

From Curating to Cedong:

***Long March: A Walking Visual Display*
and the Emergence of Contemporary
Chinese Curating**

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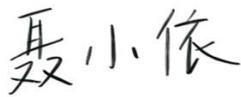
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Declaration

This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature of the author

The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink. The characters are '聂小依' (Niè Xiǎoyī), which is the name of the author. The signature is written in a cursive, fluid style.

Date 14 March 2022

Acknowledgement

My deep gratitude goes to my supervisors Prof. Victoria Walsh and Dr. Grant Watson. Victoria has empowered me along the long journey towards completion and taught me the importance of being ‘unassuming’ and ‘fair’ in my work. Grant inspired me to learn from the writing of novelist Jane Austen, when I mistook judgement for analysis. In the first two years of this research, my previous supervisor Prof. Juan Cruz encouraged me to explore marching and I chose to march in snow mountains, which added much fun to the research process.

This thesis could not start without the granted access to Long March Project’s archive. I much appreciate the assistance by the in-house researchers. Without Shen Jun’s sorting out the archive in 2017 and her discussion with me over the years, this research would not have been possible. I am also grateful for the trust from the curators, artists and scholars who received my interviews: Felicity Allen, Zian Chen, Ding Jie, Fei Dawei, Anna Harding, He Wenzhao, Hu Liu, Huang Qiang, Grant Watson, Theresa Leung, Li Shurui, Lu Jie, Philip Tinari, Qiu Zhijie, Shen Jun, Shen Xiaomin, Shi Qing, Song Yi, Wang Jianwei, Wang Yuyang, Xiao Xiong, Yan Bing, Zhang Hui, Zheng Shengtian. The conversation with Lu Jie has continued for years and Lu demonstrated great courage in allowing me to write about his own practice.

While in London and in China, my friends, peers, neighbours, and life partners in different stages, have encouraged me so much in my personal and professional life. I will always celebrate those meals, tea, wine and laughter we shared together. I especially appreciate Lillian’s support, sometimes in the way of persuading me to write another two minutes when I was caught by frustration. When you despair, what you need most is foolish support. Speaking of this, I am so proud of my brave parents, who always overcome their restraints to support me to explore the world, even when they cannot fully understand what my passion is for. As I wrote up in the winter of 2021, I returned home to Shandong. My mom, newly retired, cooked three meals a day for me for a whole month. I hope one day I will bring this research to them in Chinese.

Finally, my six years of education and research in Royal College of Art have been generously sponsored by the Chinese Scholarship Council. Without Prof. Zhu Qingsheng, my mentor in Peking University, I would not have been so lucky as to secure this opportunity. His vision of art was one approaching liberation, exhibiting a great passion for education, helped me to realise the path trailed by several generations of students. As one

student among many, I position this thesis as partially based on the efforts of my predecessors in writing the histories of contemporary Chinese art and contemporary curating.

As a non-native speaker of English, I appreciate the work undertaken by my proof-readers: Ren Chao, Rachel Boyd and Josh Leon.

Abstract

Long March: A Walking Visual Display (abbreviated as *Long March*) was an internationally renowned large-scale curatorial project curated by Lu Jie and executive curator Qiu Zhijie in China in 2002. It involved over 150 artists in an intense journey of temporary exhibitions and events along the historical and revolutionary Long March route in China. Based on four years of archival research and nearly thirty interviews with key participants, especially with Lu Jie, this thesis, as the first significant research on *Long March*, restores the international trajectory of the project in the wake of globalisation in the Chinese art ecology. The thesis details how the project grew out of Chinese artists' and critics' concern over the dependence of contemporary Chinese art on Western art and its art system in the 1990s. Influenced by the surging experimental curating practices in the West and in China, the two curators creatively appropriated work models of Socialist China — revolution propaganda and mass mobilisation — in their curatorial practice. In so doing, they attempted to open up alternative spaces and invent new approaches to art in a Chinese context. This thesis argues *Long March* reinvented Western curating for the Chinese context. Having greatly expanded the discourse and practice of curating, *Long March* became a watershed moment in the emergence of independent curators and curating in mainland China.

To shed light on the transcultural factors shaping the project, this thesis embodies a chronological order in three sections: 1) Lu's early trajectory in mainland China, Hong Kong and abroad as a young artist, editor, and art dealer (1964–1998); 2) the birth of the project's curatorial proposal at Goldsmiths, London, and its development in New York (1998–2001); 3) the project's mobilisation and realisation in China (2002). Sourcing from first-hand documentation, internet archives, video footage and interviews, the research restores the complex dynamic of the project's realisation, especially its unprecedented open nature of

organising, improvisational display of artworks by curators as agents of artists, and clashes caused by different understandings of exhibition-making. The gap between the original curatorial concept and the on-site execution led to the project's halt halfway, demonstrating the tension in curating between an individual's creative approach and the realities of the murky and muddy process of collaboration.

Re-examining *Long March* in relation to contemporary Chinese art, this thesis considers how the project has opened new spaces and reactivated overlooked local approaches for contemporary art in China. Curating as an unsolidified discipline also made it possible for *Long March* and Lu Jie to demonstrate a heterogeneous mode of artmaking and understanding of art. This thesis argues that the approaches and intentions found in *Long March* differed fundamentally from typical approaches to curating and participatory art practices of the West, with its aim to mobilise participants and instigate practitioners for self-reflection instead of displaying artworks as objects. I conclude by arguing that the work of *Long March* and similar curatorial projects in China should be understood as *cedong*, which initially means to devise plans, mobilise the public and instigate people for political movements. Free from the burden of art history and the long tradition of museums, *Cedong* can liberate curating and inspire more self-instigated actions reacting to urgency.

Key words: curating, Long March, *cedong*, transnational, Lu Jie, contemporary Chinese art

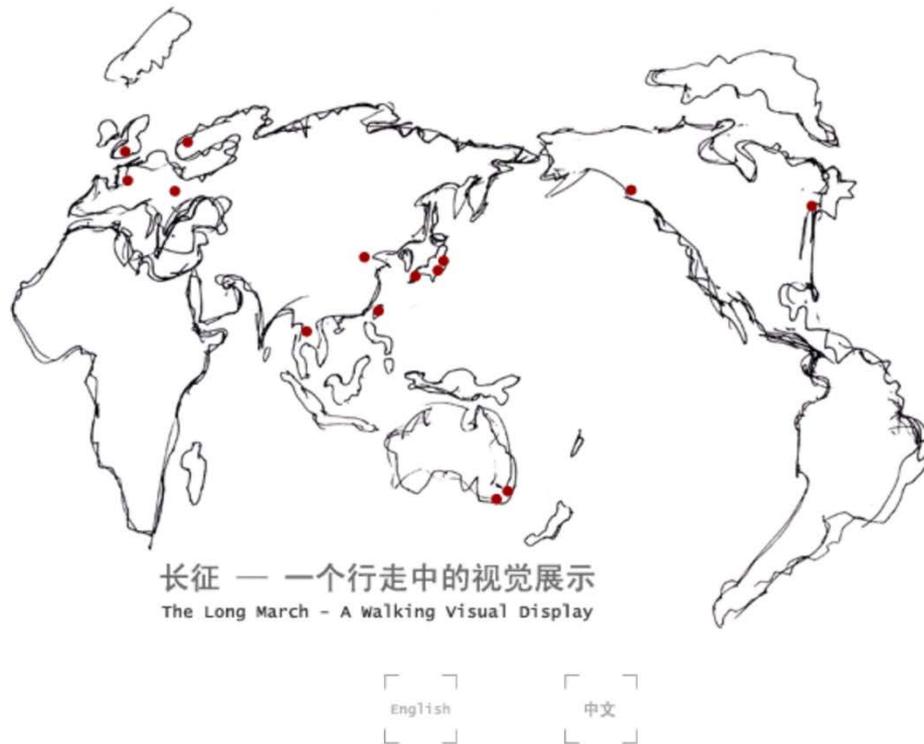


Fig. 1 Screenshot of website longmarchspace.com (6 March 2005). Courtesy of Long March Project, Long March Space and Internet Archive.



Fig. 2 Qiu Zhijie (the man with glasses on the left) and Lu Jie (the man with glasses on the right) were exhibiting Song Dong's photographic work Changing Directions-Scenery Series in a bazaar at Site 3 Longsheng, on 15 July 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

The Trajectory of Long March: A Walking Visual Display

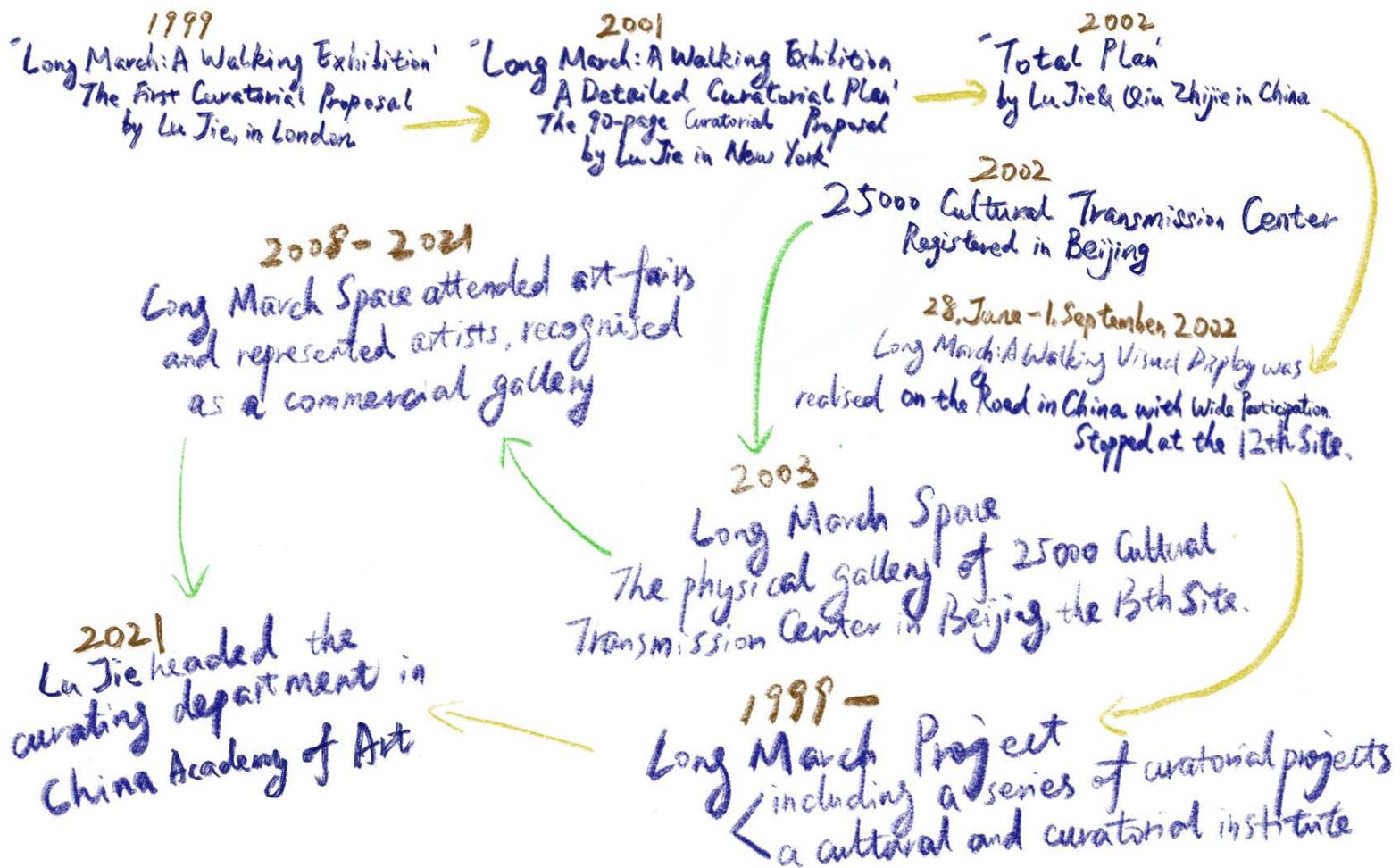


Fig. 3 The trajectory of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, drawn by the author.

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- As this thesis relates to contemporary art and curating in mainland China and most figures are Chinese, spelling of people's names and certain terms usually follows the *pinyin* system used in mainland China by Mandarin speakers. For most Chinese names of Han people (the major ethnicity in China), the surname is positioned before the given name. For example, Lu Jie's surname is 'Lu' and the given name is 'Jie'. If there are conventions or people have demonstrated their own way of spelling, my spelling follows existing examples. For example, Johnson Chang (Chang Tsong-Zung) is usually spelled with his English name at first.
- This thesis follows MHRA style in citation and format. The names of curatorial projects have been formatted in single quotation marks. To differentiate and emphasise *Long March* in relation to other curatorial projects mentioned, I have chosen to italicise *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, sometimes abbreviating to *Long March*. Other projects which make reference to 'Long March' in its various iterations: for example, the historical act Long March, the institution Long March Project and the gallery Long March Space. These titles are given in full.
- If not stated specifically, the translation of originally Chinese texts are mine.
- As the website of Long March Project has been rebuilt in late 2021, some links of the content on the website in 2017 have become invalid. Readers are suggested to visit and browse the current website www.longmarchproject.com before reading.

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Introduction

1 The Archive is Not Ready

In the sweltering summer of 2017, every morning I took a long breath before squeezing into the fully packed carriage of the Beijing underground. I got off at Jiangtai station on the Fourteenth Line, which was newly opened to the public, hopped on a bus for a short ride and walked from the guarded gate of 798 Art Zone to Long March Space. Walking through the white-cube space and into the office zone, I would find my allocated desk on that day, sit down, and start uploading archival texts to the online website longmarchproject.com. Many art spaces and commercial galleries are located in the 798 Art Zone. The buildings, which used to host machinery and products, instead of artworks, are the heritage of the socialist economy they once belonged to — the Beijing Huabei Wireless Equipment Joint Factory, which opened in 1952 as part of China’s First Five-Year Plan.¹ In the 1990s, as the ‘Reform and Opening Up’ policy accelerated, many state-owned factories were privatised. Occasionally, operations ceased after going through the reformation; at others, the factories were compulsively relocated to the suburbs to combat excessive pollution. The land within the 798 area was initially reserved for the technology industry; but from the early 2000s, some sculpture artists from CAFA began to rent workshops (the space of Galleria Continua today) and soon other workshops were converted into artist studios and galleries.²

In November 2002, Lu Jie (1964–), who had just stopped the curatorial project *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* halfway, returned to Beijing. *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (abbreviated as *Long March*) was an internationally renowned large-scale curatorial project in the hinterland of China along the historical Long March route in 2002. Curated by the main curator Lu Jie and the executive curator Qiu Zhijie, it involved over 150 Chinese and international artists, critics and scholars including established names such as American artist Judy Chicago (1939–) and Chinese artist Wang Jianwei (1958–), as well as amateur and emerging artists in art academies, official institutes and rural areas. But the journey, initially aimed to end in Yan’an, stopped halfway in Sichuan Province. After returning to Beijing, Lu rented one of the factory spaces in the 798 Art Zone and renovated

¹ Ye Ying, *Yaobian 798 [Fambe 798]* (Beijing: Newstar Press, 2010), p. 61.

² Interview with Chyanga, December 2021.

it into the art space 25000 Li Cultural Transmission Center (abbreviated as the Center).³ The space claimed to be 250 m², corresponding to the length of the Red Army's Long March, which was also said to be 25000 li, about 12500 kilometres.⁴

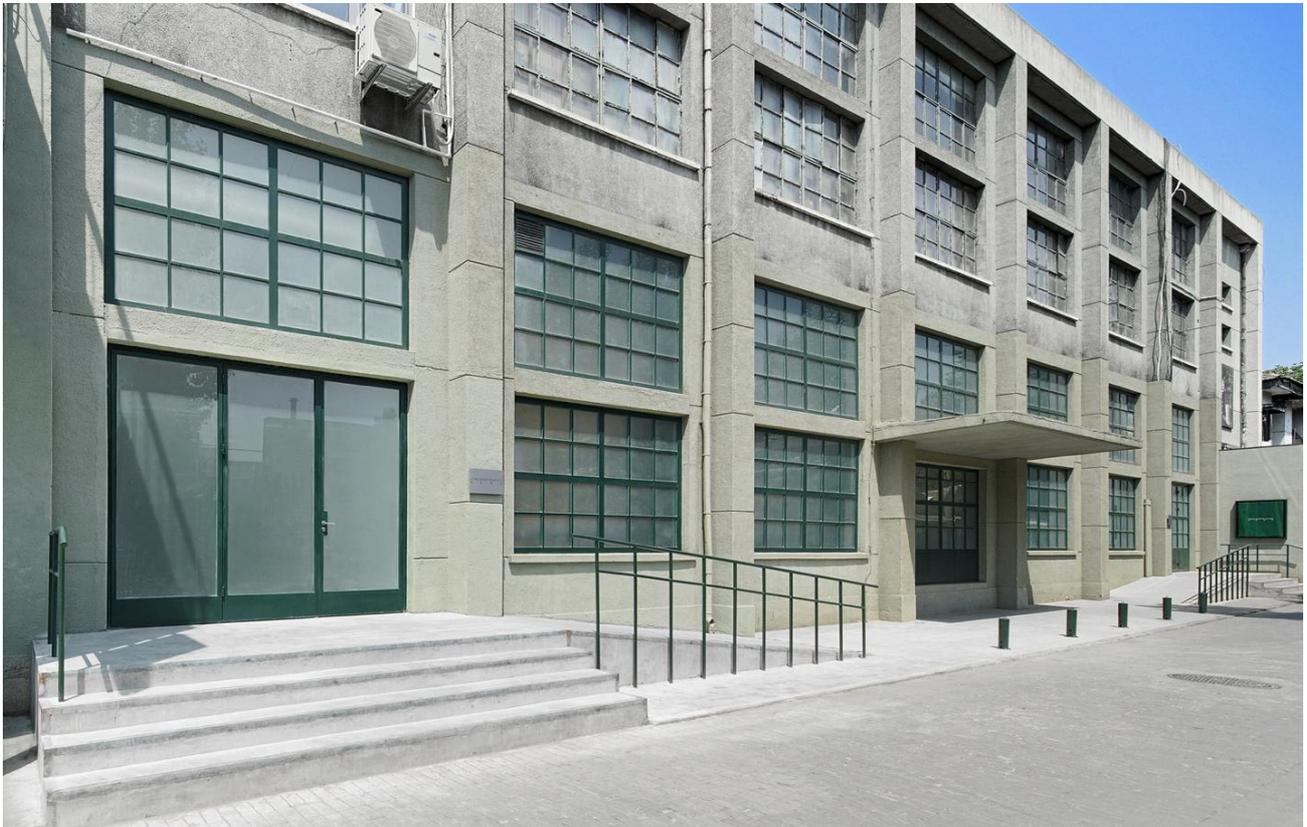


Fig. 4 The facade of Long March Space after renovation in 2020. Photography by Wang Hongyue. Courtesy of Long March Space and Studio HVN.

The centre was 'hybrid' by nature: it initiated non-profit art projects that later travelled to overseas biennials and public galleries, ran a residency programme for artists and

³ 'Changzheng Kongjian Shengji Shi: Cong 1.0 Dao 8.0 de Changzheng Lu' [The Upgrading History of Long March Space: The Long March from 1.0 to 8.0], *Artron.Net* <<https://news.artron.net/20180320/n991689.html>> [accessed 8 July 2021].

