

Light on our future steps

Interview with Zhang Xiaotao

Cecilia Freschini

Cecilia Freschini: The Sakya project is a very complex task you have choose to keep on... Both for technological and human skills... Probably the heaviest one you had dealt with recently... Right?

Zhang Xiaotao: The *Sakya* project is a fusion of Tibetology, Tibetan Buddhism, archaeology, digital technology and new media language. The project comprises two parts, a documentary and an animated film. Since its inception in 2007 to its production in 2010, it has been quite difficult both financially and technically, but I was quite happy to take on the complex challenge of a “virtual art project.” For me, it’s like a breakthrough. The preparatory period was very long and involved a massive amount of time and effort. I wanted to discard with the conceptualized production model of contemporary art. Completion of these two films was sure to be a long process; it is the fusion of technology and concept, and touches on new fields of study. It required a slow process of practice and learning, but I believe that “true knowledge only comes through great difficulty”.

Freschini: Sure. I completely understand that in terms of time, budgets, technical equipment and staffs it has costs a lot, but also concerning your person, I believe that physically and psychologically it has costs a lot to your self... What brings you and helps you to deal with this till the end?

Zhang: I never count the costs of the project. Whether it’s in terms of time, effort or money, I don’t mind spending it. Passion is the greatest teacher, the greatest motivator. The production of an experimental animation and a documentary are team efforts that require systemic management and practices. Contemporary art is the production of knowledge, and the artist is the producer of images. I’m more concerned with the knowledge system behind the image. Artworks are the encoding and transcendence of the scene, history and the soul, and art is the torch we use to illuminate the long dark night that is the future. I hope to always have this warm power in the heart.

Freschini: Yes, nowadays the mystic factor is underestimated, but I do agree that is an essential part of ourselves that we have to learn to face with. Especially in art field, the transcendental is in fact very related with the substance of the artwork. You had a really strong intention and this project, obviously means a lot to you not just as an artist but for sure also as a person... Can you describe how this project born up and which feeling drive you into it?

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Zhang: This determination is possibly rooted in the traditional education I received as a child. Learning things like calligraphy and martial arts require a long, slow process of practice and learning. Skills must be cultivated. There is an ancient Chinese parable about how a drop of water can penetrate stone. I think that drops can accumulate to the point that they can change the future. Perseverance is very important. Since I was a child, I was always taught that “perseverance is victory.” The *Sakya* project is a “virtual art project” that went through several key stages: 1, in 2007 I went to Tibet for a month to investigate the Sakya Monastery, and I shot a large amount of footage; 2, in 2008 I started developing the concept for *Sakya*, collecting materials, writing the script and systematically reading up on Tibetology, Archaeology and Buddhism; 3, in 2010 I brought a team to Tibet to film the *Sakya* documentary and brought a team together to begin production of the *Sakya* animated film. I completed the *Sakya* documentary and animated film between 2010 and August 2011.

My decision to do this project was connected to the Buddhist influence in my life since I was a child. Childhood influence is a seed, and when you grow up, it will surely flower and produce fruit. I was deeply moved when I went to the Dunhuang Grottoes for the first time in 1993, to the point that I lacked the language to express it. Art created under the power of great belief and spirit is timeless. I’ve always been obsessed with ancient Chinese artistic stone carving, portrait tablets, woodcarving, ceramics and the like. I’ve always been very curious about this thread. Artists should have a place in their hearts for religion. Art is the artist’s personal religion, and the job of the artist is to follow the path of transcendence. Buddhism began its spread into China during the Han dynasty, and brought massive changes to Chinese history and the progression of culture and society. I’m very curious about the history of Tibetan Buddhism, with its fusion of religion and politics during the Yuan dynasty. I want to know about the situation of Tibetan Buddhism today. I want to unlock those secrets from within Sakya Monastery. It’s all rooted in curiosity.

Freschini: What was your first intention when you start and which considerations when you end it up with this project?

Zhang: My original idea was to fuse animation and documentary film. I’m interested in the intersection of experimental animation and cinematic language. Now I’ve nearly completed this project, and I have quite a few regrets; it was difficult to fuse the team and the technique, it was difficult to fuse the languages of animation and cinema, and so in the end I decided to split the two films apart. The animated film is about the virtual world and the documentary is a real world. Five virtual people pass through the same tunnel through time and space, entering into a multidimensional, game like world. The film is in the editing and postproduction process now, as is the sound. I hope for *Sakya* to transcend *Mist*, my previous animated film. I want for it to make breakthroughs in terms of language, technique, aesthetics and conceptual expression. Experimental animation is very technical, and it is difficult to make any breakthroughs. Experimental animation is also full of regret. I want to find a new path through trial and error.

