

Toward the “global village”, shaping the world: looking into new directions of international contemporary art from new practices of intertextuality in the works of José Krijnen

"I love China. I must return to China." - That is what José Krijnen, a Dutch contemporary artist, kept saying during my invited visit to Europe.

Of course, José Krijnen's desire for Chinese art and culture is partly caused by her concern and rebellious thought of herself and even those of conventional European design practices. In my personal opinion, almost all of the basic artistic philosophies and academic systems across the whole breadth and depth of Europe, from Copenhagen to Florence, or from Berlin to Rome, are to be concluded with two words - Concept and Medium. And from these two words, "Concept", which is thought to be the main legacy of late modernism and post modernism, appears to be a dogmatic rule dominating art practices in the European continent.

Therefore, José Krijnen, whose areas of interests being visual arts researches in the Royal Academy of Art in Hague, is considered rather eye-catching as she thinks that "there's nothing wrong to draw like the Chinese Gongbi." Moreover, under the current trends of pluralism and shared history difference, it's a rather common phenomenon among western artists. José Krijnen's fascination for Chinese art, especially the "borderless" nature featured in traditional Chinese cultures, also her and implementations in the series during this period, are worthy of analysis.

Maybe we can begin with the morphological aspects of her works. I have to point out that, all José Krijnen's works in recent years were inspired by China. Let us look at the titles of two of her works - "24. 28' NB, 118. 5' 0L" and "Piauw Liang", which were exhibited in China and the Netherlands respectively. The former one is the coordinate where she found design elements in China, while the latter is a pun sounds like "wonder" in Dutch and "beautiful" in Chinese, after she had heard people praising a peacock in China.



24° 28' NB, 118° 5' OL, 2014



Piauw Liang, 2014

Looking at the medium aspect, both works have Chinese paper-cuts as their "corpus" and traditional Chinese charms as their "morpheme". From the subject matter of speaking, besides combining image projections which reflects Chinese daily life, she also borrowed the traditional Chinese paper-cut layouts that are frequently seen on New Year paintings to create in her works - the carp and the peacock, which is an avatar of pheonix, as main theme elements. Of course, it will be too superficial if we think that her works are merely nothing more than some duplicates of traditional Chinese art.

This is because although her works possess intertextual relationship with Chinese culture, there are still differences. It is not difficult to distinguish if we analyse and compare them accordingly: In the theme and medium aspects, besides being an indigenous-culture and life-realistic, traditional Chinese paper-cut also has a singular medium; In the contrast, José Krijnen's works feature reusabilities and compound structures.

In the technical implementation aspect, the flat Chinese paper-cut had already reached its final form in art; José Krijnen's paper-cut is just an element or a segment of her modern multimedia image and multidimensional techniques such as modern multimedia images, light-and-shade cutting, etc.

And if we speak of the functionality of her works, traditional Chinese paper-cut was some festival decorations in some ancient Chinese rituals and worships; but José Krijnen's works show significant reality and spiritual-concerned objects. Also, traditional Chinese paper-cut is static and flat; but José Krijnen's works are stereoscopic and multidimensional, some are even dynamic, soft-carved and installation artistic. That was not only shown on the space suspension of her works, but also shown on "24。 28' NB, 118。 5' 0L" rotatable paper-cut and the meaning projected beyond it. Although we must admit that Chinese element was one important factor composing the works, they reflected a creative thinking and direction featuring Chinese old saying "Harmonious but different" in different aspects like linguistic medium, implementations, combination and structure. It is indeed worthy to research more on the background thoughts and contexts of José Krijnen's

creative thinking and methodology.

As I actually had both letter and real conversation with her, together with my academic concern in the related field, let us look at her sundry works and understanding of Chinese culture, we can see from the background that this is the now-already-popular "practicing history" and "practicing theory" thought which emphasise on judging representation value of things. Going further, let us put it this way, as a contemporary international trend which is full of contents and is widely influencing, this was actually started to develop in America and Europe including the Netherlands around 40 years ago. Then in the 80s, it started to bloom in the field of historians in Taiwan and China. It views culture and society as a whole individual in methodology, and hence it was called "New Cultural History" or "New History" of "Society Cultural History", or "New Culture" practicing thought.

Moreover, as a subject which emphasises theoretical studies as well as lingual expression at the same time, this sort of "New History Study" originated from old-backwashing, that means the limitations of post-war Almanac School scientism using a quantitative approach to study history, is against the classical history studies which treat culture as an unrelated subject to "foundation", and is represented by historic elite culture as a new thought featuring "Spirit of the Times".