⁴ 25000 li is about 12500 kilometres but the length of the Long March was a controversy over the years. Edward Snow recorded that, "The Reds themselves generally spoke of it as the "25,000-li March," and with all its twists, turns and counter-marches, from the farthest point in Fukien to the end of the road in far northwest Shensi, some sections of the marches undoubtedly did that much or more. An accurate stage-by-stage itinerary prepared by the First Army Corps showed that its route covered a total of 18,088 *li*, or 6,000 miles — about twice the width of the American continent — and this figure was perhaps the average march of the main forces.' Edward Snow, 'A Nation Emigrates', *Red Star Over China - The Rise of The Red Army*, 1st ed. (London: Left Book Club, Victor Gollancz, 1937); an extensively revised version by Snow was published in 1968 with Grove Press (New York). According to the contemporary research into the Long March, the length 25,000 li was published firstly in 1935 and was the length of the longest trip among soldiers as different sections of the army took on different routes. Also, the collective memoir edited by the party's propaganda department in 1936 was also named as *25000 Li*. Jiang Tingyu, 'Jiedu Changzheng (6): Hongjun Changzheng Liangwanwuqian Li Shi Ruhe Tongji de?' [Interpretation of the Long March (6): How Did the Calculation of the Red Army's Twenty-Five Thousand Li Take Place?], *Dangshi Xuexi Jiaoyu Guanwang*, 2016 <<http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0901/c85037-28683905.html>> [accessed 15 July 2021].

scholars, and at the same time managed an art business to fund itself.⁵ These activities stretched the Center into different directions. For example, in 2005, Lu moved the gallery to a much larger space within the 798 and renamed the centre as Long March Space. This space, asserted to be 2500m² this time used to serve factory workers as a huge cafeteria and the kitchen, also hosted Long March Project, which conducts artistic and creative practice like its former entity.⁶ But after 2008, Long March Space began attending art fairs and representing artists on the market. It started to be recognised in the art world as a commercial gallery. Though Long March Space and Long March Project have different names, internally they share resources like funding, space, and staff. Lu, the founder of both, considered the two entities to be ‘two legs in the same pants.’⁷

In April 2017, my PhD research proposal was accepted by Royal College of Art. Yet my access to materials in Long March Space during the summer was not granted for academic field research but as an intern. It was lucky that during the time when I was doing a PhD on *Long March*, the curatorial project was also undergoing changes. Before that, Long March Project had not initiated curatorial projects and had remained in hibernation since around 2012. Around the beginning of 2017, two staff of similar age to me, Shen Jun and Zian Chen, were recruited as ‘researchers’ of Long March Project, marking the revival. On its new website, Long March Project introduced itself as ‘an ongoing curatorial and institutional practice’.⁸ Shen Jun spent months sorting out a detailed chronology of Long March Project, including its events, exhibitions, presentations, and publications in and out of China. Her work laid a foundation and a route map of tasks for the temporary team — two staff and two interns (including me and Jin Zhanyi, a young art student from Slade). That summer we worked to build a new website for Long March Project for the comprehensive survey exhibition ‘Art and China After 1989: Theater of the World’ to be opened in Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in October 2017. The priority for the new team was not to initiate new projects or demonstrate its presence in the contemporary art scene. Rather, Long March’s contemporary revival was brought about to reflect upon how the project had evolved, and subsequent impact on curatorial practice, the art market and in artist relations. It had been invited to become part of the history of contemporary Chinese art

⁵ Ye Ying, *Yaobian 798 [Fambe 798]*, p. 71.

⁶ ‘Changzheng kongjian shengji shi: song 1.0 Dao 8.0 de changzheng lu’. From 2017 to 2021, Long March Project self-introduced itself as ‘curatorial and institutional practice’ but at the end of 2021, with the update of its website, the introduction changed to ‘curatorial and artistic practice’. ‘About’, *Long March Project*, <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/about>> [accessed 18 November 2021].

⁷ Interview with Lu Jie, July 2021.

⁸ ‘About’, *Long March Project*, <<http://longmarchproject.com/about-lmp>> [accessed 12 October 2017].

since 1989, but its own archive was not yet organised, or readily available to the contemporary public.



Fig. 5 Exhibition scene of Long March Project in ‘Theater of the World: Chinese Contemporary Art after 1989’ in Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2017. The video was the recording of Long March Project’s performance/event ‘Avant-garde’ on Performa in New York in 2007. The digital pads were displaying pages of the website of longmarchproject.com. Photography by Shen Jun. Courtesy of Long March Project.

Exhibiting overseas was not a new experience for Long March Project. Before 2010, Long March Project had been invited to join many renowned biennials and museums: Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial (2003), Shanghai Biennale (2004), Taipei Biennial (2004), Yokohama Triennial (2005), Asia Pacific Triennial (Brisbane, 2006), PERFORMA (New York, 2007), The Lyon Museum of Contemporary Art (2004), The National Museum of Contemporary Art in Oslo (2004), and Asia Society Museum in New York (2008). This array of worldwide art institutions had endorsed Long March Project, thus accounting for the project’s importance. In these international exhibitions, Long March Project often positioned beside other artworks in the context of contemporary Chinese art. However, Long March Project cannot be encapsulated as a single artist, nor an artist collective. Long March Project initiated a series of curatorial experiments. As a curatorial project, the

internal dynamic between the participants and the curators and the curatorial process were essential to understand these projects. However, in these exhibitions centred around artworks, Long March Project often could not fully unfold.

This thesis clearly regards Long March Project as a curatorial experiment, and focuses on its first project in 2002, *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, which, as Long March Project acknowledged, laid the crucial ground of methodology for later projects.⁹ *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* did not take place in galleries, in big cities or target art professionals, but extended itself to the hinterland of China, encountering various groups of people including ‘workers, peasants, soldiers, students, and merchants.’¹⁰ Lu Jie was the main curator of the project and the author of the curatorial proposal ‘A Detailed Curatorial Plan’ (2001), in which he planned for twenty sites of exhibitions, screenings, seminars, symposia along the historical route of the Long March. The project’s main title also came directly from the original Long March: of 1934, under the military attack by Kuomintang (the Chinese Nationalist Party or the KMT), the Red Army, military force of the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP), began an over one-year arduous trek across China, from the southeast to the northwest. When Edgar Snow reported it to Western readers in 1937, he referred to the military action as ‘an odyssey unequalled in modern times.’¹¹ The Red Army’s excruciating journey has been depicted and fabricated in films, songs and stories and celebrated as the founding legend of the People’s Republic of China. *Long March*, the curatorial project, appropriated this heroic narrative as well as the history Long March as a living cultural symbol in China, arousing collective memories and sentiment. In 2002, the project was realised and eventually, twelve sites took place. Lu Jie, Qiu Zhijie and other participants travelled along the original route, organising film screenings for villagers, mounting on-site exhibitions, and hosting symposia with local residents and sometimes officers of non-art institutions. There was also remote participation from artists based in Beijing, Shanghai, Europe, and America. The project can be easily perceived as another *pilgrimage to the Long March* (*‘chongzou changzheng lu’*), which was a symbolic act

⁹ The introduction of the ‘Project’ page on the website of Long March Project says, ‘As Long March Project’s function and form incorporates that of scholar, curator and art space, following the methodology laid down in the inaugural project “Long March – A Walking Visual Display” (2002), each subsequent project chooses prescient issues of discussion whilst adhering to the notion of the inseparability of the present from the historical.’ See, Long March Project, ‘PROJECT’ <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/project/>> [accessed 17 December 2021].

¹⁰ Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, ‘Curators’ Words’, in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (New York: Long March Foundation, 2003), pp. 5–12 <<http://longmarchproject.com/curators-words/>> [accessed 18 November 2017].

¹¹ Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*.

conducted most often by the young Red Guards during the radical decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). In fact, some still perceive *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* and Long March Project as Communist propaganda reinforcing the mainstream ideology in China.¹²

The project also attracted other kinds of interpretation. When art historian and critic Claire Bishop was working on her *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), she became aware of Long March Project and made a field trip to Beijing. Bishop defined ‘participatory art’ in reference to ‘socially engaged art’, ‘community-based art’ and ‘collaborative art’ that emphasised collectivity, collaboration and ‘the involvement of many people’.¹³ *Long March* echoed with the term by nature because of its wide participation and its happening in social space. However, Bishop ultimately did not include the project as her case study. As a consequence, the geographical range of her research became restrained to Europe and America. Bishop explained in a footnote that, Long March Project initiated by Lu Jie and *the Land Project* (1998–) by Thai artists Rirkrit Tiravanija and Kamin Lerdchaiprasert ‘sat uncomfortably within my narrative, despite the fact that the instigators of both projects were trained in the West.’¹⁴ Bishop’s footnote intrigued me to discover more about this project, especially the inaugural *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*.

What was the heterogeneity that made the project sit ‘uncomfortably’ within Bishop’s framework? If *Long March* was excluded from the range of ‘participatory art’, how should we understand the participation in the project in relation to art? How is this related to Lu Jie’s education in the West and the location of the project in China? The awkwardness of taking the project as participatory art, did not only apply to Long March Project, but also other projects in China like ‘the Bishan Commune Project’ (2011–2016), ‘Transit Project’ (2011–) ‘Tetris’ (2020–): could we still perceive these projects in China as ‘participatory art’?¹⁵

¹² Both Lu Jie and some other interviewees said there had been such readings on *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*.

¹³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Verso Books, 2012), p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹⁵ ‘Bishan Project’ was carried out in Bishan Village, Yi County in south Anhui Province in the 2010s. Inspired by both community-building experiments in the West and the Rural Reconstruction Movement in Republica era, Ou Ning, with Zuo Jing, ‘mobilized some intellectuals to live together there for experiments in utopian living’. Ou Ning, *Utopia in Practice: Bishan Project and Rural Reconstruction* (Springer Nature, 2020), p. 47.

‘Transit Project’ was organised by He Wenzhao, Yang Qing and more in Lijiang, Yunnan Province. It will be discussed more in the Conclusion.

‘Tetris’ was a series of collective trips and discussions in peripheral places in China and the first edition took place in 2020. Song Yi, the initiator and previously a research in Long March Project, has been interested in non-professional art practices outside of the art industry. In *Tetris*, he invited 17 researchers, artists and educators with different backgrounds to travel together during two weeks. The aim of this project, as Song Yi said, was to challenge the participants’ existing ‘understandings of people living in the society’ and ‘self-critique’. *Dispatches from Tetris*, ed. by Song Yi (Beijing: Institute for Provocation, 2021).

‘Bishan Commune’, ‘Transit Project’, ‘Tetris’ and ‘Long March: A Walking Visual Display’ were quite comprehensive and invited practitioners with diverse backgrounds to join. They indeed involved participation of artists and local residents and took place in social sphere. But they were not asserted to be artworks. Moreover, though organisers brought in typical artistic practices like painting, performance and music, the projects did not come from Bishop’s narrative about artists’ rethinking about the role of art in an increasingly commercialized society. These projects often started with particular interests and emphasis on how social realities reshaped the methodologies and positions of art.

On another note, I acknowledge that scholar Meiqin Wang’s systematic writings on social-engaged art in China can provide a much more concrete analysis to these projects. I agree with Wang that Chinese socially engaged art are shaped by the bottom-up desires among Chinese intellectuals (2019: 3) — the first Section of this thesis will present Lu Jie’s self-identification as an intellectual instead of an artist or someone in the art industry. Wang also traced the emphasis on ‘social function’ of art in China to the Modern Woodcut Movement during the 1930s and 1940s and the Maoist art and culture policy before the 1980s (2019: 4). As Tang Xiaobing argues, with the example of Modern Woodcut Movement,

What the Chinese avant-garde confronted, however, was not only a nascent modern system of artistic values and practices, but also an entrenched traditional aesthetic order and sensibility. Furthermore, the looming national crisis defined how the woodcut artists understood the praxis of life to which they wished to return art and on which they sought to exert an impact. (2008: 4)

What Tang reveals about the Modern Woodcut Movement applies to many other socially engaged art projects in China — while updating they have been born in social crises and become activism, as Meiqin Wang has noted. In this sense, socially engaged art in China added the dimension of social values into the common understanding of ‘art’ (*Yishu*), a translated term from the Western culture and introduced via Japanese, which included traditional intellectual practices like ink wash paintings and the Western ‘fine arts’.

Reviews of socially engaged art in China has come into existence during the 2010s. SEACHINA (seachina.net, 2014–) is a digital archive and research project of ‘socially engaged art in contemporary China’ initiated by artist and scholar Zheng Bo. Scholar Meiqin Wang (2019) has conducted in-depth analysis of and added values to practices out of the mainstream vision. Both scholars like Wang (2019) and Zheng Bo (2010) recognise that in the authoritarian Chinese political context, China and the West face different obstacles in the pursuit of publicness and these socially engaged art projects often appear to be radically against the regime. However, Zhou Yanhua, who published the first theoretical book (2017) on ‘engaged art’ in China, considered that at the current stage, the analysis of engaged art still had to rely on Western discourses. In their research, most cases have been conducted by artists who largely work with particular social phenomena in certain places. For example, Zhou’s book (2017) centres around theatricality and an expanded field of ‘artworks’. To develop a more precise discussion on ‘Bishan Commune’, ‘Transit Project’, ‘Tetris’ and ‘Long March: A Walking Visual Display’, I consider that it is important to clearly recognise that these projects are not artworks but curatorial practices that invite participants to join with different ways — curating directly suggests an encounter of different agenda and various disciplines.

Meiqin Wang, *Socially Engaged Art in Contemporary China: Voices from Below*, Routledge Research in Art and Politics (New York: Routledge, Taylor Francis Group, 2019). Tang Xiaobing, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (University of California Press, 2008). Zheng Bo, ‘Creating Publicness: From the Stars Event to Recent Socially Engaged Art.’, *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 9.5 (2010), 71–85. Zhou Yanhua, *Yishu de Jieru: Jieruxing Yishu de Shenmei Yiyi Shengcheng Jizhi [Artistic Engagement: The Aesthetic Paradigm of Socially Engaged Art]* (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2017).



Fig. 6 The landing page of longmarchfoundation.org on 1 December 2002.

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20021201142926/http://longmarchfoundation.org/>>

[Accessed through Wayback Machine, Internet Archive on 17 October 2020]. Courtesy of Long March Project and Internet Archive.



Fig. 7 The cover of the catalogue of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (Beijing: Long March Foundation, 2003). The two characters below the logo were composed by English letters of 'Long March' and drawn by artist Xu Bing. Courtesy of Long March Project.

With these questions, I started the journey of my doctoral degree as an intern for updating the website of Long March Project. I was lucky to work with the first-hand materials archived in Long March Project and reading these miscellaneous materials transformed my macro questions into detailed observations. I realised that, for Long March

Project, the website has always been a crucial method of presentation. Devising and updating the website was also a persistent practice from its early stage till now. Through the Wayback Machine of Internet Archive, we can consult the earliest website longmarchfoundation.org, initiated in 2002, and its later iteration, longmarchspace.com and longmarchproject.com.¹⁶ These websites took on versatile forms and during their active periods, these websites kept updating alongside the practice. As one of the staff reflected, choosing the website as the medium to exhibit in the Guggenheim exhibition was largely because, through a single portal, the website can extend into unlimited pages and present different facets of the curatorial practice.¹⁷ Long March Project/Space's extensive websites demonstrated their established networks, just as a physical archive may make manifest a series of relationships within the body of a collection. For a long time, during the 2000s, the content of exhibitions in the physical gallery Long March Space in Beijing and curatorial projects initiated and carried out in other places were published together on longmarchspace.com. But after 2008, as 'Long March Space' became a name for the brand of a commercial gallery, its website was also updated and mainly published news of represented artists and art fairs. The old content on the previous website was transferred to longmarchproject.com but this website was rarely updated and became suspended around 2016.¹⁸ The chance of building a new website in 2017 was also to gather the materials of curatorial projects together and build an archive dedicated to Long March Project.

Comparing this website with the old versions demonstrated the change of the relation between Long March Project and Long March Space, and the relation between Long March Project and the audience. The websites longmarchfoundation.org and longmarchspace.com, during the 2000s, had often been a comprehensive index, generously sharing materials about the initial project *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* including the curatorial plan and the process on the road. The website also collected different writings about *Long March* in the column called 'Discourse' (*huayu*) including transcripts of closed-door discussions and some participants' diaries during the trip. (In the early stages back in 2004, the column even included articles by Mao Zedong and official reports on the sixteenth Chinese Communist Party Congress.¹⁹) In 2017, when Shen Jun and Zian Chen designed the

¹⁶ Though few people knew this method and the materials on them cannot be found on search engines.

¹⁷ Interview with Shen Jun in 2017.

¹⁸ Thanks to the Wayback Machine on Internet Archive, one can find the changes of a website over the years by comparing the screenshots on different dates.

¹⁹ 'Discourse', *Long March Foundation*, 2003

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20031008014454/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/english/e-discourse.htm>> [accessed 18 July 2021].

new website, not all materials were expected to be uploaded and the existing contents should also be revised: Long March Project itself had changed and the expected audience along with it. For example, a volunteer Yang Jie wrote about her experience during *Long March* with rich anecdotes and this series 'Niuniu's Long March' (*niuniu changzheng ji*) (2002) attracted a broad public on the initial website in 2002.²⁰ For the new website, these writings were not included perhaps for their highly personal perspective.

The official account of *Long March* — 'Reports from the Road' (2002), which documented the daily happenings in the realised twelve sites, were also revised. Some pieces of were posted on arts.tom.com during the journey in 2002 and their full versions were published on the project's website later. These reports, though official accounts, read like traditional Chinese fantasy novels with vocabularies and quotations from socialist propaganda. The author was unstated; yet through interviews, I came to confirm it was mainly written by one of the curators Qiu Zhijie.²¹ Qiu's humour saturated the lines: he often played with a wide range of references and casually brought in anecdotes. The playful tone worked in 2002 as the writings were clearly written by the curators; but after fifteen years, these writings, with highly individualistic characteristics, could not be used as official accounts by a curatorial institute. In 2017, Shen Jun was sitting beside me. She replaced all the 'we' with 'the team', levelled down exaggerating statements and deleted funny detours. Through such detailed editing, the narrative was stripped of the traces of first-person narrative and was rewritten to appear like an objective history.

The series 'Reports from the Road' (2002), diarised the inner workings of the curatorial project. Although 'Reports from the Road' documented the journey taken by the artists and curators quite meticulously, it was written from the perspective of the curators and other staff. It omitted any mention of the preparations undertaken for the journey. It also lacked other participating artists' perspectives, experiences, feelings, and reflections — failing to fully represent the whole of the project. In observing the editing of the old texts, I also realised that despite the name of the texts remaining the same, a text was likely to have been altered posthumously, upon accession into the project archive. The revision of the contents and the updates of the websites indicated a shift of temporality of the project: from acting in the present to becoming a reflection of the past. New audiences and researchers

²⁰ Lu Jie and Yang Jie, 'Wo Men Shi Shui? — Lu Jie yu Niuniu de duihua' [Who We Are? — A Conversation Between Lu Jie and Niuniu], 2002
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20021230203635/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/huayu/nn14.htm>> [accessed 30 November 2020].

²¹ Interview with Qiu Zhijie, October 2018.

possibly would not realise this when browsing the new website of Long March Project in 2017, making it more difficult to learn how the project originally took place.

