

Inhabiting the in-Between

Xiaojing Yan, the Third space, Buddhist Metaphysics and the Aesthetics of Transience

By Rebecca Catching

As a Chinese-born artist who has been living in Canada for 16 years, returning to China to present her work in a venerable institution which houses an impressive collection of Chinese antiquities, Xiaojing Yan is navigating a complex field of culture and identity. If we were to visualize this field, it would be less of a “flow chart” or “Venn diagram” highlighting the Chinese and Canadian facets of her existence, rather more of an installation with secret passageways leading off into different dimensions. Her bi-cultural status and diasporic experience is not only something we have discussed frequently in our conversations, but which also parallels the metaphor of transcendence and the concept of “passing through realms” which crisscrosses her numerous works.

Third Culture Existence

As a Canadian who has lived in China for 16 years only to have recently returned, I am also familiar with the third-culture experience: the liminal state of swapping hats of one’s identity in response to the groups and communities around us. In Canada, most Canadians would label Yan as a “Chinese Artist” but upon returning to China, she finds herself struggling to navigate the various channels of her so-called “home country”. Says Yan:

North America has made a great impact on my life and my art as well. After living in Canada and the United States for several years, my soul is no longer all Chinese. In the best of times, I feel I belong to both the culture of my country of birth and to that of my country of adoption. In the worst of times, I belong to nowhere. I no longer wish to completely resolve the duality of my existence. Moreover, I have started to accept this “in-between space”. This experience engendered in me a “new life”, from which I can draw strength and richness. I consider this act of transformation as the process of

transmigration in the Buddhist concept–reincarnation.¹

It is in living this experience that we both begin to understand Homi Bhabha’s notions of “third space” in a personal way: how cultural identity itself is, from the very beginning, not a fixed, innate or pure entity, and even less so when two cultures combine, producing a fluid hybridity based on two innately fluid things: like two amoebas fusing into one entity with a porous membrane constantly absorbing nourishment from the environment which surrounds it.

Both Sides Now–Cross Cultural Readings

Yan’s visual vernacular is an interconnected web of symbols which project and reinforce themes of transience, longevity, rebirth, illusion of the self and reincarnation.

Like Chinese characters, the symbolic value of her imagery may be lost on the average Canadian viewer, who in reading the wall text, might view it as merely “Chinese”—the Chinese culturally-specific meanings indecipherable. Visiting her exhibition at the Varley Art Gallery this fall in Markham, a suburb of Toronto populated by many overseas Chinese, I wondered how “Lingzhi Girl” might be interpreted by the Chinese and visitors of other ethnicities. *Lingzhi* do apparently grow in Canada, but only a mycologist, or TCM practitioner would be aware of them.

Cicadas, another symbol employed in her work, don’t have much of a place in mainstream Canadian culture, yet the meanings of impermanence and rebirth were conveyed in other ways. The golden staircase, for instance, would be easily recognized by most Canadian viewers as a “Stairway to Heaven”, the concept popularized by the words of the 70s rock band Led Zeppelin who sang:

There's a lady who's sure
All that glitters is gold
And she's buying a stairway to heaven

Ironically, this consumerist urge towards immortality echoes the elaborate tombs of Qin Shihuang and other egomaniacal rulers from the Aztecs to the Egyptians.

¹ An interview with Yan published during the World of Threads Fiber Art Festival

This idea of an ascension to the heavens is reflected in the life cycle of the insect itself; the young cicadas living most of their lives as deep as 2.5m underground before burrowing to the surface. Once arriving above ground, they begin molting and shed their exoskeleton, leaving behind an eerie cicada doppelganger. They then ascend into the trees for their “swan song” creating a deafening din, before collapsing unceremoniously onto the pavement. Some kinds of cicadas will actually remain underground for as long as 17 years; no doubt this trait has lent it the aura of immortality for which it is known in China, both through Chinese medicine² and Buddhist lore.

Of course most viewers in China would immediately recognize the allusion to Xuanzang³ and *Journey to the West*, Xuanzang being a cultural vector of sorts, bringing sutras, and relevant Buddhist concepts to China, ideas such as *anatta*—the notion of “non-self” which proposes that self is an illusion and that one should be without the outer layer, the exoskeleton or façade of human greatness known in western terms as the “ego”.

