I felt that I would be able to bring out a variety of possibilities for the wooden frame joint. Richard Sennett said that "It might seem that the more people train and practice in developing a skill, the more practical minded they will become, focusing on the possible and the particular."[34] I expect more possibilities will arise from the learning and reinterpreting of traditional Chinese architecture.

I reviewed different traditional Chinese architectural structures that have the ability to connect different forms to create structures that have the space and volume of architecture from a birds' eye view. I realised that I am fond of all kinds of traditional Chinese architecture because of its link with my childhood memories of my father, who worked as a builder. I admire my father's knowledge, and am pleased to think that people are living in houses that my father and his work team constructed for our neighbours and those in adjoining villages. Over the long period of building houses, my father had very few accidents. Once in a while, I liked to ask him the same question, "how did you design and build your most recent house?" The answer was almost the same every time, "it is in my mind." He also answered a general question of how ancient craftsmen built such complicated historical architecture, such as those amazing wooden structural frames of temples. By researching different traditional Chinese architecture and domestic houses, I started to draw the courtyards and sky-wells of Chinese domestic buildings focusing on the different joint structures.

Miniature (2013)

The *Miniature* series is a set of redesigned and reinterpreted birds' eye views of buildings. To ensure I would not get involved in a lot of detail and become distracted by the complicated structure of those buildings, I set up certain rules.

Firstly, I would investigate different wooden frame joints that would serve as links to support architectural forms. Secondly, I would create each piece so it had geometric forms with open-ended shapes, most of which would have two parts. Like a

[34] Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 46.

miniaturised house, each must have an empty space that could host or contain something. When I constructed each experiment, I focused on mimicking different wooden frame structures by constructing a joint using a round wire that was soldered onto a length of flat metal.

In this way, each experiment had a main part with a hollowed space where the wooden frame joint became either a support or an extra form. By redesigning my continual and intermittent memories, I merged different architectural forms (see fig. 16) to suggest a new ambiguous construction; each one looked like a machine, a flower or architecture. One piece, titled *Pole* (see fig. 17), drew on poles found in Chinese architecture. I bent it to join two parts and made this form look like a form of fishing cage and a flower.

My studio work involved detailed research into traditional Chinese architecture. I stepped in and out of this resource of traditional Chinese visual culture, and constructed numerous experiments. The wooden frame joint worked as either a connection or form that helped each experiment build on both positive and negative spaces.

Both interpretations gave me direction for the next stage in my studio making. I looked at several approaches that I could take with these new directions with my PhD research. The first was that the connection became a meeting point where two parts were jointed together, representing the past and the present, the traditional and the new. Stuart Hall thought of identity as "a meeting point,"[35] a junction point where the joint became a bridge to create dialogue between tradition and reinterpretation. The symbolic meaning of these joints seemed to construct a narrative that was imbued with my past memories and present ideas. I asked myself if it was possible to focus my work directly on those wooden frame joints from traditional Chinese architecture? Or should I research just one type of wooden frame joints first?

The second approach was that when the wooden frame joint worked as a form in some of my experiments, it resembled a concentrated form of architecture. These joints were the main support for the whole building and could not be seen from the outside. However, they were emphasised and became the main focus in each of my small-scale jewellery-based objects. I did not realise this outcome until I put all my experiments together. This analysis suggested that I should explore only one type of wooden frame joint on a magnified scale.

[35] Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?," 5.

Cross Joint Experiment (2013)

My research began to focus on the wooden frame joints. Instead of using them in structures, I began to make structures out of the joints. They evolved into a logical arrangement and each one was linked to the other. This technique is similar to the ceiling in traditional Chinese architecture (see fig. 18) where the joints created a huge complex structure that was used to support the whole roof. Each joint was placed in a predetermined order so that they supported each other by means of a cross joint system.

A cross joint (see fig. 19a-b) is one of the most common joints found in traditional architecture. It was used whenever it was necessary to join two pieces of wood that would cross over each other (an example is the strengthening rails of tables and chairs). This general application of cross joints on traditional Chinese architecture allowed me to reinterpret this traditional way of construction for my own practice-led research.

I drilled through 1.5mm thick square wires, joined the square wire with 1mm diameter round wire to create a cross joint (see fig. 19b). This referenced the basic wooden frame joint possibly the simplest of joints to mark out and cut.

The first series of these experiments was constructed by using a wire structure to interpret the cross joint (see fig. 20). Each structure kept a geometric form which reflected the intricate structure of wooden frame joints in traditional Chinese architecture. I carefully arranged each wire and precisely drilled each hole in the square wire. By drilling, cutting and soldering, I constructed flat forms through a range of wire cross joints, using either a long or short wire joint construction. Inspired by the traditional architecture of *QI NIAN DIAN*, I constructed a round base, a triangular frame and a fence from these wire structures. Those forms (see fig. 21) were abstract and universal, and able to be easily identified by the viewer. The cross joint became a method or form of construction rather than only the inner structure. Those forms left the audience with an open idea in an abstract way. They presented a range of possibilities between predictability and randomness, emptiness and solidness, interior and exterior.

The single joint allowed me to construct geometrical forms. I believed that these wooden frame joints could build up an object and I reinterpreted the traditional architectural technique into a way of constructing forms. I brought traditional forms and ideas into contemporary life.

I became more determined with my approach after reviewing jewellery made by Mari Funaki. *Container* (see fig. 22) was a piece that was created by using a geometric folded construction technique. Each part was carefully folded to build up an interplay between negative and positive space. Like paper folding, this piece visualised various compound forms, such as in contemporary building, a standing table or a recumbent insect. Similar to Funaki's methodology of construction that was based on her interpretation of her original culture, I proceeded to research the methodology of wooden frame joints from my own Chinese cultural position.

To further develop, I spent a large amount of time and labour in cutting, filing, drilling, soldering, re-cutting and re-soldering. I cut a long wire into many short wires; constructed each cross joint through a repetition of this technique (see fig. 23); then reconstructed it into a flat sheet that was used to rebuild each piece of 'architecture.' I developed a large stock pile of cross joints that would be used as elements for my next step. Each element seemed like a cell, waiting to be injected with ideas that could be developed into a structure.

Personally I see the action of destruction, construction and reconstruction as an interpretation of traditional visual culture as a foundation in placing cultural identity. In China, different forms of traditional architecture are constructed, then destroyed through natural causes or human war and then reconstructed. The action of making those cross joints reflected on this life cycle of ancient Chinese architecture. There is a similarity to this architectural life cycle also evident in Chinese traditional culture, as is evidenced by the recent destructive power of the Cultural Revolution. The destruction triggered by the Cultural Revolution caused generations who were born after the Revolution to be dramatically cut off from traditional Chinese culture. The responsibility of reinventing, reconstructing or reinterpreting traditional culture became important to Chinese people of my generation.

I also found my passion for reinterpreting original cultural heritage increased when living in foreign countries. I sensed differences in ways of thinking and living from the local foreign community while residing in a foreign cultural environment. This sense of difference allowed me to pay a lot of attention to my original culture and helped me realise the importance of traditional Chinese culture. Thus the making of jewellery as a means to reinterpret my original traditional culture would become one of my life journeys.

I concluded that the way of reinterpreting original traditional culture not only offered me a way of accessing traditional knowledge, but also created a cultural foundation for me to further interact with foreign cultures. The intensive labour of making cross joints allowed me to create a visual form for my next series of experiments.

Combination Experiment (2013)

Combination Experiment was a series of explorations of cross joints. I focused on one size of cross joint and investigated it to create visual forms that were both two-dimensional and three-dimensional. In this experiment, I combined different forms of cross joints with flat metal sheet to construct a range of experiments.

Combination Experiment was also a comparison of ways of form construction, with a contrast being provided by combining two and three-dimensional forms, open and enclosed forms, and random and rigid forms. These two different dimensional approaches provided an interaction with each other to form a conversation.

Random Series

I intended to create a flat sheet using cross joints in the *Random* series (see fig. 24). I randomly arranged cross joints and soldered them together to create each arbitrary form. Its flatness became an extension of the geometric form that was constructed using flat sheet metal. Like a dialogue between cultures, two different forms interacted with each other and became a combined form. These forms are more abstract and less associated with narrative or emotion. Each geometric form was enclosed and hollowed and constructed from a simple flat sheet made of cross joints.

In these experiments, the action of joining two different constructions together seemed to be a metaphorical reference to stitching cultural components together. Similar to the idea that different cultures are constructed in different ways, these two forms differed, yet there was a negotiation occurring between the parts. This idea of negotiation is explored further in Chapter Two.

Cone Series

My exploration of constructing a flat sheet using cross joints from the previous experiment provided me with confidence to explore the construction of different three-dimensional forms through cross joints. Each form was built up from a flat sheet of cross joints. It was a technical challenge for me to build up different three-dimensional forms, such as a hemisphere, rectangle or a cone. During the soldering process, a nearly finished three-dimensional form could easily fall apart if the last joint's solder was overfired after each piece was domed, hammered and soldered.

When I overcame this technical difficulty, a series of samples (see fig. 25) was developed through a variety of experiments. These forms explored different spatial structures and relationships between positive and negative space. These cross joints were accumulated into each three-dimensional structure. This procedure of form construction seemed to be a metaphor for re-establishing my original cultural roots.

In the *Cone* series, I decided to imbue two forms with references to Chinese visual culture by adding form, colour and related traditional philosophies. Each piece had a basic cone form. A cone is a universal form that we are able to find in many different cultures, such as the cone roof of the *QI NIAN DIAN*, a common filter form, haystack or a paddy container from my farming life in my childhood. I chose this form and constructed it out of a sheet of cross joints.

Along with the cone form, I bezel set a red stamp (see fig. 26) made of acrylic on the top of a cone shape and engraved it with a good luck pattern from Chinese characters. As a child, I used to watch my mother put a red paper with lucky words written on it on the cover of paddy containers after every harvest. It is not a ceremony or celebration but a folk habit where every family prays for the continuation of a good harvest. The square red stamp on the centre of the round base of the cone reflected the philosophy that *the Earth was represented by a square and Heaven by a circle*—a philosophy related to traditional Chinese architecture.

To enhance the interaction or communication between the two forms, I powder coated both the cone form of cross joints and the flat form of the sheet construction in white. I also painted the flat form red to refer to a red stamp. Red has similar but also some different meanings in Chinese traditional culture and other cultures. In Western culture it is a warning sign, whereas in China red is a favourite colour of many people as it has

meanings of "nobility, magnificence, warmth and luck" [36]. Chinese people have consciously used this colour throughout the ages. This interaction with or communication of cultures was more complicated when it had to be transformed into visual jewellery-based object making. These changes revealed my willingness to negotiate between my original cultural upbringing and references from other cultures.

These reinterpretations of the original culture heritage are also evidenced in the work of Lucy Sarneel. In *Wish You Were Here* (see fig. 27), she constructed a neckpiece that incorporated a form like a bucket, a hexagonal shaped form, and a gourd-like object all of which resembled things she encountered during her daily life. Sarneel made each one with great care, especially the wood veneered surface of the hexagonal shaped object and the painted gourd. She reinterpreted traditional objects found in the daily life of Dutch people to suggest social contexts of cherishing the idea and the place of tradition in a rapidly moving world.

In this *Cone* series (see fig. 28) I succeeded in reversing ways of constructing forms found in the last series of *Combination Experiment*. I created a communicative dialogue between those forms to reflect an interaction of cultures. By reducing the complexity of the components and details, I infused these pieces with my interpretation of traditional Chinese culture and related ancient Chinese cosmology.

By aiming to use cross joints as a way to create structure, each fabricated form of cross joints looked more like a pattern than a joint structure. The emphasis on a cross joint structure disappeared when it was powder coated in white colour. How to make this structure of cross joints more apparent, and more of a reference to Chinese visual culture by adding colour or surface change will be considered in the next chapter.

Based on this exploration of construction techniques, the cross joint was used to reinterpret both traditional techniques and cultural forms, and it was also used as a means of communication with other cultures within my current life experience. I developed this idea further in the next set of experiments.

[36] Stephanie Busuttil-Cesar, *Red* (New York: Assouline Publishing, 2000), 6.

Conclusion

During this part of my research, I spent a lot of time using practice-led research rather than theoretical investigation. I used my hands to guide my thinking for much of the time during the early stages of my PhD. Based on each of these early investigations, I decided that the next step was to undertake more research into theories that were directly related to my making.

At the beginning of this chapter, I posed the following two questions: how to reinterpret traditions of cultural heritage through jewellery-based objects making and how could I draw reference from this heritage and its materials, forms and related traditional philosophies? In my earliest research, I developed cross joints as a method of form construction that was a reinterpretation of aspects of traditional Chinese architecture. I reinterpreted different architectural forms and related traditional cosmology based on this research into traditional Chinese architecture. These developments and reinterpretations were the foundation for my next exploration where I focused on the effects of being exposed to a different cultural environment and negotiating other cultures.

In this chapter, I have analysed the *Something Underneath* series in detail. This enquiry provided a visual outcome that was revealed in each step or decision I intuitively made in the studio. This outcome revolved around my experiments with wooden frame joints coupled with an exploration of traditional Chinese symbols or patterns, and a narrative of my childhood memories. It became obvious that this series of experiments was too complicated to explore as a single idea. This logical analysis offered an appropriate way to continue my research step by step.

The evaluation of my work to date allowed me to experiment with only wooden frame joints in the *Joints Experiment*. I set up rules for this experiment and constructed different joints without direct reference from the physical world. The *Joints Experiment* helped me understand the traditional culture heritage of Chinese architecture and this was followed with the forms and cultural exploration of *Miniature* series.

By reviewing these miniature objects that I had made and referenced from traditional Chinese architecture, I changed my perspective from overall forms of architecture to one that just focused on a magnified version of the cross joint. This resulted in the creation of the *Cone* series where I realised that the combination of two forms replicated

the fusion of cultures, based on the two forms having an interaction or negotiation with each other. Reflecting on these conclusions reinforced the importance for me to continue working with this type of form construction and cross joints from wooden frame joints of traditional Chinese visual culture in the next chapter.

Briefly, this chapter has focused on an exploration of traditional Chinese visual culture. This cultural root was my foundation for the whole project and meant that I could use my feeling and understanding of 'motherland' as a means of communication and negotiation with other cultures. When my physical location has altered from past to present, the context and place have created an impact on my behaviour and they have the ability to bring the issue of cultural heritage back into reality.

My immersion into other cultural environments has enabled me to see possibilities for ideas for jewellery construction based on cultural interactions and negotiations. These jewellery-based objects as a visualised outcome would be the creativity that is a 'behaviour resulting from the interaction of the person and the environment.' My physical making would be a process of suturing a mixture or a combination.

Environment or place, no matter if it is natural or cultural, is "relational, historical and concerned with identity."[37] This raises new questions concerning the shifting of places or environments when locating cultural identity. I will explore those themes and related questions in the next chapter.

[37] Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 77.

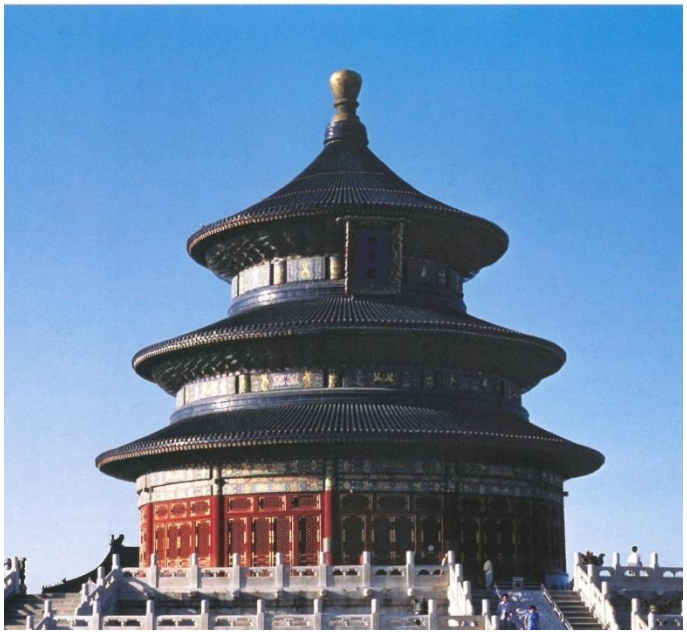


Fig. 1. *QI NIAN DIAN* (Hall for Prayer for a Prosperous Year), Temple of Heaven complex, Ming-Qing dynasty.

Fig. 2. A detailed dissection of *QI NIAN DIAN*.

Fig. 3. General aerial view: The Temple of Heaven.

Fig. 4. Pavel Opočenský, *Brooch.*

Fig. 5. Mari Funaki, *Bracelet.*

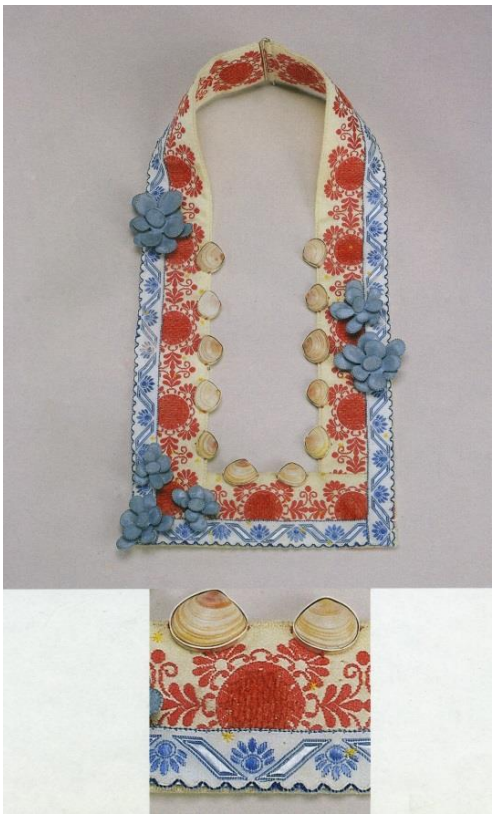


Fig. 6. Lucy Sarneel, *Ashore.*

Fig. 7a-b. Bifei Cao, *Something Underneath*: *Longevity* and *Samshu Making.*

Fig. 8a-b. Bifei Cao, *Something Underneath*: *Fishing #1* and *Fishing #2*.

Fig. 9. Bifei Cao, Wearable part of each piece in the *Something Underneath*.

Fig. 10. Tools for Samshu making in the Qiandongnan Museum, Kaili, China.

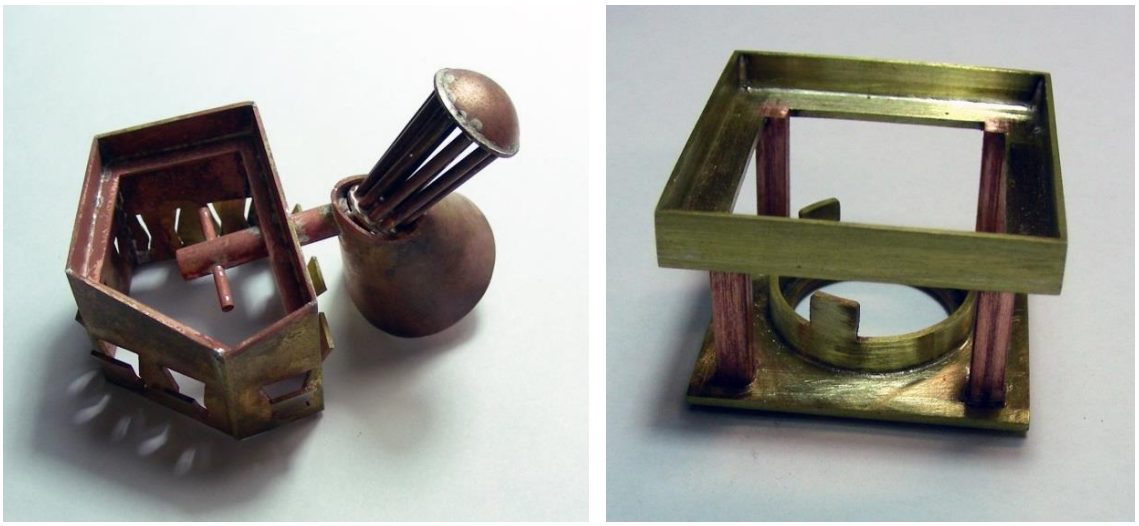


Fig. 11. The construction of basic forms.

Fig. 12. Opened window shapes in the *Samshu Making*.

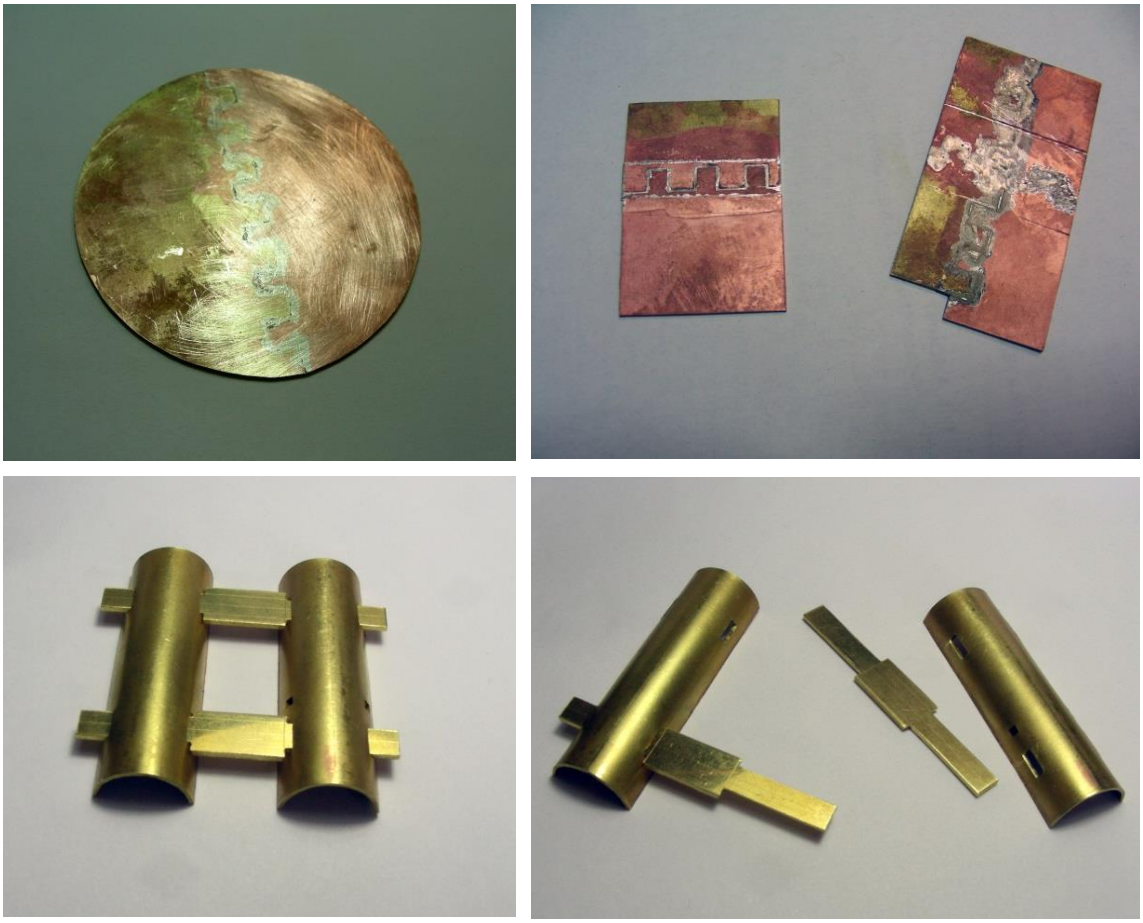


Fig. 13. Bifei Cao, Process of *Joints Experiment*.