Apart from these materials open to the public, there are in fact many original sources about *Long March* in their archive not open to the public yet, such as the voluminous video cassettes of the process, objects collected meticulously by Lu Jie during the journey, analogue films and working documents. These materials have rarely been exposed. Initially the curators wanted to make a documentary. Apart from collaborating with a television station to make a documentary with analogue films, they also invited videographer Shen Xiaomin to shoot the project with a digital camera. The television station's documentary did not work out and Shen Xiaomin's documentation became the only copy. As an insider and as one of the few who travelled through the journey with the curators, Shen Xiaomin documented the whole process, not only the exhibitions but also work meetings, conversations, and meals. These recordings were edited into an hour-long documentary.²² As for the objects, most of the time they had been packed in storage. Like these objects, there are also numerous digital materials including films, photos, files, and emails stored on hard drives or the internal server. Many of these were just files in folders on computers when a project was completed.

As the original staff and witnesses of those projects had left or forgotten the details, the latecomers like Shen Jun needed to read a lot of materials and conduct research to make sense of the inherited objects and files. In 2017, Shen Jun sorted out the digital documents, producing a chronology of Long March Project and several checklists. In 2018, Shen Jun and other staff moved to organise the physical remains. They invited young volunteers, moved the packed boxes to the white-cube gallery and initiated a public 'redisplay', showing the process of registering 'transitory objects' that 'existed in a suspended state' in the warehouse.²³ In this process, Shen and other staff felt that, "The excavation of Long March Objects was akin to an archaeological dig."²⁴ On the other hand, it has also been difficult for the staff to connect the history of *Long March* to its present state. The new team of Long

²² Long March Project, *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, Youku <https://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMjk2MzI2NzUyMA==.html?spm=a2hzp.8244740.0.0> [accessed 8 December 2021].

²³ Long March Project, 'From Long March Object to Long March Archive', *Long March Archive: Long March Object #1*, (Beijing: Long March Object, 2019), unnumbered pages. This publication was a companion to the exhibition 'Long March Project: A Working Redisplay' (15-30 November 2018) in Long March Space. The exhibition and publication were led by Shen Jun, though it was not clearly stated.

²⁴ 'Press Release of "Long March Project: A Working Redisplay"' (Long March Space, 2018) <<http://www.longmarchspace.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Long-March-Project-A-Working-Redisplay-Press-Release-en-1026-final.pdf>>.

March Project, together with the new director Theresa Liang and another staff member, Clement Huang, curated exhibitions synonymous with early exhibitions, but the early histories and contexts of Long March Project were already too remote to be known by the current audience and such efforts often became self-referential.

This lack of a continuous and comprehensive history of Long March Project, to some extent, is also related to the resistance to a systematic review by the living participants. Since 2019 the in-house team were working on a five-volume publication of Long March Project as the twenty-year anniversary of *Long March* approached. However, this publication has been constantly put off and nearly suspended. In a meeting summoned for the publication, Qiu Zhijie could not make it but called Lu Jie and said, '*Long March* should not stop!' This persistence enabled Long March Project to present their legacy, seemingly oblique, as a continual 'work-in-progress'. Few researchers could earn full access to the physical and digital archive hosted by Long March Project. Though there were documentation, there was not a strict procedure for joining the project in 2002 and not many participants had signed consent forms. The content, administration and ownership of the archive involve different parties and this makes the access to the archive — partially because the participants of *Long March* in 2002 did not anticipate the great value, international reputation and legal status of these materials, nor did they account for the archival legacy of the testimony and documentation they had accumulated throughout its run.

Returning to 2017, I faced many puzzles and questions. Though Long March Project and Long March Space were clearly separate — one as a non-profit and curatorial institute and the other performing like a commercial gallery — there seemed to be a more cohesive force called *Long March* when the two entities shared staff, space, and a founder. Besides, what was the relation between *Long March* and the public? How should we comprehend its engagement with society at large? When Bishop visited Long March Project in Beijing, she found she could not include Long March Project into the framework of participatory art. Long March Project did emphasise the social value in bringing art to the public, installing exhibitions in a number of unconventional spaces. It distinguished itself from other contemporary art centres and galleries by closely working with 'the public realm'.²⁵ If not

²⁵ Long March Project curated a series of exhibitions called 'The Power of the Public Realm' at 25000 Cultural Transmission Center from 2003 to 2004. 'The Power of the Public Realm', *Long March Project* <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/project/minjiandeliliang2003-2004/>> [accessed 10 January 2022].

participatory art, from what kind of perspective should *Long March* be understood? Many researchers have interpreted this feature. For example, Enhua Zhang looked into the project's appropriation of collective memories and its emphasis of the geographical space of the original Long March.²⁶ Chang Tan discussed the project's embodiment of the communist ideology and mobilisation of 'the masses' in relation to 'communal art'.²⁷ Timothy Shea emphasised the project's attempt to relocate Chinese contemporary art and create a new 'national art geography' in peripheral areas.²⁸

However, most researchers have distilled a particular component of the project, especially the curators' discourse. This research tried to understand the project by examining the full process of the curatorial project. This thesis creates a new narrative of *Long March* by weaving materials from different sources, with participants' personal experiences in and out of the project and examining these accounts against each other. Hopefully this narrative can pave the way for greater understanding of how these materials might be represented and interpreted within the public domain.

My thesis emerges from several questions, concerning the overarching methodology of *Long March*: How did the project take place? What was the role of the participants in the project? What were the curators, artists and participants' motivation to start and join the project? To answer these questions, in the summer of 2018, I started interviewing participants of *Long March* to collect more accounts of the project outside of Long March Archive.

²⁶ Enhua Zhang, 'The Long March: From a Search for a Promised Land to a Site of Memory', in *Space, Politics, and Cultural Representation in Modern China: Cartographies of Revolution*, Routledge Contemporary China Series (Taylor & Francis, 2016), pp. 64–107.

²⁷ Chang Tan, 'Art for/of the Masses: Revisiting the Communist Legacy in Chinese Art', *Third Text*, 26.2 (2012), 177–94.

²⁸ Timothy Shea, 'Where There Are No Art Circles: The Long March Project and New Geographies of Contemporary Chinese Art', *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 16.6 (2017), 77–83.



Fig. 8 On-site Scene of 'A Working Redisplay: Long March Archive' exhibited in Long March Space in November 2018. The staff and volunteers were taking photos of objects collected during the journey of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* and documenting their information in digital files. Courtesy of Long March Project.



Fig. 9 On-site Scene of ‘A Working Redisplay: Long March Archive’ exhibited in Long March Space in November 2018. The boxes of archival objects. Courtesy of Long March Project.

2 Long March as A Crosspoint

Although ‘Reports from the Road’ was written from the perspective of the curatorial team, as soon as I interviewed Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, I realised that the official documents still omitted much of their personal experience. After the late 2000s, Lu has rarely given interviews, perhaps because he has tried to keep a distance from the running of Long March Project/Space as a founder with strong personal approaches. But during my research, I had privileged access to Lu Jie including three in-person interviews, several online calls, and a lecture where I presented some of this research to him and students at China Academy of Art.²⁹ The first interview in 2018 was arranged and accompanied by the in-house researchers Shen Jun and Zian Chen, who I have shared puzzles and thoughts with since 2017. This close bond with the staff of Long March Project helped me win some crucial trust and they have since considered me as one of their co-thinkers regarding their practice. The

²⁹ Nie Xiaoyi, “‘Cezhan Jiaoyu’ he Jintian de Gongzuo” [‘Curatorial Education’ and Our Current Work], 28 October 2021, China Academy of Art.

interviews with Lu also gradually moved from fact-checking to reflections upon the project — these contents contributed substantially to this thesis, by helping to identify unmentioned people and factors that influenced the project and extended the research to the emergence of contemporary Chinese art in the 1980s.

Working with Long March Project and understanding their difficulties in sorting out the history, I also identified some key participants of *Long March* to interview. From 2018 to 2021, I conducted about thirty interviews with the curators, artists, scholars, and staff who have crossed paths with *Long March*. Initially I planned group workshops so that different participants could be reminded of and stimulate each other about their shared experiences. But I later found that it was difficult for previous participants to reflect upon their divergences in and after the project. Instead, one-on-one interviews created a safer and more intimate space. To secure these interviews, I needed to build different relations with my interviewees, navigating through existing and ongoing politics. As a student of a younger generation and a young female, I found I could earn people's trust easier because I was not a witness or participant myself. I could explain that my research was conducted out of curatorial interests and due to my own struggles in studying curating in the West as a Chinese student — like Lu Jie in the 1990s. This position as a latecomer to *Long March* allowed me to ask direct questions, but also required me to collect more materials for a more accurate understanding of the project.

When interviewing, I usually prepared a question list, starting with general questions but often encountered unexpected accounts and new information that overturned my assumptions. There were different stories, anecdotes, reflections, complaints, explanations, and thoughts — some of which had fermented for years. For these participants, the project was not a history, but a part of their experiences; rich, lively, personal. They turned the collective project personal, and the single account polyvocal. To my surprise, most artists I spoke with considered that they participated in *Long March* to realise their own work and organise their own production. There was not a shared identification among participants in the project as a collective and they did not necessarily meet each other in the project. Although they were involved in the project, they remained independent and felt that they could not speak for the project. *Long March* in fact should never be seen as only 'a walking visual display', but an aggregation of many individuals' experiences over different temporalities.

The narrative put forward by Long March Project sometimes alluded to a collective

status. For example, the author of ‘Long March Glossary’ is ‘Long March Collective’.³⁰ This text was printed on the first content page of the catalogue of *Long March*. It was an index of nine entries, such as ‘Long March Discourse’, ‘Long March Remains’ and ‘Long March Methodology’ – all of which started with ‘Long March’. They consciously included all elements and factors that appeared in the project, from human beings to objects. To some extent, each tiny part of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* could be included into one of these terms. So, who were the members of ‘Long March Collective’? There wasn’t a list of participants. In our interview, Lu mentioned he came up with the idea of ‘Long March Glossary’ during the journey of *Long March* in 2002. But he did not credit this file with his name, which contrasted sharply with his clear self-credit on his curatorial proposal. ‘Long March Collective’ can be seen as a particular way of the curators sharing credits with participants in this curatorial project. After these interviews, this thesis puts forward the idea that the voice created through the identity ‘Long March Collective’ should be considered as a curatorial invention, which in return has subdued individuals’ voices including the curators’.

Certainly, there can never be two same accounts of the same event. Sometimes, the accounts are even contradictory to each other. It was at this time that I started checking more materials and conducting more interviews for cross-referencing, verifying them in historical documents. The case of Site 6, Lugu Lake, where Judy Chicago collaborated with Chinese women artists was one such example. Scholar Sasha Su-ling Welland recorded and analysed this site in detail, especially the clash between Chinese artists, Chicago and Lu Jie in her book *Experimental Beijing*.³¹ Welland, as one of the participants of this site, reflected upon how this site raised questions of feminism in contemporary art in China through transnational encounters. But through the interviews with artist Li Shurui – who was on site but not in the collective of other Chinese artists, as she did not identify herself as a ‘women artist’ – and Lu Jie, I came to examine more practical issues in the curating of the project especially the limit of time in execution, the different understandings of exhibition-making and the lack of communication among participants. This echoed with some artists at other sites who also found it was not clear how to collaborate with the curators from the start due to the flexible format of the project. As the large-scale project unfolded in 2002,

³⁰ Long March Collective, ‘A Long March Glossary’, in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (New York: Long March Foundation, 2002), p. 1 <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/discourse/changzhengcidian/>> [accessed 11 November 2021].

³¹ Sasha Su-ling Welland, ‘The Hinterland of Feminist Art’, in *Experimental Beijing: Gender and Globalisation in Chinese Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: duke university press, 2018), pp. 135–76.

there were many implicit understandings which were not fully discussed. The interviews with them became a way of clarifying and reflecting upon the misunderstandings and divergences involved.

As most participants of the project are still active curators, scholars, and artists in the world today, during the research, I also needed to deal with these private opinions and conflicted interests. For example, some artists and some of my peers would not consider Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie to be sincere practitioners when they curated *Long March* because of their later success following this project. Though the contemporary art world in China does not have a long history, there is already a deep gap of experience between different generations of art practitioners. While acknowledging that there must be private consideration in people's action, this thesis tries to eradicate ungrounded assumptions and excavate the project's overlooked contribution and inspiration to the larger field of art and curating, based on the understanding that the project's realisation was made possible by all participants and should not be viewed as the work of only the curators. At the same time, to reach a narrative that can be accepted by different participants, it has become important to clarify some misunderstandings and look again at the implicit contradictions that become visible through interviews.

As one of the largest art projects in the history of contemporary Chinese art that included artists across generations, *Long March* is identified by this thesis as a cross point of art practitioners. To position the project back within different historical contexts it had moved through and weaved together, I also consulted extensive writings and oral histories about contemporary Chinese art after the 1970s and the art ecology and curating in the West in the 1990s. In searching for more original documentation, I also collected many unmentioned and forgotten materials about the project, such as the already defunct early websites like longmarchfoundation.com and arts.tom.com, which I cherish as the lost lively art scenes. Among them, scholar Sasha Su-ling Welland's *Experimental Beijing* greatly fascinates me.³² Welland has weaved her field research in Beijing at the beginning of the 2000s, friendship with female artists and her own experience as translators into a bold rewriting of contemporary Chinese art. Its rich details in the ethnographic writing create a nearly tangible ground for me, a late comer. Welland also wrote about *Long March* as a participant of the site Lugu Lake. When reading Welland, I was haunted also with the

³² Sasha Su-ling Welland, *Experimental Beijing: Gender and Globalisation in Chinese Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: duke university press, 2018).

question, how could I, someone who could not have been there on the historical site, to write about *Long March*? What I draw upon is more first-hand materials from different sources: interviews, documents and visiting different participants. These experience and information have helped me to grasp the project's historical and geographical context with sometimes contradictive perspectives. In her project *Site-Writing*, architect and researcher Jane Rendell's foregrounded the importance of 'spatial qualities of writing' and advocated 'situated criticism' in *Site-Writing*. Rendell did not take 'sites' as a concrete entity, but referred to an embodied understanding of the object:

the sites — material, emotional, political, and conceptual — of the artwork's construction, exhibition, and documentation, as well as those remembered, dreamed, and imagined by the artist, critic and other viewers.³³

In her discussion, Rendell also brings in the example of cultural theorist Irit Rogoff who drew upon and alluded to the more democratic relation in 'writing with' instead of 'writing about'. I also align with Rogoff's proposition. While knitting different materials together, I often imagined myself as Lu Jie in London, as Qiu Zhijie in Beijing, as a Chinese artist longing for exhibitions in the West, as a Chinese critic worrying about the lack of museums in China or as a young artist in Lugu Lake. By imagining myself in their positions, I tried to understand the anxiety and longing about reforming contemporary Chinese art and the difficulty in collaborating on a fast-speed project. The narrative is not a detective's investigation but my attempt to understand the paths of my predecessors. As a researcher of a younger generation, I find the transnational recreation of curating and the conundrum of collaboration in *Long March* still resonant.

The Structure of Content

In this research, I start from Lu Jie's personal trajectory in and out of China to comprehend how Lu could and why he devised a project so distinctive in China at that time. His experience is also the clue to ground the project in the international struggle of contemporary Chinese art from which the project grew. As the only research on *Long March* that has excavated so much of its prehistories, writing about Lu's trajectory is not aimed to heroise Lu, who was already the protagonist figure, or extend the length of the legendary narrative of *Long March*. Rather, I write about Lu to demythologise the project

³³ Jane Rendell, 'Prologue: Pre-Positions', in *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (I. B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 1–20.

and restore the complexity of its history. The difficulty in understanding the project for non-Chinese researchers or researchers of the younger generation, is the result of its current distance from the particular historical context in which it emerged, which was so obvious for its Chinese participants then.

Adopting a chronological order, the thesis is composed of three sections, covering the project from conception to realisation. The first section introduces Lu's early life from 1965 to 1998 that witnessed the reformation of socialist China from planned economy and Cultural Revolution to the free market largely open to the West. Lu was born in Fujian Province and grew up in Putian, a historical town along the sea. During his youth, he was immersed in traditional Chinese culture and the Socialist system of art: trained in calligraphy, attending the School of Art and Crafts of Fujian Province (*fujian gongyi meishu xuexiao*) (1978–1982), working as a propaganda cadre in the Workers' Club back to Putian (1982–1984) and then studied ink wash painting in Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (ZAFA) (1984–1988).

But his encounters with contemporary art and devotion to learning English in ZAFA turned his path away from becoming an artist and led him to be an editor in Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House (1988–1992). As an English speaker, Lu began working as a mediator between international visitors including collectors, gallerists and curators and local artists. This brought him to contribute to the rise of contemporary Chinese art in the international world as a gallerist during the 1990s, which also quickly demonstrated to him the limit of the existing art ecology. Lu's extensive travelling after 1996, which he called a 'confessional journey', fulfilled by physical experiences of strange places and devoted comprehension towards the local histories, society, and culture, offered him a different approach for understanding the relation between China, looking onto the rest of the world.

The second section focuses on Lu's writing of the curatorial proposal 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition' during the 'Creative Curating' programme, Goldsmiths (University of London) (1998–1999). While *Long March* was largely realised in China, it was also deeply influenced by independent and non-institutional curating in London. The ideas behind the curatorial proposal and the research surveys reflected external influences, such as critical discourses found in visual culture and cultural studies at Goldsmiths, the wave of interest in exhibition formats in museum studies and the series of protests against capitalism and globalisation in London at the end of the twentieth century. These aspects offer clues for diving into Lu's contemplative writing and discovering what enabled him to take curating as a response to the situation of contemporary Chinese art. Lu should be seen as one of a new

breed of curators at the time: who took curating as a means to challenge the existing art world, by imaginatively adopting the historical Long March as his curatorial framework..

Moving to the third section, I review how this project was opened up by turning it from a proposal to reality – from a conceptual proposal in the education environment to practical curatorial work with collaborators, artists and participants. In this accelerated and hasty process, Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie’s curating was a mixed practice comprising professional and institutional procedures, independent approaches like DIY movement, socialist propaganda, the revolutionary tradition, customs among Chinese mainland artists in the 1990s and improvisation on site. With more participants joining the project, the narrative also moves to on-site realisation and the dynamic among participants. By examining the complicated curatorial process of fundraising, coordinating, mobilising and realising, this section demonstrates how the project changed over time and the gap between the planned and the realities that occurred.

3 In-Between the West and China

In October 2018, I interviewed Qiu Zhijie when he visited London. Qiu was the head of School of Experimental Art in Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) and he travelled to London with other tutors in contemporary art for an exhibition ‘Tradition is the Power for Invention’.³⁴ Born in Zhangzhou, Fujian Province, Qiu had trained in Chinese calligraphy since childhood. But during his time in ZFAFA from 1988 to 1992, Qiu became one of the youngest Chinese conceptual artists and gained international fame. He was also an eloquent writer and co-organised a series of exhibitions, from the earliest survey on video art in China to the series of experiments ‘Post-Sense Sensuality’. Joining *Long March* as the executive curator in 2002 was his last project as an independent artist and curator before joining the faculty of China Academy of Art (CAA, formerly ZFAFA) in 2003.

In the interview with Qiu, I mentioned the footnote about *Long March* in *Artificial Hells* and asked if he considered *Long March* as participatory art. Pondering for a bit, Qiu said ‘it should not be counted as participatory art’; nor did he consider *Long March* as social intervention because in his opinion, artists and intellectuals were never outsiders of social

³⁴ The exhibition was co-curated by Central Academy of Fine Arts, The Prince's Foundation School of Traditional Arts and China Culture Connect. It was on view during 5 - 18 October 2018. ‘Exhibition by Teachers from China’s Central Academy of Fine Art’, *The Prince’s Foundation*, 2018 <<https://princes-foundation.org/school-of-traditional-arts/news/exhibition-cafa>> [accessed 18 December 2021].

situations even when they were in galleries.³⁵ It was not influenced by international situationism, as previous researchers, such as Shen Jun had suggested — Qiu said, ‘at that time, those theoretical discourses were not fashionable yet.’³⁶ So, what was his motivation to join *Long March*? Qiu replied,

Long March was not only Lu Jie’s *Long March*. It belonged to our whole generation of artists. [...] *Long March* was born out of a generation of artists’ anxieties. [...] Possibly we have arrived at that point when we always went abroad for exhibitions and were stuck in that kind of narrative.³⁷

After the interview, I realised that to understand the project, I needed to move my eyes from *Long March* and gain a better understanding of the situation of contemporary artists in China during the 1990s, especially their relationship with the international art world.