The cicadas also point towards the concept of *anicca*—the idea that life is transient and impermanent, passing through cycles of *samsara* (birth and death) and *Journey to the West* seems to espouse a kind of seamless transit between the heavens and earth (for instance the door behind the curtain waterfall which leads to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit) as if visiting the realm of the immortals was as easy as passing through an airport customs hall.

Constructing the Space of the Liminal

Yan explores the realm of the liminality not only through images but through structure and form as well. In her installation “Lingzhi”, a series of copper-cast fungus climb up the wall, echoing the form of the aforementioned stairway in her installation “Song of the Cicada”. The *lingzhi* are cast in copper and bear a tarnish of green, a turquoise patina speaking to a sense of age and the passage of time. Yet against the white wall these hoary objects appear to float in space. They are unattached to any life giving organism (in nature usually a tree trunk or rotting log) . . . rather they have been decontextualized and arranged in a pattern of steps. This technique of suspending objects on transparent fishing line, or affixing them on blank space seems to underline the metaphysical nature of Yan’s whole oeuvre.

² British Sinologist, Joseph Needham writes about “Shan Tao-Khai, who supposedly a cicada-like metamorphosis by ingesting pills.”

³ In the Chinese classic “Journey to the West”, the term Golden Cicada was used to describe the character of Xuanzang based on an actual Buddhist Monk who visited India returning to China in 645 AD with Buddhist scriptures.

Scholar Rocks, Ink and the Transcendental World of the Literati

Often in Yan's work, the objects themselves are as important as the space they occupy, hanging weightless in space and often conveying movement or flux. "Ink-Water-Stone", a mesmerizing video of swirling water seems to frame the other works in the show, not only echoing the whorled forms of her "Lingzhi" and "Spirit Cloud" (a cloud-shaped installation made of pearls) but also referencing *literati* culture with the evocation of *shanshui* painting and scholar rocks, which of course reflect back on the scholar gardens and literati culture which the Suzhou Museum attempts to preserve.

Says Yan,

"When I wash my brush, I always enjoy looking at the ink as it dissolves in clean water. It's like a plume of smoke dancing, flying, and transforming. It's utterly captivating. I decided to capture this. I shot a water fountain and edited each frame to show a steady pulse of water that seems to push out against gravity. One of the most important aspects of Chinese aesthetics is suggestion. The water's arcs and undulations recall the scholar's rock; similar forms emerging from different yet fundamentally connected materials. "Ink-Water-Stone" (2014) was exhibited together with "Cloud Cell". Water is similarly viewed by Chinese as a source of continuous energy, one that is always in the process of making and shaping, always regenerating and never ending.

Her work "Spirit Cloud", a constellation of suspended pearls, evokes a similar idea of continuous energy and movement; it is as if the pearls could just up and whisk themselves out of the exhibition hall, carried away on the breeze only to reconstitute themselves in another form.

On another level, the pearls mimic the structure of an actual cloud where miniscule water droplets create the illusion of a solid object and this ephemerality is echoed in the actual construction and installation of the works. Both "Spirit Cloud" and "Song of the Cicada" have finite life spans in that they are installed for the period of the exhibition and otherwise packed away in boxes as incongruous piles of cicadas or pearls resting in nests of fishing wire. There is a certain intentionality to this construction says Yan, "I consider materials, colors, techniques, and display methods all parts of my vocabulary."

The idea of an “arrested temporality” seems to be a common thread which connects her various pieces. Often we see that she has constructed an illusion of “stopped time” not only through presentation methods but through materials themselves. For instance, objects which in their natural form are organic and mutable become immortalized and frozen in time as if one has pressed the “pause” button, as when a *lingzhi* or cicada husk is encased in some durable material such as metal or a morning glory rendered in reed and paper so that it can live forever rather than shriveling up after a half a day. This material trickery, not only practical but a conscious strategy, is one which owes something to the illusory use of materials we find in Chinese gardens, one example being the stone boat, which made out of stone would seem to contradict the idea of buoyancy. Says Yan:

Canadian author Michael Ondaatje writes about the scholar’s stone in his World War II novel *The English Patient*: “In Asian gardens you could look at a rock and imagine water, you could gaze at a still pool and believe it had the hardness of rock.”