Although it coincidentally fits the semiotics model and "linguistic turn" described by postmodernism, it is also affected by its critical thinking. Having said that, it still differs a lot from postmodernism which favours history negativism, metaphysics and analysis. But in fact, this new thought highlights a microscopic "subordinate" equality-inclusive cultural relativism which also pluralises narrative imagery and ecological interpretation.

In other words, the new cultural practicing thought is also generalised as "Culture Studies", in terms of characteristics, not only it takes into its own visions various subjects such as family and marriage, women and children, gender and sex, physical bodies, married life, emotions and sense, essential necessities of life, illness and death, religions and sorceries, time-space, etc, at the same time, it also tries to explain the "shape" and social implications such as our daily language and symbols, imagery rituals by diverting vision from traditional areas like economy, politics, social structures to cultural relationship and cultural causes.

If you ask Peter Burke, new cultural history advocate, to look at the seven complex categories of new historiography, a "material cultural history" including almost all consumer goods like clothing, books, accommodation, etc. It will lead people to think of the pretentious wordings people developed in order to obtain status recognition or reproduction. And regardless of the gender-related "body history", "presentation history" featuring self and ethnic esteem, imagination and perception of other individuals, the historical-relic-related "Social memory history", or "Political cultural history" which targeted events and imagined communities, inspired by Edward Said's "Orientalism" and "Social language history" consisting of modes of discourse such as jargons and ethnic consciousness, it shows concern when people view foreigners with prejudice, also, it values "Travel history" about travelling at different times, especially from a female perspective. This also reminds people of related artists and works from China and other countries.

In other words, maybe we should put it this way - art, as an important part in the social culture, no matter how did it take part in occurrences of new history philosophies in the history, it has been still interacting with people. For examples, different artists and works such as Marina Abramovich ,the famous artist in China, or Marlene Dumas are closely related.

Having mentioned the two, of course, it is not just because both of them had created works in China or that they are residing in the Netherlands, more importantly, the former one is a quintessential who makes good use of body, behaviour and travel to start creation. The later one is a typical example who treats painting as researches in personal history like self-perception, imagination, gender behaviour, emotions and senses. And for the vast amount of closely related Chinese contemporary art subjects, we would discuss on them later. In short, just like China shaped "Contemporary Art Institute" from "Contemporary

Art", or the world shaped environmental protection law from environmental issues, because we did not make "Society - Structures" and "Culture - Spirit" into binary oppositions but replaced causationism with monogenism. This trend of thought outlined that culture and society are in fact, a series of both internal and external shaping processes, while emphasising the con-structural, developmental and practical aspects of society culture and the practical implementability of 3S theory. In short, the concern and rebellious thought of José Krijnen, and the thoughts of Chinese culture and traditional art were originated from her responses to that kind of contemporary new cultural practices.

Let us look from the "con-structural" perspective of the works again, although the intercultural significance of José Krijnen's works can be concluded with "Tao Produced One" and "Harmonious but Different", however, the meaning inside is of much greater importance.

From a subjective motivation of view, the reason that she "burrowed" traditional Chinese paper-cut to form her words is because of her concept of Chinese traditions, also it is somehow related to her consideration of the semantics of her works. But more importantly, just like the new history values, she did not believe that any culture could be isolated or missed. On the contrary, as long as it is needed by the theme, the works can be presented beyond spacetime and dimensions.

In her opinion, her fascination with fish, peacocks, or other symbols, was her own intuition of representations and as well was her extension of particular cultural meaning. She believed that since culture was basically a symbolic concept, in order to present the meaning behind culture, the correct way is to make good use of "semiotics".

As for the works structural subjectivity and initiative, especially in multimedia works like "24. 28' NB, 118. 5' 0L", she turned fish, which symbolises wealth, happiness and large family into a huge paper-cut symbolising human relationships.

With her footage of a tall building under construction in rural China, a village hut with a "demolish" Chinese word written on it, daily lives of the villagers, and techniques such as wheeled projection, stack throughs, light-cutting, she composed a bizarre and multidimensional representation of the world.

And thus she viewed human as "some sort of animals which hanged themselves on their own meaning web" like new culture historian Geertz, on the basis of Max Weber significance.

She views culture as a symbolic system composed of this kind of web structures, and cultural representation is not any kind of scientific experiment seeking for regularity, but instead it is a kind of explanatory science seeking for meaningfulness.

Also, she has the same attitude as Hayden White, author of "Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe". Due to artists' deep structural mindset, she thinks an artist should present via various linguistic models such as symbols, rituals, plots, custom ideas, spiritual flags, etc.