Every time I finish a project I gain a lot of knowledge and experience. This will be valuable as a reference for the future.

Freschini: In these three years, thinking and discussion on the history and secularization of Tibetan Buddhism have been evolved... you decided to use Sakya as a model for your project... why? Can you introduce a little Sakya Monastery, his importance and his historical role in the Tibetan Buddhism culture?

Zhang: The Sakya sect was established in the 11th century by Khon Konchog Gyalpo in the 11th century, and spread by his grandson, Kunga Nyingpo. There were five leaders of the Sakya sect beginning with Kunga Nyingpo, and they became known as the “Five Venerable Supreme Masters.” Outside of Kunga Nyingpo, the most famous masters were the fourth one, Sakya Pandita, and the fifth one, Chogyal Pakpa (born Drogon Chogyal, responsible for converting Kublai Khan to Buddhism and named the Priest-King of Tibet under the Mongols). With the support of the Yuan dynasty government, the Sakya sect came to rule all of Tibet, setting the precedent of theocratic rule in Tibet. The head of the sect was often not a monk but a hereditary ruler. In the later history of the sect, one of the most famous masters was Rendawa Shyongnu Lodro, who was the most important teacher of Je Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect. Tsongkhapa’s famous Migtsema Prayer was originally composed as a prayer to Rendawa. When Yuan rule spread into the Central Plains of China in the 13th century, the Sakya sect gained immense political power. The fourth Sakya leader Pandita and the fifth Sakya leader Pakpa both made great contributions to the solidification of Yuan rule. Pakpa was named the Imperial Preceptor by Kublai Khan, and he invented the “Pakpa Script.” This new Mongolian script was used throughout Mongolia and played a large role in the progress of Mongolian society and culture.

The Sakya Monastery is not only the founding temple of the Sakya sect; it is also highly revered by all sect members and across Tibetan society. It has a rich cultural atmosphere and is famous throughout the world. It served as the seat of a theocratic regime that ruled Tibet for a time. The temple has over 900 years of history, including roughly 70 years as the seat of Tibetan political power. The complex is home to a rich collection of Tibetan texts and cultural relics, most famously religious sutras. The Sakya texts are collected in three places, the *Utse* hall of the north temple, the library of the *Gurong* hall and the main hall of the southern temple, with a combined total of roughly 24,000 texts. The *Utse* hall was the earliest library at Sakya, and was said to be already full of books before the time of Pakpa, who also brought in a few precious texts. Aside from the large number of handwritten Tibetan texts, the hall also contains many Sanskrit palm leaf sutras and Chinese scroll sutras. All of these texts are exquisitely handwritten in gold, silver, cinnabar or ink. For this reason, some scholars believe that the scripts and frescoes of the temple are comparable in beauty to the Mogao grottoes at Dunhuang, and call it the “second Dunhuang.” Aside from these three main libraries, there are many handwritten manuscripts to be found in the smaller shrines and the two remaining palaces.

Sakya County covers 7510 square kilometers and has a population of 45,019. The Sakya Monastery is a holy place for the Sakya sect. The north temple was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution, and the south temple has been renovated many times. The monastery hosts many religious gatherings of various sizes every year, the largest being the Vajra Dances held in summer and winter. The summer Vajra dance is held each year in the

seventh month of the Tibetan calendar and the winter dance is held on the 29th day of the eleventh month. When the dance is performed, the dancers wear masks of the Sakya Dharmapala (protector spirits) and various beasts. The dances use simple narratives to visually reflect the basic processes of esoteric exorcism. During these two major gatherings, thousands of monks and common people gather in Sakya from far and wide to pray for peace and prosperity.

Freschini: Sakya animation analyze the paradox between the religious world, the transcendental matter and the materialized reality, how do you personally deal with this comparison, how do these two worlds face each other in your daily life?