From Death Comes Life

Suzhou’s gardens, like outdoor museums, are pockets of an alternate temporality, a sense of time frozen in amber. This sense of live-death is conveyed by works such as “Lingzhi Girl”. This newly-created work involves a slightly smaller-than-life-sized sculpture of a young girl made out of wood shavings which have been impregnated with the spores of a *lingzhi* fungus. Yan has produced a video of the process whereby the spores slowly transform into small ‘fruiting bodies’ (as the mycologists would call them). The same spore can actually take on different forms according to the environment and light conditions, from the typical shelf-like fungus one sees at the Chinese apothecary, to the prototypical toadstool with a long stem, to antler-shaped, horn like forms. As it turns out, *lingzhi*, like humans, are shaped by culture and environment; they assume different forms based on light and moisture levels. At the same time, *lingzhi* are composed of complex information systems that communicate with each other through webs of mycelium, bacterial webs which can cover hectares of land underground—a kind of fungal internet. Like the cicada, their lives inhabit different realms: below the soil, hanging in the air off the side of a tree, and on the breeze as spores.

In the video, we see these strange horn-like forms emerge from the

sawdust, perforating the bodies of the human figures. Then, once they have completed their life cycle, they release a sprinkling of spores all over the body of the girl like a baker putting a finishing touch on a cake with a dusting of icing sugar. Yan then halts the cycle of *samsara* (birth and death), by drying the sculptures, depriving them of their moisture and allowing the *lingzhi* to dry out and harden.

Beyond the realm of Buddhist metaphysics, the *lingzhi* has a personal significance for Yan, who has discussed the difficulty of being far away from her aging parents, struggling with the challenge of fulfilling filial duties, a common problem for children living overseas. Without reading too much into her personal situation, we can say that the relationship of parent to child shares many parallels to that of the *lingzhi* and the woodchips, one drawing sustenance from another.

A Sense of Historical Vicissitudes

This idea of a progression of generations is certainly very much in the psychology of Suzhou, a city which despite a thriving industrial park, very much identifies itself with its past. With their weathered and forgotten appearance, these sculptures present an arresting scene, frozen in time, forgotten like some moss-covered Khmer or Aztec Temple, an allusion to once flourishing empires, now only historical objects, ruins . . . to be consumed by tourists. Shelly's sonnet "Ozymandias" which was written in commemoration of the acquisition of a statue of Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II by the British Museum, comes to mind, its concept of faded glory and grasping at immortality.

My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

In fact Shelley's poem was inspired by Chinese poetry and the genre of elegiac nostalgic poets of the Tang Dynasty⁴. We can see the obvious influence of this genre by comparing it to Chang Tai and his "The Desecration of the Han Tombs".

At Pei-mang how they rise to Heaven,
Those high mound, four or five in the fields!

⁴ Xie Ming, "Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry: Cathay, Translation, and Imagism", Routledge, New York: 2014.

What men lie buried under these tombs?
All of them were lords of the Han World.
“Kung” and “Wen” gaze across at each other:
The Yuan mound is all grown over with weeds.⁵

Chang Tai’s poem talks of jeweled scabbards lying twisted in the grass, ancestral temples rendered to hummocks in the ground, and peasants turning the tombs into orchards. Somehow this idea of ruins resonates with the context of Suzhou, the former capital of the State of Wu, and home to many a stately residence, now overrun with visitors.

In fact, the whole selection of works in this exhibition is steeped in a deep existential pall. The fleeting lifespan of the “Morning Glories” and “Mountain of Pines” which offers a wry take on this symbol of longevity—presenting a dry stand of yellowed pine needles, their shadows casting long pointy shadows across the wall. “Star Mountain II”, a work in the same lineage but not included in this exhibition, features a Song Dynasty-style landscape, rendered using star anise pods as a medium. These works not only reference longevity, but also the idea of transcendence or “crossing realms”. The landscape painting, the garden, scholar’s rocks and bonsais were used by the literati as a focus for meditation—when the *literati* could not retreat to the mountains, these ersatz landscapes were a means through which to enter onto a spiritual plane.

The Politics of Chinese Imagery and the Dilemma of Post-Orientalism

Playing with a toolbox of Chinese symbols, porcelain spoons, *lingzhi*, *shanshui* paintings and other China-specific imagery, Yan’s work could be easily construed as what Gao Minglu and Hou Hanru have discussed as “post-orientalism”⁶, referring to a tendency of Chinese artists abroad to self-exoticize, employing Chinese imagery in order to attract the eye of the western art establishment. It is true that many of the early artists, Cai Guoqiang, Xu Bing and Gu Wenda have obtained a certain amount of status within the Western art world in part through their use of this imagery. But, this argument is in some ways like blaming a beautiful woman for attracting unwanted male attention.