However, through a gentle rotary way, a montage narrative structure, and a "Periphery - Core" limited yet not boundless "field", José Krijnen highlighted the visually-centred paper-cut symbols specific, pluralised spacetime sequences and relationships. Besides breaking singular spacetime views such as "historical stage", it also valued complicated psyches such as blessing, retro, ecological costs, together with multi-dimensional ambiguities such as ritual-like situation, poetic ambience, people, cultural symbols, mindsets, to present the multi-degreed complexity China went through during industrialisation in the global village development process.

Regardless of viewing as José Krijnen's perspective or the new historical perspective, they all imply one single concept: It is the phenomenon determines concept, and not vice versa; narrative art should be made consistent in the subjective/objective manner. This way of thinking is just like you found a door leading to the truth from an "existence and conscious" hut. Of course, for José Krijnen and other artists, this door is not simply a copy of the world, in the contrast, it is some sort of self ego and various "texts", a hypertext screen constructed with different language resources, which also fits the Chinese cultural psyche. And the screen is just like a filter. It is one which can highlight certain word and filter out some other word, or even, it is a device which is able to extract the word from its background, then extend and reconstruct its meaning.

Of course, we must recognise the intertextuality José Krijnen achieve with Chinese folk culture.

Although apparently that is somehow related to her pursuit of the works' localised meaning, the

reason of that, undoubtedly is related to her instinct to care about visual psychology and the shared genes of human culture. In the meantime, of course, "the sense of justice and rationality is the same with everybody." is also uncertain anyhow. The so called "overlapping consensus" also allows the cases where singularity is reached by misunderstanding and oppositions. In other words, even José Krijnen's understanding of China was not detailed, maybe even it appeared simpler because of some particular "filter". Although her works might be imperfect, the inspected contents were not significant for us, or even not to be defined as an "obvious event". And because of that, this was not Chinese "potential event" for her. Firstly, the horizon and fusion achieved from this contributed the "thousand readers read thousand versions of Hamlet" phenomenon. Secondly, it pointed out that "inter-subject" or "multivalence" inherited from "misread" brought by intertextuality is of great value and meaningfulness for inducing new ideas in both subjective and objective perspectives.

And all of these were just new implementations José Krijnen tried on her work structures after integrating and reflecting new theoretical practices.

Let us put it in the perspective of survival, José Krijnen's intersubjective work was not just merely presenting the intertextuality of Chinese culture, looking into it we would find that it was "inter-subject survival" of mankind, determining inter-subject works and inter-subject meaning as a kind of "inter-subject survival".

This is also the recognition and interaction of "existence and consciousness" relationships. Overall, José Krijnen integrated feelings in reality and imaginations, then she opted and filtered Chinese culture, multimedia, the multi-spacetime-subject-object relationship collaboration. Maybe we should say, no matter it is the past or the "Global Village" today, it reflects the humanistic matrix of commonality, on the other hand it also reflects the broad interactivity and subjectivity of human existence interactions.

Just as her works demonstrate, it deployed symbolised modern building in the works and filtered out traditional imageries. This shows that she was able to exploit materials around and compose them in a suitable theme for she being a westerner, especially a lady who cares about family and living. In other words, this kind of "judging others by oneself" attitude and design method was determined by her empathy for the Chinese people's desires for a better living. The forms and meanings behind the blissful fish and long lived bird are the most natural and appropriate direct reflections in her eyes.

Of course, this also explains the reason why she was astonished by some symbols such as "Monkey grabbing the stamp" (a pun) and "Warding off Evil". This also points out, choosing objects symbolising good meanings fits with both western and eastern minds.

And we have to make sure that, as a symbol of an "Imagined Community", these kinds of source codes represent the thoughts of Chinese people wishing for good lives as well as the "collective representations" of human life mentality. No matter it is "surviving culture" or "cultural survival", it is just like the Confucius saying "By nature men are similar to one another, but learning and practice make them different". Therefore, represented in José Krijnen's works, she did not present tools or units confined with borders but instead she composed a meaningful system which is beyond spacetime, visible and invisible context based on existence relationships. Besides implementing new historical practice theory and methodology, she also rejected the old thinking that art could only be possessed by some particular language and some particular way, whilst some other languages and ways were considered "outcasts". Of course, more importantly, people, events and objects do not exist in vacuum in her eyes; Even personal will was not economical driven, but instead it should have some kind of relationships with the world; it is also impossible to split accomplished facts if we have to present an existing fact, we also should not craft them into fragments, but we must inspect people and events in the environment accordingly, or we should even obtain meaningful signs from those "seemingly hopeless places" such as senses, love and lusts, consciousness and intuition.