The Chinese artists in *Long March* were born from the 1940s to the early 1980s; but the two curators and a majority of artists invited by the curators to join the project, like Song Dong (1966–), Zhan Wang (1962–), Jiang Jie (1965–), Xiao Xiong (1962–2020), Shi Qing (1969–) and Chyanga (1971–), were born during the 1960s or the early 1970s. Their childhood or teenage years were often during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when the style of Socialist Realism was pushed to an extreme through political propaganda. Socialist Realism was introduced by the Soviet Union to China in the mid 1950s through the promotion of the Chistyakov Drawing Pedagogy for oil painting, which soon dictated teaching in all art schools and all media including printmaking, traditional Chinese ink wash painting, mural and sculpture.³⁸ The dominance of Socialist Realism reflected that art and culture were highly controlled as part of the ideology in China and there was very little space for individuals’ exploration and expression.

With the death of Mao Zedong and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, China began introducing the new national policy ‘Reform and Opening Up’ (*gaige kaifang*) in 1978. Many artists around China began making experiments which were strongly influenced by books and catalogues imported from the West. The spontaneous emergence of experimental art in 1985 was generally called ‘85 Art New Wave Movement’, a term coined by influential editors and critics such as Gao Minglu (1949–).³⁹ The curators and artists

³⁵ Interview with Qiu Zhijie, October 2018.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Zhou Yan, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Art: 1949 to Present* (Singapore: Springer, 2020), p. 14.

³⁹ *’85 Meishu Yundong Lishi Ziliao Huibian (Collected Historical Materials of ’85 Art Movement)*, ed. by Gao Minglu (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008).

mentioned above in *Long March* were generally too young to be protagonists or articulators in this movement. It was in the 1990s that they jumped onto the main stage when contemporary art in China became a recurrent theme in Western museums and biennales. As art historian Wu Hung observed, the 85' Art New Wave was a domestic moment, but in the 1990s, 'the dialogue between global and local' became 'one of the most powerful driving forces' for the development of contemporary art in China.⁴⁰

Wu Hung identified four factors contributing to this 'dialogue': increasing overseas exhibitions, an emerging international art market propelled by commercial galleries, an increasing number of Chinese artists and curators moving abroad, and finally in 2000, the third Shanghai Biennale.⁴¹ Scholar Britta Erickson compiled a list of exhibitions on contemporary Chinese art in the West in the 1990s and there were over twenty group exhibitions in the decade.⁴² For example, in 1993, fourteen Chinese artists were selected for the 45th Venice Biennale in the section 'Passaggio a Oriente' on the recommendation of Italian art historian Francesca dal Lago; six years later, in 1999, at the 48th Venice Biennale, curator Harald Szeemann chose twenty Chinese artists, for which Szeemann was accused of 'playing the China card'.⁴³ (Chinese artist Cai Guoqiang living in the US was one of the artists who won the Golden Lion award that year.) At the same time, a group of Chinese artists also accumulated considerable wealth with the success in the international art market facilitated by commercial galleries such as Hanart TZ Gallery in Hong Kong. The shifting conditions meant that despite most Chinese artists still living in mainland China, their work was already in a globalised circulation of contemporary art, and they had grasped rules of the international art world.

But as Qiu Zhijie recalled, for some Chinese artists around him, the initial excitement of 'striding to the world' was gradually replaced by anxieties: they felt that they were waiting to be selected by Western curators and positioned in the framework of representational politics in the Western discursive system. Such a mentality was laid bare in some artworks at the time. In 1997, Yan Lei (1965–) and Hong Hao (1965–) played a prank by sending forged invitation letters from Documenta X for an exhibition 'From the Other Shore' to

⁴⁰ Wu Hung, 'Contesting Global/Local: Chinese Experimental Art in the 1990s', *Orientalisms*, 33.9 (2002), 62–67.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Britta Erickson, 'The Reception in the West of Experimental Mainland Chinese Art of the 1990s (2002)', in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. by Hung Wu (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), pp. 357–62.

⁴³ Ibid. Also Zheng Shengtian persuaded sponsor Annie Wong to establish an art foundation (*Liang Jiehua Yishu Jijinhui*) and supported Cai Guoqiang, Zheng Shengtian, 'Youjian Weinisi' [See Venice Again], *SHENG PROJECT*, 2016 <<http://shengproject.com/texts/life-encounters-2/id-16.html>> [accessed 22 July 2021].

about one hundred artists all over China. Many artists responded enthusiastically until later they found that calling the telephone number would direct them to a public phone in Beijing.⁴⁴ This work ridiculed a common desire to show abroad and alluded to some artists' strategies of self-stereotyping for the Western gaze and efforts to be introduced to Western curators. Scholar Zheng Shengtian, who had taught in ZAFSA, noted that when Okwui Enwezor visited China in 2000 as the curator of Documenta, his group of international curators were greeted with feelings of hostility: his speech in CAA had a full-house audience, but students compared international curators as 'agents for galleries, officers of United Nations and even a virus'.⁴⁵



⁴⁴ Karen Smith, 'An Ideological Reflex', *LEAP*, 2016 <<http://www.leapleapleap.com/2016/01/an-ideological-reflex/>> [accessed 22 July 2021]. Michael Dutton, Hsiu-ju Stacy Lo, and Dong Wu, *Beijing Time* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 237.

⁴⁵ Zheng Shengtian, 'Ouyu Rensheng — Ba Ziji Saomiao Yibian' [A Life of Coincidences: Scan Myself], *SHENG PROJECT*, 2014 <<http://shengproject.com/texts/art-browsing/id.html>> [accessed 12 May 2021].

Fig. 10 Yan Lei and Hong Hao, *Invitation Letter*, public intervention, 1997. Courtesy of Yan Lei and Hong Hao.

If Qiu Zhijie and artists in mainland China were anxious about the dislocation of their artworks, during the 1990s, Lu Jie was in a more complicated position as a mediator, exposed to the tension between China and the West. From 1992 to 1995, Lu travelled between Beijing and Hong Kong to introduce Chinese artists to collectors outside of mainland China. As mediators between China and the West, they were also enduring, on the one hand, Chinese artists' anxieties and distrust towards the West and on the other hand, the limitations of Western understanding of contemporary Chinese art. In 1996, Lu left China due to a feeling of 'exhaustion' in contemporary art and began to travel the world.⁴⁶ This traveling practice remains central to Lu to this day.

In 1998, Lu began studying curating at Goldsmiths, University of London. While travelling and studying, he carried the concern regarding the tension between China and the West and the limits of the existing contemporary art ecology. In 1999, the year he wrote out the curatorial proposal 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition' for the later *Long March*, Lu also wrote an essay 'Outside In', calling to overturn the current 'inside out' paradigm of contemporary Chinese art. 'Inside Out: New Chinese Art' was the name of an influential group exhibition in the US curated by Gao Minglu from 1998 to 1999.⁴⁷ In this exhibition surveying contemporary art by Chinese artists living in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and overseas, Gao suggested a changed framework for understanding contemporary Chinese art from identity driven narratives, 'toward a transnational modernity', as the 'internally directed, nationalist modernity' that Chinese intellectuals and artists concerned during the 1980s had already changed by globalisation.⁴⁸ Lu reinterpreted 'inside out' from another perspective — the 'circulation' of Chinese art, the 'unidirectional, "inside-out" (an "out" pointing rather narrowly to the West) flow of the display, collection and exchange' as well as the understanding of 'contemporary Chinese art' from an outset and self-objectifying position.⁴⁹ This different interpretation of the same term 'inside out' demonstrated that the

⁴⁶ Philip Tinari, 'A Conversation with Lu Jie', *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 1.3 (2002), 60–67.

⁴⁷ It was exhibited first in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and later in Asia Society Galleries and P.S. 1 in New York.

⁴⁸ Gao Minglu, 'Towards A Transnational Modernity: An Overview of Inside Out: New Chinese Art', in *Inside/out: New Chinese Art* (San Francisco, New York, Berkeley: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Asia Society Galleries, University of California Press, 1998).

⁴⁹ Lu Jie, 'Outside In', *Long March Project*, 1999. <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/discourse/from-outside-to-inside/>> [accessed 30 November 2021].

younger generation of Chinese art practitioners (here, Lu) were beginning to pay more attention to the power relations and exact mechanisms in art instead of a grand theoretical framework. In an observation, Lu stated:

What I observe in the current ecosystem of contemporary Chinese art is that art has departed from its audience, moving away from the public toward the elite, from private studios to bureaucratic institutions (authoritative platforms such as biennials and large-scale museum shows, etc.), from China to overseas, leading to a quagmire in which the avant-garde falls straight down to the market, with which it forms a reciprocal relationship.⁵⁰

However, Lu did not only criticise the Western art system. He also pointed out that contemporary Chinese artists were quite conservative in their perception towards art. Lu used the exhibition 'China: 5,000 Years' (1998) at the Guggenheim Museum (New York and Bilbao) as an example of this. This exhibition brought together contemporary Chinese art, revolutionary propaganda and traditional Chinese art. Lu noticed that contemporary Chinese artists were generally disappointed that their works were positioned alongside revolutionary propaganda, yet Lu considered that their disappointment not only exposed a desire to be positioned in the Western system and to be acknowledged in the history of Western art, but also revealed 'their ignorance of the significant ties between leftist art, socialist realism, the art of the Cultural Revolution and contemporary art from China'.⁵¹ In his essay, Lu's focus was to point out the problematic ways in which Chinese artists perceived the West, lacking a deeper understanding towards their own 'local context'. While Chinese artists were generally in a 'love/hate' relation with the West, Lu reminded them that, 'The problem of facing the West is essentially that it entails facing ourselves.'⁵² This return to oneself is what Lu phrased as 'outside in'.

Lu's concern was shared by more Chinese art practitioners. In an edited volume of writings (2002) about the third Shanghai Biennale and satellite exhibitions, the editor Ma Qinzong (1957–) used 'Questions and Anxieties' as the title to raise his concern:

The contemporary art in our country, after the journey of facing up the international for over a decade, is becoming weaker and weaker in its pulse of thought and life of our own art history, instead of forming towards our own voice.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ma Qinzong, 'Xulun' [Introduction], in *Zhongguo Shanghai 2000 Nian Shuangnian Zhan ji Waiwei*

The third Shanghai Biennale, in 2000, was of monumental influence in bringing contemporary Chinese Art to an international audience.⁵⁴ Art historian Zhu Qingsheng (1957–) acknowledged this iteration of the biennale as ‘the first public and legal exhibition of modern art in China’, a symbol marking contemporary art gaining legal status.⁵⁵ But many Chinese artists and critics like Ma found the biennale problematic. After over a decade of Chinese artists’ going abroad, China finally became ‘international’ by hosting its own international biennial. Moreover this reception of contemporary Chinese art was met with some anxiety that its manifest cultural reference would be subsumed by Western discourses, especially in the absence of a local perception and discourse of art. Zhu Qingsheng also pointed out that ‘Shanghai Biennale was born out of China’s desire to comment on the world in the art field, but once there is an opportunity, we don’t have our own standard.’⁵⁶

The mainstream art in China was still Socialist Realism during the 1990s. The official art associations and art academies were still the most influential ones in the domestic environment and they were hesitant to embrace contemporary art.⁵⁷ Therefore some curators considered it was more important to find legitimation for contemporary art. In 1999, curator, critic, and art historian Huang Zhuan (1958–2016) curated the second ‘Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Sculpture’ in He Xiangning Art Museum, including contemporary Chinese artists and two international artists Bernar Venet (French) and Philip King (British). Huang admitted that he was not particularly interested in proposing a particular form of art and his collaboration with this state-level museum was an attempt ‘to find a legal mode of operation for contemporary art in social transformation’.⁵⁸ He

Zhan Wenxian [Documentation of China Shanghai Biennale in 2000 and Satellite Exhibitions] (Wuhan: Hubei meishu chuban she, 2002), pp. 1–24.

⁵⁴ The organisation committee of 2000 Shanghai Biennale invited overseas Chinese curator Hou Hanru (1963–) and Japanese curator Toshio Shimizu (1953–) to work together with the in-house curators of Shanghai Art Museum. For more contemporary research on this biennale, see *Uncooperative Contemporaries: Art Exhibitions in Shanghai in 2000*, ed. by David Morris, Exhibition Histories (London: Afterall Books in association with Asia Art Archive and the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2020).

⁵⁵ Zhu Qingsheng, ‘Zhongguo Diyi Ci Hefa De Xiandai Yishu Zhan — Guanyu 2000 Nian Shanghai Shuangnian Zhan’ [The First Legal Exhibition of Modern Art in China — About 2000 Shanghai Biennale], in *Piping de Shidai: 20 Shijimo Zhongguo Meishu Piping Wencui [The Era of Critique: Collection of Critiques on Chinese Fine Arts in the End of the Twentieth Century]*, ed. by Jia Fangzhou (guangxi meishu chubanshe, 2003), ii, 349–52.

⁵⁶ Zhu Qingsheng, ‘Zhongguo Diyi Ci Hefa de Xiandai Yishu Zhan — Guanyu 2000 Nian Shanghai Shuangnian Zhan’ [The First Legal Exhibition of Modern Art in China — About 2000 Shanghai Biennale].

⁵⁷ In other words, there was barely any art market in China and no public museums to support contemporary art. Some curators and critics developed alternative approaches to the official system. For example, in 1992, Chinese critic Lü Peng (1956–) initiated ‘the First 1990s’ Biennial Art Fair’ in Guangzhou and tried to form a domestic commercial environment beyond the ideological orientation of state sponsorship.

⁵⁸ Huang Zhuan and Gaoshi Xiongdi, ‘Shenme Dou Xing yu Shenme Dou Bu Xing — Huangzhuan Fangtan’

summarised it as:

To put it simply, contemporary art was still in the stage of imitating the West in the eighties and came into the stage of creation in the nineties. To elaborate it in detail, first, people started paying attention to social issues in the nineties; second, contemporary Chinese art started going into the international world in the nineties. I think the next step we should focus on is the publicness of art, which means to seek possibilities of establishing a public mechanism of art.⁵⁹

Towards the end of the 1990s, more and more practitioners beheld public status in mainland China and the local context as the future direction of contemporary Chinese art. The pursuit of publicness (*gonggong*) and the emphasis of the local (*bentu*) context both demanded a return from the Western art museums to the reality and society of China. Entering this particular historical context, we can understand why, in 1999, Lu Jie chose to take the revolutionary Long March as his curatorial framework and to locate the project in China for his curatorial proposal. It was a conscious return to China and the local social reality.

Around the time, there were also other art projects excavating this revolutionary narrative of the Long March. For example, the exhibition ‘Another Long March’ (1997) in the Netherlands and the project ‘International New Long March — Red Star Cross Europe’ (2002), which I will introduce in detail in Section II. But *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* clearly differentiated from them at the stage of proposal in identifying China as the space it would take place, Chinese artists, and ordinary people as the targets to work with and China as the new alternative mode of art for the world.

After graduating in 1999, Lu returned to New York, continuing to polish his proposal for two years, by which time it extended to ‘A Detailed Curatorial Plan’ (2001). He founded Long March Art Foundation in 2001 and tried to raise funds from overseas museums and art foundations to support the project. After he invited Qiu Zhijie to be the executive curator, Qiu encouraged him to not rely on sponsorships and instead realise the project immediately.⁶⁰ In 2002, Lu invested his own money with hardly any institutional support. Qiu’s indication of the urgency of conducting was possibly driven by the fact that the third

[Everything is fine, Everything is Not — Interview with Huang Zhuan] (1999), in *Zhongguo qianwei yishu zhuangkuang: guanyu zhongguo qianwei yishu de fangtan* [Conditions of Chinese Avant-Garde Art: Interviews about Chinese Avant-Garde Art] (Jiangsu People’s Publisher, 2002), pp. 49–58.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Interview with Qiu Zhijie, October 2018.

Shanghai Biennale had already opened, marking the moment the international system of contemporary art began to be legal in China. However, Lu's curatorial proposal called for a more distinctive mode of contemporary art. In an interview in 2002, Lu expressed his ambition:

If we can open things up for them to get rid of the mentality that 'this year China, next year Vietnam, next year Cuba,' — each a novelty to be consumed by the international power structure — we have done good. If there's a way to make people think that 'wait a minute, maybe this Chinese thing is really something; maybe the Chinese visual culture is in the process of producing something that might be a very interesting reference point,' then we have succeeded. Sometimes I feel that contemporary art is exhausted, but that it may not be exhausted in China.⁶¹

To some extent, after about six years' living and studying in the West, Lu had gained the perspective of looking at China with a distance: appreciating its particularity as a contribution to the world and reflecting upon local artists' misreading of the international art world. The local context of China, for Lu, did not only denote the current social realities of China but also its long-lasting interaction with the West. Apart from traditional Chinese culture, what Lu identified as 'local' also included the perception of the West in China and understanding of the representation of China and Chinese culture in the West — as he said, 'the contribution, displacement, misreading, rebirth, reconfiguration and indigenization of Western ideas in China has also become firmly ingrained in our social and individual consciousness.'⁶² Therefore, in his initial curatorial proposal (1999), though the journey was set to be in China along the Long March route, Lu not only planned to exhibit many foreign books and films on China, such as Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni's documentary *Chung Kuo Cina* (1972), but also intended to organise a reflection on the mass critique of this film in China during the 1970s.

Another crucial part of the local that Lu emphasised was those art practices in China that were not in the field of contemporary art: folk art, amateur art, and especially Communist propaganda, as demonstrated in his essay 'Outside in'. In Long March, Lu sought to resituate contemporary Chinese art, especially these contemporary artists, back to the rich and charged contexts paving ways for the birth of experimental expressions of the 1980s.⁶³

⁶¹ Philip Tinari, 'A Conversation with Lu Jie'.

⁶² Lu Jie, 'Outside In', 1999.

⁶³ Researcher A.C. Beaker discussed how experimental group practices in '85 Art New Wave Movement had origins in Socialist practices from the 1950s to the 1970s, for example, the Hu Xian 'peasant paintings'. A.C. Baecker, 'Consolidating the Contemporary: The Socialist Origins of '85 New Wave Group Art Practice',

While contemporary Chinese art was pursuing ‘publicness’ and ‘local context’, Lu connected such a motivation with Socialist practices. Instead of only working with contemporary artists, Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie were willing to collaborate with local governments, international museums and mass media. In *Long March*, there were a mix of contemporary artists: radical avant-garde artists, artists from the official system drawing ink wash paintings, and folk artists who heartfully made sculptures of Mao Zedong. What lies behind this inclusiveness of different art styles was the project’s conscious deviation from the mechanisms of contemporary art.



Fig. 11 Collective creation of Pollock-style abstract paintings with local residents after watching the documentary film slices about Jackson Pollock. Site 9 Maotai, Guizhou Province in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, on 14 August 2002.