Zhang: In the *Sakya* animated film, I focus on a certain paradox between the spiritual world of Buddhism and the real world. I hope to present this contradiction and isolation between the material and the spiritual. The documentary looks at things entirely from the perspective of the archaeologist, while in the animated film, the encounters of the characters in the labyrinth have a kind of prophetic tone with some game elements. I didn't think about this much before, but when the animated film reached this point, I suddenly became aware of some contradictory encounters between the real and virtual worlds. I think it's mainly an issue of comparison, and there are multiple narrative spaces, for instance the comparison between the primary school and the monastery, comparisons between the souvenir market and the monastery, comparisons between rapid urbanization and the natural landscape, etc. Spectacles such as the square in front of Lhasa's Jokhang Temple are all there. Here, the relationship between secular society and faith becomes quite clear and substantial. This plays out in the opening of the documentary. It is very tense.

The artist must have a persistent, pious devotion to the sacred and must also draw from secular life. Art is like personal cultivation, but this cultivation takes place in the secular world. It is very difficult to separate the two. I try to find a channel between the two, a connection between the secular and the sacred. I have many friends who have converted to Buddhism, and religion becomes an important part of their lives. In 2009 I went with a friend to stay at Guoqing Temple on Mt. Tiantai for ten days, where we chatted with the abbot, watched the scenery, wrote calligraphy, read and painted. A tranquil life is very important. It is difficult to have an opportunity to cultivate the heart and mind. Today's China is too fast, too crazy. Slowness is a luxury. The meditative state is great. We really need this tranquil way of life.

Freschini: When you first introduced this project to me you said that the artist's identity has gone while the works presented expansive visual and culture-oriented research... Of course this subject deeply affect our inner self ..

Zhang: The *Sakya* project is a cross-discipline, cross-media visual cultural research project, one that looks especially at the issue of the secularization of religion from the intersection of Tibetology, archaeology, anthropology, Buddhism, regional politics and other fields. This knowledge surpasses the boundaries of the artist. I have been working together with archaeologists Zhang Jianlin and Xu Tianjin for many years now, and there are many things that require new knowledge backgrounds, such as the management and operations of the documentary and animation teams. This is a test of an artist and his techniques, marked by: 1, cross-discipline and cross media teams; 2, advanced digital teams; and 3, a systematic, intense and highly effective management team that can complete a relatively whole, independent and creative digital art project or artwork.

Freschini: The animation language of *Sakya* was inclined to the characteristics of both 'Eastern Mystery' and 'Deconstructivism'... What do you mean with this two words?

Zhang: In 1996 I read a book entitled *Jung's Psychology and Tibetan Buddhism*, published in China by the Sanlian Bookstore. I've always been curious about the relationship between the world of mysticism and things like science and rational psychoanalysis. The concept of the alchemist has always hovered in my memory, and the artist is actually a cultural alchemist, while art is the gold in the artist's heart. This book is an analytical spiritual comparison of eastern and western mysticism and rational science. "Eastern mysticism" is the mysterious, desolate and vibrant side of the Tibetan natural world that I had always wanted to express in the *Sakya* animated film. The snowy plateau and the air of Tibetan Buddhist mysticism are enchanting, and this is a tone I set for the film. As for "deconstructionism," my hope when I made the film is that I could use some virtual elements to deconstruct some of our set views on the plateau and Tibetan religion, so I incorporated a lot of elements such as mandalas, mudra hand positions, stars, human organs, maps and digital cities, which become new visual channels that can inspire our reading of the relationships between classical civilizations and modern civilizations. I'm more concerned with the construction that takes place after deconstruction, which is like the rearrangement of numbers; it is a very concrete task, one which virtually unfolds within contradiction, almost simultaneous with the act of deconstruction. Deconstruction and construction are merely different perspectives, all in hope of opening up a different channel.

Freschini: This work of yours easily appear as visual and mental travel... Where you are not going to guide the viewers to a specific land.. You just give them some suggestions, the path to follow... Each person are free to follow his heart in this adventure... But there is anything you really mean to make them discover about?