Fig. 14. Bifei Cao, *Joints Experiment*.

Fig. 15. Pavel Opočenský, *Brooch.*

Fig. 16. Bifei Cao, Samples of architectural form.

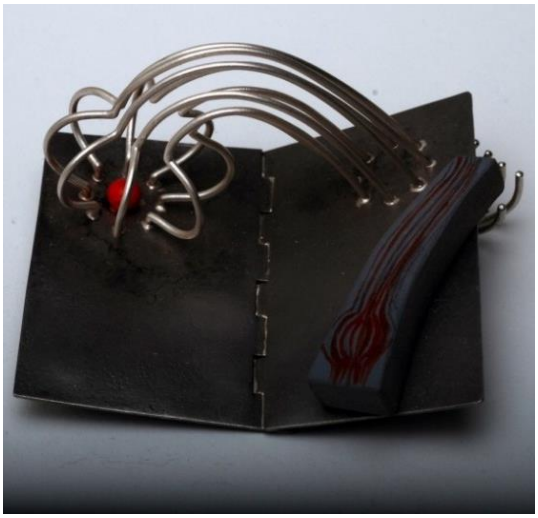


Fig. 17. Bifei Cao, *Pole*.

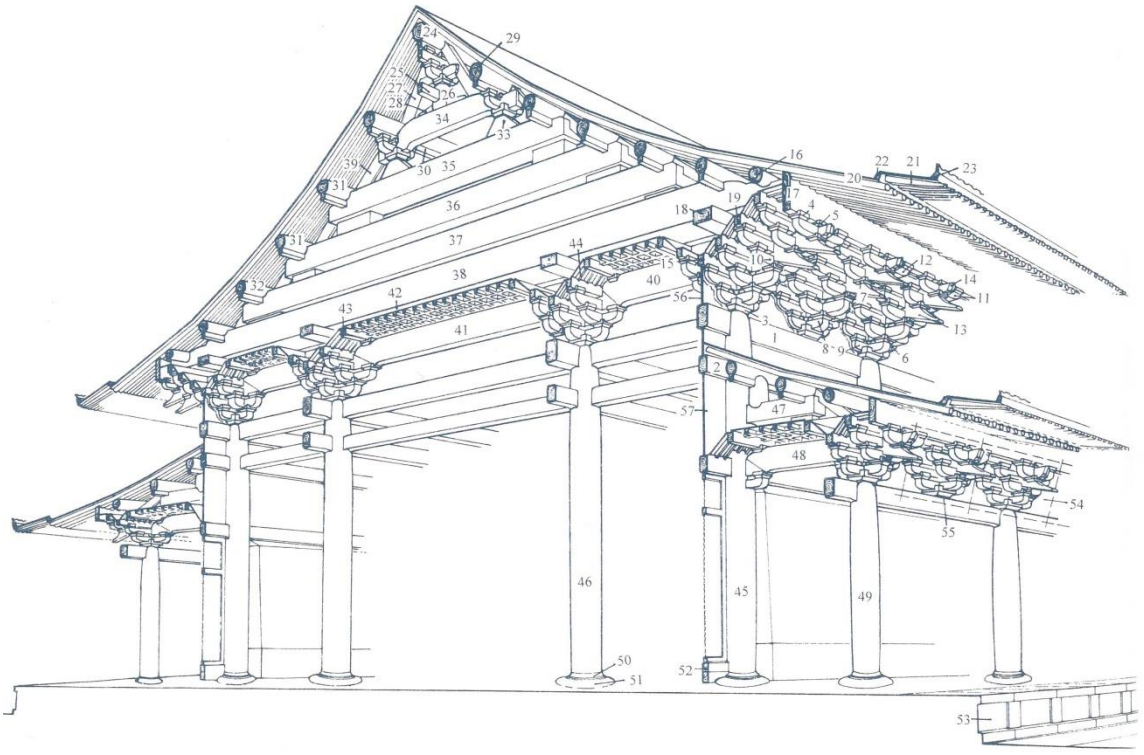


Fig. 18. A ceiling of traditional architecture.

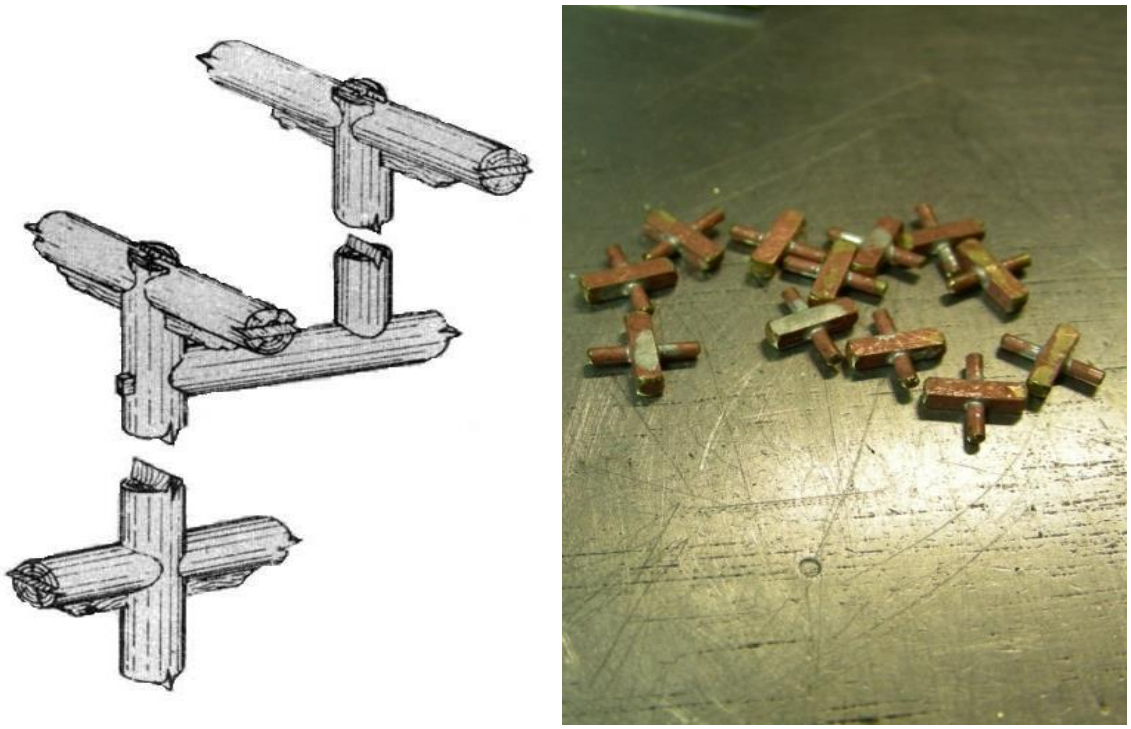
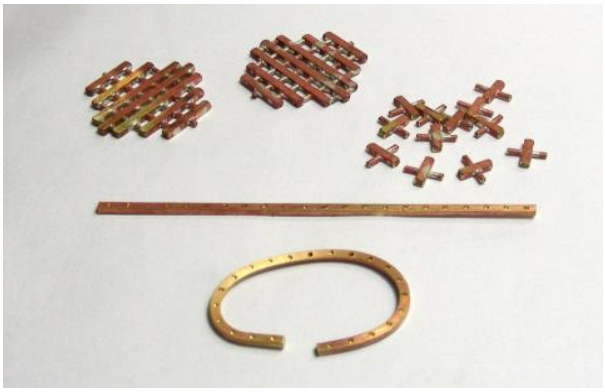
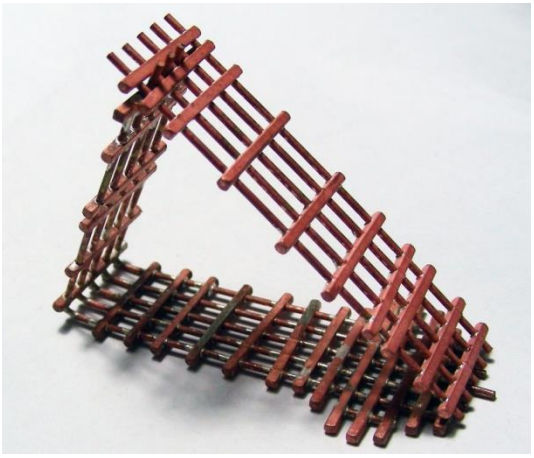


Fig. 19a-b. Structure of cross joints and its metal sample.





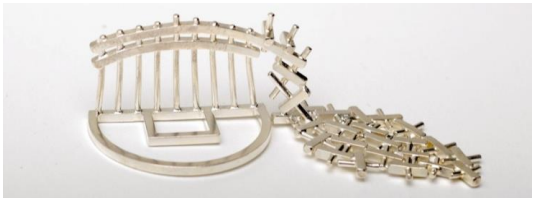


Fig. 20. Process of cross joint experiments.

Fig. 21. Samples of cross joints construction.

Fig. 22. Mari Funaki, *Container*.

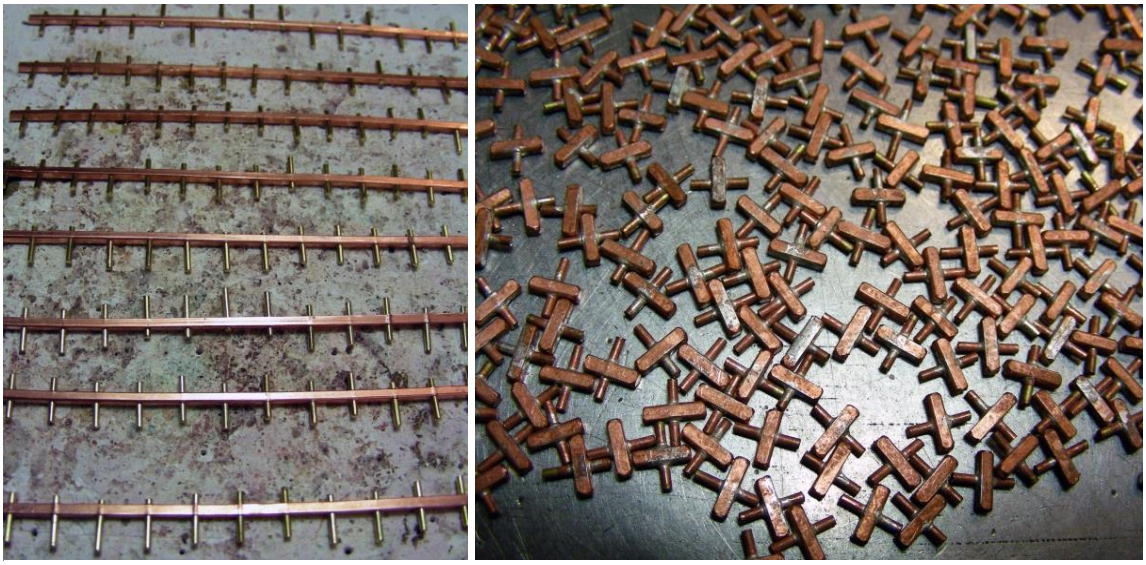


Fig. 23. Process of cross joints construction.

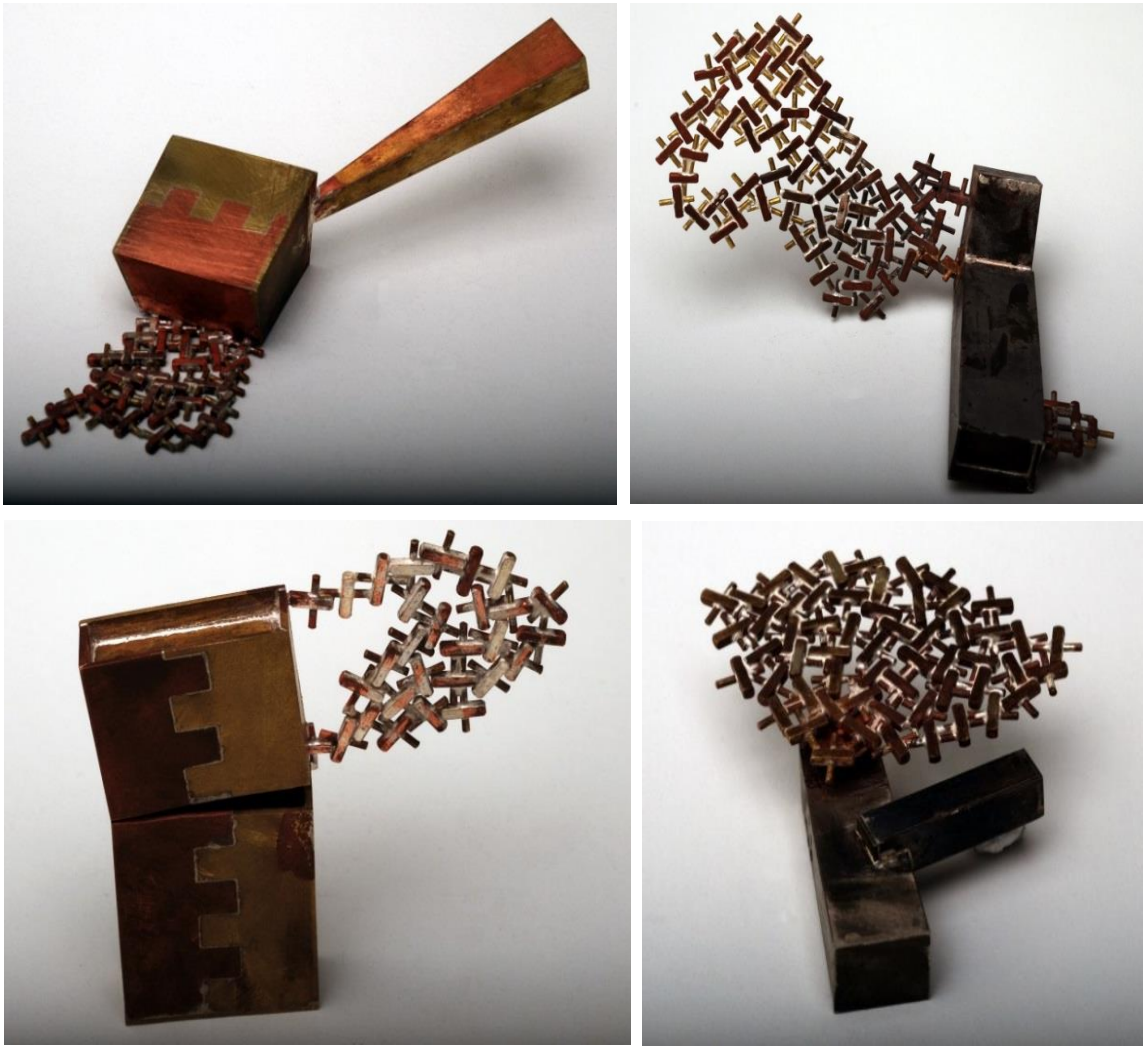
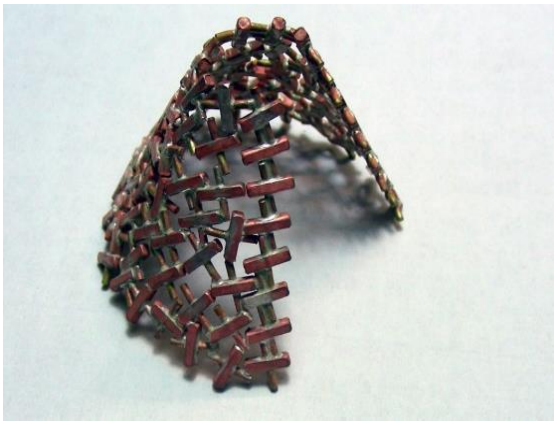


Fig. 24. Bifei Cao, Samples of the *Random* series.



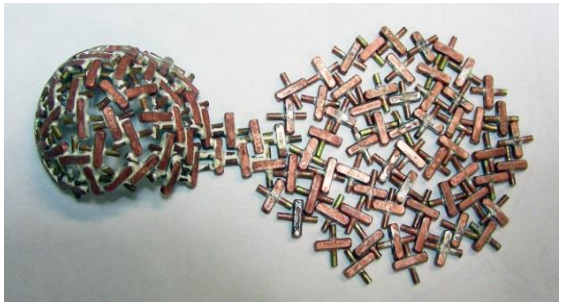


Fig. 25. Bifei Cao, Cross joint experiments.

Fig. 27. Lucy Sarneel, *Wish You Were Here.*

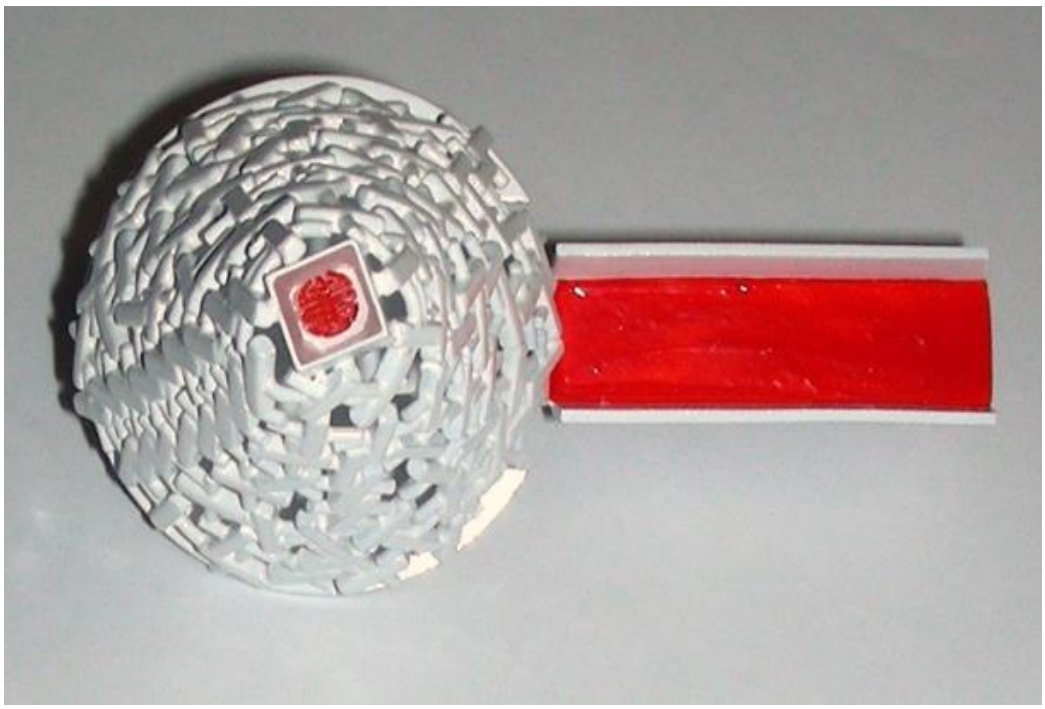


Fig. 26. Details of the *Harvest* in the *Cone* series.

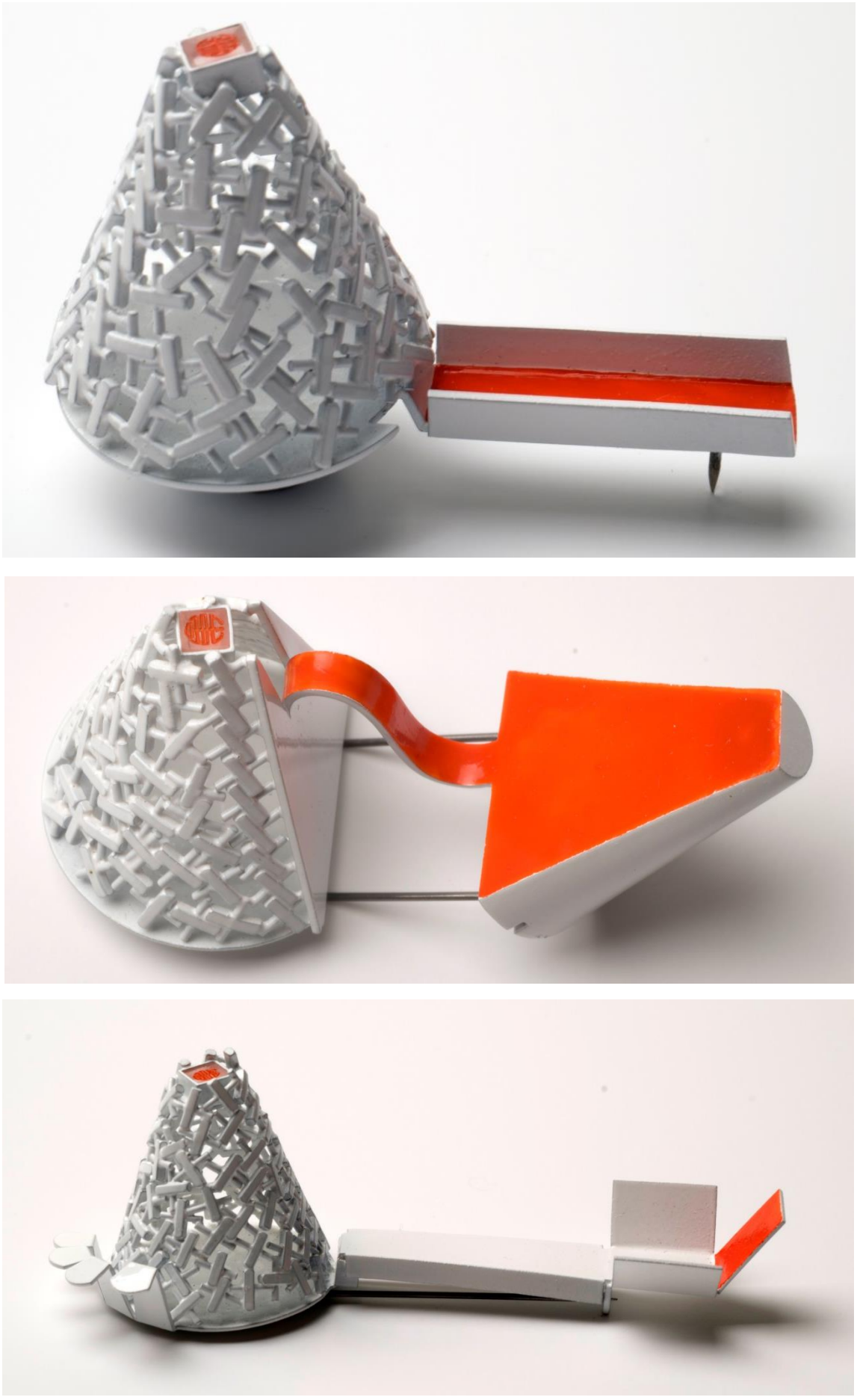


Fig. 28. Bifei Cao, *Cone* series: *Harvest*, *Blooming* and *Bending*.

> "Artists often utilise a sense of place to help define identity. The actual locations however, are very frequently less important than their wider metaphoric meanings. Realisations of place often act as signs for a range of apprehensions to do with our sense of the broader environment … as well as particular, personal identities."[38]

Chapter Introduction

In Chapter One, I focused on reinterpreting traditional Chinese visual culture and exploring methods of form construction derived from traditional Chinese architecture. Chapter One described the cultural foundation for thinking about my identity when I was living in different cultures. Those places and my memories of China became a symbolic comparison when I was immersed in a different cultural environment. They allowed me to negotiate other cultures as I moved between these cultures and environments.