However, Lu’s consciousness of the influence of Socialist practices on contemporary Chinese art was still remain at a level of acknowledgement. As a curatorial project, it was

International Institute for Asian Studies 12, Kyoto, 2021. ‘Amateur Art Practice and the Everyday in Socialist China’, *Made in China*, 5.1 (2020), 80–87.

not an exhibition that directly invited audience's active engagement or worked with a particular group of people in a certain place. Lu desired to change the context and environment of creating and displaying contemporary Chinese art, but methodologies of working with local residents in China were still not clear. Lu designed public activities such as screenings, reading groups and seminars open for non-professional audience, but how to attract local residents' interest and ensure the effectiveness of such public participation remained to be seen. To some extent, the proposal reflected the logic and methodologies of representative politics. What Lu emphasised was still the identities of non-professional participants and their being part of the project, instead of facilitating participants to form their own agenda and leaving space for their actively shaping the project.

The project called artists to create works directly within social realities, including the experience of local residents. In this sense, what Lu proposed clearly differed from the 2000 Shanghai Biennale. It was not a copied and imported international art model relying on museums and biennials, but a reinvention based on local resources. One of these local resources was the historical Long March. In the 'Curators' Words' of *Long March*, Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie put forward that

The working model created by the historic Long March provides us with not only a subject to discuss, but a substantive praxis for a critique of contemporary mainstream exhibition culture. [...] The Long March looks to integrate the production, consumption, and interpretation of art in a single scene, three issues which have traditionally remained separate. It looks to overcome the traditional distance between viewer and creator, to close the gap between 'host' and 'guest,' and to seek a new understanding of space. In this way, The Long March will merge exhibition with creation, and allow consumption and production to interact.⁶⁴

For the two curators, the Long March could function as a geographical space, and an approach for making art. In his own words Lu said, 'Many people would understand Long March as a military event, but our understanding of Long March is a metaphor, a cultural transmission and cultural translation. There are many layers.'⁶⁵ For the curators, this return

⁶⁴ Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, 'Curators' Words', in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (New York: Long March Foundation, 2003), pp. 5–12.

⁶⁵ The comments appear in *APT5 / 'The Long March Project' Panel Discussion*, uploaded on 2018 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9iJgT8Yl3w>> [accessed 16 December 2020]. This video recording is of an event about Long March Project as part of the programme of the 5th Asia–Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT5), 2 December 2006 – 27 MAY 2007, Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA). More information could be seen via <<https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/whats->

to the local context was not to return to contemporary art in China, but to draw onto the ‘raw material of our historical and lived experience’ to reconfigure contemporary art.⁶⁶ The Long March was a raw material that evoked the incarnation of ‘one hundred years of revolutionary struggle and the lived experience of socialism’.⁶⁷

In knowing this, it became clear that *Long March* was not intended to meet any practical needs of residents along the Long March route. Rather, if we look for the curators’ motivation, we see that it emerged from the representation of contemporary Chinese art in the West and the mentality of Chinese artists during the 1990s. If Yan Lei and Hong Hao responded to the twisted relation between Chinese contemporary artists and the West with conceptual art, then *Long March* was an ambitious curatorial response. It was directly aimed at deconstructing the ‘mainstream exhibition culture’ – from the format of exhibition to the system of biennials – which were still seen as subjects to be studied in China. This all related back to Lu’s education at Goldsmiths, where he was introduced to critical theories of the time such as visual culture and postcolonialism and became conscious of the debates and practices around the museum, institutional curating and curating in non-exhibition formats, which highly influenced his curating in *Long March*.

Modern, Contemporary, International

In this thesis, I have largely used ‘contemporary art’ instead of terms like ‘experimental art’, ‘avant-garde art’ or ‘modern art’. These terms have all been used in China from the 1980s to the 2000s to refer to new art practices that came out of the academy, propaganda and differed from Socialist Realism art. ‘Modern art’ or ‘avant-garde’ were the earliest terms used in the 1980s. In ‘The Landscape of China’s Modern Art Movement’ in 1991, scholar Tong Dian attempted to define it as:

What is Chinese modern art? Given as it is *Chinese* modern art cannot be completely dependent on Western modern art as a framework of reference. But, at the same time, it cannot be independent of the many concepts and characteristics of the time. Chinese modern art is not an abstract concept, but rather a [real] artistic phenomenon that has already happened and a concept that integrates both the [specificity of the] time and artistic viewpoints. More specifically, ‘modern art’ refers to all those who have proposed new concepts (or revealed them in their artwork) distinct from past artistic phenomena in China and formed trends and movements in art

on/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/the-5th-asiapacific-triennial-of-contemporary-art-apt5>.

⁶⁶ Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, ‘Curators’ Words’.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

circles.⁶⁸

Instead of referring to the stage of ‘modern art’ in Western art history, this definition grounded ‘modern’ in the ongoing art practice in China which distinguished itself from the past. As for ‘Avant-garde’ (*qianwei/xianfeng*), Gao Minglu noted Chinese artists and critics began using this term from the end of the 1980s. Compared with ‘modern’ that denoted a style or a period of time, Gao, as an important critic during the ’85 Art New Wave Movement, advocated ‘avant-garde’ for its sense of ‘a built-in sense of critique and protest’.⁶⁹ Chyanga, who began studying art in Beijing in 1987, said he and his artist friends all used ‘avant-garde’ to describe their practice during the 1990s. In an exhibition, a foreign journalist reminded Chyanga that ‘avant-garde’ was already an outdated word, but Chyanga had never realised that.⁷⁰ Scholar Wu Hung noticed that, in the 1990s, ‘contemporary art’ and ‘experimental art’ gradually replaced ‘modern art’ when artists referred to their works. In his opinion, this change indicated a major shift in conceptualisation: ‘If the notion of “modern” is temporal and diachronic, then that of “contemporary” is spatial and synchronic.’⁷¹ In 2002, Wu Hung put forward the use of another existing term ‘experimental art’ (*shiyan yishu*) because it offered more space for academic discussion and some distance from the Western avant-garde.⁷² Yet today when referring to the new art practices after the 1970s in China, people still use the term ‘contemporary art’ more. This is partly because as more Chinese artists were shown in the West during the 1990s, they picked up the notion of ‘contemporary art’ more commonly used in the English-speaking world.

In this thesis, I choose ‘contemporary art’ because, firstly, the curators of *Long March* used this term in their curatorial discourse; secondly, the project itself was part of the international phenomenon ‘contemporary Chinese art’; and third, the younger generation of artists and researchers in China and abroad generally use ‘contemporary art’ to denote the practices (despite in art colleges, the corresponding department is usually called ‘School of Experimental Art’). Today, when saying ‘contemporary art’ in China, it usually refers to conceptual art or art in non-traditional media such as moving image, installation,

⁶⁸ Tong Dian, ‘The Landscape of China’s Modern Art Movement’ (1991), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, 2010, p. 66-78. The square brackets and the content within them are in the original text in the book.

⁶⁹ Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press; in association with China Art Foundation, 2011), p. 9.

⁷⁰ Interview with Chyanga, 2020-2021.

⁷¹ ‘Major Trends in Contemporary Chinese Art of The Mid-To-Late 1990s’, *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, 2010, p. 184.

⁷² Wu Hung, ‘Introduction: A decade of Chinese experimental art (1990-2000)’, *Reinterpretation: a decade of experimental Chinese art: 1990-2000* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2002).

photography, or performance. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the connotation of the term ‘contemporary art’ was what Lu and Qiu were trying to challenge and expand in *Long March*.

Furthermore, I have used ‘contemporary Chinese art’ instead of ‘Chinese contemporary art’ to denote the contemporary art in China and overseas by Chinese artists. This is based on the choice of most Chinese practitioners during the 1990s. In the ‘Curator’s Words’ of *Long March*, the two curators used ‘contemporary Chinese art’; In the foreword for ‘Inside Out’, Gao Minglu chose ‘contemporary Chinese art’; when Wu Hung edited the collection of first-hand documents about contemporary art in China after 1970s, the book was also titled as *Contemporary Chinese art: Primary Documents*.⁷³ But what is the reason behind these choices and what is the difference between the two terms using the same three words?

Qiu Zhijie summarised that for him and some Chinese artists of his generation, there was a big difference between the two terms ‘Chinese contemporary art’ and ‘contemporary Chinese art’:

‘Chinese contemporary art’ would make us a branch of ‘contemporary art’ just like China used to be a branch of the Comintern. [...] But if we call ourselves ‘contemporary Chinese art’, we are closer to Huang Binhong and Pan Tianshou and more far from Andy Warhol in terms of kinship. My choice of name definitely implies a certain degree of nationalism, but this narrative is true and also effective.⁷⁴

Comintern is the abbreviation for the Communist International, an organisation headed by the Soviet Union and guided the founding of the early organisation of the CCP in the 1920s. When Chinese people refer to the Comintern, there is often the suggestion that the PRC strived to keep its political independence from the Comintern because of the Sino-Soviet split between the 1960s and 1980s. The refusal towards the Communist International was reappropriated here in Qiu’s words as a refusal towards an imagined ‘Contemporary Art International’ — an overarching art framework in which China is still at the periphery. Though Qiu was a conceptual artist using multiple media including performance, photography, installation and ink wash painting, he preferred to position himself closer to the traditional Chinese painters instead of Andy Warhol who also made conceptual art.

⁷³ Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, ‘Curators’ Words’. Gao Minglu, ‘Towards A Transnational Modernity: An Overview of Inside Out: New Chinese Art’. Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

⁷⁴ Interview with Qiu Zhijie, October 2018. Huang Binhong (1865-1955) and Pan Tianshou (1897-1971) were two master artists in the history of Chinese ink wash paintings in the modern time.

‘Contemporary Chinese art’ indicated Qiu’s self-positioning in the long genealogy of ‘Chinese art’. It was an act of asserting identity.

There were also other preferences. Philip Tinari, now the CEO of Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing, was once a reporter during *Long March* and assistant curator in 25000 Cultural Transmission Center. He preferred ‘Chinese contemporary art’ because, in his opinion, ‘contemporary Chinese art’ is nationalistic — the same reason why Qiu chose ‘contemporary Chinese art’.⁷⁵ Tinari, who was also one of the curators of exhibition ‘Theatre of the World’ in Guggenheim in 2017, held a similar attitude with the main curator Alexandra Munroe. Munroe positioned the project among other conceptually driven artworks by Chinese artists which had emerged at the turn of the millennium, utilising conceptualism as a means to connect contemporary Chinese art to worldwide artistic practice. She considered that these artworks and projects footnoted ‘globalised China’ and the globalisation of the art world.⁷⁶ Tinari noted,

The moniker ‘Chinese contemporary art’ confronts us, immediately and ontologically, with a paradox: the paired modifiers suggest that the concepts are not one and the same, that an effort must be made to be, to remain, or to become at once Chinese and contemporary.⁷⁷

In interview, Tinari pointed out that both ‘contemporary art’ and ‘Chinese art’ (or ‘American art’), are flawed premises. Qiu and Tinari have chosen and avoided the same term for the same reason, and this reveals to me the obstacles that ‘to become at once Chinese and contemporary’ lie not in the moment of making art but in the process of navigating the existing system with these terms. Having lived and engaged with the art system in China and the West, Lu was already immersed in this debate and understood the tension between the two groups of practitioners. Yet in *Long March*, he did not lean towards a particular one.

For some artists like Chyanga, an ethnically Mongolian artist based in Beijing and a participant in *Long March*, both terms failed to describe his practice. The cultures of ethnic minorities and the peripheral areas in China played an important role in *Long March* as it attempted to deconstruct the over-simplified perception of ‘China’. However, in the 1990s, the nation remained as the most common unity for comparison in identity politics and

⁷⁵ Interview with Philip Tinari, December 2019.

⁷⁶ Alexandra Munroe, ‘Preface and Acknowledgements’, in *Art and China After 1989: Theater of the World* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2017), pp. 11–14.

⁷⁷ Philip Tinari, ‘Between Palimpsest and Teleology: The Problem of “Chinese Contemporary Art”’, in *Art and China after 1989* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2017), pp. 51–67.

cultural exchange. In 1994, the Institute of International Visual Arts and the Tate Gallery in London published a collection of essays *Global Vision: Towards A New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*.⁷⁸ The ‘new internationalism’ was aimed to reflect upon the Western-centred and often ethnographic gaze of other cultures in the name of ‘multiculturalism’. It hoped to expand the mainstream understanding of ‘the visual art “International”’ (‘a term synonymous only with Western Europe and the USA’) to ‘a utopian horizon against which multiculturalism might be scanned, kept on its toes, and shown up for having fallen short of its own claims’.⁷⁹ It demonstrated an awareness that ‘multiculturalism’ was still limited by representative politics and failed to conduct effective conversations.

The entanglement between Chinese artists and Western art and culture from the 1980s summarised in the term ‘contemporary Chinese art’ has been widely addressed in research. But curating in China was rarely discussed nor historised. The case of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* represents a vivid example for us to examine, as it asks: how did curating as an independent discipline and the independent curator as a profession emerge in China with influence from the West? In *Long March*, curating was not entirely imported from the West, but developed through hybrid approaches combining ideas from the West, revolutionary propaganda by the CCP, existing self-organisation among Chinese artists and the application of the Internet, a relatively new phenomenon. Curating was then an experiment combining all these resources. The participants held various personal motivations when joining the project and the project itself was open to contingencies. In this sense, *Long March* was not as simple as stated in the ‘Curators’ Words’: it was a return to the local context, to the rural area, to the revolutionary tradition. Those statements should be seen as slogans of the project for the Chinese audience. The project itself was not a denial of the West or a full acknowledgement of the Chinese revolution. The experiment was planned to take place in China, but the outcome was expected to inspire the international landscape of curatorial practice.

⁷⁸ *Global Visions: Towards A New Internationalism in The Visual Arts*, ed. by Jean Fisher and Institute of International Visual Arts. (London: Kala Press in association with the Institute of International Visual Arts, 1994).

⁷⁹ Researcher Lotte Philipsen gave a thorough and detailed analysis of the emergence of ‘New Internationalism’ in the 1990s and its connection to other subjects such as visual culture in *Globalizing Contemporary Art: The Art World’s New Internationalism* (ISD LLC, 2010). The content of the direct quote is from Gavin Jantjes and Sarah Wilson, *Final Report. The Institute of New International Visual Arts*, (London Arts Board; Arts Council, 1991), p. 7. Sarat Maharaj, ‘Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability of the Other.’, *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, 1994, 28–35.

4 Reinventing Curating in China

The programme ‘Creative Curating’ at Goldsmiths College which Lu attended was set up by curator Anna Harding in 1995. Within the Visual Arts department, the programme differentiated itself from the Royal College of Art’s curating programme which collaborated with the Tate Gallery and Arts Council England and aimed to cultivate a more professional workforce for institutional needs. ‘Creative Curating’, on the other hand, aimed ‘to teach curating the same as teaching art’ and it took curating as equivalent to the creative practice of art. It was not surprising then that one of Lu Jie’s tutors asked them to ‘go against curating’ whilst studying.⁸⁰ The programme encouraged students to find their own motivation and explore alternative curating methods — each procedure in curating, from writing a proposal to fundraising, could be done in their own way. It was as a student in this programme that Lu Jie wrote the initial curatorial proposal for *Long March* as a course submission in 1999. In 2002, he realised the proposal in China. However, if we regard the project to have *transplanted* Western curating to China, we miss many specificities of its process.

In studies on contemporary art in mainland China, the location has often been seen as the condition indicating the nature of the exhibition. In 2002, Wu Hung coined the term ‘experimental exhibitions’, denoting those exhibitions in ‘non-exhibition spaces such as shopping malls, bars, abandoned factories, and the street’ that appeared after the mid-1990s considering their significance, which focused on ‘inventing new forms, spaces, and modes of interaction with the public’.⁸¹ But looking back at the 1990s and 1980s, there were barely any longstanding public institutions supporting contemporary art in mainland China, and nearly all contemporary art exhibitions took place due to the effort of artists, critics and newly emerging curators. These opportunities were not actively granted by any particular institute but made possible through artists’ and curators’ persuasion, mediation and navigation of complicated politics and situations. For example, the ‘China/Avant-Garde’ (1989) exhibition held in the National Gallery of Art, the gallery had to be persuaded to rent its space to the artists instead of acting as the host institution.⁸² In this sense, no

⁸⁰ Lu Jie, ‘Weishenme Yao Changzheng?’ [Why Do We Long March?], *ARTCO Monthly*, September 2002 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20030913031907/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/huayu/meiti-16.htm>> [accessed 29 November 2020].

⁸¹ Wu Hung, ‘A “Domestic Turn”: Chinese Experimental Art in the 1990S’, *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 1.3 (2002), 3–17.

⁸² Zhou Wenhan, ‘Gao Minglu: Jiemi 89 Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu Zhan’ [Gao Minglu: Disclose 1989 China/Avant-Garde Exhibition], *Artnow.Com.Cn*, 2007

matter if the exhibition was held in proper galleries or on the streets, their happening can all be considered ‘experimental’.

Despite there being active critics who organised influential exhibitions in China and became nominators of artists and articulators of artistic statements, most exhibitions were small-scale and organised by groups of emerging artists and younger critics who knew each other. For example, the 1985 Art New Wave was formed by the numerous self-initiated art groups around China. Later, scholars like Bao Dong (1979–) considered such practice as ‘self-organisation’ (*ziwo zuzhi*). As he said,

We need to realise that self-organisation is actually the norm of contemporary art in China. It happens anywhere at any time, especially before the proliferation of galleries and museums [before 2000]. Nearly all exhibitions of contemporary art were completed through self-organisation.⁸³

During the 1990s, Lu Jie’s priority was not exhibition-making. During his global travels, Lu found a way of engaging with different cultures — using travelling as research, notes, and reflections. But this method was not ready to be directly brought into the art mechanism. In London, Lu encountered a more liberated understanding of curating, which not only intrinsically echoed the ‘experimental exhibitions’ and ‘self-organisation’ in China but also allowed him to transform his approach of ‘confessional journey’ into curating. The updated perception of curating, as well as the exposure to critical theories of visual culture and postcolonialism was transformative for Lu who was educated in a rather out-of-date education of art history and art theory in China. And he continuously tried to introduce the discourse and practice of curating in the West to China in 2000, as will be detailed in Section III.⁸⁴

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, curating was still something not commonly known to the public. In the 1990s, there was no curatorial education in China and most curators were

<<http://www.artnow.com.cn/CommonPage/ChildArticleInfo.aspx?ChannelId=304&ParentId=1213&ArticleId=6533>> [accessed 2 December 2021].

⁸³ According to Bao Dong, ‘self-organisation’ first appeared as a term as one of the special projects in the second Guangzhou Triennial in 2005, which involved art institutes and art spaces like Parasite in Hong Kong and Bizart in Shanghai. But it was Long March Foundation, the long-term organisation, instead of the temporary project *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (2002) that was selected. In the later review of ‘self-organisation’ among the younger generation of Chinese artists, the curators Bao Dong and Sun Dongdong also mainly included collectives instead of events. Bao Dong, ‘Dangdai Yishu Ziwo Zuzhi Zai Zhongguo’ [Self-Organisation of Contemporary Art in China], in *ON/OFF Collective Practice in China* (Beijing: Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art), 2013. An English version on the similar content can be found. Bao Dong, ‘Rethinking and Practices within the Art System: The Self-Organization of Contemporary Art in China, 2001–2012’, *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 1.1 (2014), 83–95.