Should Chinese artists be denied their cultural toolbox because of an orientalist or post-orientalist western art establishment fixated on “Chineseness”? In order to see the fault of this argument we only need to apply it to other peripheral groups of artists. Should

⁵ Wayley, Arthur, “Chinese Poems”, Routledge, New York: New York, 2005, p. 86-87

⁶ Gao, Minglu and Hou, Hanru, “Strategies of Survival in the Third Space: Conversations on the Situation of Overseas Chinese Artists in the 1990s”, Hou, Hanru, *On the Mid-Ground*, Ed. Yu, Hsiao Wei, Timezone 8: Hong Kong, 2002, p.23

indigenous artists in Canada who are engaging with their own tradition, using their own symbols, commenting on their spirituality or the political struggles of the First Nations People⁷, be denied the opportunity to do so? Certainly such art is garnering much attention in curatorial circles. But are these artists “pandering”? Should they be forced into art which is “culturally unspecific”, which reflects mainstream currents of the still largely white contemporary art world?

Perhaps it's best that critics not attempt to replicate colonial power structures by labeling artists and creating parameters of what kinds of art can be made.

The “third space” which these artists inhabit, according to Homi Bhabha is supposed to displace the “histories that constitute it, and set up a new structure of authority, new political initiatives which are inadequately understood through received wisdom”.⁸

Yan's work may not be blatantly critical of orientalism, or the western museum system, rather she is more like a cultural vector introducing vital aspects of Chinese culture and Buddhist philosophy to new audiences, filtered through her own unique experience in order to generate new understandings. As more of us cross boundaries, enter the door behind the curtain waterfall, the occupants of the third space can harness the potential to speak through a plurality of production modes challenging both the art establishment and the attitudes of the general public.

⁷ 美洲印第安人

⁸ Rutherford, Jonathan. 1990. “The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha”, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 207-221.

居于中间状态

闫晓静，第三空间，佛教玄学以及瞬态美学

林白丽

作为一位在加拿大生活了16年的华裔艺术家，闫晓静一直在复杂多样的文化和身份之间穿行。此次她将回到中国，在一个拥有惊人的中国文物馆藏的古老博物馆中举办自己的展览。如果我们将她的这些文化和身份视觉化，那么可能不会是一张标注着她的中国和加拿大生活经历的“流程图”或者“维恩图”，而更可能是一个装置，其中的秘密通道引导着我们进入不同的维度。闫晓静的双重文化身份和离散经历，不仅仅是我们近期频繁讨论的话题，同时也与那些贯穿于她作品中关于超验的隐喻和跨界概念相互呼应。

第三文化的生活方式

作为一个在中国居住了16年，近期才回国的加拿大人来说，我也很熟悉这种第三文化的生活经历：根据周围的人群和社会，频繁地转换自身身份的一种阈限状态。在加拿大，大多数加拿大人会将闫晓静视为“中国艺术家”，但一旦回到中国，她又发现自己面对所谓“祖国”的方方面面已难以游刃有余。闫晓静曾说：

北美的生活经历对我的人生和艺术都产生了很大的影响。我在美国和加拿大生活了很多年，精神上已经不完全是中国人了。状态好的时候，我觉得自己既属于祖国的文化，也属于旅居国的文化。而状态差的时候，我感觉自己不属于任何地方。我不再奢望能完全消解我的二元身份，而是开始接受这种“中间状态”。这种经历促使我获得了“新生”，我可以从中获得力量和丰富性。我认为这种转变就像是一个轮回的过程——佛教概念中所谓的轮回转世。⁹

类似的生活经历，使得我和晓静都开始以个人的视角来理解霍米·巴巴关于“第三空间”的概念：文化认同本身从一开始就不是一个固定的、先天的或纯粹的实体，而当两种文化结合并产生了一种基于两种天然流动的事物的流动混杂性时，就更非如此：就如同两个变形虫融合成一个整体时，多孔膜需要不断地吸收周围环境中的养分。

兼顾双方——跨文化解读

闫晓静的视觉语言如同一张相互关联的符号网络，突出和强化了短暂、长寿、重生、自我的幻象、转世轮回等主题。

就像汉字一样，她作品中的意象的象征价值可能对于一般的加拿大观众来说晦涩不明，他们可能只能认出墙上的解说文本是“中文”——而对其中中国文化特有的含义却难以辨认。当我参观闫晓静今秋在万锦市（一个居住着众多海外华人的多伦多郊区）的瓦莱美术馆举办的展览时，我很好奇，中国观众和其他国家观众会如何解读“灵芝女