This chapter shows how I place my project in a new cultural environment of Australia and how this shifting of places affected my thinking and making of jewellery-based objects. What is the outcome of the negotiation between my original cultural background and foreign cultures? These research questions are addressed through the processes and analyses of my studio work and related cultural references that are central to my research.

An important issue was how jewellery-based objects can carry the maker's cultural identity when they rapidly move between places. Place is a foundation for identifying that people live in a particular environment and have feelings and memories about their surroundings. Place becomes a symbolic connotation more than any actual location where one used to live. As Den Besten points out, "Places are both material and mythical constructions; they are locations or sites, as well as personal, intangible and mythical webs of associations and memories,"[39] Places build up personal memories.

[38] Simeon Kronenberg and Susi Muddiman, *Imaging Identity and Place: the Work of Nine Contemporary Australian Artists* (Australia: Crafton Regional Gallery, 2001), 1.
[39] Liesbeth den Besten, "Making Places," *Place(s): Papers and Exhibition 2006* (Gmunden, Austria: Think Tank, A European Initiative for the Applied Art, 2002), 10.

They mark where one is born, grows up and dies, and assist in the creation of personal identity. Since places require human making, I argue it is possible to incorporate memories and cultural references of places into a narrative exploration of jewellery-based objects.

Moving between places provides encounters with different cultural environments and allows us to negotiate between one's original culture and other cultures. Shifting from place to place affects personal making, and so the outcome of the negotiation between my original culture and other cultures will also reflect on the outcomes of my visual object creation.

In this chapter, I describe how at this stage of my research I considered my cultural identity as a duality and thought of myself as in-between or on a borderline between my Chinese identity and the cultures I was negotiating and interacting with. I describe how the outcome of my early practice reflects these ideas. I will explain each position through describing the outcomes of my practice. I will also discuss in detail the related philosophy and theories of my original cultural references, including concepts of blank space or negative space in Chinese brush painting, and dynamic movement of Chinese calligraphy. I will also introduce related artists' work in relation to the influences of place and culture. All these references have affected the development of my jewellery-based object making in the studio.

Related Philosophy and Theories

Concepts of Blank Space or Negative Space in Chinese Brush Painting

The concepts of blank space or negative space in Chinese brush painting has influenced every domain of traditional Chinese visual culture, including Chinese traditional and contemporary art, architecture and folk arts such as papercuts. I have been inspired by these concepts in my previous work.

Blank or 'white cloth' refers to a place that does not have any ink marks in a Chinese brush painting. It is an expressive language that is related to the composition of the painting and the appearance of space. In three-dimensional sculpture or an object, blank space includes all that surrounds the work. It refers to those blank spaces outside of the

solid physical forms of an object. In this chapter, I will explore this concept through a series of experiments that I created by making sheets of cross joints.

A Chinese painting will use blank space to depict a richness and a deeper meaning of life, as well as to represent all the thoughts and feelings that comprise everything in life. This blank space becomes as important as the positive space, which is the physical form in the painting or object. The blank space surrounding a physical form can be imagined as a form; with both forms creating a brush painting or an object of harmony.

These concepts allow me to pay more attention to blank space when I construct a structure made of cross joints. It also strengthens my design ability to consider the relationship between the object itself and the outside space when I create three-dimensional jewellery-based objects. I will consciously arrange those cross joints to form blank space, as the blank space between the cross joints can reinforce the main form or structure of the physical composition of my jewellery-based object. The negative space in each piece of the *In Between* series, discussed in this chapter, emphasise the rigid forms of a structure created by cross joints.

I also work with both blank space and the form itself to create meanings in jewellery-based objects, as the blank space reflects a deep spiritual life representing as it does an ongoing life experience or situation. Through this extended meaning, I use blank space to play an important role in a composition that embodies the very vastness of life experience. The negative space that was created between the positive forms or space embodied a deep symbolic meaning.

Dynamic Movement of Chinese Calligraphy

Dynamic movement takes a primary role in Chinese calligraphy. It is about an intuitive way of writing, both controlled and unrestricted through the whole movement of writing. Understanding this movement helps me create an intuitive working methodology. I have the characters' forms and structures in my mind when I write calligraphy. I remember a bark or Chinese lotus form during my physical making, but I intentionally arrange cross joints in a random way to create a bark or Chinese lotus form.

The terms of movement in calligraphy cover a wide range of states, and refer to "different modalities of actual movement, of movement in static shapes, various emotional states, different speeds and intensities."[40] The approach to dynamic movement requires that any artist should have complete faith in the power of his own nature, "providing he makes no intellectual effort and is not 'pressed in any way,' to accomplish spontaneously the desired result."[41] With an intuitive way of writing, a calligrapher works within a defined structure and at the same time must express the meaning of the text. Meaning makes calligraphy an art and this way of creating or writing inspired my thinking when making objects. I soldered each cross joint together and hammered each sheet to move them intuitively into three-dimensional forms as my mind captured different images of Chinese lotuses or Australian barks.

This methodology developed a way of making through thinking. Learning from this methodology, I drew some sketches of my idea as a tangible visual reminder, but I had a clear image of those natural forms in my mind. On other occasions, I didn't draw anything but simply looked at nature or photos of a Chinese lotus. With this confidence, I created forms though a transition of my ideas into metal, emotionally following the movement of hammering metal and creating my ideas both consciously and unconsciously.

Referenced Artists

Migration or moving location is a prevalent topic in this global environment. This rapid shifting of places offers opportunities for human-beings to interact, adapt and negotiate their original culture with host cultures, and locations could be considered symbolic metaphors rather than actual places. Artists who have lived in various places often accumulate layers of cultural experiences and create works reflecting those realities of human existence.

Liu Xiaoxian

[40] Lucy Driscoll and Kenji Toda, *Chinese Calligraphy* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1964), 13.
[41] Ibid.

Artist Liu Xiaoxian came to Australia from China in 1990 at the age of twenty seven. As a person who lived through the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square trauma of China, his work reflects on his identity and compares his experience of East and West in his photography, installation and other works.

The negotiation of places and cultures offered Liu inspiration for his work. He has explored objects and images as references between two cultures. In the *My Other Lives # 7* (see fig. 29) of his In *My Other Lives* series, he duplicated a nineteenth century photograph of a woman, placing the two images side by side like a stereoscopic image.[42] In the right hand image, he transposed his own face on to the original photo. This transposition expressed his identity between being Chinese and a new identity in the Australia cultural environment. However, he selected a photograph of a female Australian from the nineteenth century, which was a time when Chinese people were not welcome in Australia.[43] The transposition created both a gender contradiction and a time contradiction. Both contradictions allowed Liu to create works that reflected these negotiations in a geographical complication that shifted between the dislocation of being Chinese and living his life in Australia. His "In-betweenness"[44] was also my cultural and life situation. I borrowed his concept of "In-betweenness"[45] and created the *In Between* series.

Daniel Kruger

As an artist based in Germany, Daniel Kruger recreated his early experience of nature in South Africa in his jewellery and objects by using different techniques. His life on a farm in South Africa where he was brought up, offered memories of landscape, flora and a variety of other influences. He represented these memories and reinterpreted his tradition through an investigation of craft techniques, such as crocheting, knitting and fabrication.

Materials, forms, colours and varying skills were incorporated into his objects. He took an unconventional approach to materials, using both non-precious and precious

[42] Suzanne Davies, *Introduction-Liu Xiao Xian: From East to West* (Melbourne: RMIT gallery, 2009), 2.
[43] Anna Edmundson, "But Where Are You Really from?: The 'Crisis' of Multiculturalism Examined through the Work of Four Asian-Australian artists," *Australian National University*, XV, 2 (2009): 96, Accessed 30 October 2016, http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p14881/mobile/ch07.html
[44] Claire Roberts, "In-Betweenness: The Art of Liu Xiao Xian," *Art & Australia* 47 (2009): 222.
[45] Ibid., 222.

materials. Different materials, beads, bones, stones and found items were imbued with his memories and skills. Through his hand, these materials were transformed into various forms, hard and soft, geometric and organic, orderly and random. Each composition formed a colourful view, mirroring the colourful lands of South Africa.

Kruger intended to learn from history and tradition, and those places and times where he had previously lived provided the history and tradition for his observations. Found or discarded objects were of interest to him, and as he stated, "I desire to give my work a feeling of looking old, as if it has always existed."[46] His objects (see fig. 30) aim to be part of a link between the past and the future.

Both artists' interest in the reinterpretation of the memories of places they had visited encouraged me to review my experiences of every place where I have lived. Kruger's consistent learning from history and tradition also inspired me to search for ideas from culture and tradition.

Duality Series (2013)

My *Duality* series used sheets of cross joints in a first stage of cultural negotiation between my original cultural references and references from this new cultural environment. I divided the series into two separate experiments, the *Test Cone* experiment (see fig. 31) and the *Bark* experiment. Both experiments were based on the investigation of a combination of the *Miniature* and *Cone* series discussed in the first chapter. Both the materials used in these two experiments were discarded either by humans or nature. My intention was to engage with my adapted place through materials, forms, techniques and cultures. I intended to suture each material with a sheet of cross joints to create a combination. I captured different aspects of both my original culture and my newly embraced Australian culture to allow these negotiations.

My settlement in Australia caused me to interact with its culture and natural environment. Cultural differences were clearly visible in my life: I had never called gas 'petrol;' I had never walked on the left side of the road; I had never experienced spring time in October … I analysed these differences while searching for ideas for my jewellery-based object making.

[46] Daniel Kruger, *Between Nature and Artifice: Schmuck 1974 - 2014 Jewellery* (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche, 2014), 10.

Test Cone Experiment

In *Test Cone* experiment, I described my feeling of experiencing a twofold difference between Chinese culture and Australian culture in my practice. Based on an exploration of sheets of cross joints as reinterpretation of Chinese traditional visual culture discussed in the last chapter, I developed it in different forms to react with local materials and forms of using test cone in Australia. This was my first experiment engaging with the local cultural environment.

I had never seen test cones in China. They were invented and used for kiln firing in Western countries, are made of porcelain, and are only used to monitor a kiln's temperature. These cones will slump at a specific temperature which then creates an organic or natural loose form as each is half-melted during the kiln firing. I encountered these test cones in a rubbish bin at the ANU School of Art as they were thrown away after kiln firing. They attracted me because each glazed and shiny surface reminded me of Chinese porcelain; each cone's physical bending seemed like a Chinese Bonsai, both resembling a natural phenomenon and the outcome of human intervention.

I hammered each shape made of a sheet of cross joints to mimic or reflect the natural bending of each cone shape and inserted them into each other. I plated all of these cross joints to be the same colour. Both actions were to ensure that the combination of both materials and construction did not disturb each other; each piece created an uninterrupted flowing movement.

Each combination shared my personal experience as the two forms or materials were unrelated to each other. Through memories of traditional visual culture and my encounter with this test cone, I joined these two different constructions together. Each construction suggested an ambiguous object, either an animal-like form or a machine-like form or neither. Each construction reflected my experience of a shifting environment.

At this time I became influenced by the local Australian environment. The *Test Cone* experiment caused me to pay attention to both the local natural and cultural environments.

Bark Experiment

In *Bark* experiment (see fig. 32), these investigations emphasised a negotiation or interaction between human constructions of one's mother culture with the local natural constructions of Australia. Each piece was a combination of culture and nature.

The choice of bark as a material was based on a new and strange experience I had. Late December 2013 was a dry and hot Christmas period in Canberra, Australia. When I was riding my bicycle from my home to my studio at the ANU School of Art, I heard the sound of bark peeling away from the trees as I pedalled along. Some of the strips of bark had curved into the mud, some piled together on the ground and some were dispersed by the wind to find a new home. My attention was drawn to this local natural environment, especially those scenes which I had never seen in China or anywhere else except in Canberra. I began to pick up various pieces of dried bark and built up a collection. Departing from the *Test Cone* experiment, I engaged with this bark collection and built up a combination of bark with each sheet of cross joints.

In the *Bark* experiment, I intended to insert these two parts together. I either mimicked naturally occurring bark forms or made geometric forms and joined them with natural bark forms by using a sheet of cross joints. Inspired by the shapes of the peeled bark, my experiments emphasised a combination of human construction with that of nature in the form of natural bark.

I painted each bark form with resin to prevent it from cracking. At the same time, I built each sheet of cross joints and hammered each sheet to be either an organic curved form or a geometric form. Like a bird builds a nest in a tree, each sheet of cross joints was either built up with a similar form to the bark or as a geometric form to react with the bark. I either blackened or silver-plated each individual sheet, and then riveted the sheet to different bark shapes to create each combination.

In the *Duality* series, my strategy was to engage with the local setting and build up interactions between my cultural experience and the natural environment of Australia. This engagement with various locations allowed me to encounter these two materials, test cones and bark which I then used directly in my project.

The interaction of cultures revealed dual forms in each piece. These forms were created either with similar or contrasting shapes, based on differences of the material used,

together with cultural and environmental inspiration. The physical combination of visual objects from two cultures reflected on the duality of my situation of cultural identity.

However, articulating cultural identity through the interaction of cultures was more complex than joining two different forms and materials together in the *Duality* series. Stuart Hall stated that identity refers to "the meeting point, the point of suture"[47] through articulation of cultural differences and similarities. This process of articulation is also not a one-sided process. This interaction of joining two different forms should flow more smoothly between each form via multiple representations of visual language, such as a similar material, the way of fabrication, or a strategy of ideas. These complex interpretations of different ideas between cultures should allow me to build up a meeting point through physical and visual object making.

In Between Series (2013-2014)

In the *Duality* series I captured these differences between locations and cultures. The negotiation between these dual parts of culture allowed me to suture my experiences together, just as I sutured the elements of my brooches together. In doing so, I began to compare the differences between locations and cultures. This comparison allowed me to think of myself as being in an "in-between" situation. This *In Between* series was a second position of cultural negotiation where I engaged with local environment and culture consistently. I began to sense the meeting point of my home culture and Australian culture. Both my original culture and host culture in Australia were not just two parts in the *Duality* series, but had integrated with each other and this was a momentous turning point in my work.

In the works titled *In Between*, I incorporated my personal experience of encountering different natural plants in different places, my motherland of China and the adopted land of Australia. The dual location and double experiences, as well as the places of my memories came together in the work; the work became an expression of a threshold space.

[47] Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?," 5.

This series included two different experiments, *Bark & Lock* and *Bark & Lotus*. The *Bark & Lock* experiment explored a meeting point between Australian natural forms and the cultural objects from past memories of my childhood. *Bark & Lotus* investigated a more complicated negotiation between nature and culture, past and present, place in sense and place in experience. The *In Between* series was the outcome of an examination based on affection for places I had been and a negotiation of cultures. It was also a systematic investigation of cross joints that were referenced from Chinese traditional architecture.

Instead of gathering the experiments together and analysing the results of my work, my methodology changed to a more theoretical approach, in which I explored what Bhabha called a "liminal space."[48] I believed my current cultural situation should be this threshold space that connected my original culture and other cultures. I could interpret these complexities into a visual statement in jewellery-based objects. This series was an incorporation of both theory and practice.

Bark & Lock Experiment

The *Bark & Lock* experiment explored visual forms of jewellery-based objects from different sides to create a meeting point through material, form, etc. I then analysed and examined the selection of materials for the *Duality* series in detail when I was putting all the pieces together.

Understanding and engaging with both the test cones and bark helped me appreciate my host environment's nature and culture. However, I needed to work closely with the material to understand it better. Bark for example, was a difficult material to work with as it is fragile, and not secure, strong or stable. Even though I resined each one of the bark fragments, they were easily broken.

I realised I should not focus directly on using the bark material. I proposed to search for the similarities between bark and the sheet of cross joints so that more interactions were created. I asked whether it was possible to mimic those pieces of degraded bark by using cross joints rather than using natural bark. In *Bone* (see fig. 33), I experimented with a sheet of cross joints made of metal, trying to resemble a bark form. To use a

[48] Ibid., 4.

cultural reference to mimic the bark form obtained from the local environment could open up more ways to express the cultural interactions I was experiencing. Mimicking bark may bring a meeting point of place, nature and culture, as well as helping to resolve the issue of the brittleness of bark.

The *Bark & Lock* experiment was my representation of degraded barks from the local environment. I returned to look at these bark fragments in detail. Degradation (see fig. 34) is a natural cyclical process; the bark naturally grows up, peels off, falls off and fades away. The relationship between the bark and the tree was a metaphor for my relationship with my home country and Australia. I had left my homeland, mother culture and family to struggle in foreign countries without 'protection,' as though I was shedding my bark, and left exposed. This personal attachment encouraged me to find a way of transferring those feelings to a visual language. The bark from the local environment afforded me the possibility to express both my ideas and feelings.

I particularly focussed on two key words, 'protection' and 'insecurity.' Bark grows to protect the tree and when it peels off, the bark becomes vulnerable because of having left the tree's branch and at the same time, the tree has also lost the bark's protection. Both the feelings of nature and of current life experience interacted with each other, bringing associations with the words of protection and insecurity. These words caused me to reconnect with my childhood memories, where I found an object that has a similar symbolic meaning for protection—the *Longeval Lock* (see fig. 35). I decided to bring together this object of my childhood memories with a reinterpretation using bark so as to express a form of cultural engagement. As an international traveller I felt vulnerable when living in different locations other than my homeland. The lock and the bark both convey a sense of protection and security and when combined they form a perception of safe keeping for me with my "in between" space of cultural identity between China and Australia.

In China, a lock usually used to lock a door, has developed into a form of symbolic protective jewellery, called a Longeval Lock. A Longeval Lock is the traditional Chinese gift that "is given to children by their family so it will bring a long and happy life."[49] Most Chinese people wear this lock during their childhood. To reinterpret this lock form with the bark form was an interaction with traditional visual culture.

[49] Xuxiang Tang, *Yin Shi Zhen Shang Zhi (An Appreciation of Silver Ornaments)* (China: Guangxi Fine Arts

In the actual making, I borrowed the outline of this lock form and created a bark form within this framework by using a sheet of cross joints to recreate new objects (see fig. 36). I used one or two half shapes of a Longeval Lock which I pierced in the centre thus creating an abstract form as a frame; I constructed a sheet of cross joints that mimicked the cracking and peeling of the bark, peeled off from this frame. I added coloured pencil to replicate the surface colour of the bark. A piece, titled *Peeling* (see fig. 37 middle), presented this dynamic balance of the natural process; a sheet made of cross joints seemed to have developed into an unstable form by the process of hammering. Like a brush stroke that rises and falls, the shape of this fabric expanded and contrasted with the rigid lock form. The fold in the cross joints sheet imitated the bark forms that are formed naturally. With its reaction to natural energy, this piece also delivered a combination of space, emptiness, separation and union that expressed my cultural identity in a meeting point between two references.

My interpretation of both forms represented a cultural negotiation in different ways, through time, environment and culture. The cross joints that were referenced from Chinese traditional architecture were hammered into organic forms of bark from a foreign place. Each sheet of cross joints seemed to create ‘patterns’ which developed into a motif or fabric as a result of this process. Whether this process was either random or intentional, it was possible to visualise these feelings by shaping the sheet of cross joints into the form of the bark.

In drawing a conclusion, I felt this series was much clearer in expressing this connection I was making with the interaction between Australia and China. A sheet made of cross joints was shaped into a bark form that had peeled off from a lock form. This architectural reference succeeded in mimicking the natural organic form of bark. I seemed to capture the boundary between the past and the present, nature and architecture, my original culture and other cultures.

Each sheet of cross joints became a connective tissue to join those differences between tradition and the present, original culture and other cultures. This multi-directional cultural negotiation caused me to step on to the meeting point, expressing the idea of cultural identity as an in-between space. These objects were more ambiguous as we now saw the original component as neither natural bark nor a fabricated lock. The cross

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Publishing House Co. Ltd., 2006), 10.

joints were worked as "liminal space, in-between the designations of identity."[50] I saw this ambiguity between the boundaries and wanted to continue to explore this in-between space of cultural identity.

Bark & Lotus Experiment

The *Bark & Lotus* experiment explored more deeply the negotiation of cultures. I integrated two natural forms from both my original culture and my host Australian culture. The two forms brought together my memories of places, merged into a single meeting point.

In early March 2014, I visited the West Lake in Hangzhou, China accompanied by my parents. It was early spring; there were a few groups of decaying lotus blossoms that had suffered during the severe frosts of a West Lake winter. Each decomposing lotus (see fig. 38) stood proudly in the water in the sunset, like a brave skeleton with a strong backbone. The contrast between its strength and pliability, perseverance and ruination attracted my attention. The scene was suddenly intertwined with my childhood memories of harvesting lotus roots with my parents.

I realised I had never looked at decaying Chinese lotuses in detail until I had been in a different environment or a different cultural situation. I had been aware of Chinese lotus since my childhood; it is a native Chinese plant and was so familiar to me that I took it for granted. Only after I had been in new places and different environments was I able to re-engage with my Chinese surroundings. Anna Fariello suggested "The best works capture the motivations of an individual life and, extending specific circumstances and situations, translate these into a more universal language to reveal a collective human story."[51] My motivation was to capture these characteristics of the Chinese lotus, both culturally and personally, and reveal this natural 'human-being' as part of my realization of my shifting situation in Australia.

The *Bark & Lotus* experiment is divided into two different sets, dynamic movement and relationship. I focused on each key characteristic of Australian bark and Chinese lotus.

[50] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 4.
[51] Anna M. Fariello and Paula Owen, *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), 149.

Since I had used sheets of cross joints to interpret bark in the *Bark & Lock* series, I looked at the characteristics of decay and fragility of the Chinese lotus and used cross joints to build forms that reflected those characteristics (see fig. 39).

Dynamic Set

The first set in the *Bark & Lotus* experiment was an interpretation of dynamic space and movement. As a reflection on place, each piece was created with an enclosed or folded form that built up a dialogue between internal and external spaces. I wanted viewers to feel space shifting within each piece through the process of my continual cutting, engraving, soldering and folding.

Inspired by the long leaf vein of Chinese lotus, I tested soldering a long wire between the cross joints to reference the veins (see fig. 40). I tested different combinations of both bark and lotus shapes without directly copying them; some were cracked, some curved and some folded (see fig. 41). In both *Stretching* and *Flying Once Again* (see fig. 42 middle and bottom), a dynamic space was created through open forms of negative space and positive space. Viewers could follow the arrangement of cross joints, some soldered to be densely packed while some were scattered, creating open spaces that suggested a sense of decay. Blackened or slightly painted with coloured pencils, these constructions had achieved mutual forms between the bark and lotus.

I liked the long wire that I had constructed between the cross joints. These long wires were set between the cross joints, like a pole holding joints to support a building, or a stem of the natural lotus leaf. This treatment also made the form more diverse and offered more detail when depicted in each lotus. At first glance each piece looked like a simple construction but the more one engaged with the piece, the more fascinatingly complex it became. *An Action of Weaving* (see fig. 42 top), for example, created an enclosed form that seemed to be a simple volume but embraced more details when one looked closely; it looked like a creature that could move or a mechanical structure that could hold. The long wire served as a scaffolding to support each accumulation of cross joints. Different forms or different kinds of references can be read in the forms, such as cracks or decay or veins.