Zhang: I hope that my artwork is a journey for the viewer, one beset by uncertainty, full of a sense of surprise and fear like creeping through the dark of night. At the end of the animated film, I sent five characters through a mandala, which is an allegory for multiple dimensions, like the different encounters and conclusions of people within the same time channel in the film *Inception*. It's not just about psychology but also about a multiple world of reality, history and the virtual. It requires the artist to ponder and discover. I am also making discoveries. The artist is not the provider of answers but the provider of space for imagination and thinking. If I look at things from the perspective of a Buddhist,

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then it will present a different spectacle. We need observations and thinking from different dimensions; this is in line with the thinking of each viewer. I don't wish to provide a standard answer in the film but an open-ended conclusion, so that the thoughts of the artist and the viewers become an extension of this open-ended conclusion.

Freschini: The history of Western art comes out of a Judaeo-Christian legacy and for centuries the relationship between religion and art was very close. It is only in fairly recent times, since the beginning of modernism and the advent of contemporary art, that the two have been considered apart. But, what's happen here in China? In the west, the connection between art and religion was so strong and important because politic was very closed and involved in this relation as well.

Zhang: In college I studied western oil painting. My formative education actually came from the western Christian traditions of devotional painting. The history of Christianity is a microcosm of western art history. The continuation of devotional painting is a great tradition; during the period of classical civilization, religion and art were fused together. The concepts of patrons and sponsors in China and Europe were quite similar. When Buddhism spread to China during the Han dynasty, the secularization movement of Buddhism had a profound impact on Chinese culture. This was especially the case with Buddhist art, which produced important works of art in different historical periods in China. Buddhist art is a peak in art history. In the time of ancient society, faith and art were fused together. The Medici family's support of the Sistine Chapel ceiling fresco, China's Dunhuang Grottoes, Yungangling Grottoes, Longmen Grottoes and Maijishan Grottoes are all cases of art and religion's involvement in politics. The construction of religious facilities at important ancient Chinese temples and Zen monasteries were mostly supported by the imperial family, and became imperial religious facilities. I think that on this point, the sense of sacredness and universal values were quite comparable among the classical arts of both East and West. In today's China, religious faith is free and politics and religion are separate. Religion is more on the level of the cultural and spiritual, and the greatest assault against religion now is faith in the material. This is not only the case for the Tibetans; it is even more evident among the Han Chinese. The decline of education, the collapse of humanism, these are the negative effects of China's social development over the last three decades. We are a speeding train that cannot stop. We are worried because we don't know where this train will go. Is it safe? Will it derail?

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Freschini: Here, politic and religion never have been so deeply linked together each others... As you said there was a connection between Buddhism Art and Imperial family... but lots of this have been damaged because of the time and canceled, removed by human actions, the cultural revolution, ... Perhaps there is something invisible inside Chinese people, a spiritual inner still alive and able to rebuilt a sacred path. What is your personal story? How can you see evolving this relation ship between art and religion in your Country?

Zhang: There are some great artworks among the frescoes and carvings of ancient Chinese temples. They were made at the time by artisans. In classical Chinese art history, religion, politics and art were fused together, as you can see with the imperial tombs, temples, Daoist shrines and cliff carvings. These were all contained within everyday life. This thread was an independent system from our ink wash painting and literati painting. In the past, it was classified as folk art, but this classification is problematic. Among ancient Chinese art education, there was so much folk art outside of the mainstream that was really great. For instance, woodcut printing was used quite early on in Buddhist sutras, and the illustrations and texts of these sutras were spread among millions of believers, from the mouth straight to the heart. This knowledge sparked wisdom among the masses. Western Christianity also has a concept of “the spirit becoming flesh.” I think these influences continue to this day, hidden, concealed within our blood.

I agree with what you say about Chinese people having a spiritual tradition concealed inside them, but concern for the current world and for family bonds win out over the passage of spiritual traditions. The question of how to reconstruct our inner world of faith is a massive topic, but my hope for the *Sakya* project is to construct a dialogue between Tibetan Buddhism, archaeology, anthropology and new media technology. Personal religion and Buddhism are two different things, but we will use artistic methods to focus on society, to intervene in society and to give back to society. Income from the sales of the *Sakya* catalogue and some related products will be donated to impoverished schools in Tibet. I've gotten help from Gade, the Tibetan curator. He is full of passion, friendliness and kindness, and he did a lot to aid the completion of this film. Through such practices we will begin to give back to society, to gain an understanding of the wisdom and enlightenment of the Buddha. The light of Buddha shines on the hearts of all people. This is a cycle and a practice. It is like there is a channel and a connection between art, society and religion. Through this method we can make a difference in a small way.