⁸⁴ Lu Jie’s Email to Zheng Shengtian (24 April 2001), Zheng Shengtian Archive.

independent. Zhang Zhaohui (1965–) was one of the earliest to study curating overseas. From 1996 to 1998, Zhang was invited by Asia Art Society to go to the US, where he enrolled in the Curatorial Studies in Contemporary Art programme in Bard College.⁸⁵ In an interview in 1999, when asked if there was any contradiction between the theories he learnt overseas and the practice after returning to China, Zhang said, ‘Of course, there is no corresponding art system in China. Compared with the US, the foundation for contemporary art in China is nearly nothing.’⁸⁶ In his opinion, there were no professional curators in China. But he raised the example of Cai Guoqiang’s copy of *Rent Collection Courtyard* for the 48th Venice Biennale to demonstrate artists were already working like curators, because art now needed to face society and work with many people together. At the same time, Zhang also stated that ‘curators are also working like artists’ and ‘take the exhibition as the way to express their free will’.⁸⁷ These expanding curatorial approaches and situations of applying these approaches in the West had come to influence Zhang’s understanding of curating.

Practitioners like Zhang who had a systematic knowledge of curating were few and far between. Gu Zhenqing (1964–) was one of the few self-identified ‘independent curators’ in the late 1990s. In an interview in 2000, when asked about his understanding of ‘the independent curator’, he said it referred to people ‘which China lacks right now’.⁸⁸ He was reflecting on the knowledge of curating and choosing to be a curator was very elite at the time. Independent curators were conceived as those making exhibitions — for example, Gu was specifically asked how he devised an exhibition and how he combined his curatorial concept with artists’ works. In his perception, sometimes, exhibition-making was not intrinsically connected with curating and the role of curator. In ‘Post-Sense Sensibility: Spree’ (2001), Qiu predicted that the ‘post-exhibition era would arrive’. Qiu Zhijie and his peers consciously avoided the form of exhibition and presented an overwhelming and ephemeral event.⁸⁹ In the statement, Qiu traced the history of the exhibition system and

⁸⁵ Zhang Zhaohui and Gaoshi Xiongdi, ‘Yu Dangdai Yishu Youguan huo Wuliao de Shuofa — Zhang Zhaohui Fangtan’ [Sayings about Contemporary Art or That’s Boring — Interview with Zhang Zhaohui], in *Zhongguo Qianwei Yishu Zhuangkuang: Guanyu Zhongguo Qianwei Yishu de Fangtan* [Conditions of Chinese Avant-garde Art: Interviews About Chinese Avant-Garde Art] (Jiangsu People’s Publisher, 2002), pp. 83–93.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Gu Zhenqing and Jin Feng, ‘Yichang de Shengcun Xianshi Jianjian Richang Hua: Gu Zhenqing Fangtan Lu’ [Abnormal Everyday Realities are Becoming Normal], in *Zhongguo Shanghai 2000 Nian Shuangnian Zhan ji Waiwei Zhan wenxian* [Documentation of China Shanghai Biennale in 2000 and Satellite Exhibitions] (Wuhan: Hubei meishu chubanshe, 2002), pp. 79–109.

⁸⁹ Qiu Zhijie, ‘The Prediction in the Age of Post-Exhibition’, in *Post-Sense Sensibility: Spree* (Beijing: self-published, 2001), unnumbered pages.

regarded the exhibition as a form rooted in Western colonialism and capitalism. However, throughout this statement, Qiu did not mention the word ‘curate’ or ‘curator’. In other words, Qiu did not perceive curating as an activity connected fundamentally to exhibitions.

By contrast, in *Long March*, the role of the curator was clearly credited and fully present in this process. Lu was more like what Zhang Zhaohui said, a curator as an artist. He put his name as the author for the curatorial proposal and furthermore, he put in his own money to realise this large-scale project. (By contrast, Gu Zhengqing acknowledged that it was only after 1998 that he could take the identity of independent curator in stride, because it became possible to make a living from this work.⁹⁰) Besides, Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie expanded curating from the common understanding of exhibition-making to a critical practice, reforming art ecology. ‘Spree’ criticised the exhibition format; as a continuation, in *Long March*, the two curators criticised the ‘contemporary mainstream exhibition culture’ – the circulation of contemporary Chinese art in the existing international art system, from creation to display and then consumption. In their ‘Curator’s Words’, Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie directly put forward that ‘the Long March is an exhibition about exhibitions.’⁹¹ Taking the historical Long March route as the space for the project, embodying a real journey on the road, extending the time to three months, the curating of *Long March* – as this thesis argues – was much more experimental than making an exhibition in a gallery. It was alternative, flexible, temporary and self-organised. Most importantly, this thesis identifies that what further distinguished *Long March* from ‘experimental exhibitions’, ‘self-organising’ or the typical curating in galleries, was the curators’ conscious appropriation of ‘the working model created by the historic Long March’.⁹²

⁹⁰ Gu Zhenqing and Jin Feng, ‘Yichang de Shengcun Xianshi Jianjian Richang Hua: Gu Zhenqing Fangtan Lu’ [Abnormal Everyday Realities are Becoming Normal].

⁹¹ Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, ‘Curators Words’.

⁹² Ibid.



Fig. 12 Wang Wei, *1/30 sec. Underwater*, lightbox installation, at 'Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies & Delusion', in Beijing, 1999. Francesca Dal Lago Archive. Courtesy of Francesca Dal Lago and Asia Art Archive.

What was the working model created by the historic Long March? Mao Zedong's statement that Long March is 'a manifesto, a propaganda force, a seeding machine' was realised through significant propaganda.⁹³ During the historical Long March, in scarce

⁹³ Mao Tse-tung, 'On Tactics Against Japanese Imperialism', *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Volume I,

conditions, the Red Army used flexible approaches such as publishing newspapers, drawing slogans, and creating songs and dramas by adapting local folk art. They took advantage of every possible material to promote revolutionary thoughts and mobilise local people. Slogans were the most applied form of propaganda during the Long March.⁹⁴ In February 1935, each Red Army soldier was asked to write at least one slogan every day, using ‘chalk, ink brush, giant characters, small characters, on walls, on doors’ to cover slogans all over their cantonment.⁹⁵ Today, some of these slogans were still kept in China along the Long March route. Such propaganda work also influenced China’s later guidance on art. Mao Zedong’s ‘Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art’ (1942) pointed out that artists and writers should forgo their bourgeoisie intentions and make art for ‘the masses of the people’ in service for the Socialist revolution.

Lu and Qiu did not restore exact approaches in the historical Long March. But like the propaganda of the revolution which was aimed at Red Army soldiers, ordinary people and the enemy, Lu and Qiu tried to mobilise the general public instead of just contemporary art practitioners. They widely distributed visual materials like leaflets and logos to create unexpected encounters with ordinary audiences. They presented sculptures directly to villagers in rural areas instead of cultural elites in cities. They worked with different systems (like the local government) and promoted themselves to the general public through mass media like television. *Long March* invested great effort in inviting folk or self-educated artists like Guo Fengyi (1942–2010) and secured collaboration with many official art associations.

If we consider such curating in relation to the longer communist revolution tradition, such practices might be also seen as ‘cultural positioning’. In her substantial study on early Communist cadres’ mobilising strikes in Anyuan Coal Mine, political science scholar Elisabeth J. Perry found that central to the success of the 1920s mobilisation was the ‘innovative deployment of classical phrases, folk practices, clothing, ritual, and other elite and mass cultural resources’.⁹⁶ She called such practice as ‘cultural positioning, or the strategic deployment of a range of symbolic resources [...] for purposes of political

(Peking: Foreign Languages Press), 1965, pp. 153–178.

⁹⁴ Chen Danhong, ‘Changzheng Shiqi de Xuanchuan Gongzuo yu Makesi Zhuyi Dazhonghua Yanjiu’ [A Study on the Propaganda and the Popularization of Marxism during Long March] (unpublished Master of Arts, Southern Medical University, 2014), p. 16.

⁹⁵ Chuan Dian Qian Bian Hongse Wuzhuang Wenhua Shiliao Xuanbian [Selected Collection of Historical Materials about Communist Martial Forces’s Cultural Work in Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou], ed. by Dong Yougang (Guiyang Shi: Guizhou People’s Publishing House, 1995), p. 33-4.

⁹⁶ Elisabeth J. Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China’s Revolutionary Tradition*, Asia–Local Studies/Global Themes (University of California Press, 2012), p. 8.

persuasion'.⁹⁷ To some extent, *Long March* was also an intentional 'innovative deployment'. Like the early Chinese communists, the curators engaged with non-contemporary art resources: pop culture, folk art, amateur art, and especially the revolutionary heritage. They visited existing slogans (Site 2 Jingang Mountain) and documented local residents' farewell dance to the Red Army (Site 5 Lijiang). While the early Communist party took on these folk resources to mobilise workers for the strike, *Long March* deployed visual materials of the historical Long March, people's memories and sentiments and society's ongoing visual production to remind people to be conscious about the rich and particular visual culture and resources in China.

Different from the object-based curating that centres around artworks, as this thesis demonstrates, *Long March* prioritised the mobilisation of participants. As the curators said: 'The entire exhibition will continue to develop while on the road, becoming a way for every participant to continually adjust their thinking.'⁹⁸ Making art in the social realities of China was in part to expand the audiences of contemporary art to ordinary people, on the other hand, an attempt to transform the participating contemporary artists. Both aims put participants at the core of the curatorial concern. This echoed political movements in communist China, including the 1942 rectification movement in Yan'an, which put transforming party members especially intellectuals, as key targets.

In *Curating Revolution* on exhibition-making during China's Mao era, historian Denise Y. Ho pointed out that 'as a tool of mobilization, an exhibition was not only revolution's textbook, it was also revolution's handbook.'⁹⁹ Exhibitions were aimed to deepen viewers' understanding of the revolutionary narrative and inspire them to devote voluntarily into the revolution. Ho observed that these exhibitions often became sites of performances and the situations like meetings, forums and reading groups were also sometimes appropriated as a form of exhibition. Similar to these exhibitions, Lu Jie's initial curatorial proposal 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition' (1999) and the developed version 'A Detailed Curatorial Plan' (2001) included many discussions with the locals on their personal experience.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Denise Y. Ho, *Curating Revolution: Politics on Display in Mao's China*, Cambridge Studies in the History of the People's Republic of China (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 25.



Fig. 13 Resident performing the Tibetan Guozhuang dance in front of the Catholic church where Mao is said to have stayed. Site 11 Moxi in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* on 27 August 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

The clear appropriation of the communist heritage, especially the approaches of propaganda and political movements, reveals how the curators were consciously re-inventing curating drawing on local histories — not only visual materials but also ways of organising. Such curating should be called a re-invention of both the Western curating and the revolutionary practices in China because of the constant adjustment and experimentation for different concrete situations, instead of aligning with any one particular existing practice. Lu still took *Long March* as an art project and framed his way of organising as curating. For example, we can find that Lu's curatorial proposal demonstrated a more 'provocative' attitude than propaganda. Instead of trying to assimilate and convert viewers into Communist supporters like the propaganda in the historical Long March, Lu expected some situations to 'confront' participants and trigger them to be in a state of 'surprise', 'shock' and 'non-understanding', which was more familiar to the attitude

towards the public in Western avant-garde art.¹⁰⁰ In the ideal situation, the curatorial project *Long March* would empower the participants and activate their agencies. At the same time, as Section Two and Three demonstrate, *Long March* differed from many other curatorial attempts like the Shanghai Biennale (2000) that were trying to introduce the international infrastructure of contemporary art to China. *Long March* was engaging with the field of contemporary art, but at the same time trying to deconstruct it, expand it and redefine it within a Chinese context. Different cultural and social thoughts found their ways into the project because of the hybrid experiences of the curators as well as the hybrid conditions of Chinese society of the time.

In this project, these various influences were not necessarily coherent; many presumptions were also changed during the process. For example, in the early open calls for proposals in 2002, Lu and Qiu called artists to make large-scale sculptures that could be left in the localities as long-lasting artworks; but when the project was realised, most artworks were very light or temporary as the budget was limited combined with the moving nature of the project. If the curatorial proposal was a neat, systematic, and cohesive conceptual work, the realisation became much more messy, muddy, and fragmented. If ‘The Detailed Curatorial Plan’ (2001), written solely by Lu, could be seen as a curatorial correspondence to Socialist planned economy, the project’s journey on the road literally embodied the term ‘movement’ (*yun dong*, moving and acting), which was often used in the context of ‘political movement’ during the Mao era. Once turned into reality, curating no longer served only for the curatorial statement and was no longer restrained by the curatorial plan. It evolved with contradictory desires and demands: making an impressive mega art project, collaborating with high-profile artists, engaging more participants, producing good artworks, challenging audiences, and participants, prompting genuine reflections, attracting more media exposure, saving money, and hiding from censorship.

As it turned out, the project halted halfway at Site 12. If we conceive the project as an attempt to re-invent, we might find it easier to understand Lu’s decision to stop. Lu decided to stop instead of realising the full plan because he realised that the twelve sites had already turned into a different project and turned away from his initial proposal. For a long time, on the initial website (www.longmarchfoundation.com) of 25000 Li Cultural Transmission Center (or Long March Project), the curatorial proposal and the real journey of *Long March*

¹⁰⁰ Lu Jie, ‘Long March — A Walking Visual Exhibition: A Detailed Curatorial Plan’ (English version), 2001, p. 8, p. 20, pp. 30-31.

were presented in parallel to each other. This detail reflected the break between the plan and the journey and their different natures, despite the two using the same curatorial framework. The transformation from the plan to the journey clearly demonstrates that curating intrinsically involves different working modes in the same project. Especially during the journey, the assumptions of the curators gave way to realities, happenings, and accidents. In this sense, being flexible and responsive is also a crucial part of curating.

Through promoting the project and organising one of the events in the project, *Long March* widely introduced the discourse of curating into contemporary Chinese art. 25000 Li Cultural Transmission Center and Long March Project/Space consciously framed their critical engagement in biennials and the art market as curatorial practices. This insistence of a non-conforming role, as my thesis argues, is fundamentally related to how curating emerged in China out of a non-institutional context. In Zunyi International Curating Symposium, 2002, Lu Jie reflected on the emergence of curating in China. As Lu said, most active curators in China were not professional and nearly all of them were self-made. ‘Power’, in contemporary Chinese art during the 1990s, was usually considered to be in the hands of the government, who could cancel a public exhibition, Western curators who could select Chinese artists, or Chinese critics who could promote artists. However, Lu re-interpreted the word as the ability to form one’s new role in a changing environment — for him, the power to curate in China, was sought by oneself.

I want to summarize my conclusion about the power of space, the power of the curator. In China this power is not given by the society but sought by the individual. The work of all curators right now is to continue integrating resources, and in this way to make new things possible. I am interested in whether in this process there might be something new — that perhaps because our context, our situation is different, because of this complexity, our practice might produce something interesting which might become a contribution to the visual art world.¹⁰¹

This self-sought power to integrate resources and make new things happen, for Lu, has been practiced since the 1980s. When looking back at his and his peers’ experience in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, Lu Jie put forward that ‘the editor was the curator at that time.’¹⁰² On first glance, his statement could be understood from the fact that it was the

¹⁰¹ Long March: A Walking Visual Display, ‘2002 Zunyi International Symposium: Curating in the Chinese Context’, 2002 <<http://longmarchproject.com/2002-zunyi-international-symposium-curating-in-the-chinese-context/>> [accessed 29 April 2018].

¹⁰² Interview with Lu Jie

editors that organised exhibitions and symposia during that time. But Lu meant more than this. There was no existing perception of the role of the curator or the activity of curating; therefore, those editors who stepped out from their given roles were creating a new way of working in the field of art. They were not only organising exhibitions and symposia but also involved in a lot of ‘new things’, which could be deals, exchanges, conversations, connections, communities and more ‘particular structures the world does not provide’.¹⁰³ From this point of view, we can understand the multiple roles, skills and knowledge which were often combined in one person like Lu Jie: curator, critic, dealer, gallerist, and scholar... These identities became an all in one, a creator of ‘new things’. To make these things happen, one had to be a mediator, creating convergences between different resources, systems, and people. The navigation and mediation to make things happen, was the power to curate.

In this thesis, we will review how curating was seen as a chance to form a new reality — it was through curating, that Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie ambitiously attempted to set up a new art system and reform contemporary art by marching into social realities. This close relation between curating and society, with people, with political movements of curating in China instead of with the museum, its collections and art history leads me to argue that the word ‘curating’ is unable to grasp this differentiation. Based on the understanding of *Long March* and more local practices in China, I argue for the need instead to embrace the term *cedong* for contemporary curating instead of translating ‘curating’ as *cezhan*, which means ‘devising exhibitions’ (*cehua zhanlan*). As a Chinese term, *cedong* means to devise, mobilise, instigate and incite, usually in a political context. It overcomes the boundaries between art and politics in the sense that to curate is inherently a political action.

In bringing together this extensive body of research on *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* twenty years after its inauguration, this thesis aims to provide a textured and dynamic narrative for the history of curating in China, illustrating how curating was introduced to China in close interaction with the international art system developed in creative and reinventive local curatorial practices. This thesis also draws out the particular curatorial mode *cedong* by examining and reflecting upon this particular history and tracing its influence on later artistic and curatorial practices. Despite the ambition to establish an alternative world of art in *Long March*, this aim has not been fully realised. Through re-

¹⁰³ Words by Wes Taylor, in ‘Remote Affinity’ workshop organised by Li Hang and Cecilia Wee and hosted by Chisenhale Gallery, 5 December 2021.

narrating and rehearsing the past, we can encounter the already forgotten thoughts, experiments, stories, and lessons again, hopefully opening up a space in which to reimagine the future of art and curating.

Section One: Lu Jie

It is difficult to be Marco Polo. — Umberto Eco

In 1999, Lu Jie quoted this sentence from Umberto Eco as an introduction to his essay ‘Outside In’ on overseas exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art.¹⁰⁴ Umberto Eco used Marco Polo, the thirteenth century merchant and explorer who travelled to China from Europe through the silk road, to illustrate transcultural travellers. In the context of Eco’s article in 1977, it was the Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni who was his case study of choice. Antonioni’s documentary of China *Chung Kuo, Cina* (1972) was both protested in China and in Italy during the 1970s.¹⁰⁵ But this quotation could as well be Lu’s personal feeling when Lu wrote this essay in London. Like Marco Polo, Lu himself was also a worldwide traveller and had experienced different cultures and, sometimes, the mutual misunderstandings which arise along the way.

This section traces the life path of the main curator Lu Jie and takes his trajectory as the clue to understand the emergence of contemporary Chinese art. Moreover, it investigates contemporary Chinese art’s fractious relationship with the West. Lu’s path from a teenager learning Chinese calligraphy in Fujian, a cadre in Socialist art, a college student exposed to contemporary art dedicated to learning English, an English editor in Shanghai and a gallerist working between Hong Kong and Beijing, was accompanied by the ‘Reform and Opening Up’ of China. The path of Lu’s early life also brings out stories of Lu’s contemporaries: Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s, promoters of ‘contemporary Chinese art’ in the 1990s and transcultural travellers in the emergence of globalisation.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, Lu went through several educational and cultural systems: traditional Confucian education, craft art education, the Communist propaganda system, the newly restored higher education in China, Western modern and contemporary art, newly Chinese experimental art and the international art system. His path was also entangled with different localities: Xiamen, Putian, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong and New York. In the rapid transformation of mainland Chinese society, Lu was at the fore of rising tensions and conflict between China and the West. In response to this tension

¹⁰⁴ Lu Jie, ‘Outside In’, *Long March Project*, 1999 <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/discourse/from-outside-to-inside/>> [accessed 30 November 2021].