This *Dynamic* set allowed an interaction between places. I had been familiar with Chinese lotus since my childhood but I had ignored them until that day when I realised their significance. Mari Funaki recounted a similar experience looking at beetles in their natural environment. She was familiar with beetles but had never understood them before. [52] This interaction in a special place aroused her realisation of understanding, which led her to create works based on her observation by folding thin steel. In *Bracelet* (see fig. 43), the geometric form seemed to be organised into the shape of a beetle and at the same time, the form was quite architectural. She reinterpreted the traditional art of Origami to create pieces between nature and architecture. Both her work and my exploration answered my question about how places affect an artist's work.

With my experience and exploration, I took a detailed observation of Chinese lotus. My mind followed each lotus' form and each movement from stem to leaf, spiralling, enclosing, bending or curving. I consciously remembered each dynamic movement and recreated them with cross joints (see fig. 44).

In this exploration (see fig. 45, 46), each piece not only addressed its in-between identity but also created each stage of my interpretation of the traditional Chinese lotus. Each piece seemed to have a vivid form like a creature, that is sitting, lying, waiting or flying; perhaps a natural enclosed or opened form, like a little container or a building or something in between those shapes. *I Don't Wanna Go* (see fig. 45 middle right) was built as an organic form that replicated the movement of a bird ready to fly. Technically, I constructed different sized long square wire to create an intricate pattern of random repeated cross joints. The rigid shape created an empty space but the whole structure still held a volume or enclosed space. Without blackening this piece, I kept the lightness of colour to highlight the whole form. The lightness seemed to visually express the idea that it might be preparing to fly away. This appearance is suggested in the title, *I Don't Wanna Go*. The reiteration of cross joints could be seen more clearly through the contrast made when a part of each piece was blackened and the rest of this piece was tinted with a yellow brass colour. I conducted many experiments with acid and Liver of Sulphur to create this colour contrast. I found that this contrast helped to define and clarify each cross joint and structure. I was pleased with this complex and chaotic structure but I felt that I needed to explore different solutions to the problem of how to permanently keep this fresh colour contrast.

[52] Otto Künzli, *Mari Funaki* (Australia: Gallery Funaki, 1997), 1.

This intuitive method of working to depict movement reminded me of Chinese calligraphy, where the hands intuitively moved with one's emotion and feelings. Chang Hsu, an eighth-century poet and master of the *Tsao* calligraphy style, developed the ideology of his writing style by watching Lady Kung-sun perform the dance of the two-edged sword. He simply took advantage of his own awakened but harmonious feelings to communicate a heightened sense of movement and order to his characters, rather than expressing anything specific about the dancing of Lady Kung-sun.[53] Similarly, I could not remember each bend or curved form of the lotus but simply each movement. By hammering each sheet, my feelings had a harmonious communication with each movement of the lotus and, by this means, a piece was created.

The first set in the *Bark & Lotus* experiment successfully addressed in-between identity, as well as interpreting the way in which places affect one's identity. As Sarah Ahmed and others have argued, "home and movement are not necessarily directly or neatly opposed; people's relationships to place are more complex than either 'rooted belonging' or 'rootless mobility'," [54] my intention was not to interpret either the Chinese lotus from my original homeland or bark from my new home of Australia, but rather to represent a dialogue between two places. By titling the work *In Between*, I was able to create different ambiguous structures that were between architecture and nature. I used the cross joints to represent the influences from these different cultural places. This set helped me understand the relationship of nature and culture.

The exploration of cultures and places stimulated my awareness of traditional Chinese cultural references. This negotiation allowed a comparison and a realisation of how significant one's original culture is to oneself. Even after he had lived in Germany for decades, through his memories Daniel Kruger could literally find his way back to his home place, the landscape, colourful bushes and round stones. He interpreted his detailed memories of this original place in his jewellery making based on his journey through these places.

This dynamic movement made me aware of the cycle of the Chinese lotus; each one grows, blooms and fades, all within the four seasons. This life cycle of the lotus reflected my current life; dynamic movements between different places, my birthplace, and other countries or cities where I had lived and currently live. These changing shapes

[53] Driscoll, *Chinese Calligraphy*, 9.
[54] Sarah Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (New York: Berg., 2003), 1-19.

helped me to create an intuitive working methodology just as each environment impacted on me and influenced or changed my thinking.

Relationship Set

The second set in the *Bark & Lotus* experiment was inspired by relationships between groups of decayed lotus (see fig. 47). I began to explore the spaces between the forms, in the same way that Chinese brush painters explore blank or empty space.

The way the lotuses stood in the pond created a random web in space. Some leaned close to each other while others stood independently, some lay totally on the pond while others bent their 'head' down as if to bow. Each lotus seemed like a word from Chinese calligraphy, written on a pond. Looking at the whole pond, I thought of it as a natural Chinese brush painting with each empty space between the lotuses creating a negative space. I then paid more attention to those 'blank' spaces between the lotuses.

Along with what I learned from the philosophy of Chinese brush painting about blank or empty space, I constructed the *I Agree with You* and *Shoulder by Shoulder* (see fig. 48). Each depicted a natural scene of two lotuses leaning on each other. I had created not only two structures but also the empty space between them; one bent down to bear the weight of another to form an empty space, and one inserted into another to create another layer of empty space.

In the *In Between* series, I constructed these jewellery-based objects as outcomes of my negotiation between cultures. This investigation of cross joints allowed me to bring a traditional construction method for wooden frame joints into our contemporary society. Each visualised form that had been created through this methodology brought my ideas into each object, building an interaction between place and culture.

The *In Between* series was a depiction of my life experiences of two places in the present but each encounter aroused deep and significant memories of childhood. This implicit knowledge and memories working with the conscious reality of my contemporary life in multiple places formed an in-between space in my consciousness.

I worked through the in-between space of cultural negotiation through making. I consciously made decisions about depicting both the peeled bark and the decayed lotus,

combining these two naturally occurring plants to create an ambiguous form that suggested cultural negotiation. But I worked intuitively in creating each new form. Each was created by using the cross joints, arranged randomly. As with the writing style of Chinese calligraphy, the process of my making was both controlled and unrestricted through observing, hammering and forming.

During each making, I did not intend to portray an exact depiction of the two natural plants, even if each experiment emphasised the characteristics of decayed lotus or peeled bark. The negotiation of cultures was more complex than mixing components as you would in scientific research.

I developed a working methodology in creating an experiment between the hypothesis of cultural studies, the theories of traditional culture, and intuitive thinking. As Richard Sennett suggested, "In the higher stages of skill, there is a constant interplay between tacit knowledge and self-conscious awareness, the tacit knowledge serving as an anchor, the explicit awareness serving as critique and corrective,"[55] I learned from Chinese calligraphy that it required a high level of skill in both writing and painting, but also that this skill developed differently with each writer or painter when they engaged with their self-awareness. This self-awareness was one's identity developed through an interpretation of one's life experience, such as in family relationships, place and culture.

Compared with my experiments in Chapter One, such as the *Something Underneath* and the *Miniature* series, I saw a shift in my work. These previous experiments were architectural, geometrical and symmetrical as they were influenced by traditional Chinese architecture and ancient Chinese cosmology where the Earth was represented by a square and Heaven by a circle. The *In Between* series had evolved into natural, organic and asymmetric works that were influenced by the natural environment and continual research of ancient Chinese philosophy, and Chinese brush painting and calligraphy from traditional Chinese visual culture. Even if there were some similarities between those different experiments, such as capacity and space in each piece, I wondered if it was possible to merge these two differences, combining these natural and architectural forms in the next experiment.

[55] Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 50.

Borderline (2014)

The *Borderline* series was another stage of negotiation of cultures. I realised the in-between as a meeting point and through the meeting point, both my original cultural roots and the references from Australian culture continually integrated with each other. I saw my cultural identity between the two different cultures slowly blurring and in a transition, with the possibility of belonging to either one of them.

This series was an outcome of merging two types of form—architectural and natural. Both forms were created by a sheet of cross joints. I intended to build a transition from the natural forms of lotus or bark to the architectural forms of a building.

In this series, I investigated making different sized cross joints (see fig. 49) and creating a square by using two or more cross joints soldered together. With this foundation, I made a more complex example (see fig. 50). The sizes of the cross joints became more varied allowing the building of more complex cross jointed sheets.

As with the complicated negotiation of cultures, making this series gave rise to a complex making process. As Sennett suggests, "In the production process, introducing complexity is a procedure that addresses the suspicion that things are not what they seem; here, making things more complex is a technique of investigation."[56] The complexity is not only about the technique of investigation but also that it prompts people to engage more with their surroundings. Those cross jointed sheets of different sizes built up a more complex structure. Each structure (see fig. 51) in my experiments was either of geometric or organic form, and was organised by the shifting of the cross joints in order to construct more complex spaces between the different sized cross joints. This complexity seemed to reflect both the natural plants and architectural spaces, but also to reflect these complicated interactions between cultures.

The two completed experimental pieces (see fig. 52) embraced both the form of Chinese lotus or the bark and the forms of an architectural structure. Each two contrasting forms were made to create a transition. This transition generated a contrast between density and openness, controlled and unrestrained but still with a harmony of co-existence. Each object was my expression of depicting both nature and culture. The interpretation of the co-existence was far more complex than the in-between space of

[56] Ibid.: 225.

identity that I had previously explored. The shifting from the natural form to an architectural form saw the piece transform into a complicated creature or perhaps a hybrid organism.

Conclusion

In this chapter I described my cultural identity as a form of duality, of being in-between or borderline through my negotiation of the cultures I found myself in. Shifting between places and cultural environments allowed me to engage with the local natural world and create jewellery-based objects that reflected both these natural and cultural references.

I investigated several types of cross jointed sheet construction. I tested these cross jointed forms in a geometrical and architectural context in the *Duality* series; then created the *In Between* series with organic or natural forms. I then merged both architectural and natural forms in the *Borderline* series. I changed the size of the cross joints to create a variety of thoughts provoking complex forms.

Both cultural studies and references taken from Chinese visual culture and its related philosophies were reflected in my physical making of the pieces. This making process was guided by both theories and intuition. This working methodology produced hypotheses and then developed those hypotheses in a scientific way. I could generate clear images but they still had ambiguities when the images reacted with my feelings in an intuitive way. I transferred these hypotheses into visual experiments.

Moving between Australia and China affected my work, through engaging with the local material, the natural environment and cultural aspects. I answered this research question: how did this shifting of places affect my thinking and making of jewellery-based objects? Through the *Duality* series, I investigated local materials such as the ceramic test cones and bark. These findings helped me interact with other places and their cultural environment, which I describe in the next chapter. This series brought different aspects of my experience, both in China and Australia together and that revealed in the selection of materials, structures and forms. I discovered this selection enabled me to speak of the position of duality in the early *Duality* series.

My discovery led me to continue to explore forms and structures to reveal my cultural experiences in and between China and Australia. My sense of my cultural identity shifted to more complicated positions through the negotiations between my original cultural background and host cultures. An outcome of my negotiations between two cultures has been expressed through the *In Between* series and the *Borderline* series. Both series proved that moving between places affects object making. Both also expressed my sense of my cultural identity as a set of blurred positions 'in-between' and borderline through the negotiations between two cultures. I continue to reflect upon my investigation of the interaction or negotiation with cultures in a multiple cultural environment in Chapter Three, where I describe the effect of time spent in Europe on field research. Together with the implications of using forms and materials, the exploration of these cultures will help me create more personal and culturally significant work in the next chapter.

Fig. 29. Liu Xiaoxian, *My Other Lives # 7* in the *My Other Lives* series.

Fig. 30. Daniel Kruger, *Necklace*.

Fig. 31. Bifei Cao, *Test Cone* series: *Boating*, *Flying* and *Winging*.

Fig. 32. Bifei Cao, *Bark Experiment.*

Fig. 33. Bifei Cao, *Bark Experiment: Bone*.

Fig. 34. Bark degradation in Canberra, Australia.

Fig. 35. Traditional Chinese Longeval Lock.

Fig. 36. Process of lock form and cross joints sheet.

Fig. 37. Bifei Cao, *Bark & Lock* experiment: *Crossing*, *Peeling* and *Tearing*.

Fig. 38. Decomposing lotus group in the West Lake, Hangzhou, China.

Fig. 39. Making process of the *Bark & Lotus* experiment.

Fig. 40. Bifei Cao, *Dynamic* set: *Falling*.

Fig. 41. Bifei Cao, *Dynamic* set: *Listening* and *Surviving*.

Fig. 42. Bifei Cao, *Dynamic* set: *An Action of Weaving*, *Stretching* and *Flying Once Again*.

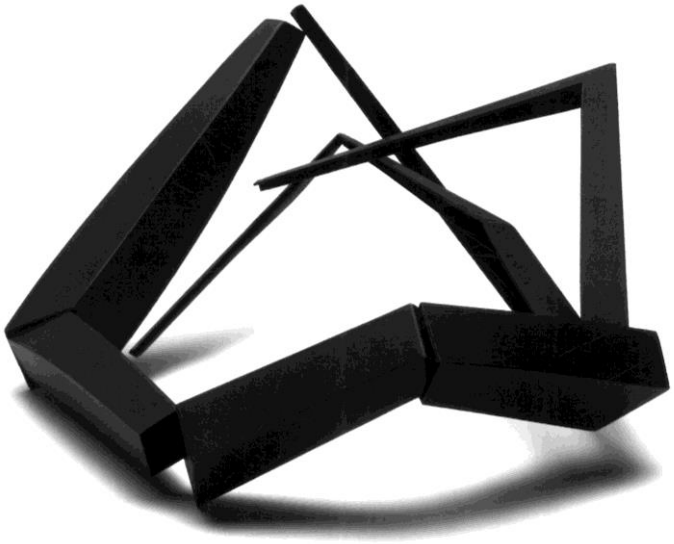


Fig. 43. Mari Funaki, *Bracelet*.

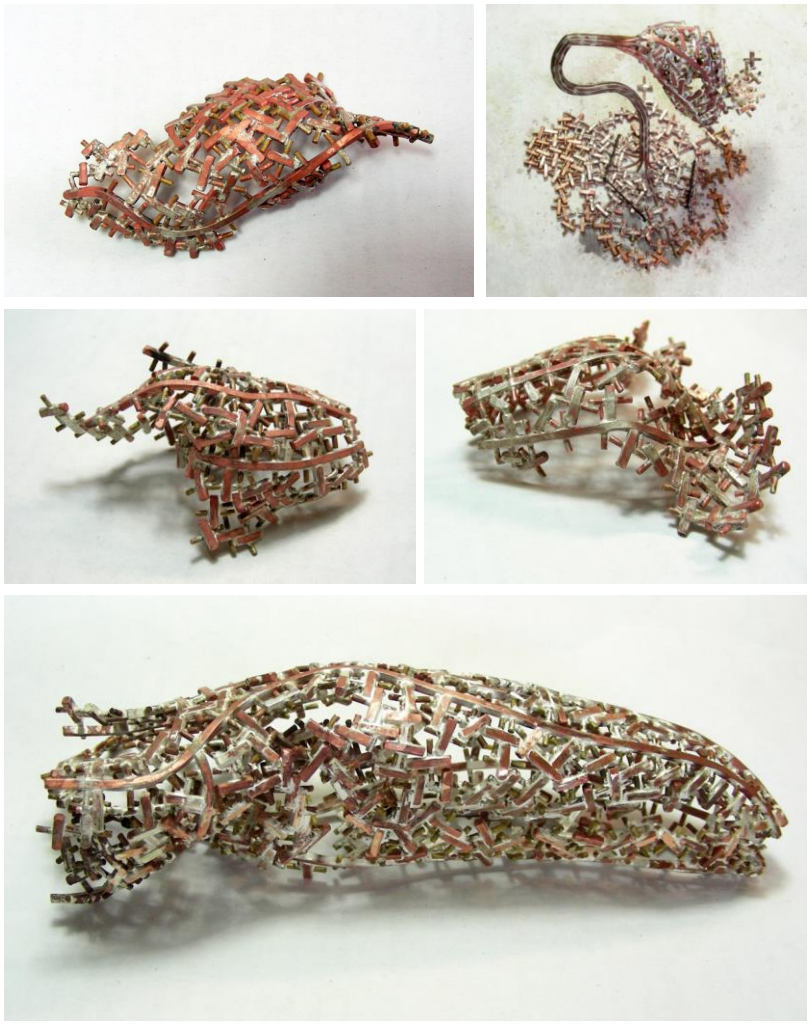


Fig. 44. Experiments of Chinese lotus form.

Fig. 45. Bifei Cao, *Dynamic* set*: Slowly Decaying, I am a Heavy Burden, Just Wait for a While, I Don't Wanna Go, Listening to the Internal Voice,* and *Loosing.*

Fig. 46. Bifei Cao, *Dynamic* set*: Shy, I Need a Pair of Wings.*

Fig. 47. Relationship of decayed lotuses in the Qinghua garden, Beijing, China.

Fig. 48. Bifei Cao, *Relationship* set: *I Agree with You, Shoulder by Shoulder*.

Fig. 49. Different sizes of cross joints.

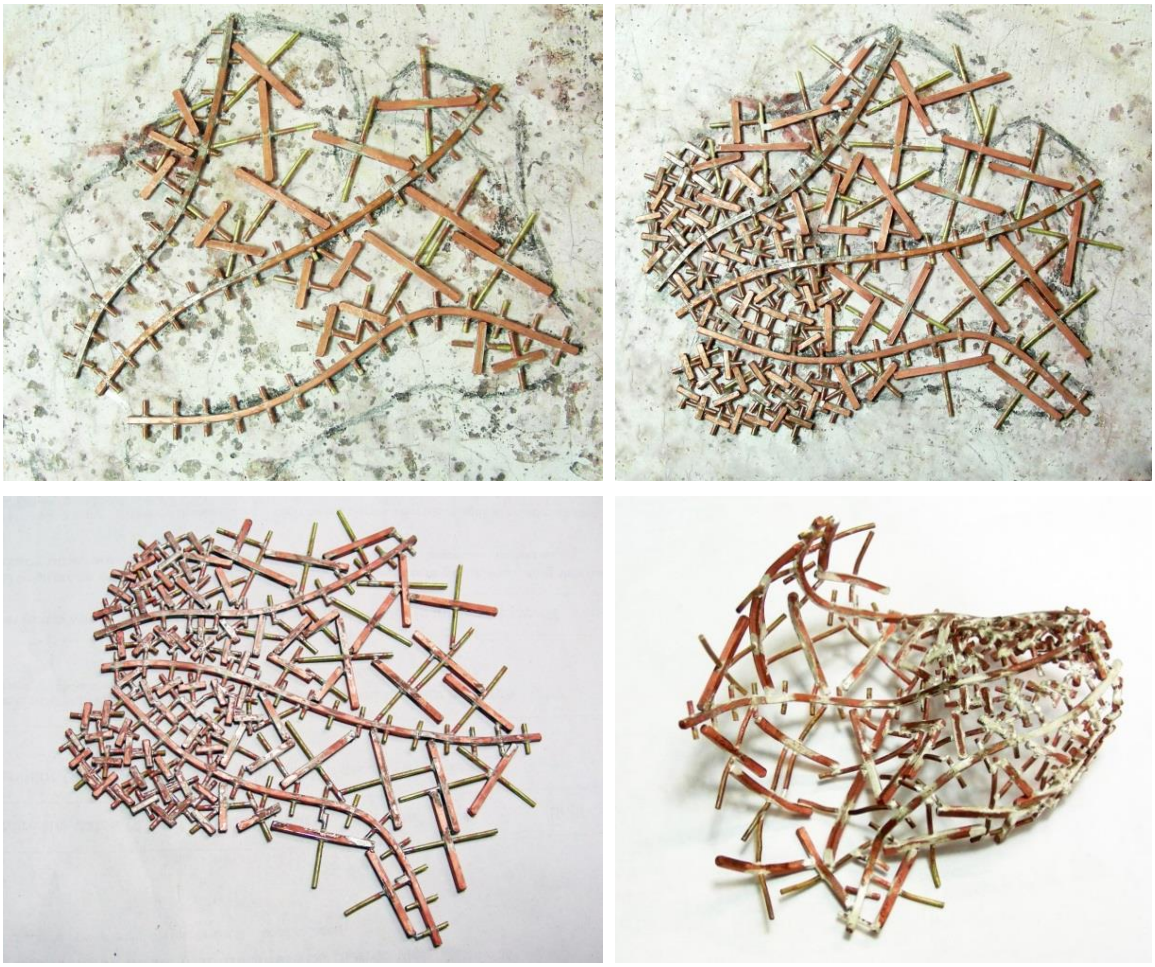


Fig. 50. Making process of square form by using cross joints.

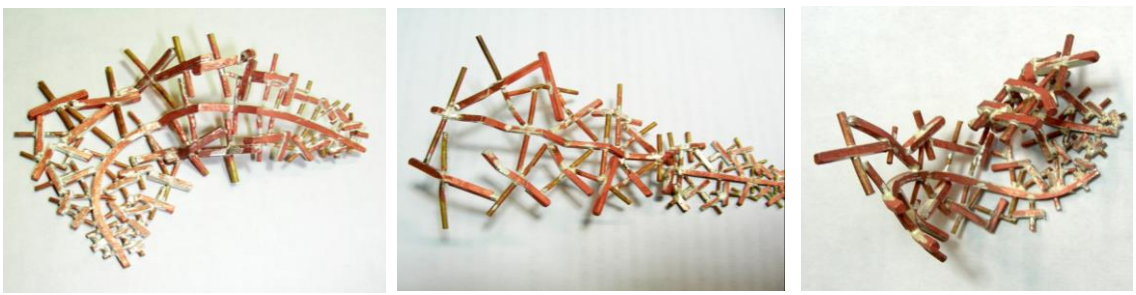


Fig. 51. Complex structure that is built from different size cross joints.

Fig. 52. Bifei Cao, *Borderline* series: *Paradox Wings* and *Don't Lie on Me*.

Chapter Three - Surface Identity, Global Identity and Hybridity

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse the effect on my cultural identity of my six-month fieldwork research trip to Amsterdam, the Netherlands. This research was framed by the following questions: what is the ongoing outcome of the negotiation between my original cultural roots and the more complex cultural situation? What is the implication of my choice of materials and how did the selection of these materials reflect my shifting locations and cultural identity? I will explore these two questions through reflection upon a series of studio work made during and after the fieldwork research and related cultural theories that are central to my research.

My key words for the chapter are 'imitation,' 'adaption,' 'subversion' and 'recreation.' Living in the global cultural environment of Amsterdam allowed me to observe, mimic and adapt elements of different European cultures into my research work. It stands to reason that each adaption of this new cultural environment must interact with and subvert a part of my original cultural roots. This knowledge allowed me to negotiate and recreate my cultural identity. I will explain these key words through my personal practice.

There were two important reasons for my research trip. Europe is often considered the centre of contemporary jewellery culture which has led to the establishment of many leading contemporary jewellery and object galleries. By visiting those galleries, I was able to look closely at many of the newest works of exemplary artists who are directly relevant to my research, such as Lucy Sarneel and Daniel Kruger.

With decades-long developments in a multicultural environment, I wanted to engage with the international cultural environment of this European country. In Europe, shifting between places and interacting with different cultures was much easier as one simply crossed borders between countries. This new environment was more complicated than the cultural environment of this island of Australia. Frictions and interactions between different cultures are negotiated continually in a process of hybridity, and the study of

these allowed me to face what Jonathan Rutherford calls "a multiple form of identification, waiting to be created and constructed."[57]

My research in Amsterdam was interrupted by a short trip to China for the Chinese New Year. This dramatic shifting between places and cultural environments created a more complicated cultural negotiation between my original cultural roots and the different cultural references of Amsterdam and Europe. The different cultural experiences in Amsterdam, and my memories of childhood and travel experiences in my homeland, interacted together and offered me a chance to change the direction and focus of my project that demanded a change in materials.