Freschini: Recently, during your staying in Italy we had a small talk about the situation in Italy, where religion is still very present and powerful, this brings you to some reflections and considerations. You told me that this experience make you understand more and better lots of things, not just concerning Italy and its religious behavior but also about your believes and notions about Buddhism....

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Zhang: Let's discuss this as it relates to the "perspective of the outsider." I look at Italy from the outsider's perspective. When I was in Italy, I visited the Illy Coffee Factory, a winery and a clock factory. They placed great importance on the preservation of traditional craftsmanship. In addition, I spent a great deal of time at some less-developed small towns visiting archaeological sites, ruins and churches. They all implied certain historical and cultural information. The humanist sentiment reflected in these historical sites surpassed my preconceived impressions of Italy – my impressions of those fashion capitals of Rome and Milan. The survival of these sites has allowed people to gain an everyday, microscopic understanding of ancient urban culture. The material development of Chinese society today is closing the gap with the West. They are already very close, but this is just a reflection of the material level. The real gap is embodied in the spiritual and cultural character of the people, as well as the social system. Art is an important channel for observing society and people.

The exhibition will take place this September. I am planning to approach it from a comparison between Catholicism and Chinese Buddhism. For the opening of the new *Sakya* animated film, I used a mudra. Some people might not understand this use of a mudra in the opening. They may think that the hand positions are sign language, without realizing how much indescribable meaning is found within them. At the upcoming group exhibition I will project mudras into the space of a church. It will be a dialogue about religion. Mudras represent the spiritual world of Buddhism, while the church space is full of solemnity and grandeur. The two of them will engage in a dialogue and meditation on the different religions. I hope I can take both the Chinese and Italian perspectives, and through them find a different point of entry. Art can traverse history and reality. The religious connections I focus on are a perspective. It's not really such a grand one, just a reading of the individualization of religion, but I hope it can become a fresh look and gaze at different historical dimensions. For every film I make, I engage in close observations and thinking about all of the footage, and then extract from this analyzed footage. The thought and practice processes are very important to me.

I've discovered that religious life is a part of everyday life in Italy. We went to Bolzano in northern Italy, which is situated on the border between Italy, Switzerland and Austria [not Germany **note: actually Bolzano borders with Switzerland and Austria no Germany.**] The people there are German-speaking Italians and the churches are built in the Gothic style. There is a clear sense of cultural hybridization. Churches are carriers for the architecture, culture and arts of different historical periods. The religious life is in a tranquil state within Italian society. The churches, cemeteries and museums form a "soul" of the nation.

Freschini: Did you find any connection between the Roman Catholic Church and Buddhism?

Zhang: Ancient Chinese people called "heaven" the "old man of heaven". "Heaven" in this sense is a superior deity who meted out justice. When Catholic missionaries brought Catholicism to China in the late Ming

dynasty, in order to set their god apart from the gods of traditional Chinese religion, they drew from the Confucian statement of “nothing is higher than heaven, nothing more respected than the lord” to call their god “lord of heaven” (Tianzhu), to be the “true lord of heaven and earth, the lord of man and of all things,” and named their religion “the religion of the lord of heaven” (Tianzhu Jiao). Catholicism emphasizes its universality, and calls itself a public religion. This refers to Catholicism’s permeation of western European society’s politics, economics, morality, law, academics, culture, education, art and every other field during the Middle Ages, becoming an omnipresent spiritual force.

Buddhism, also known as the teachings of the Buddha, is the full, diverse cultural and social education as taught by the Sakyamuni Buddha with regards to all realms of life. In terms of time, it covers the past, present and future. In terms of space, it begins with the life we can see, and extends out into infinite worlds. It does not make distinctions for nations, ethnic groups or religions, and it covers the limitless dimensions of space. Why is Buddhism not a religion? In a religion, god and the people have a master/servant, father/son relationship. God created all things, and the people can never become god.