⁹ 参见世界纤维艺术节期间对闫晓静的访谈

孩”这件作品。当然，加拿大也有灵芝，但是估计只有真菌学家和中医师才知道它。

蝉，是闫晓静作品中另外一个象征符号，但在加拿大的主流文化中并不常见。在加拿大，无常和重生的意象通常用其他方式来表达。比如，用“黄金阶梯”来表达通往天堂之路一般更容易被广大加拿大观众接受，这一概念的流行源自于70年代摇滚乐队齐柏林飞船的这首歌词：

有一位女士相信
所有会闪亮的都是金子
她想买一架去天堂的梯子

具有讽刺意味的是，这种追寻永生的消费主义式渴望呼应了秦始皇以及从阿兹特克到埃及的那些极端利己的统治者精心修建陵墓。

蝉本身的生命周期也反映了这种升天的观念；蝉的幼虫在爬出地表之前，大部分时间蛰伏在地下 2.5m 的地方。一旦钻出地面，蝉就开始蜕皮并蜕下一层外骨骼，留下一个令人毛骨悚然的蝉壳。然后它们爬到树枝上唱出最后的哀歌，震耳欲聋，最后狠狠地摔在地上。有些蝉可以在地面下生活 17 年之久；毫无疑问，蝉的这种特征蒙上了中国人从中医¹⁰和佛学中所获知的关于永生的光环。

大多数中国观众很容易从中联想到玄奘西行取经的典故，玄奘法师¹¹作为一位文化使者，从天竺带回了佛经以及重要的佛学概念，比如anatta——“无我”，认为自身即幻影，个体不应禁锢于美好的皮相、外观或表象，亦即西方术语中的“ego”（自我）。

另外，蝉也指向了anicca（无常）的概念——即生命是短暂且变化的，不断经历生死轮回。西天取经的故事似乎展演了一种瞬息间即可从天界到凡间的无缝转化（例如穿过水帘洞后的小门，即可通往花果山），仿佛游历仙界就如同穿过机场海关一样容易。

建构阈限性空间

闫晓静不仅通过意象，同时也运用结构与形式来探索阈限性空间。在她的装置作品“灵芝”中，一组铜制的菌类攀爬于墙上，呼应了她的作品“蝉之歌”中所采用的阶梯的形式。“灵芝”用青铜铸造，长着绿色铜锈，蓝绿色的光泽仿佛言说着岁月无情和时间的流逝。而这些饱含沧桑的灵芝在白墙的映照下，如同漂浮在空中。这些灵芝没有依附于任何能够为菌类提供生长环境的有机体（自然界中，通常是树干或者树墩）……而是抽离于环境，被布置成阶梯的形状。用透明的鱼线悬挂作品，或者将作品固定在空白的空间的手法，都强调了闫晓静作品所体现出的超自然的本质。

文人石、墨与文人的超验世界

10 英国汉学家李约瑟曾经写到“单道开，据说是一位能够借助药物幻化成蝉形的人。”

11 在中国古典名著《西游记》中，“金蝉”一词用以形容玄奘这一角色，这是基于一位佛教僧侣的真实故事，他访问了印度并于公元 645 年带着佛经返回中国。

在闫晓静的作品中，展品本身通常和它们所占据的空间同样重要，展品被悬挂在空中，体现着一种运动或者说流动。“墨-水-石”这部表现水的漩涡的魅力十足的影片，似乎囊括了展览中的所有作品，它不仅与漩涡状的“灵芝”和“灵云”（用珍珠做成了云朵形状的装置作品）两个作品相互呼应，同时也借由对山水画和文人石的追忆指涉了士人文化，而这种追忆又回过头来反应在文人园林和士人文化中，这也正是苏州博物馆试图去存续的。

闫晓静：

当我清洗画笔的时候，我总是很喜欢看着墨水在清水中慢慢地晕开，就像一团烟雾在跳舞、飞翔、变幻。这非常迷人。我决定要捕捉这一美妙的画面。我拍摄了一段喷泉的视频，逐帧剪辑，来表现水柱仿佛要挣脱引力束缚时的某个固定形态。中国美学其中一个很重要的方面就是暗示。水花的弧线和波浪形轮廓，令人联想到文人石；相似的造型却来自于不同的，但本质上又紧密相连的材料。“墨-水-石”（2014）与“云胞”是作为一个组合同时展出的。水，在中国人的眼中是一种源源不断的能量源泉，永远在塑造和变化，不断再生，永无止境。