In this chapter, I discuss the development of my understanding of my cultural identity at different stages in my work. I moved from thinking of my cultural identity as a surface identity, to a global identity, and then to hybridity or a third space through a series of complex negotiations between cultures. As I stated in Chapter Two, the shifting between places affected my ideas and work, and my movement to Amsterdam and China brought different geographical views. These changes in surroundings or peripheral aspects were reflected in my personal practice through adaption, interaction and negotiation.

Certain philosophical theories and aspects of Chinese traditional culture, including Chinese traditional visual patterns and traditional farming tools were explored through my jewellery-based object practice. I will introduce related artists in greater detail as part of discussions of my own work later in the chapter.

Surface Identity Series (2015)

The *Surface Identity* series was the first series that was based on an interaction with multi-cultural environments during my field-work research in Amsterdam. This series included three projects: the *Mimicking* project, the *Adaption* project and the *Integration* project. The series was based on a group project researching a bee swarming system that I was part of at the Jewellery Department of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie. This group project was titled *Project Rotterdam*. Inspired by the concept of bee swarming and the

[57] Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space. Interview with Homi. Bhabha," *In: Ders. (Hg): Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 220.

bee hive system that was adapted from the local environment, I transferred this idea to my current new life where I was trying to adapt to the new global cultural environment of Amsterdam.

Mimicking and adaption were key words for my research and reflected the immediate feeling I experienced when I faced this international environment. This adjustment allowed me to understand some surface features of different cultures, such as food, language or other communications. This surface negotiation created a conversation between my original cultural roots and these foreign cultures. Like bees adapting the bee hive to each different environment, I began to mimic surface features by using cross joints.

Mimicking Project

The *Mimicking* project was the first project in the *Surface Identity* series. It expanded and furthered research developed in my last exploration of the *In Between* series. This project was based on feedback I received about my *In Between* series and two related researches.

One of the frequent comments about the *In Between* series was that each piece's surface appeared to have the characteristics of fabric or woven structures such as cocoons. I decided to explore this idea further in the first two months of my settlement in Amsterdam.

The idea of making a soft fabric (see fig. 53) was confirmed by further research into methods of fabrication. The research I undertook was for the *Project Rotterdam*, based on a video that I saw as part of my research about the adaption of a bee swarming system to a local environment. The bees' swarming intelligence is created from the repetition of a signal by the scout bee that enables the bees to gather and construct an unpredictable or unexpected structure. This repetition of a signal reminded me of the sheets of cross joints that I had used to create other research projects. I was inspired by the idea of repetition and felt that I could create a soft organic form by using this cross joint construction technique.

I had also been observing the behaviour of drapery on sculptures from a variety of cultures, including ancient Chinese Buddhist sculpture and Italian classical sculpture (see fig. 54a-b). I was particularly interested in the way in which sculptural materials such as marble, wood, or jade were carved to replicate soft fabric draped over and around the contoured shape of the body. One factor was the material transformation: a hard marble stone was used to imitate soft cloth that adapted to each permanent sculptural form.

The *Mimicking* project (see fig. 55, 56a-b) was based on the imitation of soft fabrics. The form of each piece was an ambiguous organic form. Each appeared to be similar to the accidental shapes of fabric that had been gathered and folded by the wind or the forces of gravity. It was about a rapid shifting where there is not just the shifting of fabric but also the shifting of place. Each piece of fabric that folded back and forth reminded me of each shifted place that I have encountered in my life.

I created each piece with its own form of movement. *Tight Hard* (see fig. 56b), for example, was formed from a sheet of cross joints that was folded so that it appeared to flow and fall. I created tension by looping a shoe tie in the centre of the form so that it looked like a piece of fabric that had been tightened or gathered.

I wondered if I could build up an environment to emphasise each folded fabric. Similar to the manner in which a textile or fabric rests on or falls across a chair or table, I thought I could build up a structure of sheets of cross joints that mimicked the movement of textiles over a body or other form. I wanted to construct an environment that could show some form of adaption. This inspiration suddenly connected me with a scene from my childhood memory: my father used a towel to wipe sweat from his face after he had carried so many crop loads from the paddies. I remembered how he often left the towel on the paddy pan during each harvest season. The towel adapted to the shape of the paddy pan. I then wondered if I could put these two references together to represent a union between past and present.

Adaption Project

In the second project, the *Adaption* in *Surface Identity* series, I continually mimicked fabrics that looked as if they had adapted to the forms that supported them. My intention

was to emphasise the surface of fabrics, but I found this action also addressed my adaptation to a new environment.

My new environment in Europe, coupled with farming events in my past memories, came together when I made a short trip back to my hometown for Chinese New Year. The experience of shifting between places and time pushed my thinking back and forth between new places, places of past memories, and the new experience of seeing my homeland after years of change. I was in an endless process of adaptation and adjustment. Maybe because of this unhomely situation of thinking and living and consistently adapting to places, I responded to Bhabha's observation that "the 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living."[58] This necessity allowed me to negotiate between past and present, my memories and my contemporary situation, as well as encouraged me to draw on those memories for my project.

In the *Adaption* project, I began to sketch and photograph tools linked to specific farming events, such as bamboo baskets, winnowing pans (see fig. 57a-b) and paddy threshing machines. I followed my narrative and created two experiments.

In these two experiments, I intended to create a combination that represented how a soft fabric adapts itself on a familiar tool using cross joint construction. I focused on two tools: bamboo baskets (Mandarin, 箩筐, Luo Kuang) that are used for carrying paddy, and winnowing pans (Mandarin, 簸箕, Bo Ji) that are used for winnowing the empty paddy. I created a towel-like fabric form to 'hang' on each tool. Each towel-like form adapted to the shape of each tool to combine into a new form.

In *Washing in a Wave* (see fig. 58), I hammered a geometrical winnowing pan form using small-scale cross joints. To create an adaption, I made a soft towel-like form to hang through this basket structure. The soft towel-like form was also created by the cross joints I had previously used in the first series. The towel shape adapted its form to the shape of the winnowing pan and also created a new shape by itself. Both generated a relationship with each other.

In *The Burden Is on Me* (see fig. 59), I specifically arranged the cross joints to create a form reminiscent of a bamboo basket. This pattern or logical arrangement built up a contrast with the randomly arranged towel-like fabric form. I also considered the

[58] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 10.

function of the bamboo basket. Traditionally, Chinese bamboo baskets come in pairs, which are suspended on a bamboo stick on two sides of a person's shoulder. Hanging from ropes, the two bamboo baskets create a relationship with the human body. This relationship is a heavy burden. The Chinese describe this burden (Mandarin, 挑担子, Tiao Dan Zhi) as a responsibility. It symbolises a responsibility between a Chinese male and his family when the two sides are balanced on his shoulders. This work reflected the tension between Chinese familial and Western individualist conceptions of responsibility that I was trying to negotiate at the time.

In the *Adaption* project, I succeeded in constructing an environment or a support for an adapted form. I developed a fabric structure made from sheets of cross joints that looked as though the structure hung slightly through another form. Both forms built up a contrast of softness and hardness, organic and geometric. The arrangement of sheets of cross joints also created a contrast between the systematic and the accidental in both forms.

Additionally, the project highlighted the negotiation between my past and present. When moving between places during my current life experience, my past memories of childhood constantly reappeared in my imagination, through remembering stories and places. The project reminded me of Helen Britton's *Unheimlich: The Ghost Train* series (see fig. 60). Britton, a German-based Australian-born jeweller, revealed her childhood's stories and memories in this series, which presented a colourful combination of objects, such as the ghost train in an amusement park fun fall, animals and other items that were related to her hometown in Australia.

Each new adaptation to a place triggered a comparison with the past. Those accumulated adaptations provided a more complex cultural negotiation and they offered me opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of my original culture. Caroline De Wagter stated that "Cultures must be understood as complex intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities, and subject positions."[59] Through the experience of shifting and adapting to places, I became more aware of aspects of my original culture that were related with my past memories of farming culture and childhood experiences.

[59] Caroline De Wagter, *"Mouths on Fire with Songs:" Negotiating Multi-Ethnic Identities on the Contemporary North American Stage* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2013), 53.

Integration

The third project of the *Surface Identity* series titled *Integration*, was a combination of mimicking the behaviour patterns of fabric and their logical arrangement by using cross joints. This project was inspired by the structure of the bamboo basket from *The Burden Is on Me* in the *Adaption* project. This allowed me to further my research and see if I could arrange cross joints that systematically followed traditional Chinese patterns. Recreating these traditional Chinese patterns remembered from childhood through the medium of metalsmithing, provided me with a way of fusing my current life experience with my original culture.

By systematically arranging each pattern within the window frame, I was able to understand the structure and meaning that was embedded in the patterns when I was recreating them.

I integrated each geometric pattern with the soft fabric form during each pattern's arrangement (see fig. 61). I matched cross joints with each other but without mathematical calculation, I simply followed the design. I then switched to a random organisation of the cross joints to create a three-dimensional wrinkle or fold. This intentional shifting mimicked a creased papercut or fabric on a window frame. This scene was based on memories that I remembered of a papercut that was folded by the wind after it had been glued on a window for a long time.

The *Integration* project (see fig. 62) involved the concepts of merging, shifting and changing. In this project, I explored changes in surface as a way of talking about how materials are transformed over time and space. I intended to use cross joints to create patterns derived from traditional Chinese windows frames and represent the change between my traditional and my current life experience. However, I decided to stop using this technique because the more complicated traditional Chinese patterns became lost in the arrangement of cross joints.

The *Surface Identity* series was my first attempt to create work that reflected my cultural interactions in a more complicated multi-cultural environment. I employed a process of mimicking, adaption and integration that reflected the way in which I approached my cultural negotiations. In the global "cultural supermarket"[60] of Amsterdam, I first

[60] Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," 622.

imitated surface features from different cultures and created the *Mimicking* project to mimic the movement of soft fabric by using cross joints. This surface imitation allowed a hard metal material to take on the appearance of a soft fabric.

Through imitation and insight gained into other cultures, I began to adapt some surface features observed from different cultures. This learning process afforded me greater understanding in this field which allowed me to create the *Adaption* project. This project not only highlighted the stylistic traits of soft fabric that I then adapted to create the form on farming tools, but it also enabled my childhood memories of farming tools to interact with my current life experience.

This continual interaction with memories and cultural traits allowed me to integrate my experience of different cultures, in different times and spaces. I merged the imitated fabric form with the pattern of a traditional Chinese window frame to create the *Integration* project. In the project, part of each piece was constructed with a structured and systematic arrangement and integrated into another part fabricated from a random arrangement of cross joints. This integration exactly reflected cultural interaction: all cultures are constructed by similar forms but become different through different ways of construction. In the next chapter, I will continue to explore the integration of different cultures.

Global Identity Series (2015)

The *Global Identity* series was the outcome of the second stage of my negotiation between cultures in this global cultural environment. During my field-work research in Amsterdam, I observed, compared and learned about cultural differences. Shifting physical locations between China, Australia and then Holland, Italy and Spain, offered a global platform for my ideas. I felt that I was a global citizen even if I needed a Chinese passport to travel to all these countries.

This feeling allowed me to think of my cultural identity as more multi-dimensional. Jan Aart Scholte stated that in a global world, "Identities that previously have been strictly confined to territories and borders have tended to become more plural and hybrid in character."[61] Through an investigation of the first stage of the *Surface Identity* series, I

[61] J. A Scholte, "Globalisation and collective identities," in *Identities in international relation*, ed. Jill Krause et al.

began to integrate these cultural influences together and following this, I planned to fuse them together into forms that reflected how identity operates in a global situation in the *Global Identity* series.

This series emerged from a personal experience when I mistakenly mixed up different coins from different countries' currency. The coins were mixed together in my backpack, and this meant that I often used the wrong country's coins.

This unintentional action encouraged me to observe coins from different countries in more detail. Firstly, the coins have different values but their value was not logically linked to their size or shape and I was confused by this. Also, the materials used and the sizes of the coins were similar in a number of countries, which is also very confusing. The only difference in the coins was that every country had set up its own currency that reflected their own unique national identity. Each coin contained a representation or symbol from each country. For instance, a Chinese fifty cent coin (see fig. 63) included a printed value from the Mandarin Bank on one side and on the other side, there was an imprint of a Chinese lotus flower and leaf as one of the symbols of China. The similarities and dissimilarities of the different coins created a foundation for further exploration with my research.

My intention was to use the material from these coins and fuse two of them together to create a global coin. The similarities of each coin, the use of similar materials such as zinc and brass, and the similar diameter of the coins offered me the opportunity to merge the coins together. The differences between the coins, such as value, weight and country of origin became fused together into a single identity.

During the process of making (see fig. 64), subversion and fusion were key words for this project. For consistency, I set up a few rules: the diameter of each coin would be kept the same; one side of each coin would be sanded off; the two matched sides relied on the same diameter of coins without prejudice. According to these rules, I first matched two coins and then sanded off the symbols and numbers to destroy the surface identity on one side of each coin. I soldered the two halves together to make an international coin. Each fused coin created a set of tokens that represented a form of confused cultural negotiation. For example, in *German & Japanese Coin* (see fig. 65), I

(London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 38-78.

merged half of a Japanese coin with half of a German coin to create a coin that represented a fused global identity.

The *Global Identity* series was similar to *Change*, made by German-based Swiss jewellery artist Otto Künzli. In *Change* (see fig. 66), Künzli filed the stamping off coins from thirty seven countries and drilled a hole in each to create a pendant. Both projects used a variety of coins and also destroyed part of the surface. The difference in Künzli's work is that his strategy for this project was removing details so as to present the original appearance of each coin before it was minted. My intention was to create a negotiation between the coins of two cultures and fuse them together so they became a symbol for global identity.

Each completed piece in this series suggested an uncertain identity and became the motivator for my consideration of making objects that reflected or symbolised a hybrid identity. I enjoyed the situation when a viewer could not figure out the origin of the coins, and I decided I would like to continue to explore this ambiguity.

Hybridity Series (2015)

I experienced different phases of cultural negotiation in the global cultural environment. I started to engage with this process through key words such as imitation, adaption and integration in the *Surface Identity* series. The continual integration and fusion of different cultural references allowed me to create the *Global Identity* series. When I engaged with this compound global cultural environment, the accumulation and fusion of my original cultural roots with other cultures led me to the concept of hybridity, or what Bhabha calls "the third space."[62]

The *Hybridity* series was the third stage of my negotiation of multiple cultures. This complicated negotiation between cultures, time and space allowed me to engage with new, unrecognisable and dissimilar spaces through making. In the making of the series, I encountered different experiences and materials and mixed them together to produce a new hybrid material. I used this material to imitate traditional Chinese jade objects and created two projects, the *Carves* project and the *Form* project. The *Hybridity* series was

[62] Rutherford, "The Third Space," 211.

an articulation of both cultural references and life experiences. It was also a hybrid encounter of past memories, cultural images, current experience and material awareness.

Past Memories and Cultural Images

As a part of Chinese visual culture, jade art and objects were a deeply held memory for me. I respect this facet of my cultural heritage and wondered how to utilise my interest in my research project. I decided to reinterpret traditional Chinese jade art using contemporary materials to replicate jade. During my visit to the British Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, I viewed their jade collections (see fig. 67), which built on my previous study of jade in China.

The jade carving collection was of special interest to me in my previous study. The discovery of jade and the tradition of jade carving took my thoughts back to the Neolithic period in China. Over thousands of years the carving techniques have changed very little whereas their form and decorative pattern have changed (see fig. 68). As a natural material, jade comes in various colours; its subtle, translucent colours and protective qualities were associated with and related to the Chinese concept of the soul and immortality. I also loved its colours and wanted to explore both the possibilities of colour and the physical material in my research project.

Another question arose in my research: how to refer to jade without using jade in my object making? Jade has had a long history with jewellery design and construction, so it seemed sensible to use jade as a material. However, jade is an expensive and rare material which made it almost inaccessible for me to use. More importantly, this traditional material carried huge symbolic connotation that I didn't want to involve in my work. The focus in this series of my work is on imitation, so it would not be fitting to use this rare and important symbolic stone.

My rethinking of traditional visual culture was neither to think of tradition as fixed, nor to depend on the persistence of tradition. I feel tradition is not a burden and does not create tension with one's personal contemporary life. Tradition should be a starting point to allow people to achieve their own national or communal identity in a global cultural environment. Through a revival of traditional forms, materials and symbols, I could reveal this complexity by placing cultural identity in this third space—hybridity.

Current Experience and Material Awareness

My use of milk powder as an imitation for jade was a completely accidental discovery. I had purchased five cans of Dutch milk powder for a newborn baby for one of my best friends in China.

He had asked me to do this because of the scandal in China concerning the contamination of powdered milk and infant formula and other food materials containing melamine in 2008. This contamination caused an estimated 300,000 babies to become sick, and the resulting kidney damage led to six fatalities in China. As a result, many Chinese or Asian new parents lost faith in the local powdered milk brands, leading to Asian people spending a fortune in buying milk powder from overseas agents or special dealers from countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands. This event caused supplies of milk powder to run out of stock overseas and companies could not provide enough supplies for babies in those countries.

I researched this experience and the milk powder supply in the affected countries. I was shocked by the contamination scandal but I also understood the reasoning behind the rationing of supplies: one person could buy one can of milk powder from the supermarket in Amsterdam per day. Customers could not purchase milk powder from the shelves, but they had to personally buy the product from the customer service department in any supermarket. The price of milk powder increased due to this ongoing limitation on the supply and it also led to a black market run by agents or special dealers. Milk powder became similar to jade, in the sense that it was difficult to find and it was expensive. I found similarities to the symbolic meaning of jade in that it protected humans in traditional Chinese culture just as foreign milk powder became a guarantee that safeguarded a baby's life. Further research on milk powder led me to the finding that milk was a material that had been used to make plastic. This discovery provided me with the idea of using milk powder as a material to mimic jade.

Shifting between places provided different cultural environments for my personal experiences. I embraced these experiences and let them mingle with my past memories. This negotiation allowed me not only to understand my present experiences but also gave me greater understanding of tradition and the past. The Chinese sculptural artist Xu Bing said, "Actually, the most valuable part of art is that those talented artists should be sensitive to the current period and should be aware of current culture and

environment, and their awareness is more sensitive than ordinary people. Moreover, those artists should recreate the traditional art in a methodology of transformation and then, come out with an 'artistic method'."[63] I understood the artistic value and material value of jade and wanted to transform it into a new artistic form, both in material and symbolic value.

Early Experiments

My initial intention was to produce imitation, unrefined jade. By mixing different proportions of milk powder, baby oil and wood glue (see fig. 69), the outcome of the experiments was quite different; some experiments would not set or they cracked after drying; and some resembled the quality of plastic rather than stone. I added pigment in an attempt to make each experiment closer to the characteristics of jade.

Different proportions of ingredients changed the outcome of the experiments (see fig. 70). This was similar to my personal experiences in different cultural environments—by adding any cultural reference it would influence the outcome of my cultural identity. Those cultural references aroused my inner thoughts on my traditional culture and encouraged me to reconsider my original visual culture and search for a new solution to reinterpret this culture.

My approach to reinterpreting traditional Chinese visual culture was similar to that of the way of a Taiwanese painter Chen Chun-Hao (陳浚豪), who made a series of work that imitated Chinese traditional brush painting. He recreated famous brush paintings from artists of the Song and Ming dynasty, such as Shen Zhou and Wu Bin, through pinning nails on canvas rather than painting with ink. In this work (see fig. 71a-b), Chen projected this image of the traditional brush painting on a canvas. By following the image, he used an air powered gun to fire each nail into the canvas. Thousands of nails were used in the construction and making of this paining. The size and density of nails were used to "imitate the effects of the play of light and dark across the canvas. "[64]

[63] Bing Xu, "Perspective: Xu Bing Special Collection," *Today Literary Magazine*, Summer 2014, 105.
The original source is written in Mandarin, as "其实，艺术最有价值的部分是：那些有才能的艺术家、对其所处时代的敏感，对当下文化及环境高出常人的认识，而且，对旧有的艺术，从方法论上进行改造，并用'艺术的方式'提示出来。"

[64] White Rabbit Gallery, "Chen Chun-Hao 陳浚豪 (Howard Chen)," accessed 08 June 2015, http://www.whiterabbitcollection.org/artists/chen-chun-hao-howard-chen/#sthash.66t4a1Jg.dpuf.

In his series of work, he did not create a new painting but directly imitated Chinese traditional brush painting. The approach allowed him not only to comprehend the history of Chinese traditional brush painting, but also to transform traditional material into one suitable for the contemporary world. Chen Chun-Hao and I have both revisited traditional Chinese visual art and brought it into contemporary life through a new interpretation.

In my early experiments (see fig. 72), I intended to reproduce different colours and appearances of jade from the unrefined to the refined product. Different proportions and combinations of the various components listed above produced completely different results. Controlled by my hands and mind, the resultant thickness and the grains of pigment of each experiment were taken into consideration when making changes to the experiments. The experimental pieces took a day or two to dry and then exhibited an appearance that was somewhere between plastic and jade.

This process of imitating materials was similar to the strategy used in *Wellpappe*, a series of work by German-based Swiss-born jeweller David Bielander. In one work in the series (see fig. 73), he made a model by using real cardboard, and then he replicated this by cutting thin metal to mimic the model. By altering the surface and applying a patina, he recreated the appearance of this cardboard object using hard metal.

The ambiguous nature of the objects in this series gave me confidence to continue with my project. The main difference between his pieces and my project was that his work mimicked cheap cardboard by using precious materials such as sterling silver and white gold. Conversely, my experiment involved transforming cheap material such as milk powder and wood glue to simulate a precious jade like substance (see fig. 74). It was also clear that his work had a playful quality and was a clever idea whereas the purpose of my research was to reflect my own cultural identity, even though both of us mimicked other materials to achieve our artistic goals.

Carving Project

The *Carving* project in the *Hybridity* series was focused on interpreting traditional lucky patterns on unrefined milk jade (the simulated jade I made). I made the raw and

unworked milk jade and then slightly cut or carved each one so I could understand the process of jade cutting and carving used in ancient China.

I selected three traditional lucky patterns that related to my personal life experiences. These were the *Yun* pattern (see fig. 75 top), the *Hui* pattern (see fig. 75 bottom) and the *Shuangxi* pattern (see fig. 76). Yun, means Cloud (traditional 云, pinyin Yún); the *Yun* pattern symbolizes soaring and wishing but the original meaning of Cloud is about movement, similar to my situation of shifting locations. Hui, means to return or go back (traditional 回, pinyin Huí); the *Hui* pattern symbolises continuity and auspicious wishes for the home, which fitted in with my unhomely situation. Shuangxi means double happiness (traditional 雙喜, pinyin Shuāng Xǐ); *Shuangxi* pattern ignites a double celebration as parents or a family wishes a loved one, success in both career and family. I recognized that these patterns reflected my current life situation and experience as I either carved or laser printed the image on milk jade.

The *Carving* series was not only about the knowledge and learning of traditional Chinese jade culture, but it also expressed my feelings of having an unhomely life situation when shifting between places. This series was a reflection of this complicated situation.