This then points out a recognised fact and common sense: In the age of globalised trades, informations and survival relationships, for example, an ordinary people will compare their housing conditions with those of other countries. Artists and artistic works, of course, are affected by those related information, and at the same time, they are not accepting without feedbacks.

Even though artistic works are just like drama in the global village, even the new history study admitted that it owns a dramatic trait, just as Brecht realised the intersubjectivity of actor and

audiences, yet the undeniable fact is: No matter you are audience or performer, no matter you are neighbour or a neighbour's neighbour, in this global village, everyone has its own responses to different objects and events. This is the relationship between works and audience, or to present and to be presented. This kind of "You are in me and I am in you" situation is just like works are after all "unity of representation and presentation". As a people also in this sort of survival interactions, artists are of course, subjects in this "causes and reasons" environment. This is an unavoidable and unsurpassable new trend of the global village as it is shaped by history explicitly or implicitly, it allows both acceptances and conflicts. From personal intersubjectivity, to survival intersubjectivity beyond locations and cultures, "works intersubjectivity" were brought up from those.

Looking at the value orientations from both sides, under this trend of new historical culture, "José Krijnen phenomenon" is not rare to see in the international contemporary art industry including that of China.

And also, the aforementioned artist Abramovich did not only host the art event "Valentine - Great Wall" in China (1988), he was also continuously looking for opportunities to interact with the world through different means like "body test" and "Thousand looking at each other". He earned well reception and honour from the world.

On the other hand, the "subject research law" performance of the new poetic practices subjectively "took" and shared human common heritages.

Through the creative conversion of Chinese "treat the old ones as new ones" source codes, she tried hard to explore the contemporary approach of her own artistic paths. All these embodied one important concept of new cultural practices: the world is no longer a passive object. Historical writing and art presenting are all structural as social reality does. All behaviours, events and images are interact-able texts conceived by society and culture. And every successful masterpiece is an individual work embodying history integrations.

Objectively speaking, as this is a world trend value, José Krijnen is not the only one. Abramovich and Dumas are also like that. China contemporary art falls into this category as well.

It must be pointed out that, as an integral historical scene, we all know that China contemporary art was started in the time of reforms. Liberated mind had great potential at that time, scholars and artists from China and worldwide could be divided into two groups. One could not distinguish between late-modernism and postmodernism, or they could not understand the relationships between them. Another one accept both of them anyway. But the fact was, China contemporary art was affected by the former one as well as the latter one at the same time.

In other words, in the view of new historians, China contemporary art possessed certain spontaneity due to the situation of China at that time. That was just like self-prime advocated by Taiwan scholars.

However, if we discuss that and ignoring reforms and Taiwan system, everything will just be obviously unbelievable.

In my humble opinion, if we speak of "collective mentality", which is a kind of consumer society psyche which Andy Warhol presented. At that time it was overwhelmed by contemporary art that concerned more about meaningless signs such as individual, family and social memory.

In the early stage, Yongbo Huang made art not simply for visual entertainment and not bounded by forms.

If we treat "2-minute washing machine"(1987) as a late prompt of postmodernism art, then, on the other hand, this made China contemporary art progressing faster in cultural aspects.

For example, in the 90s, those narrations, descriptions and presentations such as family-related, "amnesia and memories" of bloodlines, imagination of collective community and "Great Criticism", or just even the "yawning pose", or more spiritually "masks series" and "cruel youth", all of them had illustrated the new cultural practices theory models in details.

Of course, from this perspective, even the other artists from the "elite four", which were recognised by local contemporary artists, were also like that. Bing Xu's "Cultural Animals", Guoqiang Cai's "Exploding Symbols", Wenda Gu's "Human Hair" and "Body", which was considered as post-colonial but in fact a new historical view, etc. All of these imagery artists who won a lots of international awards, were the same as José Krijnen and Abramovich. This fully embodied the concern about both visual images and dramatic poetic imagery of the new historical view. At the

same time it made good use of new tools from various subjects, new concepts to express complex meaning and newborn meaning explorations, such as public area, imagination, structure, social memory, aphasia, legitimacy, authority, scenes, cases, foundations, micro-descriptions, folk society, archaeology and knowledge, local versus general, big versus small traditions, etc. With the new historian Lynn Hunt's saying, the focus of this kind of orientations directly means "human sanity". It is because, t"his is not simply traditional social storage, this is where recognitions were formed, and a place where facts were processed with language."

At the same time this is the art composed history, "a place where people convey one's self code of value, truth, clues, signs, gestures and poses." Of course, most importantly, obviously many artists should have understood: not only "culture embodies meaningfulness", but also "cultural symbols are being reshaped continuously in daily social contacts".