“灵云”，由悬浮的珍珠组成的一组装置作品，同样令人联想起源源不断的能量和运动。这些珍珠仿佛随时要离地而起，冲出展厅，随风而去，变化万千。

另一方面，珍珠的排列方式模拟了真实的云朵形状，而微小的水珠则制造了貌似坚固之物的幻觉，这种稍纵即逝在作品的实际组装和展示过程中得到了回应。“灵云”和“蝉之歌”这两件作品的生命有限，仅限于展览期间，非展览期间它们都被打包进箱子，如同蝉的蛰伏或是珍珠安眠于渔网之中。这是闫晓静有意为之：“各种材料、色彩、技术、陈列方式都是我的词汇表的一部分。”

“被捕获的暂时性”这一概念似乎可以被视为串连起闫晓静诸多作品的一条线索。她不仅通过展示手法，也通过材料本身来构建“时间暂停”的幻觉。比如某些自然界中有机和可变的物体，在展览中变成了永恒且凝固于时间之中，就像有人按下了暂停键。比如她用金属等耐用材料来制作灵芝或蝉壳，或者用芦苇和纸来制作牵牛花，使它得以永生而不至于半天就枯萎。这种对材料的运用技巧不仅实用，而且是一种有意识的策略，借鉴于中国园林对材料的神奇运用。例如石舫，用石头制造船只似乎与浮力相悖。

闫晓静：

加拿大作家Michael Ondaatje在他的二战小说《英国病人》中提及了文人石：“在亚洲的花园中，你可以观石而思水，凝视静谧的水塘而想象它如同石头一样坚硬。”

由死而生

苏州的园林犹如一座室外的博物馆，保存着时间变幻，如同时光静止于琥珀之中。“灵芝女孩”这件作品所表达的就是这种生-死关系。这件新作主体是一个由木屑制成

的比真人尺寸稍小的小女孩头像，木屑中布满了灵芝孢子。闫晓静录制了一段视频，展示了灵芝孢子缓慢地转变成“子实体”（真菌学家的说法）的过程。相同的孢子，因为环境和光照的不同，最终形成的形状也各不相同，从中药房里常见的片状，到长柄伞状、鹿角形。最终，这些灵芝根据温湿度的不同，各成其态，就像芸芸众生一样，被环境和文化所改造。同时，灵芝之间有着复杂信息传递系统，它们通过菌丝网和细菌纤维网进行交流，这样的真菌网络能够覆盖地下几公顷的面积。和蝉一样，真菌的生长也涉及不同的区域，或潜于土壤之下，或生长于树木的一侧，或释放出孢子随风飘散。

在视频中，我们可以看到那些奇特的角状真菌穿透了少女的雕像，从木屑中生长出来。然后，一旦它们完成了生长过程，就会释放出孢子，覆盖了整个雕像的表面，就像面包师在蛋糕上洒上最后一层糖霜一样。此时，闫晓静中止了这种生死轮回，她将雕像干燥，除去水分，让灵芝变干变硬。

除了佛教玄学上的意义之外，灵芝对于闫晓静来说，还有着特殊的个人意义。她曾经表达过远离年迈的父母，无法践行孝道的困境，这对于旅居海外人士而言是一个普遍的问题。即使不太熟悉她的个人境遇，我们也可以看到父母和子女的关系与灵芝和木屑的关系有着诸多相似之处，都是一方从另一方身上汲取养分。

历史沧桑感

这种世代延续的思想无疑在苏州的地方观念中占有很重要的地位。这座城市尽管有着欣欣向荣的工业园，但仍然非常认同自身的历史。这些雕塑斑驳而荒凉的外观，呈现出一个凝滞的场景，就像那些被苔藓覆盖的高棉或阿兹台克神庙一样，凝固于时间之中，被人们遗忘，提醒着人们往日辉煌的帝国，如今也只是历史遗迹——供游客消费而已。这让我想起雪莱的一首十四行诗《奥兹曼迪亚斯》，此诗是为纪念大英博物馆获得埃及法老拉美西斯二世头像这一事件而作，诗中表现了逝去的荣光和对永生的渴望：