During this process of making, I intuitively made each shape to visually appear as unworked or raw jade. I then worked through the two pieces and cut one or two edges of each of the pieces in a straight line. This built a platform on which the patterns, such as the Cloud and Hui, could be carved inside. In the third experiment, I left the form totally irregular and asymmetrical. This pattern was the lucky double happiness pattern which was more complicated than the organic Cloud pattern or the geometric Hui pattern.

I kept the original surface unrefined or unpolished and used a simple prong setting in a frame. My hands touched all the materials that I used; the materials were mixed with each other, forming a relationship with each other in my mind and in fact, and even my finger print was left on some of them. The simple prong setting was a reference to the way traditional jade was displayed in the jade collections of museums (see fig. 77). Each jade piece was mounted with a finger prong setting and the setting material was either metal or plastic. This setting worked as a security measure in case the jade fell off the wall. It resembled a jewellery prong setting, so for me, the fragment of jade became

a piece of jewellery and the showcase seemed like a silent human-being who wore the priceless artefact.

In the *Carving* series I experimented with both the imitation of jade material and my jade carving skills. I incorporated a range of memories of jewellery-based objects, including a variety of materials and experiences from when I was shifting between places. It was a strange experience when I shaped each milk jade piece and either carved or laser printed patterns according to their symbolic meanings. Each of the traditional patterns used were taken from an aspect in my personal life experience.

Form Series

The *Form* series was an experiment based on the imitation of jade forms. In this series the two experiments were shaped according to typical jade practice. I deliberately selected these two jade forms, the *Bi* (Disc) form (see fig. 78 top) and the *Yue* (Axe) form (see fig. 78 bottom), as they were mostly used on jade and bronze materials, and rarely used in other materials. I found it was easy to imitate the jade material for these works so as to give people the impression of real jade.

My study of the *Bi* (Disc) and *Yue* (Axe) forms helped me to understand the culture of this ancient material coupled with its implied philosophy. Through studying the most important jade collections of museums in both China and overseas, I gained a deeper understanding of the processes used to make them and their symbolism. Both forms were used from the early Neolithic period to the Qing dynasty (AD 1912). The *Bi* form was used for ceremonial events as a symbol of status s and protection from evil spirits. The *Yue* was a large jade form and it symbolised auspicious power. The value and role of these traditional objects is deeply related to the heart and soul of Chinese national identity. When they were reinterpreted and combined with my personal experiences they presented a new symbolic meaning that reflects my individual identity.

Ultimately, the *Hybridity* series was a culmination of both the knowledge and learning from Chinese traditional visual culture and the outcome of material awareness. Through these two series of exploration of both jade carving patterns and forms, I attained ongoing strategies for imitation. This strategy allowed me to appreciate traditional Chinese visual culture and bring it into contemporary crafts making.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the way in which I considered my cultural identity as I participated in a number of cultural negotiations in a multi-cultural environment. It presented three stages of exploration of cultural identity: a surface identity, a global identity and a hybrid identity. Through researching theories of cultural identity and material culture, I created three series of jewellery-based objects: the *Surface Identity* series, the *Global Identity* project and the *Hybridity* project.

The *Surface Identity* series was the first sequence of work undertaken during my settlement in the global cultural environment of Amsterdam. I observed and learned from different cultures by mimicking and adapting their surface features. This series reflected my cultural situation step by step through the key words of imitation, adaption and integration, from which I then created the three different projects. My current cultural situation also enabled me to recall past memories. The connection with these events shifted and integrated and together they allowed me to reconnect with my personal memories of farming life in China.

The continual negotiation between different cultures encouraged me to integrate and fuse them together by analysing their similarities and differences. It was so easy to travel between different countries within Europe because each country is small, about the size of a state of Australia. The experience of shifting between European countries made me feel borderless. This feeling of being a global citizen allowed me to create the *Global Identity* series. The fusion of my original culture and foreign cultures was a continual shifting and translating experience.

The translation of cultures is a continuing ongoing theme in my research and it reached a new stage, hybridity, through a negotiation of cultures. The *Hybridity* series reflected this theory. The series mixed all the contributors of culture, memories and space together to create a hybrid material that reinterpreted traditional Chinese jade. It aroused my interest in material awareness through my experience of mixed cultural situations. To mimic traditional jade was a negotiation of cultures and locations, but it was also a result of the tensions between them. This concept is addressed by Apinan Poshyananda who stated that, "Tensions, frictions and dislocations emanating from various sources may reveal connecting threads in what initially seems unrelated or disjointed." [65] Those

[65] Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition," 27.

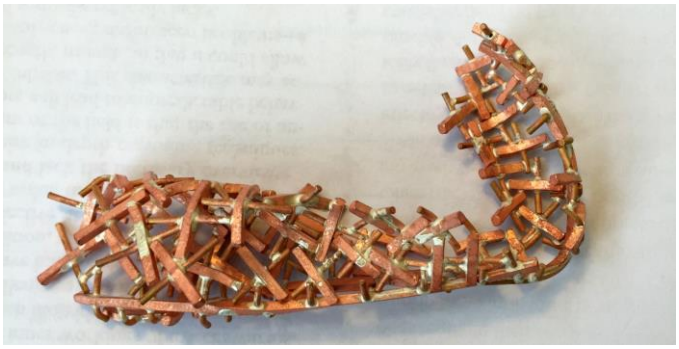
negotiations between tension, resistance and displacement of cultural differences appeared to be connections between tradition and the present, originality and replication. I joined these unrelated memories in order to create this series.

The process of translation is also a process of imitating tradition or originality. This procedure requires both elements of traditional culture and other cultures as "the 'original' is never finished or completed in itself."[66] New experiences and different references from other cultures join together with the original cultural identity. Once realised, there is a tension between my original culture and other cultures. This tension made me pay more attention to my original culture, especially traditional Chinese visual culture. Other or foreign cultures are related to the construction of my cultural identity. I will continue to engage with these contributors in the next chapter.

I will also introduce a new way of interpreting my original culture. The original or traditional is always open to be translated in a new time. It would not be a burden but a gift of personality, as Homi K. Bhabha stated, "The recognition that tradition bestows is a partial form of identification."[67] The knowledge, habits and customs of tradition have helped me to be reminded of the past and enable me to continually move into the future. We have sought a way to protect this privilege, and we cherish it, but the persistence of tradition should not depend on reiterating intangible traditional culture or isolating it from other cultures. This original heritage and the influences of life have folded together to form a dough, and have become the foundation of constructing my cultural identity.

Through a translation of tradition and negotiation with other cultures, I am articulating the differences of these cultures and will present a new series of both objects and tableware in the next chapter.

[66] Rutherford, "The Third Space," 210.
[67] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 3.



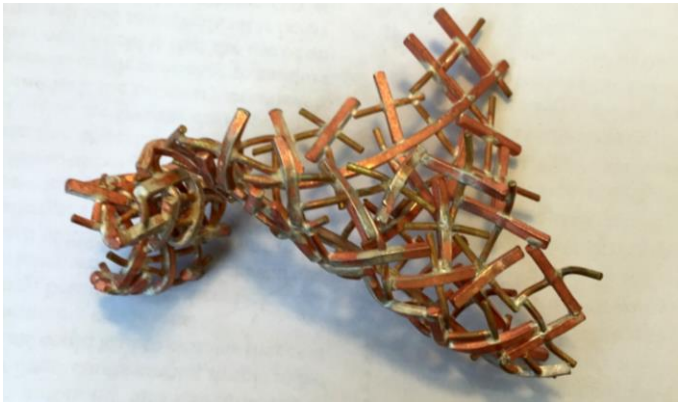


Fig. 53. Making process of soft fabric imitation.

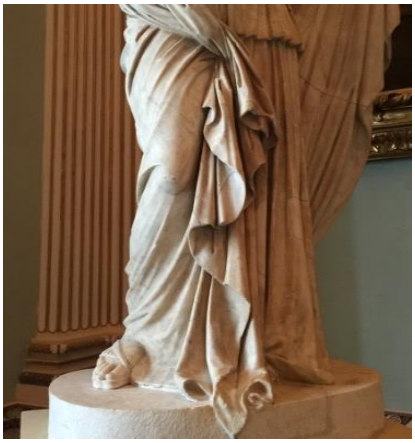


Fig. 54a-b. Italian classic sculpture at the Galleria Uffizi.

Chinese Buddhist sculpture at the British Museum.

Fig. 55. Bifei Cao, *Mimicking* project: *Endless Folding*.

Fig. 56a-b. Bifei Cao, *Mimicking* project: *Inner Accident* and *Tight Hard.*

Fig. 57a-b. Bamboo baskets (Mandarin, 箩筐, Luo Kuang) and winnowing pan (Mandarin, 簸箕, Bo Ji) in my home, China.

Fig. 58. Bifei Cao, *Adaption* project: *Washing in a Wave.*

Fig. 59. Bifei Cao, *Adaption* Project: *The Burden Is on Me.*

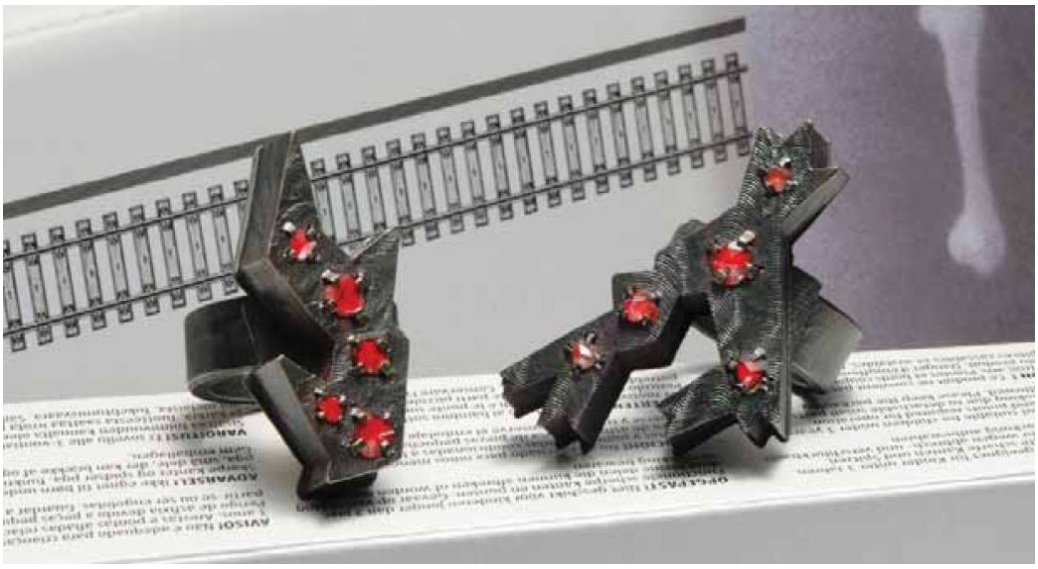
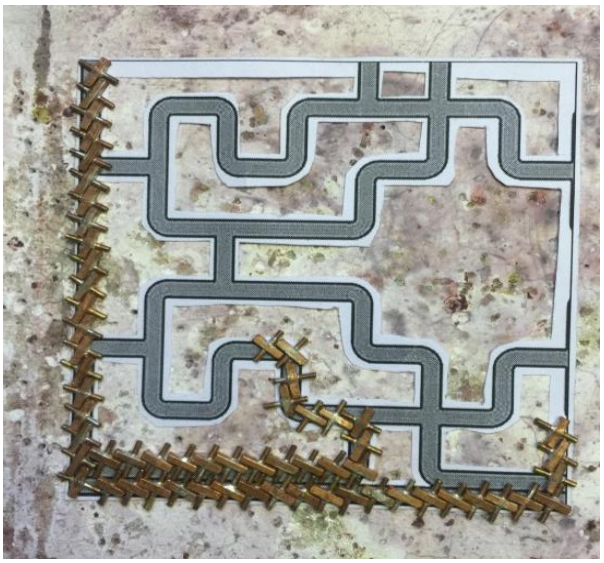
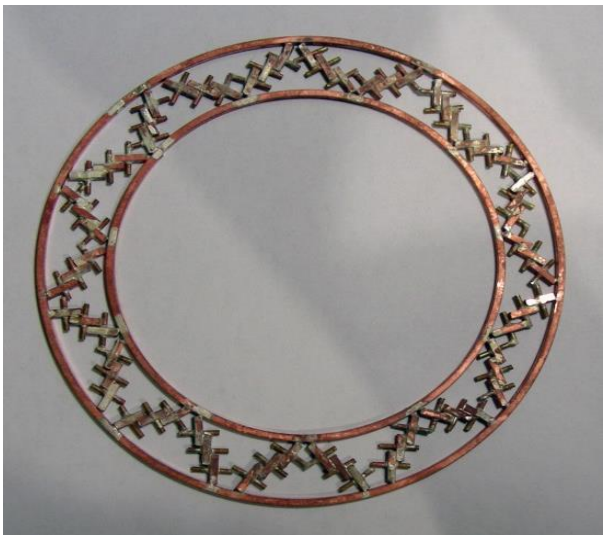


Fig. 60. Helen Britton, Two rings of the *Unheimlich: The Ghost Train* series.





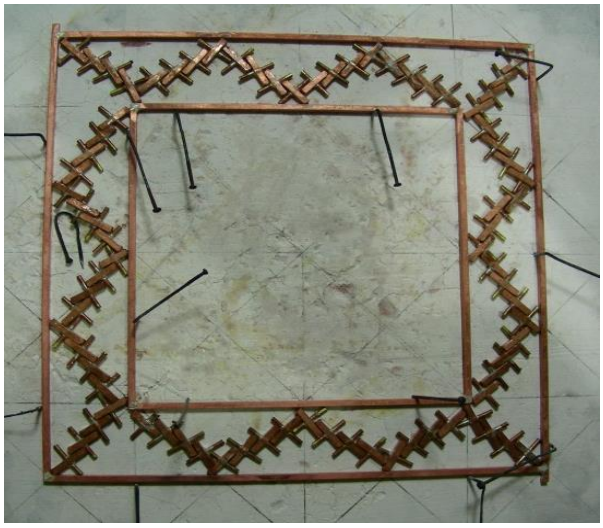
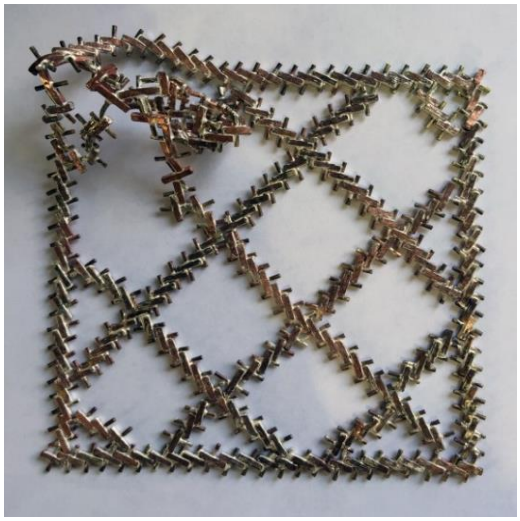


Fig. 61. Bifei Cao, Making process of pattern arrangement.



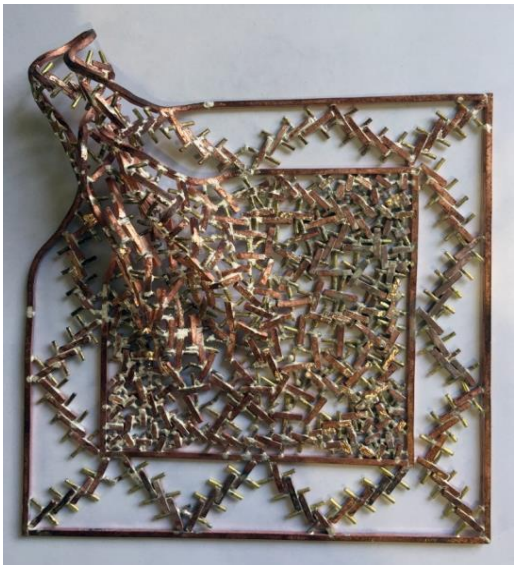


Fig. 62. Bifei Cao, Finished samples of the *Integration*.

Fig. 63. Two sides of a Chinese fifty cent coin.

Fig. 64. Making process of fused coin.

Fig. 65. Bifei Cao, *German & Japanese Coin.*

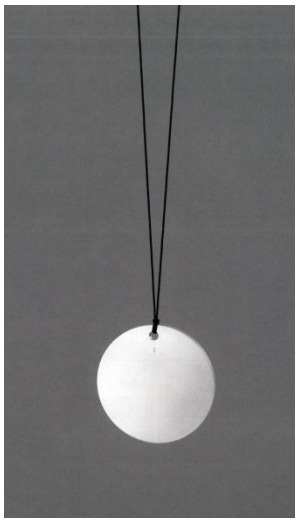


Fig. 66. Otto Kunzli, *Change* series: *Good News from the Islands*.

Fig. 67. An ancient jade from the British Museum, London, UK.

Fig. 69. Making process of milk powder based experiment.

Fig. 68. Carved jade from the Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, China.

Fig. 70. Unrefined jade experiment.

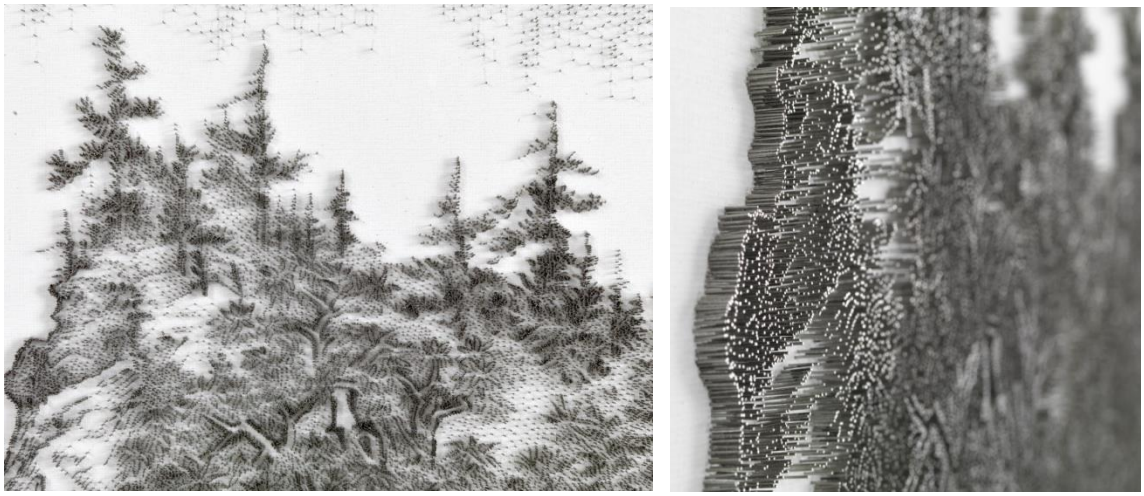


Fig. 71a-b. Chen Chun-Hao, *Imitating 'Travellers Among Mountains and Streams'. A* detail of *Imitating 'Travellers Among Mountains and Streams'*

Fig. 72. Early experiments with using milk powder.

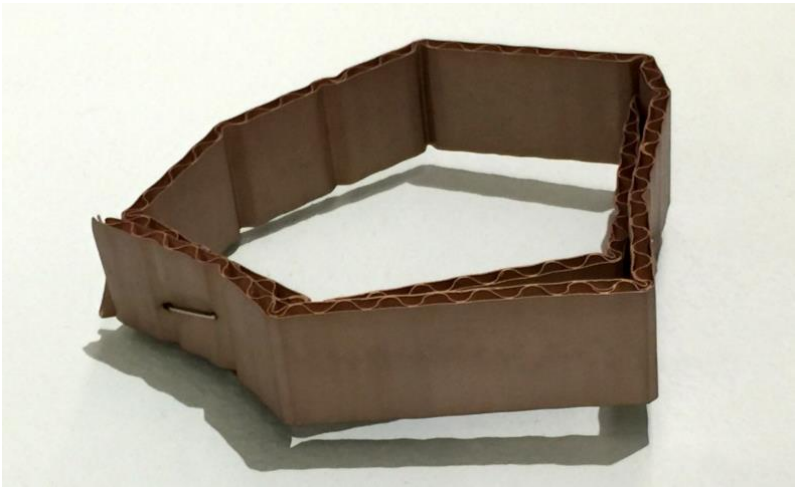


Fig. 73. David Bielander, *Wellpappe*.

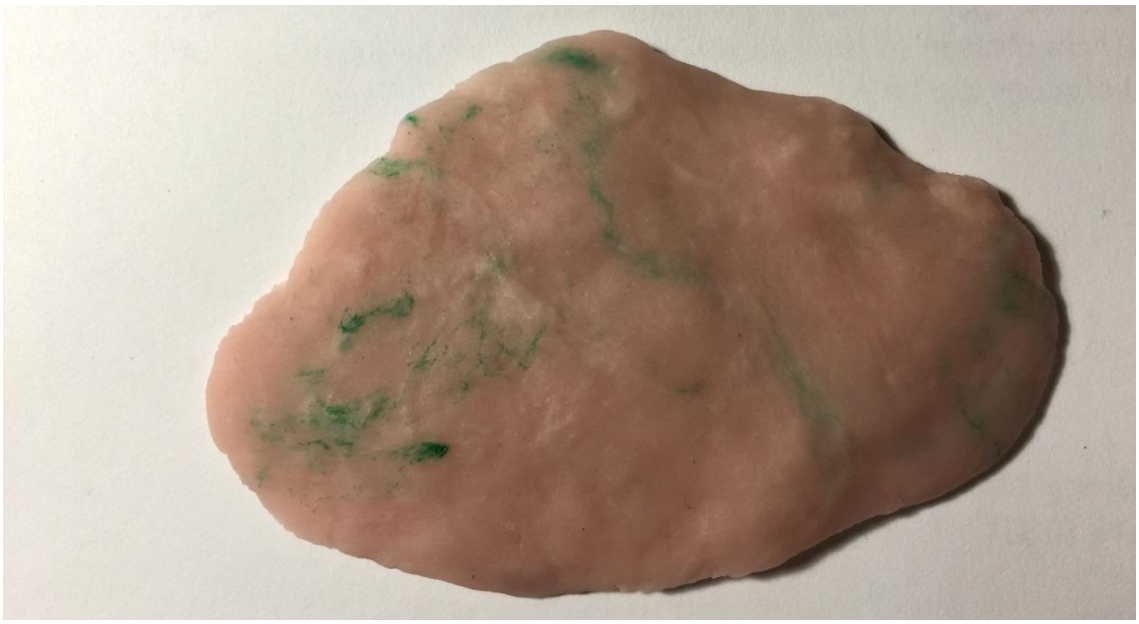


Fig. 74. Samples of milk jade.