¹⁰⁵ Umberto Eco, ‘De Interpretatione, or the Difficulty of Being Marco Polo’ [On the Occasion of Antonioni’s China Film], trans. by Christine Leefeldt, *Film Quarterly*, 30.4 (1977), 8–12 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1211577>>.

and anxiety, Lu started his worldwide ‘confessional journey’ outside of China. In travelling, Lu researched local cultures, histories and politics, and found how being in strange places could make him resonate as a Chinese. The understanding of the difficulty in transcultural exchange and the belief that everything and everyone is interconnected with others in this world accompanied Lu to London, where he would write out the curatorial proposal ‘Long March: A Walking Exhibition’.

Chapter 1 Socialist Literati

Literati Education

Lu Jie was born in 1964 in Putian, a seaside county on the east coast of southern China. Putian enjoys a long coastline along the East China Sea. People there are especially famous for being commercially talented. Like the rest of Fujian Province, many people in Putian have migrated overseas and there is a large group of diaspora in Southeast Asia and all over the world. Apart from the traditional Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and local folk beliefs like the worship of the Goddess Matsu (the goddess for fishermen), Christian and Islamic communities can also be found there.

Lu was the second child in the family. With one elder sister and two younger sisters, he was the only male child. According to Lu, his childhood started with Chinese traditional culture. His parents taught in local primary and junior high schools. His maternal grandma was from a landlord family and the maternal grandfather graduated from the Whampoa Military Academy (a prestigious place for training Kuomintang officers) and later ran a business in Shanghai. His paternal grandfather was a village doctor and geomancer who mastered both traditional and modern medicines. Though Lu's childhood coincided with the ten-year Cultural Revolution in mainland China, he did not consider the political turmoil to have disturbed much of his life. Lu's family struggled to survive the tough suppressions upon intellectuals, and the state-run schools suspended teaching. But Lu still received early education through personal tutors in a traditional Chinese way. When Lu was about seven or eight years old, he started practicing calligraphy, the traditional approach of Chinese handwriting using ink and brushes; at twelve, he started learning classic poetry from an elder teacher.¹⁰⁶ Lu later recalled,

I know that many people would despise or suspect my saying that I received a very typical Confucian education. When understanding the generation born in the 1960s, people tend to simply give symbolic explanations that this generation's education was all from the Cultural Revolution. Actually, it was not like that. [...] Even though there were the particular [propaganda] culture, slogans, images and collective life during the Cultural Revolution, they could all be transformed into something in the Confucian style in a place or family within a strong Confucian culture.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Personal recorded interview with Lu Jie on 17 December 2019 in Beijing.

¹⁰⁷ This is a public event of a conversation between Lu Jie and He Wenzhao in 25000 Li Cultural Transmission Center (the former institute of Long March Space) during the exhibition of 'The Power of the Public Realm' on 21st December 2003. Now the transcript is archived by Long March Project but not open for

According to Lu, the local folk culture provided a ‘pragmatic and secular transformation’ of the political movement. Although there were mass political movements that attempted to construct a new ecology replacing existing social mechanisms, the grassroot culture and social bonds reacted like buffers against these strikes. People still maintained their everyday life and performed rituals according to traditions and beliefs. This statement reflected Lu’s status as a child of intellectual elites with access to different cultural resources; but it also proved that folk connections were not as easy to be destroyed as those tangible temples or Buddhism sculptures. They sheltered Lu from the harsh part of politics.

In the traditional education, practicing calligraphy is a core part. While writing classic pieces of articles and poems with brush and ink, students memorised sentences and became familiar with the masters in literature. Writing is not only about reading and understanding texts, but also appreciating and imitating the action of writing. For classical literature, it was important to learn how these texts had been written out: by whom, in which place, in what kind of situation, for what reason. For example, a well-known calligraphy piece is *Requiem to My Nephew* written by Yan Zhenqing, a literatus, politician and calligrapher in the eighth century, when he found his nephew dead in a military insurrection. Yan’s handwriting was infused with grief, and people read out Yan’s loyalty and patriotism to the nation. The piece has since been taken care of and passed on as national treasure.¹⁰⁸ Young children might not fully understand the content, but through writing, they can form a somatic connection with these texts. The daily life of Lu’s childhood was immersed in repetitive practice: to copy (*linmo*), intimate and recreate the calligraphic pieces, to chant and recite rhythmic poems sometimes purely by bodily memory instead of comprehension. Through everyday practice, the intuitive knowledge was instilled into children. Lu experienced such an education that introduced him to the tradition of literatus (*wenren*).

Literati is a complicated identity and usually referred to privileged people with access to knowledge and often political power in China.¹⁰⁹ *Shi* is very similar to the concept of

the public. He Wenzhao and Lu Jie, ‘Dakai Dakai Dakai Duihua Duihua Duihua’ [‘Open Open Open, Talk Talk Talk (Do Art in Lu Jie’s Way, Talk with Lu Jie, Against Lu Jie, Together with Lu Jie)] (Long March Project, 2003).

¹⁰⁸ Qianshen Bai, ‘The Appeal of Yan Zhenqing’, *Fu Shan’s World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century*, Harvard East Asian Monographs (Massachusetts: Brill, 2003), p. 101-17.

¹⁰⁹ Yuri Pines discussed the complexity of translating the several Chinese terms into English. ‘Defining the term *shi* is notoriously difficult: hence while it is usually translated into English as “literati,” “scholar-officials,” “gentlemen,” in certain contexts it can be rendered also as “knights,” “officers,” “aristocrats,” and the like. This semantic richness is not surprising given the fact that during approximately two and a half millennia the term *shi* was the most common designation of acting and aspiring elite members, and that during this period the composition of the elite and its nature underwent considerable changes.’ Yuri Pines, ‘The Literati’,

‘intellectual’ in modern Western society because they would contribute to politics while keeping their own intellectual independence, with a commitment to the ideal of politics (*Dao*) as raised by Confucius.¹¹⁰ *Wenren*, which could be translated word by word as ‘literary person’, were not necessarily connected with the political power. They were defined more by their knowledge of literature and practices like drawing, calligraphy and music. They were respected because their knowledge of history, literature, etiquette and rituals meant that they were also educators and mediators, helping people write letters, read prescriptions and perform ceremonies. In his childhood, Lu was immersed in an atmosphere admiring and appreciating the literary people. His parents and grandparents were well respected locally as teachers or doctors.

In everyday life, he witnessed how abstract knowledge and the craft of writing and painting brought dignity to intellectuals. Lu shared an anecdote, ‘people who can paint are never afraid of local gangsters because even the police officer would need to ask the painter for a portrait of *Guangong* and cherish the painting at home.’¹¹¹ *Guangong* is a renowned military general in history and in folk legend. As the incarnation of loyalty and braveness, he was enshrined by both gangsters and police officers. The deity of *Guangong* brings dignity to the painter and such dignity, rooted in daily life, could not be easily deprived by the changing political powers. As a child, Lu was good at calligraphy. He understood that literature and calligraphy could earn him attention and honour not only for himself, but also for his family. He recalled that,

Why would it matter if you are a teacher in middle school, a head of the police office or a vendor in the market? If your child is diligent and brilliant in learning, then everybody will speak about it and everybody will know it. If

in *The Everlasting Empire, The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 76–103. Sinologist Yu Ying-shih argued that terms like *shi*, *junzi* and *wenren* became quite indistinguishable from each other because they often referred to the same elite group. Yu Ying-shih, *Scholar and Chinese Culture (shi yu zhongguo wenhua)* (Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 2013), p. 1, 2.

¹¹⁰ Yu had considered that the appearance of *shi* as ordinary people instead of aristocrats in about the fourth century B.C.E. was the clearest signal of the emergence of the intellectual stratum in China. Yu, ‘The Emergence and Development of Ancient Intellectual Spectrum’, *Scholar and Chinese Culture*, p. 16. In order to select civic service officers, in different dynasties there was also the imperial civil service examination (*keju*) organised by the central authority; by demonstrating their comprehension of Confucian classics and understandings towards the politics, ordinary people can become imperial officers and serve for the nation. Such social climbing system existed for about 1300 years (605–1905) and much longer than any single dynasty. It cultivated a solid group of intellectuals who shed influence on the society drawing from their knowledge. Rui Wang, *The Chinese Imperial Examination System: An Annotated Bibliography* (Scarecrow Press, 2013), p. 1-2.

¹¹¹ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.

that little boy comes to the market, people will also respect his mother.¹¹²

Lu did not think that his immersion in traditional culture was unique only to his own childhood. His later collaborator in *Long March*, artist and curator Qiu Zhijie, was born in 1969 and also native to Fujian Province. Lu and Qiu were the lucky ones to be blessed with access to calligraphy as part of the education on classical Confucian texts from a young age. Because of the ‘embedded bodily experience’ (Lu’s words), they also developed a strong belief in the continuity of Chinese culture and Chinese art. For example, Lu emphasised that despite that there seemed to be fractures, Chinese culture has been maintained in people’s everyday life and it is passed on through folk rituals that people still practice, as well as through the education of the classics.

What is ‘Chinese culture’? As a concept, ‘China’ (*zhongguo*) is relatively young and ambiguous. As scholar Wang Hui points out, during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, influenced by the nation-state system, intellectuals like Kang Youwei (1858–1927) argued that China had become ‘a complete and unified entity through historical change’ and proposed the idea of being ‘Chinese’ as a hybrid identity beyond the differences of ethnicity to resist the European ethnic nationalism.¹¹³ After the Xinhai Revolution overthrew the Qing Dynasty, the Republic of China inherited a vast multi-ethnic territory. In the first and second World Wars that followed, ‘Chinese’ as an identity was gradually consolidated in the contention with the West, Japan and the US. Scholar Wang Ke traced that the saying of ‘Chinese nation’ (*zhonghua minzu*) was coined to denote all ethnic groups in China and it came to be recognised as the only nation in China by several politicians and scholars like Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) and Gu Jiegang (1893–1980) for political needs of fitting China into the modern system of the nation state.¹¹⁴ The ‘Chinese nation’ has also been inherited by the CCP. The government officially identifies 56 ethnic groups in China and the majority is Han; but the most important identity recognised by the government is ‘Chinese’ and culturally, ‘Chinese’ also includes diasporic communities outside of China.

Having grown up in eastern China along the coastline, Lu identified deeply with ‘Chinese culture’. The majority of the population in his hometown, including his family, belong to the main ethnicity Han; besides, the classic traditional education he received made him identify

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Wang Hui, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, trans. by Michael Gibbs Hill (Cambridge, MA; London, England: Harvard University Press), p. 26.

¹¹⁴ Wang Ke, *Yishi Yiyou Yidi: Minzu Zhuyi Yu Jindai Zhong Ri Guanxi [Mentorship, Friends, and Foes: Nationalism and Modern Sino-Japanese Relations]* (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2015).

with Confucianism, which ran through dynasties in China as a mainstream school of thought. Lu saw himself as a continuation of a long tradition and also part of the group of literati. Such experience also influenced his view on art. In Confucian and literati education, art is not separated from classical knowledge and philosophy but integrated as media for communication and personal expression. For example, calligraphy is the written form of literature and also a form of art itself. This view of integration influenced Lu in keeping a general interest in culture and a concern towards the whole society, instead of understanding art purely through a certain medium and a history of its own. Lu also did not consider the artist as an exclusive profession. In the ancient times, a literatus usually was a writer, a politician, an artist and an intellectual at the same time. Lu never expected himself to be just an artist and he valued the status of the intellectual as the more important one. When I asked him whether he had thought about developing calligraphy as his career when he was a child, Lu replied with a question, ‘who is the greatest calligrapher in Chinese history? It should be Mifu or Wang Xizhi!’¹¹⁵ These two respected calligraphers were important politicians in their times, shaping the society in high positions in the government. By identifying himself more as a literatus than an artist, Lu’s ambition was also to engage more with the society.

But a practical impact from this literati education was that Lu got the opportunity to study art in specific public art schools. Throughout his teenage time, Lu also carried on his daily practice of calligraphy, painting and writing poems in his spare time. In 1978, at the age of 14, Lu was admitted into the School of Art and Crafts of Fujian Province (*fujian gongyi meishu xuexiao*) in Xiamen. Lu was lucky, as he caught up the time when public education was back to track. During the Cultural Revolution, most higher education were paralysed or disturbed. Even if universities were still running, their allocation of opportunities relied more on students’ political backgrounds. For example, children of the proletarian class could go to universities despite their competence and they were called ‘worker-peasant-soldier students’ (*gongnongbing xueyuan*).¹¹⁶ In 1977, after the Cultural Revolution ended, the education system, especially colleges and universities, restarted recruiting new students based on their abilities and knowledge. In 1978, the national college entrance examination was restored. This meant that the recruit in 1977 and 1978 was open

¹¹⁵ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.

¹¹⁶ Students who enrolled in colleges between 1970 and 1976, during the later part of the Cultural Revolution. Children of workers, peasants, and soldiers enjoyed privileges for education during the Cultural Revolution.

for people of all ages who had missed the opportunity of education. It also opened up an era that intellectuals and knowledge won respect again.

Socialist Education

In modern China, different practices of traditional culture, which used to be seen as basic skills of literati, were separated, professionalised and became part of the new knowledge and professional system. Calligraphy and ink wash painting were transformed into academic disciplines in art schools. School of Art and Crafts of Fujian Province was one of the six School of Art and Crafts around China set up directly by the National Department of Light Industry. School of Art and Crafts of Fujian Province was a vocational school and Lu studied Craft Painting there until 1981. The painting he studied was very different from the painting of literati he was familiar with. Lu's school was a middle vocational school (*zhongzhuan*, short for *zhongdeng zhuanke xuexiao*), which provided education for students in the high-school age with trainings in practical techniques. Although the School of Arts and Crafts is related to art, most of the majors were still set for applied functions: ceramics, design, advertisement and so on. Such curriculum echoed the orientation in 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art', in which Mao proclaimed that art should serve the people and perform its political function. The practical function of craft and the political function of art were aligned together. During the three years in the school, Lu studied pith painting (*tongcao hua*), soft-wood carving (*ruanmu hua*) and shell-carving painting (*beidiao hua*).¹¹⁷ The three kinds of painting all utilised particular materials, developed by folk craftsmen in Fujian and Guangdong. According to Lu Jie, Craft Painting was already the so-called 'elite art' in that school, compared to others, because it allowed for experimentation. However, painting was still recognised as an applied art and prioritised techniques, ingenuity and patience which could lead to exquisite handicrafts. This contradicted sharply with the literati's view of art: for reflection, expression and the exchange of thoughts. Lu's interest in art, for the first time, was challenged by a pragmatic orientation.

Not until this time that I came across a serious contradiction. At that time my personal interest was still in the traditional literati culture. However,

¹¹⁷ Lu Jie mentioned this experience during the Yan'an Forum on Art Education. Cai Guoqiang and others, *Yanan Yishu Jiaoyu Zuotan Hui [Yan'an Forum on Art Education]* (Long March Project, 2006), p. 83. For an introduction of pith painting, see Eleanor Hasler, 'Conserving Chinese Pith Paintings | Kew', *Royal Botanic Gardens Kew*, 2017 <<https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/conserving-chinese-pith-paintings>> [accessed 5 February 2021].

craft art and ink wash painting are two very opposite things. I had to study craft art as I went to the School of Art and Crafts. Entering this school meant that I was on a fixed path. I felt I was heavily damaged when facing the repetitive and mechanical craft processes every day. It was obviously opposed to my aesthetics.¹¹⁸

Lu felt out of place. This contradiction reflects the different perception of art between literati education and socialist education. While literati takes art like calligraphy and painting as ways of self-expression, socialist education regards art first as techniques and crafts to function in production and life. The education in Xiamen pushed Lu to question his surroundings and reflect on his own position on the relationship between art and craft. He became aware of different systems of thoughts shaping this reality.

Lu also became keen to learn more about the modernity of China, a key theme for Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s.¹¹⁹ After ‘Reform and Opening Up’, from the end of the 1970s, there were many Western classic philosophies like books by Hegel and Montesquieu that were translated into Chinese and became accessible to the public. In the 1980s, among the university students and intellectuals, there was the ‘reading fever’ (*dushure*) and reading Western philosophies became popular. Such feverish reading of the West was also accompanied by the questions of which path toward modernisation China should take: if they did not follow the direction of the West, then which? This was also related to the understanding of China. As scholar Wang Hui pointed out, there were two conflicting and interconnected narratives about China perpetuated in the West. The first situated China as an ancient and multinational empire, founded from agriculture and a tributary system. The other situated China as a nation state, with vibrant commercial potential and urban infrastructure, powered by advanced technologies.¹²⁰ The two different narratives of China also led to very different perceptions of China’s relation to the West and the choice of modernity. Marxism in Socialist, modern China had an altogether different vision of China’s past, present and future.

Worker’s Club

While Lu was in Xiamen, some in his class were from rural, working-class backgrounds, already in their late twenties or early thirties and had their own families. As a student, Lu also needed to live and work with peasants on the farm for a short period of time, as part of

¹¹⁸ He Wenzhao and Lu Jie, ‘Dakai Dakai Dakai, Duihua Duihua Duihua’ [Open Open Open, Talk Talk Talk (Do Art in Lu Jie’s Way, Talk with Lu Jie, Against Lu Jie, Together with Lu Jie)].

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Wang Hui, *Xiandai Zhongguo Sixiang de Xingqi* [The Rise of Chinese Modern Thought] (Beijing: Sanlian Press, 2008), p.2

‘going to the countryside’ (*xiangiang*) and ‘learning from farmers’ (*xuening*). After graduation, Lu was required to work for the government for two years before he was free to pursue his own career. Lu was allocated back to his hometown Putian and worked as a junior officer at the local Workers’ Club (*gongren julebu*) from 1981 to 1984. His close friend who was also from Putian, Xiao Xiong, enrolled into the same vocational school together with Lu and majored in ceramics. Like Lu, he was assigned back to Putian, where he worked at the local Cultural Centre (*wenhua guan*). Both institutions were occupied a semi-official status. The Workers’ Club was once a typical institution among important towns. As part of the state cultural apparatus to mobilise the masses, its agenda on the one hand served for propaganda policies and on the other hand, connected with the life of local workers.

Historian Chang-tai Hung’s research into the Working People’s Cultural Palace in Beijing shows that such institution was a ‘socialist showroom’ advertising the progress of the country and, at the same time, presenting a culturally rich life of workers.¹²¹ They held exhibitions, made display windows, put on public lectures and organised open calls among workers on painting and essays. All these activities were for workers. This was again in line with the ‘Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art’. In the concluding speech, Mao asked the left-wing writers and artists: ‘the first problem is: literature and art for whom?’¹²² Mao gave the answer that art is for the ‘the masses of the people’ and intellectuals should take the position of the proletarian peasants and workers. The class nature of artworks should be prioritised as the primary standard for art and literature. The establishment of Workers’ Cultural Palace and Worker’s Club directly echoed such spirit. Due to the public nature of this position, Lu, apart from turning his drawing and calligraphy ability to drawing propaganda posters, also needed to work with workers and officers in different local bureaus. This three-year experience impressed highly upon him. As he said,

I would be more comfortable if I sit together with a president of the local organisation of women, a chairman of the local labour union and a director of Cultural Centre, than sitting together with scholars... We come from that (atmosphere) and this is the milieu of the era.¹²³

What Lu said here was the familiarity with the grassroots manner. Such manner was

¹²¹ Chang-tai Hung, ‘A Political Park: The Working People’s Cultural Palace in Beijing’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48.3 (2013), 556–77.

¹²² Alan Lawrence, *China Since 1919: Revolution and Reform: A Sourcebook*, (Routledge, 2004), p. 86.