Finally, from the perspective of developmental view, let's first put aside how people define "contemporary art", just look into postmodernism and new history cultural practices, in my humble opinion, if the former is preparing for historical practice thoughts conversion into global village, then the latter one is the contemporary practice of that conversion.

In other words, the thinking trend brought by new history study are nourished by the former one, it explores a new door to contemporary survival consciousness, contemporary life style and contemporary cultural spirit in visual, path, meaningfulness and methodological aspects.

This sort of practices not only composed international contemporary art and art theory directions, but at the same time it contributes to the globalisation of Chinese contemporary art and Chinese art culture. And as the historical trend "contemporary art is the art of contemporary civilisation", let us put it in two ways:

Firstly, José Krijnen's concern of her artistic personality. Although this may be related to her high valuation of choices, it is reflected in behind an artist in the western microcosm as well as her resistance of the monotone images and similar formula of her own works.

And this is not only the dissatisfaction of oneself, in the context relationship, this also implies that she is performing a farewell of the time to her past formula.

The new thinking trend advocates exploration on a broader, seemingly meaningless "lower layer", abandoning limits such as "elitism and similarity of objects", "assumption that there is consistency in culture" and "tradition can be inherited completely", in order to get to a global village, to embrace numberless "differences" and to describe in detail the truth of "world of imageries".



Paintings of José Krijnen.

All these constituted her passion for Chinese social culture.

On the other hand, she was also facing her own thoughts in China contemporary art.

In simpler words, as the two related foundations, one was the ideological perspective which lacks general visions and thoughts, another one being a narrow and exaggerated self ego which lacks value judgement.

That fact is, over the past two decades, China achieved a lot in international contemporary art, causing over 100 high schools in China to have "experimental art" as a new established subject which affirmed the explorational spirit and practical significance of contemporary art, moreover, as a national contemporary cultural image, China was world-oriented since the establishment of China Pavilion in Venice Biennale since 2003.

At the same time, this kind of innovative contemporary thinking were added to textbooks for elementary schools and junior high schools, which became generalised studies for the mass.

Also, the establishment of "Experimental Art Committee", "China Contemporary Art Institute", and the new exploration ways in art history and art theory, etc, are all positive responses to new cultural practices.

The "concern" in China contemporary development includes many factors, such as artist being not skilful enough or they are often looking for shortcuts, etc. But the main bottleneck is, it is awkwardly reviewed due to the aforementioned factors, and it even uses economical value to replace cultural value, making the past confused with reality, pushing "tradition" into "twin paradox", positioning to a self-centred spiritual poverty.

In fact, in the view of new cultural practices, no matter it is José Krijnen's concern, or it is local achievement, both of the reasons can complementarily explained that the development of the world of human and literacy is not only being multi-dimensional but interactive.

That is just like the case that you cannot step into two rivers at the same time. Success is unlikely due to a wrong approach; We cannot take measures without regard to changes in circumstances.

It is a natural reality for people to explore the depth, the sources and the vivid world. To innovate based on tradition, creating a colourful and harmonious new life needs. No matter whether it is reliable to depict the future by binding "culture sources" with "new postmodernism", taking into accounts Zhijie Qiu's development plans on different traditional folk cultural objects, and the trendy "rural construction" ideas, China is experiencing even wider and even more new cultural practices.

Overall, this showed that only with open communications, "atavism" in art, "horizontal transplant" and "genetic drift" can make that possible. Meanwhile, it also showed that: we need nourish meals to have healthier bodies; and we need healthier bodies to own the world; the very first elements of cultural heritage development are roots and pivots. Firstly we should have sophistication and authenticity in self reality. Some people such as Xiang Liu, was able to tell the world, "China is awesome!" And most importantly, dwelling in the past and being crazy about foreign things are both no cool things to do. That is just long-distance cloning others and losing true selves. The world village is not singularity but shared diversities. No matter as an individual or as a nation, people should be independent, sharing various resources and changing them into valuable ones for others. Only in this way, one can be considered as having contribution to the mankind.

Finally, I have to say that history and historians are not passive. Art and artists are not passive as well. The new history study noticed its matters - imperfection and lack of directions. This is just like José Krijnen's attitude: new art practices, and not trying to replace any past "written" modes. All the endeavours are nothing more than effort aiming to open those forgotten and neglected exploration space, so as to better promote people's awareness of the world knowledge and modelling. No matter they use "texts" or "behaviours".

This article is a translation from the academic art magazin ART OBSERVATION published may 2016.

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