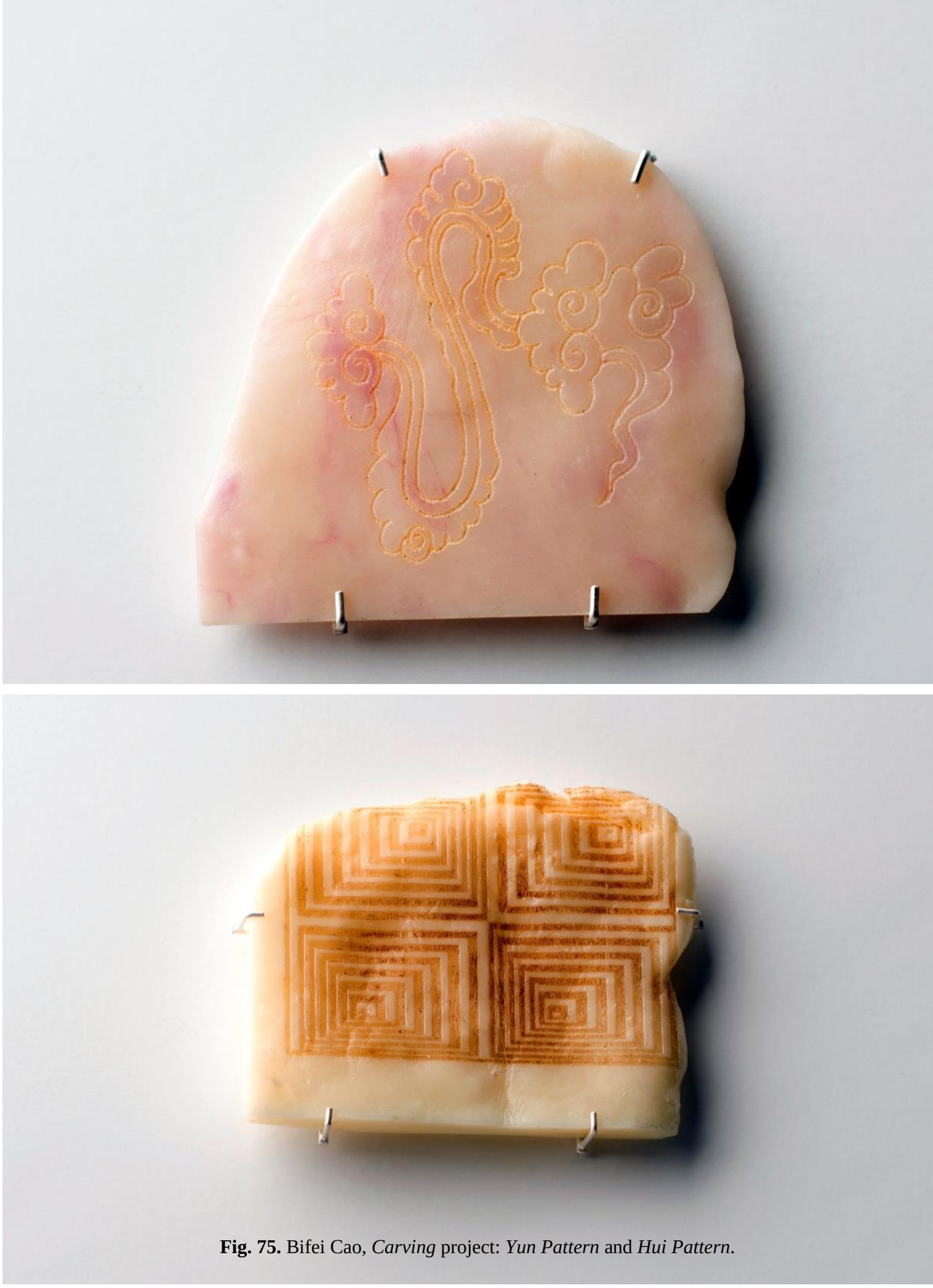


Fig. 75. Bifei Cao, *Carving* project: *Yun Pattern* and *Hui Pattern*.

Fig. 76. Bifei Cao, *Carving* project: *Shuangxi Pattern.*

Fig. 77. Different setups of jade in jade collections of Museums world-wide.

Fig. 78. Bifei Cao, *Form* project: *Bi (Disc)* and *Yue (Axe).*

Chapter Four - Beyond and Bond

Chapter Introduction

In the last chapter, hybridity was a strategy for negotiating my cultural identity as a Chinese person living in a global community. Through these negotiations, I placed my cultural identity into three shifting levels: a surface identity, a global identity and a hybridity. These levels were the result of insights gained during my fieldwork studies in the complex cultural environments of Amsterdam and a short trip to China. These outcomes contributed to the development of three separate projects, which allowed me to understand my original culture and comprehend my relationship with other cultures.

My personal narrative of experiencing cultural negotiations and researching in related cultural theories made me much more comfortable in this global cultural environment. The accumulation of experiences and knowledge with regard to cultures allowed me to confidently embrace cultural similarities and differences. This knowledge helped me to more deeply understand my original and traditional culture, and to want to continue to research my own tradition.

Cultural identity depends upon its relationship with other cultures. These interactions of similarities and differences result in relationships between diverse cultures. This chapter explores the connections of cultures, memories and experiences.

Cultural identity is always 'in process' and never finished because of the individual endlessly negotiating cultures. Cultural interaction "is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation."[68] The moment or situation of transformation shifted to the different positions that I have discussed in the last two chapters. This unstable or changeable moment through endless negotiation offered a theory base for my research in this chapter.

In this chapter, I focus on four key words: 'join,' 'change,' 'shift' and 'recreation' as a way to discuss the final two bodies of my work, the *Beyond* and the *Bond*. The noun 'joint' means "a place or parts at which two or more things are joined."[69] Joints became

[68] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.
[69] "Joint," The Free Dictionary by Farlex, accessed 19 July 2016, http://www.thefreedictionary.com/joint.

metaphors to bond past and present, tradition and innovation through the negotiation of cultures. These key words reflect the relational, uncompleted, temporal and shifting situation of cultural identity. In the *Beyond* series, I plan to continually investigate the possibilities of cross joints which may reflect the interaction of similarities and differences between my original culture and other cultures. Established on connections of cultures, memories and experiences, I will explore different ways of bonding and joining to reveal the relationships of cultures and identities in the *Bond* series.

Based on the theories and my experiences mentioned above, I will ask should it go beyond the concept of hybridity or the third space. Could we call it the fourth, fifth or sixth space? In this chapter, I will explore object making to reflect the possibilities of temporal positions in the *Beyond* series. My interpretation of incomplete or changed situations of cultural identity will be addressed in the *Beyond* series, where specifically I will move beyond jewellery-based object making to larger object making. The concept of constantly negotiating cultures will consistently provide inspirations for the making of objects.

The idea of reinterpretation and innovation of tradition has been a core concept of my research. The endless negotiation of other cultures has benefitted me by allowing me to have a deeper understanding of my own original and traditional cultural roots; my roots are in the process of continual translation during this negotiation. I have perceived that there is a tension between my original culture and other cultures; however there is also cooperation and collaboration between them. The reinterpretation of traditional or original culture becomes part of constructing my cultural identity.

This chapter experiments with these ideas and questions through the exploration of the *Beyond* series and the *Bond* series. These experiments will be fused with my reinterpretation of traditional Chinese visual culture, my childhood memories and references from other cultures. Related philosophies and theories in Chinese traditional culture are discussed in section one, such as the use of the wooden frame joint structure seen in traditional Chinese architecture. I will also introduce the concept of the original source and development of cultural significance of the Seven Foot Male, and the study of Chinese pottery as well as a continual exploration of artefacts used in farming culture.

Related Philosophy and Theories

To investigate different ways of joining or bonding to reflect the relationships of cultural identities, I decided to continue to explore other types of joints from traditional Chinese architecture. During the research into other joints, I found that all of the joints worked together to support the complex architectural structure. Joints carried this heavy responsibility, like a traditional doctrine of Confucianism that the male must be responsible for the whole family. This similarity of carrying responsibility reminded me of an allusion of the Seven Foot Male.

The Original Source and Development of the Allusion of the Seven Foot Male

As an adult man, I must support my parents according to the allusion of the Seven Foot Male. In *ENCOURAGING LEARNING* (SECTION 1) by Hsun-Tzu (荀子《劝学篇》第一篇), presented as: "小人之学也，入乎耳，出乎口。口耳之间，则四寸耳。曷足以美七尺之躯！"[70] It described an adult man as being seven foot high according to the measurement system used during the Spring and Autumn Warring States Period (770-221BC) in China. One foot was considered to be 23.1 centimetres during that time; therefore seven foot approximates 162 centimetres. The height is an average height and people generally refer to this when a man reaches his normal adult height and should then be responsible for his family.

The Seven Foot Male becomes a metaphor for coming of age when a man should be responsible and possess adult qualities. The description becomes an allusion and has developed into a broader symbolic meaning. For example, Liu Xu stated in JIUTANGSHU·TAIZHOUJISHANG, "a seven foot male must be conscious that his reputation is more important than his life; this reputation includes respect for older people and your supervisor or manager, be an honest person and take responsibility for your friends, family and relatives). Seven foot male implies a man who is honest, responsible, obedient and caring."[71]

[70] "Quan Xue (Encouraging Learning)," Gu Shi Wen (Traditional Poems), accessed 03 December 2016, http://www.gushiwen.org/GuShiWen_87078c102f.aspx.
[71] "Jiu Tang Shu·Tai Zhou Ji Shang," Gu Shi Ce (Traditional Poems), accessed 03 December 2016, http://www.gushice.com/bookview_7629.html.
The original source is written by Mandarin, as "后晋．刘昫（xù）等《旧唐书．太宗纪上》："夫岂不爱七尺之躯，重百年之命？谅由君臣义重，名教所先，故能明大节于当时，立清风于身后。"

My understanding of the responsibility of supporting family is reflected in the responsibility of the joints in supporting architecture. I combined both symbolic meanings in the *Seven Foot Male* project in the *Bond* series in this chapter.

Traditional Chinese Pottery in the Farming Culture

Farming work has been a primary part of the responsibilities of supporting family in traditional China, and Chinese pottery has an important link with Chinese farming culture. I grew up in a farming family, where I observed the different uses for pottery items on the farm, such as pots for pickling, big jars for holding water and other household utensils. Ceramic pots were an essential part of Chinese people's lives in the countryside of China.

The shape of Chinese pottery and the skill of the traditional potters were developed a thousand years ago, yet even today, current craftsmen still use these traditional shapes and techniques in their making. The traditional shapes and methods used are associated with one of the longest continuing civilisations in the history of the world—China. These traditional forms, motifs and patterns frequently appeared on Chinese lacquerware, basketwork and metalwork. The shape of an *Incense Burner in Archaic Gui Form* (see fig. 79), for example, is a similar shape to the archaic bronze *Gui* vessels from the Western Zhou dynasty. Even in the modern world of mass production, where large numbers of everyday pottery items are manufactured, I still observed these classic and ancient pottery shapes in people's homes and in various museums.

In this chapter, I will discuss how I reinterpret this traditional pottery shape in my work. Knowledge gained from my childhood memories and my research has allowed me to introduce different traditional pottery shapes into my work. I felt that exploring these shapes, forms and patterns was one of the main aims of my art making as these forms have played a significant part in traditional Chinese visual culture over many generations. My reinterpretation of tradition into contemporary life helped me search for cultural identity in this globalised society.

Referenced Artists

I had to research ways of linking my work when I was reconnecting with my memories and original culture through the negotiation with other cultures. The approach that I developed allowed me to research various linking and joining techniques across different crafts. Related artists such as Li Xiaofeng recreated the garment ‘Qipao’ by connecting ancient Chinese pottery shards as a way of reinterpreting traditional Chinese visual culture.

The temporary nature of cultural identity has always placed me in a situation of wondering and thinking, as this negotiation with other cultures is endless. My feelings during this process of finding cultural identity were unstable and changeable. I was able to capture them and transform them into a physical entity, which encouraged me to research artists such as Livia Marin.

Li Xiaofeng

The Chinese artist Li Xiaofeng revived non-functional traditional Chinese ceramic shards from broken pottery to create a garment sculpture. By using leather cord or silver wire, he stitched different ancient pottery pieces together to form a variety of garments. These ancient pottery pieces were sorted according to date, colour and shape. All were from different dynasties such as the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasty.

As part of the making process, Li first drew the design. Due to the different colours and shapes among the tons of broken ceramic pieces, he polished each shard and drilled holes in a specific place to make the attachment process easier. He put each piece individually back into the kiln and refired them, after which he joined each piece together. The ancient materials were recreated to replicate many varied and intriguing clothing garments (see fig. 80).

Li’s merging of traditional Chinese culture with contemporary art generated new ideas and was an inspiration. Li stated in the Chinese magazine *Handicraft*, “I respect traditional Chinese culture and would like to deliver these memories with regard to the city of Beijing and the country of China. The series of work ignited a spark when I

faced the intersection between the traditional culture and the world of contemporary art."[72]

Livia Marin

Livia Marin's work aroused my interest when I was contemplating the idea that cultural identity was in a state of uncertainty. This uncertainty of being in progress shifts these interactions of similarities and differences between cultures, as well as recreates my cultural identity. The negotiation of my inner world was dissolving into a temporary position, like a melted or misshapen object that was waiting for reconstruction or regeneration. It was this temporary position that I observed in Marin's work.

As a London-based Chilean artist, Marin's work did not explore object making related to cultural identity. She engaged with everyday objects to investigate a human relationship with material objects, such as ceramic cups and teapots, in the contemporary world of mass-produced objects and global distribution. In Marin's *Nomad Patterns series* (see fig. 81), each piece was created to look as if it had melted onto a surface, like a "frozen puddle of porcelain."[73] These objects look like they were heated into a liquid state, allowed to flow and solidify, yet they retained the original ornate decal patterns. These patterns were designs based on the willow pattern motif, which is a pastiche of ancient Chinese landscape decoration. Both series of her works appear to deal with a situation that is located between something that seems to collapse and something that appears to be reconstructing. This situation was exactly what I wanted to explore in the *Awkward Position* project of the *Beyond* series and the *Bond* series where I felt that I was in a temporal situation of cultural identity.

Beyond Series (2015-2016)

The *Beyond* series continued my exploration and negotiation of cultures. The series included two projects, titled the *Mutualism* project and the *Awkward Position* project. By titling this series *Beyond*, I was purposely investigating what the outcome would be

[72] Ningyi Sun, "Wear Blue and White Porcelain," *Zhong Hua Shou Gong (Handicraft)* 06 (2010): 73.
The original source is written by Mandarin, as "我尊重中国的传统文化，我想传递给世人一个关于中国、关于北京的记忆，这些作品在传统文化与当代艺术的交叉口，一下子就撞出了火花。"
[73] Edel Assanti, "Objet Dada," *Art News* 110 (2011): 117.

of consistent negotiation of cultures beyond the ‘in-between’ space and hybrid space. The cultural identity is always in a temporary position through negotiation among cultures. There is always a position shifting beyond the ‘in-between’ space and hybrid space through this negotiation process.

In the *Beyond* series, I also re-explored the possibilities of cross joint construction. I researched jewellery-based objects and also investigated tableware objects and their construction using cross joints. The possibility existed of using cross joints as a new way of construction to create a new form of tableware object.

Mutualism Project

The *Mutualism* project included the *Consistence* pieces (see fig. 82) and the *Growing* piece (see fig. 83). It was a further exploration of the *In Between* series and the *Surface Identity* series from the previous two chapters. Based on these two series, I captured the similarities of both series, such as the organic shape and random arrangement, and recreated them with different geometric shapes to build up mutual forms.

This project also allowed me to create totally different shapes to show that cultural identity is an accumulation of difference. I underlined these differences in each piece and constructed each piece using organic and geometric, natural and architectural forms. However both pieces were constructed by using square wire and round wire.

In *Consistence,* I fabricated a cylinder form by systematically joining square wire with round wire. Along with this logical form, an organic form emerged and provided a contrast, since the organic form was made of cross joints assembled in a random pattern similar to the pieces of the *In Between* series. This organic form was also evident in *Growing*, where I constructed a trapezoid form, bending or deforming one side of this form to match the organic form. The two pieces were created by this mutual interaction between similarities and differences. As different cultures share similarities and differences, the negotiation between cultures merges them to form a cultural identity that is relational yet different; the process was never ending.

I succeeded in interpreting a mutual form in the *Mutualism* project. The forms of these two pieces were related and seemed to grow together. There appeared to be more

negotiation and mutual support than ‘in-between’ in the *In Between* series. Part of each form was embodied with the characteristics of a soft fabric that also appeared in the *Surface Identity* series.

I emphasised the forms that were constructed using longer wire to create a more geometric form. These geometric forms applied logical arrangements that were seen in the *Integration* project of the *Surface Identity* series. These forms were underpinned with references from architectural structures more directly than the forms in the *Borderline* series. The *Mutualism* project continued to explore the possibilities of cross joints.

I found it was interesting when a part of a geometric shape bent and assumed an organic character in the *Growing* piece in the series. I undertook this action because I wanted to create a mutual relationship between forms. The action of a solid geometric form distorted to an unfamiliar shape that visually appeared to be waiting for a new action, reminded me of the shifting of my cultural identity. My solid Chinese cultural background has been shifted to a situation of being ‘in-between’, and a hybrid after negotiating with other cultures. I felt my cultural identity had been malleable and perhaps I will need to wait for a recovery or reconstruction sometime in the future. It was an awkward position for me to find myself in when my Chinese friends criticised me for being a Westernized person, but my overseas or international friends think of me as a traditional Chinese. These actions by other people and my feeling of cultural identity allowed me to explore this idea of transformation, deforming or a melting situation in my next project.

Awkward Position Project

The *Awkward Position* project (see fig. 84) continued to explore the possibilities of cross joints. By naming this piece *Awkward Position*, my aim was to present the awkward position of being a foreigner both within my original culture and homeland as well as in host countries.

The project was not limited to making traditional small-scale jewellery-based objects; instead it grew into the production of larger scale objects. There were two reasons why I shifted the scale of my work. The first was that I wanted to investigate the possibility of

cross joints in much larger scale objects. Since my background training was as a metalsmith, I felt it would be interesting to see how cross joints referenced from the giant traditional Chinese architecture could be used in making larger tableware objects. I could now create a large range of varying sized cross joints without having to consider weight and function. The second reason was that I was able to create this large scale object that was beyond the limitation of jewellery-based objects. My interpretation reflected the shifting and uncertainty of cultural identity, allowing it beyond the tradition and limitation of other cultural references.

In this project, I focused on the representation of traditional Chinese daily-used utensils. These traditional Chinese utensils were mostly made from ceramic or clay, bamboo, wood or metal. The construction material and context of these traditional utensils kept changing, but their basic forms have been preserved for thousands of years.

In this project, I have used cross joints to reinterpret the traditional form of an incense burner. A similar form can originally be found in an archaic bronze vessel (see fig. 79). The form has been recreated using different materials. By arranging a systematic order of cross joints, I fabricated half of the traditional form, including the handles that were usually portrayed in debased or abstracted forms of a dragon or fish. Through the reinterpretation of this half form, I intended to highlight its construction and shape which were referenced from traditional Chinese visual culture.

I intentionally distorted the other half of the incense burner to be malformed. The shift reflected my cultural identity is in an uncertain place and is in a state of progress. During the making process, I deliberately organised the cross joints in an unplanned arrangement. The structure visually appeared to be destroyed by its own internal structure or some external power. My choice of sizes of these cross joints was varied and ranged from 4mm to 30mm. The whole piece dramatically shifted from a logical arrangement of half the form, to the other half which appeared disordered and chaotic, including the handle.

A unity was formed within the work by the use of structural wires that created a consistency between the two parts. However, an unsettled and uncomfortable feeling was created with the viewer as the piece could not sit comfortably on the centre of a showcase, it could only find a resting position at the edge of the display cabinet. By

building these similarities and differences within one form, the piece reflected the situation of my cultural identity, which is one of transformation from the old to the new.

The *Awkward Position* project expressed my endless negotiation with my traditional culture and other cultures I encountered as I travelled. When my original cultural roots or tradition were opened up to be translated, my intent was to represent this journey that merged references from traditional Chinese visual culture, my personal experiences and the influences of other cultures. In this translation, my cultural identity shifted from a known position of being a Chinese national to an unknown mixed position—the mixture of an 'in-between', or hybrid position, or something beyond both positions. I investigated this unknown and shifting position further in the next project, the *Bond* series.

Bond Series (2015-2016)

The *Bond* series was my exploration of relinking with my memories, cultural references and current life experience. The exercise of relinking allowed me to visualise my research to these ways of physical joining, not only using the cross joints from traditional Chinese architecture. It also enabled me to reinvestigate ways of joining in our daily life, such as sewing and stitching. By reconnecting different forms or shapes through varying ways of joining, I could approach a relinking of past and present, similarities and differences.

The *Bond* series included two projects: the *Seven Foot Male* project (see fig. 85), and the *Map* project. The *Seven Foot Male* project focused on the exploration of wooden frame joints, and the *Map* project focused on stitching as a way of jointing to reinterpret daily-used objects, such as traditional Chinese pottery. The series was not only drawn from traditional Chinese visual culture and related philosophy, but also incorporated the ambiguity of other cultural references.

Through the complex cultural negotiation of my global cultural situation, my original cultural references were open to translation. I would like to visualise this situation during the process of translation, such as deformation, mergence and reformation. My visual depiction of this situation in the jewellery-based objects reflected time, space and shifting during the process of translation of my original cultural roots. This translation is

never ending. My traditional cultural references persistently endowed me with knowledge, and also bonded with my personal experience to be recreated in my work.

During the negotiation of cultures, I not only bonded with my original cultural references with influences from other cultures, but also reconnected my memories of the past and present as well as shifting between locations.

Seven Foot Male Project

In the *Seven Foot Male* project, I shifted my research on the exploration of other wooden frame joints from traditional Chinese architecture. This exploration was not only an investigation of methods for jewellery-based objects fabrication, but also a tenacious reconnection of memories, places and cultures.

Making physical joints represented the symbolic meanings of joining these memories, places and cultures. When I faced this global cultural environment, new coincidences recalled past memories which stimulated me to re-join each fragment. Each interaction with other cultures referred me back to my deep childhood memories. By redefined meanings of the wooden frame joint, I use this traditional visual language to re-join my past memories and present experience of different places; thoughts that were influenced from China and Western countries that centred on memory and reality, self and environment, global and local. Joints reconnected each fragment of my memories. In this project, I introduced other joint structures from traditional Chinese architecture. By measuring, cutting and reconnecting, I used wood to reconstruct these connections. Each structure was systematically designed to fit with each other, without the assistance of glue or nails.

The reinterpretation of the traditional Chinese philosophy of the *Seven Foot Male* was an outcome resulting from the negotiation with my original culture and other cultures. In traditional Chinese culture, I am an adult male who should be responsible for my family, supporting parents and siblings. In the Western culture, it was different. An adult male is considered an individual. The dilemma of the role of an adult male in two different cultures forced me to rethink and challenge my Chinese ideas of what is the role for a grown-up man? I joined my personal experiences of this subject together to form a visual conversation in my practice-led research.

In the project, I made a ruler, then cut it up and used it to build a variety of different joints by hand. This deconstruction deliberately hid the original identity of a ruler so that the rearrangement of the parts into joints conveyed the message that I am not an original seven foot male anymore. The reconstruction of each joint built up a new structure and each joint was responsible for supporting others, which is similar to the structure of traditional Chinese architecture where the joints created a systematic order. The end result of this negotiation process between cultures is that I am a seven foot adult who is a responsible person, no matter how I am influenced by other cultures.

Mapping Project

The *Mapping* project was based on further research on joints. The exploration of wooden frame joints in the *Seven Foot Male* project considered those physical joints from traditional Chinese architecture. In the *Mapping* project, I broadened the meaning of joint and expanded the ways that I could link or re-connect parts together. The symbolic meaning of joining parts allowed me to re-join my past memories and current cultural influences.