“Buddha” means all of the Buddhas. It is an inclusive term. A “Buddha” is a personage that has reached the highest levels of wisdom, emotion and abilities. Simply put, a Buddha is an “enlightened one.” The term “enlightened one” was transliterated into Chinese from Sanskrit as “futu” or “fotuo,” and the Chinese term for “Buddha” is a shortened version, “Fo.” To put it in perhaps clearer terms, a Buddha is someone who has penetrating insight into the fundamental principles of the universe and life. Since Buddhism spread into China in the Han dynasty, it has come to have a profound impact on Chinese culture, especially through the localized Zen Buddhism, which was spread by the Six Patrons. Zen Buddhism states that all people have Buddha nature in their minds, and that to become a Buddha, one must see his own nature. After the Six Patrons, Buddhism spread far and wide, flourishing in the late Tang dynasty and the Five Dynasties period. Zen brought Chinese Buddhism to the peak of its development and had a great impact over the development of ancient Chinese culture.

There is a lot of similarity between the concepts of “heaven and hell” and of “patience and submission” in Catholicism and the “cycle of karma” in Buddhism. Buddhism places more emphasis on wisdom and personal cultivation, while Catholicism focuses on such universal values as fairness, freedom, love and justice. This is the nucleus of European civilization’s advancement in recent times.

Freschini: As you know, the Catholic Church’s state is placed inside the Italian territory, the Vatican do have lots of power and political importance in the internal affairs... from my point of view... shouldn’t be like this, as Confucius said “己所不欲 勿施于人”... religious matter must be something that belong to the person, something very intimate, private and subordinated to the authority, can be not be linked to external political or economical situations, this misunderstanding is the real reason of lots of social problem in the world. Fortunately, China always took this two different matter apart, isn’t? The government never really use or make any closed connection with any dogmas...do you think that this situation provokes a lack of spirituality in China?

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Zhang: The fusion of politics and religion disappeared in China long ago. Today, many temples in China are highly commercialized and secularized. It pains many of us to see this. Some temples don't even have monks anymore, only property managers who collect entry fees and donations from believers. This is a horrible situation. There's no basic morality anymore. The temple is a sacred place for the spirit. The result of overdevelopment is devastating destruction.

After the Yushu earthquake in Qinghai province, many monks came out to the scene of the cremations to bless the spirits of the dead. It was a very moving scene. The Tibetan people are very tranquil. They don't cry and wail in the face of death like the Han people. I went to the ruins of the Sichuan earthquake, and I found many shocking contrasts, but overall, there is quite a difference between having faith and not having faith. The transcendent views about love, life and death in traditional civilization are very important. We are so far from the lofty heights of tradition. Our crazed construction has cut and destroyed this thread, and we don't know if our traditions will end up in books or in other memories. The break in traditional culture and the loss of faith form the direst predicament we face today, and will require a long time to remedy.

Freschini: In this last few years, in China, the religions have marked a fast constant development: the numbers of believers has increased significantly, and everywhere new churches, temples and mosques have been building up... I heard about 300 hundreds new churches... what means this to you? Seems people is looking for something...

Zhang: Religion is free in today's China, but China's modernization transition has been too drastic, and traditional values have almost completely collapsed in this fully market and commerce-oriented era. This is a massive problem. A lot of temples today are highly commercialized, run only to collect entry fees and incense sales, and most believers pray as a kind of exchange. From the perspective of religious faith, this is very pessimistic. In a drastically transforming society, people have a pressing need for religion to repair their souls. The Han people are focused on this life, which is a result of history. Society is changing too rapidly, so serious problems have emerged in people's minds and bodies. This has much to do with the collapse of traditional values, morals and beliefs. The rise of the material has brought more unhappiness. We need a profound rethinking. Excess commercialization and materialism bring disastrous results. The problems are especially serious in education. So many serious problems are emerging in China today, and at its root, this is a human problem. For instance, during the First Sino-Japanese War, the Qing Navy used ships built by the Germans, but they lost out to the Japanese, who almost destroyed their entire army. Why was this? The deciding factor in this war was the people, not the weapons. We are in an era of total collapse of morals, ethics, traditions and faith. This is the most tragic thing about today. As an artist, I truly feel powerless and pessimistic. I think that it's mainly a psychological problem. We need to ponder, rethink, criticize and engage in self-searching and construction. Why are Chinese people unhappy today? It is connected to the collapse of traditions, values and faith. We really live in a mirage of the material, a beautiful illusion, and our spirits are in the wilderness. The reconstruction

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of morals and faith-based values is an important remedy for society. The power of culture and religion stretches out through the ages, never dying. I believe in the restorative powers of religion. We have destroyed too many cultural roots, cut off our connection to classical civilization. The future is built on the foundation of the past and the present.