吾名乃奥斯曼迪斯，王者中的王者。
功业盖世，料诸神而不可及。
而如今只存废墟一片，荡然无存。
苍茫荒凉，环绕四周。
漫漫黄沙孤寂，无边无垠。

事实上，雪莱的诗歌受到了中国古诗特别是唐代感怀诗¹²的启发。如果我们将雪莱这首诗与张载的《七哀诗》作一比较，就可以明显看到这一诗歌类型对他的影响。

北芒何垒垒，高陵有四五。
借问谁家坟，皆云汉世主。
恭文遥相望，原陵郁膻膻。¹³

¹² 谢明：《庞德与中国诗歌中的挪用：中国、翻译与意象主义》，Routledge, New York: 2014.

¹³ 亚瑟·威利：《中国诗歌》，Routledge, New York: New York, 2005, p. 86-87

张载的诗歌描述了缀满宝石的刀鞘散落在杂草之中，先人的坟茔仅残存地面上的小丘，农夫将陵墓变成了果园。在一定程度上，这种废墟的观念与苏州的境况产生了共鸣，作为吴国的故都，带给许多人尊严的故乡，如今却被游客所充斥。

事实上，本次展览所选择的作品都包裹着一层浓厚的存在主义色彩。“牵牛花”和“松之山”短暂的展期反而让人联想到长寿这一象征，后者展示了枯黄直立的松针，及其影子在墙上投射出的长长的点状阴影。同一系列的作品“星山 II”则是以八角作为媒介，展现了宋代风格的山水，可惜这件作品没有在这次的展览中展出。这一系列作品不仅指涉了长寿的主题，也指涉了超越或者说“跨界”的观念。山水画、园林、文人石和盆景都是文人借以沉思的焦点所在——当他们无法真的隐居山林时，这些景观就成了他们寻求心灵归宿的途径。

中国意象的政治与后东方主义困境

闫晓静的作品借用了中国象征系统的百宝箱，例如瓷勺子、灵芝、山水画以及其他中国特有的意象。我们可以轻易地将她归入高名潞和侯瀚如所说的“后东方主义”¹⁴概念之内，即国外的中国艺术家运用中国意象来吸引西方主流艺术界目光的一种自我异化的倾向。不少早期的中国艺术家，如蔡国强、徐冰和谷文达等人在西方艺术界的地位确实一部分依赖于这些中国意象的运用。但是，这种说法在某种程度上就如同指责一位美女不经意地吸引了男性的目光。

中国艺术家是否应该因为运用自身的文化宝库而被否定？理由仅仅是西方艺术界为“中国性”贴上的东方主义或后东方主义标签？我们只需要将这种观点套用到其他类似的艺术家的身上就能发现其谬误。那些根植于自身传统的加拿大土著艺术家¹⁵，是否也不能运用本土的符号系统，来评论他们的精神世界或者原住民的政治斗争？类似的艺术确实正在获得策展人越来越多的关注，但是我们可以认为这些艺术家仅仅是在“迎合”吗？他们应该被迫创作“非特定文化”的艺术，来反映仍然主要由白人占据的当代艺术世界的主流吗？

艺术评论家们最好不要试图通过给艺术家贴标签，对艺术创作划定范围，来复制殖民权力结构。

根据霍米·巴巴的理论，这些艺术家所处于的“第三空间”，应该置换“构成它的历史，建立一种新的权威结构和政治动因，而这些都是现成的智慧未能充分了解的。”¹⁶

闫晓静的作品也许没有明确地批判东方主义或西方博物馆体系，她更像是一位文化使者，将中国文化和佛教哲学的主要理论介绍给陌生的观众，通过她自身独特的经历来推动新的认识。当我们越来越多的人跨越边界，走进水帘洞后面的小门，第三空间的居民才有可能通过多种生产模式来发声，挑战艺术机制和大众的态度。

¹⁴ 高名潞，侯瀚如，《第三空间生存策略：关于1990年代海外中国艺术家状况的对话》，侯瀚如：《在中间地带》，余小蕙编辑，第八时区出版社，香港，2002，p23

¹⁵ 美洲印第安人

¹⁶ 乔纳森·卢瑟福：1990年，“第三空间：霍米·巴巴访谈”，《认同：社区、文化与差异》，London: Lawrence and Wishart, p207-221.