The idea of re-joining or re-connection stimulated me to research further other link or joint methods (see fig. 86a-b). I began to really focus on joints and realized that they are so important in my life. When my grandmother gave me a pair of inner soles or shoe pads during my return home for the 2016 Chinese New Year, I could not believe the insole was made by a 90-year-old lady who spent her spare time stitching fabric and hard paper together to create these inner soles for each for her sons and grandsons. The two sides of the insole were tied with two threads to create a complete entity which seemed to symbolise that all the members of a family are part of a unit. My grandmother stitched all her wishes into each thread and I would feel these special thoughts when I wear these inner soles. The action of stitching or tying offered me the idea of bonding my fragmented memories and traveling life together as a single idea. As a foreigner, the tension and dislocation of living in a foreign environment may reveal some connecting threads which appear unrelated.

Further Research on Joints

I researched different ways of constructing joints using diverse materials and shapes. Initially, with the wooden frame joints as a reference, I recut different shapes of milk powder 'jade' sheet. Each cut-out was so fragile that I could feel those unlinked memories of my mind; then all those cut-outs were placed in a new order by inserting, fitting, drilling and stitching to create a new memory (see fig. 87).

During my research of the jade collections of museums in China, I was fascinated by the linkage method used in the Jade Burial Suit (see fig. 88) constructed during the Western Han dynasty. The Han dynasty is an extremely superstitious period in Chinese history; people believed that jade could protect the body of immortals. In order to keep the body and spirit immortal, each emperor spent a lot of their budget and labour on making jade accessories, especially jade burial suits that served as body clothes after the emperor's death.

In this burial suit, each piece of jade was selected and cut into different geometric shapes, such as squares, rectangles and triangles. The thickness of each jade piece was around two to thirty five millimetres. By drilling holes on the four corners, each piece of jade was joined with the other using pure gold wires, pure silver wires and copper wires that signified the different hierarchical levels of aristocrats. This unique way of linking and twisting reunited all the jade parts to create a burial suit that functioned as a protection for the body and spirit. I intended to explore this method of linking fragments to create forms.

The *Mapping* project was an articulation of processes. I made different sheets of this jade like material that I made from milk powder and other materials. Through either engraving by using a later cutting machine or by hand, I cut these sheets into square, triangle and other shapes according to my designs. Each square shape was around 7 millimetres or less in size. I arranged these shapes and joined them together to create forms by drilling holes on each side of each shape and stitching them together.

Project Making

The *Mapping* project included two pieces, the *Jar*? and the *Mei (Prunus Vase) ?*. The project was a continuation of my research into traditional Chinese pottery and porcelain

hollowware from the *Awkward Position* project. Instead of using a sheet of cross joints to make tableware, I used a sheet of milk powder material to create jewellery-based objects. I considered weight and colour when I switched from metals to the milk powder material.

In the *Mapping* project, one of my aims was to reinterpret these farming tools from the Chinese traditional visual culture. Using the forms of Chinese ancient pottery, I reconstructed different vase forms by joining square shapes. Each piece was a hollowed form. I did not directly use porcelain or clay as materials. Instead, I used a mix of contemporary material that I had invented to reinterpret the traditional Chinese vase forms.

I only used traditional Chinese vase forms as references rather than exactly copying the traditional Chinese vase forms. I intended to present a situation of shifting where the vase forms were deformed and they were waiting to be transformed into something else. As cultural identity is always in the process of change and is temporary, I proposed to create this situation in my work. In this case, I intended to title each piece with question mark. Each title gave reviewers an idea of forms that referenced from traditional Chinese vase forms but changed into something else. In the *Jar?* (see fig. 89, 90, 91), I copied a traditional lip form of an earthenware jar (see fig. 92) from four thousands year ago. The body form of the *Jar?* was deformed and created an ambiguous form. I laser engraved Cloud patterns on the *Jar?* as a reference to ancient jars that were usually depicted with these cloud like patterns.

Cultural identity is also individual, involved with a personal interpretation of life experiences. In the *Meiping (Prunus Vase)?*, I laser engraved a Chinese map (see fig. 93) onto the milk powder material and created the *Meiping (Prunus Vase)?* by arranging each shape systematically according to the map. The *Meiping (Prunus Vase)?* is a classic Chinese shape and is tall and elegant (see fig. 94). It was used to hold water and fresh flowers. After I completed the piece, I highlighted these lines with acrylic paint and especially highlighted a tiny area of my home city.

In the *Mapping* project, I also created different shapes and colours through a continual repetition of making. I employed these differences to reflect that cultural identity is an articulation of cultural difference. In the *Meiping (Prunus Vase)?* (see fig. 95, 96), I made different shapes of each element when I joined them together. There was a

gradual change of colour from green to white/yellow. All shapes were joined together by using thin metal wire and they were accumulated and rearranged to a new form.

Through an exploration of the *Bond* series, I addressed the idea that cultural identity is temporal and individual. I engaged the object making with my personal life experience coupled with the reinterpretation of traditional Chinese pottery forms. These forms shifted into ambiguous shapes and built up a deformed form that reflected on the theory that cultural identity is always in the process of evolving.

I also investigated various ways of bonding in the *Bond* series. I continued to search for other joints that are referenced from traditional Chinese architecture, which created the *Seven Foot Male* project. The reference of the linking method evident in the jade burial suit allowed me to bond milk powder material together in the *Mapping* project. I plan to explore different ways of linking and bonding in my object making in the future.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the development of object making by exploring different ways of bonding, joining and linking. This enabled me to reconnect fragments of memories, negotiations of cultures and reinterpretations of tradition.

In reconnecting fragments of memories I continued to develop the possibilities of cross joints in the *Beyond* series. In the series, the *Mutualism* project, I reconstructed references from the *In Between* series and the *Surface Identity* series with an emphasis of geometric forms from traditional Chinese architecture. These references such as the forms of the Chinese lotus and the bark, were joined together as fragments of my past memories, and memories gathered during my life experiences overseas. By using different sizes of wire construction, I intended to create diverse and complicated compositions in this project that reflected an accumulation of cultural difference and complexity.

The negotiation between cultures has endowed me with different cultural references. My cultural identity has gone through a process of continual evolution and change. This cultural position has enabled me to create the *Awkward Position* project that reflected my current uncertain position of cultural identity. Reflecting on my own cultural

situation, processes of making and the work of others enabled me to construct changed, deformed and temporal forms through my object making. This exploration benefited from the analysis of other artists' work, such as the works of Livia Marin and Li Xiaofeng.

Central to this chapter was the reinterpretation of tradition. Referenced from my original culture, I analysed Chinese traditional daily-used potteries by exploring these classical shapes and patterns both in the *Beyond* and *Bond* series. These shapes and patterns were addressed in my work, but are the embodiment of the shapes in a process of translation.

Fig. 79. Stoneware: Incense Burner in Archaic *Gui* Form.

Fig. 81. Livia Marin, *Nomad Patterns No.19.*

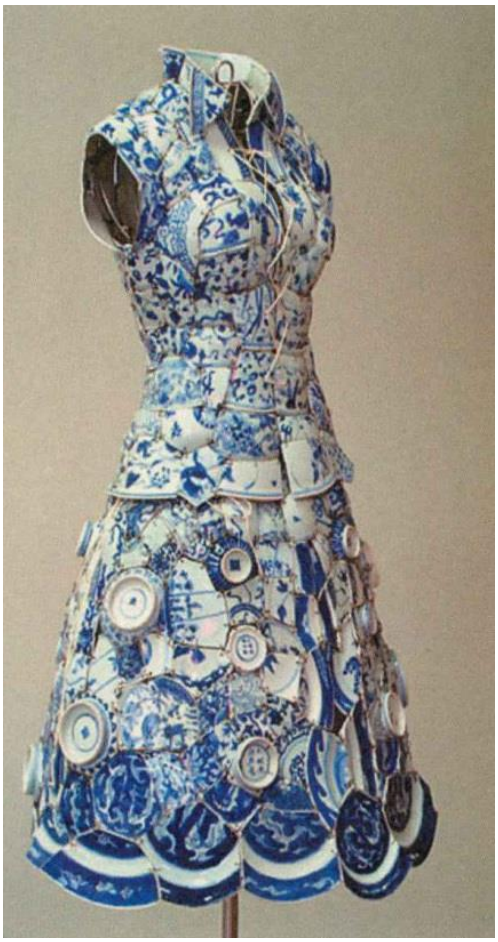


Fig. 80. Li Xiaofeng, *A Blue Porcelain Dress.*

Fig. 82. Bifei Cao, *Mutualism* project: *Consistence.*

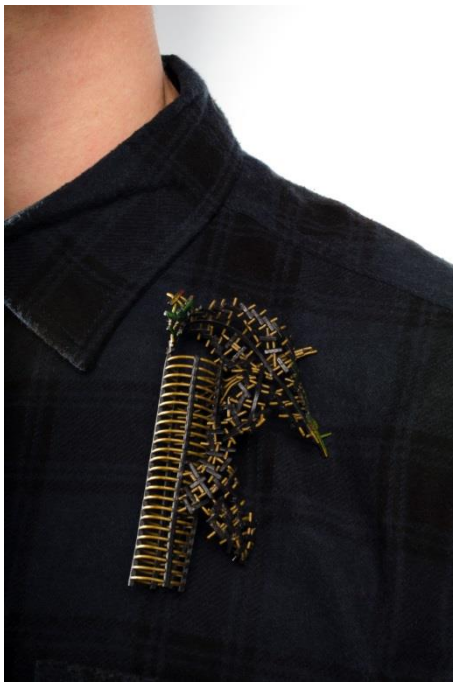
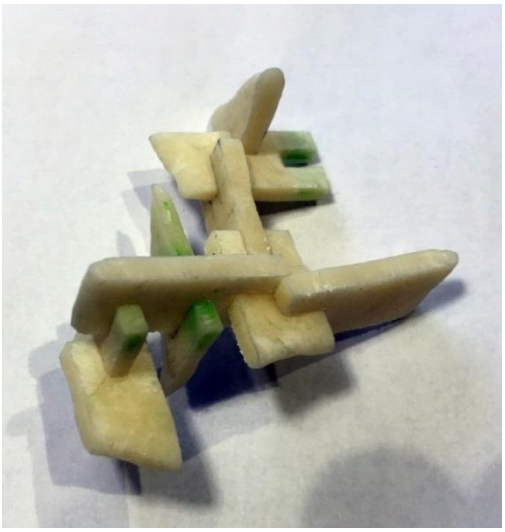


Fig. 83. Bifei Cao, *Mutualism* project: *Growing*.

Fig. 84. Bifei Cao, *Awkward Position* project.

Fig. 85. Bifei Cao, *Seven Foot Male* project.



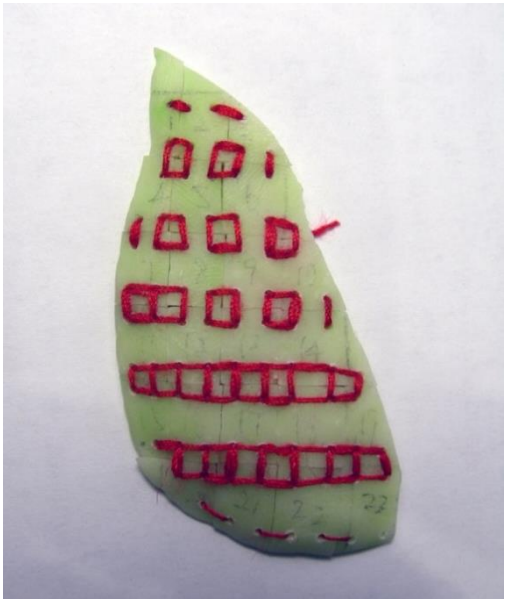


Fig. 86a-b. Experiment of methods of joining.

Fig. 87. Experiment of different linking ways.

Fig. 88. A Jade Burial Suit of Western Han dynasty in the Nanjing Museum, Nanjing, China.

Fig. 89. Bifei Cao,
Mapping project: *Jar?*.

Fig. 90. Bifei Cao, A detail of the *Jar?*.

Fig. 91. Bifei Cao, A detail ofthe *Jar?*.

Fig. 92. Earthenware jar painted with white and brown geometric patterns.

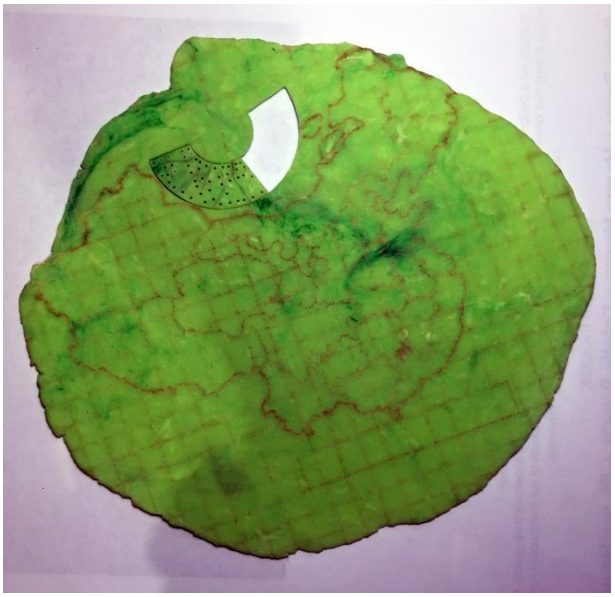


Fig. 93. The Chinese map on the milk powder material.

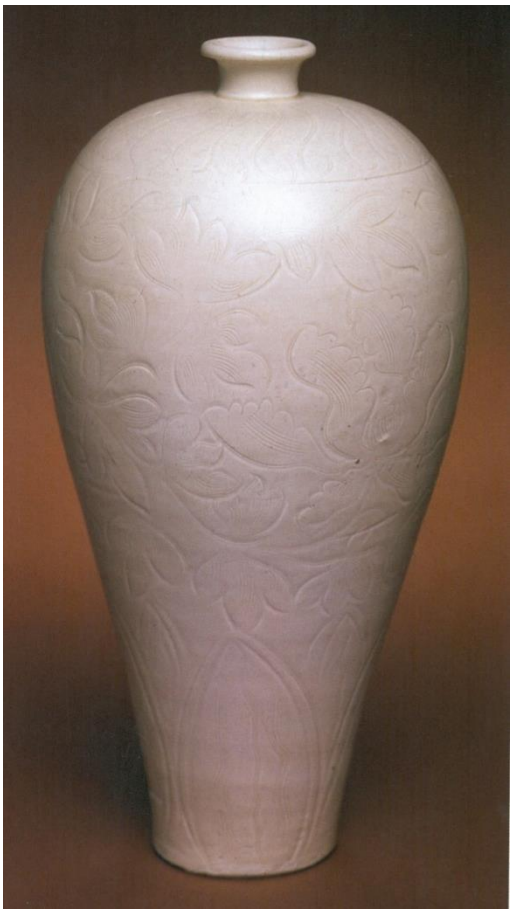


Fig. 94. Traditional classic *Meiping* (Prunus Vase).

Fig. 95. Bifei Cao, *Mapping* project: *Meiping (Prunus Vase)?*.

Fig. 96. Bifei Cao, Details of the *Meiping (Prunus Vase)?*.

Conclusion

I commenced my research by investigating how jewellery-based object making could be linked with an investigation of my cultural identity. This practice-led inquiry in the field of contemporary jewellery and metalsmithing is framed by theories of identity that emerge from cultural studies, in particular the writings of Homi K. Bhabha, Gordon Mathews and Stuart Hall. Central to this inquiry was the desire to answer a core question: what are the possible outcomes of object making that may reflect negotiations of my original culture with that of other cultural references when locating my cultural identity in the global cultural environment? This cross-disciplinary approach allowed me to consider how my identity was shaped through exposure to a variety of different cultures and locations whilst travelling in a global environment. Through research, experimentation and practice, I have developed a body of work that reflects a model of identity that is unfixed and is changing through negotiation with a range of cultures.

The first outcome of my object making enabled me to understand more deeply traditional Chinese visual culture and philosophies through these negotiations of cultures. I used my own experience as the basis for investigating my cultural identity in the exploration of this core research question. By reinterpreting traditional Chinese visual culture and philosophies, I was able to focus on my cultural roots as the foundation for my negotiation with other cultures as discussed in the first chapter.

Another outcome of my object making revealed my cultural identity in an unfixed position, or one that is going through a transformation process through cultural negotiations. In Chapter Two, I re-examined my original cultural references in relation to my new experience of Australian culture through placing my cultural identity as a state of being in between two cultures. My fieldtrip to Europe, discussed in Chapter Three, addresses a more complex cultural negotiation. As a Chinese metalsmith and maker who has worked in the United States but is studying in Australia and Europe with occasional visits back to China, this experience reinforced my feeling that my identity is unfixed or fluid. This offered me a good understanding of notions like surface identity, global identity and hybridity as discussed by Homi K. Bhabha. Thinking of my identity as something in flux allowed me to think of cultural identity as a sort of spectrum that allowed me to experience myself as having both a particular identity as a Chinese man, and also to be able to choose aspects of my identity from what Hall has called the global

"cultural supermarket." [74] As discussed in Chapter Four, this endless process of cultural negotiation has also allowed me to place my cultural identity in a fluid position and allowed me to think beyond these limitations of a single cultural identity.

I have encountered several challenges in undertaking this research. Research on Chinese traditional visual culture was a challenge as I was conducting my project outside China. Fortunately, I was able to use part of my annual leave to remotely research Chinese traditional architecture and jade collections, as well as undertake fieldwork research on both Chinese visual art and jade collections in British museums and culturally-related research of European contemporary jewellery. The second challenge I faced was how to work intuitively in the workshop whilst also considering the cultural theoretical aspects of my project, especially whilst debating how to locate cultural identity within the current situation of globalism and multi-culturalism. However, this theoretical research has guided my practical object making by helping me to analyse and recognise, consciously and unconsciously, each development of my jewellery-based object making.

The original aspects of my research lay firstly in being able to establish an experimental system to reinterpret my traditional Chinese visual culture through cultural negotiations by creating jewellery-based objects. Secondly, I intended to use tradition to combine with my current cultural experiences in order to comment on contemporary society. My intension was evident in an innovative use of cross joints from traditional Chinese architecture, and a reinterpretation of the traditional joining methods used in the jade burial suit. I brought these traditions to the fore in our contemporary jewellery making. My research has given new insights into some of the processes and techniques used for object and jewellery makers in the field of contemporary jewellery and metalsmithing.

Through the experimental system of object making, I reinterpreted my traditional Chinese visual culture with other currently experienced cultural influences. After researching structure, form, and the related philosophy in traditional Chinese architecture and other traditional Chinese visual culture, I fused them with my childhood memories to create the *Something Underneath* series at the beginning of my practice-led research. This series explored patterns and symbols, and structure, form and material evident in Chinese culture. This exploration enabled me to answer the two detailed research questions of how to reinterpret this tradition of cultural heritage through jewellery-based object making, and how I could draw reference from this

[74] Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," 622.

heritage and its materials, forms and related traditional philosophies. The incorporation of references from Chinese traditional visual culture established the foundation for my research.

My early reinterpretation of traditional Chinese visual culture led me to investigate the traditional wooden frame joints used in Chinese architecture and these became an important element in my work, allowing me to explore ideas about tradition. I investigated different joint construction in the *Joints Experiment* and *Miniature* project. Based on the two projects, I concentrated on the exploration of one joint—the cross joint. The cross joint became a way of construction in my making. It became a metaphor for joined places, and memories of my life experience. I successfully created different sheets incorporating the cross joints and used them to construct three-dimensional forms in the *Combination Experiment* project. Using the cultural interactions between my original Chinese culture and the cultural influence from my host country Australia, I recognised interactions between places and cultures in the *Combination Experiment* project.

This project extended the cross joint to work as both a way of construction and a cultural reference. By using cross joints to create forms, I merged the two cultural references together through the negotiation of my original culture and my host Australian culture. By creating a meeting point between two cultures, I considered my cultural identity to be a form of duality, of being 'in between' and occupying a borderline. I created a series of objects that reflected this position, found in the *Duality*, *In Between* and *Borderline* series. The *In Between* series succeeded in combining local bark forms with Chinese lotus forms to create different jewellery-based objects by using cross joints. This series of work also answered the complex research question of how this shifting of places affected my thinking and making of jewellery-based objects. The *Borderline* series created architectural forms that refer to architectural references and provide a contrast with plant forms. This series extended the possibilities for the exploration of cross joints and revealed the complex negotiation between cultures.

My fieldwork research trip to the Netherlands opened up a complicated negotiation between my original culture and different cultures in the hybrid environment of an international cultural location in Amsterdam. The potential of the cross joint continued to work as a way of construction in the *Surface Identity* series. I became immersed in the culture of Amsterdam, and I also made a short trip to China visiting symbolic places

from my past memories. These unresolved cultural conflicts and interactions were a meaningful part of my work in both the *Global Identity* series and the *Hybridity* series. Both series successfully investigated a combination of coins from different countries and an imitation jade made using milk powder. They also mixed symbols or materials to create objects, and materials that reflected a hybrid identity. These works were made in response to the milk powder scandal in China and the subsequent demand among mainland Chinese people for milk powder from the West. During this period, milk powder was valued as highly as jade. By using the milk powder material to imitate traditional Chinese jade I proposed to use tradition to comment on contemporary society. I reinterpreted traditional Chinese patterns and jade shapes in the *Hybridity* series. The series aimed to place my cultural identity in a hybrid space that reflects the way in which identity involves the endless negotiation of cultures.

My narrative exploration of object making allowed a rich exploration of my cultural identity. As cultural identity is always unstable, and changeable, through the endless negotiation of cultures, this situation allowed my earlier fixed feelings to change and shift to a new unknown position. This unknown situation also inspired me to create a large object beyond a jewellery-based object, part of the *Awkward Position* project. The cross joint sheets I used gradually assumed metaphoric complexity in the last body of work where they were able to imitate the cracks in the glaze of the ceramic vessel I used as a reference point.

Via these negotiations between my traditions with current cultural references, my PhD research involved combining historical Chinese construction methods and contemporary symbolism with my own narratives. This new and unknown position in relation to my identity led to a desire to build up a deep connection between cultures, memories and experiences that was translated into a visual dialogue in my object making through using processes such as bonding, joining, linking and stitching. In the *Bond* series, I changed my technique to a joining method, one that had been used to create a traditional jade burial suit, as the construction method for the final body of work for the graduate exhibition.

The strategy for the ANU Graduate Exhibition was to present a diverse body of work based on the negotiations between my traditional Chinese culture with contemporary global references. These negotiations were explored from Chapter One through to Chapter Four where a shifting of cultural identity was revealed through a

reinterpretation of Chinese traditional visual culture. This cultural shift created a form of duality; a feeling of being ‘in between’ and occupying a borderline, a hybrid or a third space that generated an unstable and changeable situation. The arrangement or grouping of display tables in my Graduate Exhibition was intended to create a chronological record of my journey through my PhD research and reflects the impact of global influences on traditional cultural values. The tables were arranged so that each one was slightly angled, each corner connected with the next table and reflected the influence other cultural and international references have had on my thinking, research and jewellery construction. Visually the group of intersecting tables and the jewellery displayed reflected the impact other cultures have had on my thinking and object making.

In conclusion, my research has broadened the understanding of cultural identity in this area of visual practice when locating my cultural identity through object making. Throughout the research project, I have examined the location of my cultural identity by creating jewellery-based objects. The outcomes of my research have attempted to reinterpret traditional techniques and bring them to the fore in our contemporary making. By working between references of cultures, such as material and forms, objects and images, I have developed a body of work which reveals these interactions through my life journey through locations, memories and experiences. The continuing research in reworking ancient Chinese crafts and techniques, and their cultural references, will help me to contribute my knowledge to the contemporary jewellery and metal field.

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