¹²³ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.

comprehensive and even left some influence on Lu's speaking: he tended to use 'we' instead of 'I' when he gave a more general statement, despite that it was often a strong personal opinion. Lu in fact enjoyed much of this work, which might seem strange if we consider that his job in the Workers' Club and the education in the School of Craft and Arts were both in the socialist art system and Lu considered his aesthetics to be oriented towards the literati. But from another perspective, the job in the Workers' Club was no longer about making artworks but about working with people. What Lu opposed in the School of Craft and Arts was the repetitive process of the craft. In the Workers' Club, art was the media of choice for propaganda, a hobby for amateurs and a reason for communication. It was working with people, centring their lived experience, that was the true essence of the work.

Also, the literati and Communist propaganda developed in parallel. As political scientist Elisabeth J. Perry's research of the CCP's early work demonstrates, in mobilising workers and farmers, the Communist leaders strategically deployed existing 'symbolic resources' of authority, including religion, ritual, rhetoric, dress, drama, art and so on.¹²⁴ Such practice has continued in the Communist propaganda in later ages. In the iconic oil painting *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* by Liu Chunhua, which was reproduced as posters and stamps all over China to deify Mao during the Cultural Revolution, the young Mao was standing on the Wugong Mountain and dressed in a traditional scholar's gown. In some sense, the formation of what Perry calls as 'the revolutionary tradition' in China was also a process enlisting existing Chinese traditions, including literati and folk religions. In the case of Lu, he was not only in the tradition of the literati but also grew up in the revolutionary tradition, which was still consciously solidified and maintained through the Cultural Revolution: seeing films about the Long March, singing songs about revering Chairman Mao and conducting pilgrimage to sacred revolutionary places like Yan'an.

In 1984, Lu was admitted into the traditional Chinese painting department (*zhongguo hua xi*) in Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. In the art college, there was a custom that students in the final year should take a long trip to broaden their minds. Most students would visit Dunhuang (an ancient cultural site in Northwestern China and home to the Buddhist Mogao Caves on the Silk Road) and then travel to Xinjiang or Tibet. Lu Jie did not choose these popular destinations. He was proud that he was the only one among his classmates who selected the route of the historical Long March and travelled to Yan'an. He

¹²⁴ Elisabeth J. Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition*, Asia-Local Studies/Global Themes (University of California Press, 2012), p. 9.

started from Guangxi, passed through Yunnan and Sichuan, entered Tibet, went north to Xinjiang, then headed south to Ningxia and Gansu, eventually arrived in Yan'an. This trip started from the summer of 1986, before his final year in the college, and took three months to complete.¹²⁵ He chose the route of Long March with a clear awareness of the history of the CCP and the importance of this collective narrative. In this sense, he travelled along the route to identify with a historical narrative and to embody a history that he had heard and imagined for numerous times. As he said later,

Yan'an is a real fact. It is in our social reality, not only in the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art'. Yan'an is deeply connected with what we do, with our teachers, our education in the art academy, with our art history, with everything of us.¹²⁶

From Lu's words, perhaps the term 'the revolutionary tradition' is not enough to depict the importance of the Communist revolution in their lifetime. The narrative, ideology and belief of revolution were infiltrated into their daily life and the revolution had become their reality. When this reality was replaced during the 1980s by Western culture, avant-garde art and pop culture, it would still haunt Lu as memories.

¹²⁵ Interview with Lu Jie, August 2018.

¹²⁶ Interview with Lu Jie in December 2019.



Fig. 14 Campus of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, 1985. Zheng Shengtian Archive. Courtesy of Zheng Shengtian.

Chapter 2 Dealing in the Avant-Garde

At the end of 1970s, the political pressure was slightly eased. In Shanghai, the local critic Wu Liang (1955–) observed that people gradually realised that they could start painting things that were not only limited to propaganda but more personal choices like the daily life and landscape, which were ‘already far away from the official requirement that art should serve the politics’.¹²⁷ In Beijing, there appeared public exhibitions of non-propaganda art. Artists directly joined the wave of enlightening the masses and opposing official ideology. About 23 avant-garde artists organised the unofficial ‘Stars’ Art Exhibition’ (*xingxing meizhan*) on the railings of the National Art Museum of China in 1979. They called for freedom in artistic practices that responded to the time with their feelings and experiences. One of the participants, Huang Rui, wrote in the preface that, ‘we have used our own eyes to know the world and our own brushes and awls to participate in it.’¹²⁸

In 1984, Lu won out from the tough competition of the National College Entrance Exam. He was accepted into Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts and majored in Chinese painting. ZAFAs is currently known as the Chinese Academy of Art. Located in Hangzhou and sitting along the West Lake, it is one of the most prestigious art academies in China and enjoys the rich heritage of literati. Its history dates to the National Academy of Art (*guoli yishu yuan*) founded in 1928 by three artists including its head Lin Fengmian (1900–1991). From 1920 to 1926, Lin studied sculpture and painting in L’Ecole Nationale des Beau-Arts de Dijon and L’Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beau-Arts in Paris.¹²⁹ In France, Li gained much influence from impressionism, postimpressionism, expressionism and fauvism. When he returned to China in 1926, he was committed to renew and modernise Chinese painting. He headed the National Academy of Art for nearly a decade and made the place an incubator for modernism in China. The academy’s early curriculum included both ‘Western painting’ (*xihua*) and ‘Chinese painting’ (*guohua*, which literally translated as ‘national painting’), along with subjects of sculpture, craft and music.¹³⁰ Lin’s commitment to reforming Chinese painting was through what was considered as form: colours and lines, but such choice

¹²⁷ Asia Art Archive, ‘Interview with Wu Liang’, in *Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980-1990* <http://www.china1980s.org/files/interview/wlftpa_201102211225591117.pdf>.

¹²⁸ Huang Rui, ‘Preface to The First Stars Art Exhibition (Xingxing Meizhan) (1979)’, in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. by Wu Hong (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014), pp. 7-8.

¹²⁹ David Der-wei Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Modern Chinese Intellectuals and Artists Through the 1949 Crisis* (Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 240-41.

¹³⁰ ‘Xiaoshiguan’ [Museum of Academy’s History], *Central Academy of Art Art Museum* <<https://caam.caa.edu.cn/cp/xsg/201306/14059.html>> [accessed 20 November 2021].

differed from the mainstream preference on realism in the era of national crisis. Lin was marginalised bearing harsh criticism in the following decades and the academy also went through several reorganisation and changes. Modernism was denigrated and Socialism Realism, introduced from the Soviet Union, became the dominant guidance for art in Mao's era, including in the art academy.

But when Lu arrived at the academy, the pursuit for modernism was resurging. As one of the eight students in Chinese painting, Lu was nearly facing the same problem as Lin sixty years ago: how to renovate Chinese painting? In most contexts, 'Chinese painting' refers to ink wash painting (*shuimo hua*) that uses the same black ink and soft brushes in calligraphy. Traditionally, it is separated into different genres according to its content: landscape (*shanshui*), portrait (*renwu*), flowers and birds (*huaniao*). Another approach was by the technique: expressive (*xieyi*) or realistic (*gongbi*). After enrolling in the academy, Lu was trained specifically in drawing portraits with extremely expressive strokes (*daxieyi zhuanxiuke*).¹³¹ Such choice aligned with the literati training he received from childhood — 'literati painting', or 'scholar's painting' usually adopted expressive brushstrokes instead of delicate and retained depiction of the reality.¹³² It seemed that Lu successfully entered into the genealogy of traditional Chinese painting, but at the same time, the subject 'Chinese painting' was in a time of crisis. When Lu was just a freshman in the academy, a graduate student in Nanjing University of the Arts, Li Xiaoshan (1957–), described the anxieties about the medium of ink wash painting: "Chinese painting has come to the moment of a dead end", this saying has become a trendy topic in painting circles.¹³³ This unnerving atmosphere was not a result of the political demand but from the pressure to make new artistic experiments with a traditional medium.

From undergraduate to postgraduate, the guidance from Li Xiaoshan's tutors in Chinese painting remained the same: to copy and imitate the antique paintings. The ossified academic training and the vibrant artistic experiments outside of the college pushed him to question, 'If I live in the shadow of antiquity for my whole life, how can I transcend antiquity and how can I create works that fit the requirements of modern society?'¹³⁴ In his

¹³¹ 'yueshi #7 yishujia jianjie', *Imagokinetics*, 2014 <<https://www.imaglab.art/2014/03/10/1e719ef6ef/>> [accessed 20 November 2021].

¹³² Susan Bush, 'The Definition of Scholar's Painting', *The Chinese Literati on Painting : Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch'i-Ch'ang (1555-1636)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 2nd ed, p. 8.

¹³³ Li Xiaoshan, 'Dangdai Zhongguo Hua zhi Wo Jian' [My opinion on contemporary Chinese painting], *Jiangsu Art Journal*, 1985.

¹³⁴ Asia Art Archive, 'Interview with Li Xiaoshan', in *Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980-1990*, 2009 <http://www.china1980s.org/files/interview/lxsftfinal_201105061558511680.pdf>.

essay 'My opinion on contemporary Chinese painting' published in 1985, Li put forward that the priority for Chinese painting was to abandon traditional standards and to update its theories, instead of simply trying to combine Western techniques with Chinese ones.



Fig. 15 Li Xiaoshan's article 'Dangdai Zhongguo Hua zhi Wo Jian' [My opinion on contemporary Chinese painting] was originally published on *Jiangsu Art Journal* in 1985. After it facilitated much debate, nationwide state-owned newspaper *Fine Arts in China* republished the article on the cover page and selected the quote Li discussed as the main title here "“Zhongguo Hua Yi Daole Qiongtu Mori de Shihou”" (Chinese painting has come to the moment of a dead end).

From 1984 to 1986, numerous unofficial art groups appeared simultaneously in at least 23 provinces.¹³⁵ It was an eruption of modern art in China after its ten years' growth since 1976, the end of the Cultural Revolution. According to a sociological survey on exhibition participants from the 1970s to the 1980s made by scholar Tong Dian, there was a huge increase of young practitioners in China, from about 500 people in 1978 to about 3800

¹³⁵ Gao Minglu, '85 New Art Wave', ed. by Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, 2010, p. 51.

people in 1985.¹³⁶ Among them, many were university students, reflecting how higher education contributed to the field of art.¹³⁷ These intellectuals avidly read books and catalogues on Western philosophies, literature, while modern art, especially conceptual art, often became the direct reference. Artists talked about topics from existentialism to semiology. For example, Chinese artist Huang Yong Ping (1954-2019) and his friends in Xiamen initiated the group Xiamen Dada, directly responding to Dadaism in Europe in the early twentieth century. This crucial historical moment was then identified as the '85 Art New Wave (*yishu xinchao*). The artistic practices were new and radical, leaving the socialist and traditional heritage behind and experimenting with recently-read inspirations. As editor Gao Minglu commented about the '85 Art New Wave saying, 'It was a movement. The nature of a movement is counter-tradition, counter-authority and seeking change.'¹³⁸

One of the critical moments at this time was the 'Rauschenberg International Tour Exhibition' in the National Art Museum of China in November, 1985. The American artist Robert Rauschenberg visited China in 1982 and he came back with more works after three years, creating phenomenal influence: his collage works with everyday materials were mind-blowing for Chinese artists and many rushed to Beijing and learnt about the medium of installation and performances for the first time.¹³⁹ As Huang Yong Ping put it in a letter in 1986, 'Rauschenberg came and brought a post-modern concept' in the way that his art can 'use any material, in any place, for any purpose and end in any way.'¹⁴⁰ This intense and drastic atmosphere also made it more difficult for young artists specialising in Chinese painting: Chinese painting itself is like the synonym of 'tradition', if they need to counter the tradition, should they abandon the medium?

While Lu was facing the question, he encountered the experimental art group Pond Society in Hangzhou. The members of Pond Society (*chishe*) included Zhang Peili (1957–), Geng Jianyi (1962–2017) and some others. In December 1985, they organised a painting

¹³⁶ Tong Dian, 'The Landscape of China's Modern Art Movement (1991)', in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. by Wu Hung (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Gao Minglu, 'Xu' (Foreword), *'85 Meishu Yundong Lishi Ziliao Huibian* (Collected Historical Materials of '85 Art Movement), (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008), p. 10.

¹³⁹ Li Jia, 'Laoshengbai, huo Laosenbege, yiji "Zai hongguo"' [Ro], *Bund-Art*, 30 July 2016 <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA4MzcyOTA2Mw==&mid=2657239893&idx=1&sn=505685055e3fa4c6282562393b2766> [accessed 15 April 2020]

¹⁴⁰ Huang Yong Ping, 'Huang Yongping Gei Yan Shanchun de Xin' (Huang Yong Ping's Letter to Yan Shanchun), in *'85 Meishu Yundong Lishi Ziliao Huibian* (Collected Historical Materials of '85 Art Movement) (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008), pp. 509–11. Originally the letter was written in January 1986. The latter quote was from *Huang Yongping*, ed. by Meichun Wu, *Dangdai Yishu yu Bentu Wenhua* (Contemporary Art and Local Culture) (Fujian: Fujian Fine Arts Publishing House, 2003), p. 27.

exhibition called '85 New Space' in opposition to the frustrating official 'Sixth National Art Exhibition' that took place earlier. Paintings in the '85 New Space' were about personal experiences of urban life and the works' forms and tones stood completely different from previous artists' works, without any reference to political events such as the Cultural Revolution. Some participants of the '85 New Space' also began exploring more media besides painting. Together, they installed an outdoor artwork near the campus of ZAFU. Lu recalled that,

I usually got up at 6 am and went for a run around the West Lake and one day, I saw a giant mural — why is there a mural here?! But it is not a mural, what is this? On the wall, a piece of 'public art' appeared and later I got to know it was the work of the group of Zhang Peili.¹⁴¹

That work was *Work No.1 – Yang-style Taichi Series* carried out in June 1986. It was a giant two-dimensional work, composed by some pieces of newspaper, on which there were figures of Taichi players demonstrating different postures. Zhang Peili and his friends put the work onto a wall near the lake. The work was a collective experiment. The artists were testing a new artistic language as well as a new way of exhibiting. Around the similar time, Lu also saw Wu Shanzhuan (1960–) in the academy. Wu was making large posters with Chinese characters in red colour and sometimes these characters were painted all over the whole room. Lu visited his studio, but he recalled that, 'I didn't understand what he was doing; so I walked off.' As Lu commented, *Work No.1 – Yang-style Taichi Series* and Wu's works were very important for him, because that sense of strike and incomprehension when he saw these avant-garde works left Lu with the impulse to understand the new trends and the pressure to rethink about his own path.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.



Fig. 16 Pond Society, *Work No. 1, Yang Style Tai Chi Series*, Hangzhou, 1985. Fei Dawei Archive. Courtesy of The Pond Society and Asia Art Archive.

Faced with the shock of new artistic forms, Lu decided to drop the brush. But he did not try to make such new art either. Instead, he picked up the English dictionary. He aspired to read western theories and art histories directly from English, instead of the translated Chinese texts which possibly already distorted the original meaning. Such a choice could possibly be understood from his identification with the status of literati. As he said, the admittance to this academy meant to him more like an acknowledgement that he had become an intellectual, rather than an artist. Indeed, he was already an ‘artist’ in School of Craft and Arts. However, that experience was concerned with technique and the production of objects, rather of expressing thoughts, engaging with debate and forming new vocabularies and theoretical frameworks through which to see the world. He grew curious to understand contemporary culture, especially that originating from the West society, which gave birth to modern and contemporary art. To do this, he needed to learn Western languages. A few art researchers at that time also chose to learn foreign languages: Fei Dawei (1954–) self-taught English and French when he was working in a factory in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution; Hou Hanru (1963–) self-taught German when he

studied in Beijing in CAFA at the end of 1970s.¹⁴² The two also later went abroad and became active curators between the Chinese art scene and abroad. But overall, those who committed to learn Western languages were rare. Lu was determined. He even started a reform in the department of ink wash painting: before him, the required second language for undergraduates was Japanese; Lu protested, therefore pushing the department to allow students to use English as the second language.¹⁴³

Lu devoted almost all his time to learning English, memorising sixty new words each day and always listening to *Voice of America*.¹⁴⁴ The academy library also offered English books and catalogues for him to read. Apart from Lin Fengmian's collection of books in the 1930s, the library's collection was updated substantially in 1979 by the professor Zheng Shengtian (1938–) and his colleagues. Soon Lu Jie was recognised by the whole college as the one speaking English well. In the 1980s, such ability was very rare, but more rare was Lu's confidence to demonstrate his ability and his creativity, having learned with the English Language. There was an anecdote that when he was in college, one of the tutors held an exhibition in Germany and the commercial gallery kept putting off the due payment. With his own typewriter (which was also a rare piece of equipment in his surroundings), Lu sent a letter in English to the Germany gallery stating that if the payment failed to reach the professor soon, the next letter to them would be from the professor's lawyer. The gallery quickly remitted the money.¹⁴⁵

As this anecdote suggests, there were more and more exchanges between China and the rest of the world after the national leader Deng Xiaoping promoted the 'Reform and Opening Up' policy. The field of art and culture was especially vibrant. In the academy library, there were professional journals like *World Art (shijie meishu)* that introduced worldwide art practices. Zheng Shengtian, the head of the oil painting department, was also the first professor in China who won the state grant and travelled to the West.¹⁴⁶ When Lu came to the academy, Zheng had also just come back with thousands of slides of analogue films he had taken in overseas museums. Zheng gave many presentations to students at ZAFa and some other colleges. In this environment, learning English was not only about the access to original knowledge but also the possibility to engage directly with the outside

¹⁴² add source. the AAA interview

¹⁴³ Cai Guoqiang and others, *Yan'an Yishu Jiaoyu Zuotan Hui [Yan'an Forum on Art Education]* (Long March Project, 2006), p. 26.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019. .

¹⁴⁵ Interview with an artist who asked to remain anonymous for sharing this anecdote.

¹⁴⁶ Zheng travelled to the US, Canada, Mexico and Europe for two years

world. In his final year in the university, Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House, a state-owned entity, came to the academy for recruiting new staff. As Lu recollected, the publishing house was looking for someone who could be proficient in English. Such candidates were often from the Department of Art History and Theory (*shilun*) because they needed to read theories and texts, but the publishing house preferred someone with experience in making art. Lu Jie fit such standards and was chosen. From late 1988 to early 1992, Lu worked as an editor in the most prosperous city, Shanghai.

Editorial work was much sought after in the art world at the time. In the 1980s, the art ecology in China was mainly composed of state-owned institutions: art academies (*huayuan*, where professional artists worked as staff), art colleges for education and art journals managed by national or local publishing houses, including the one in which Lu Jie was working. In an era before the Internet, art journals were crucial as they played the role of a national communication platform for art. The authoritative 'National Fine Arts Exhibition' was held only every five years. Self-published underground leaflets (*minkan*) and self-run alternative spaces appeared from time to time, but they couldn't circulate widely. Publishing on year-round running journals was the most obvious approach for artworks and artists to be noticed. During the 85' Art New Wave, journals like *Jiangsu Pictorial* (*jiangsu huabao*), *Fine Arts Thoughts* (*meishu sichao*) and *Art News of China* (*zhongguo meishubao*) mounted to unmatched levels of influence. They were the platform to circulate the newest information, set debates and build networks of people. In this sense, journals and newspapers were more important than exhibitions because they spread the discussion of limited scale to the vast land of China. Editors in these publishing houses were the centres in the network. Open-minded and ambitious individuals organised national symposia and exhibitions, conscious of their roles in writing history.¹⁴⁷ For example, Gao Minglu, the editor of another important journal *Fine Arts* (*meishu*) between 1985 and 1989, organised the '85 Youth Fine Arts Movement Slides Exhibition' and later edited the archives on the 'movement'.¹⁴⁸ Some artists also intentionally aligned with editors. Artists around China sent letters and slides of their works to editors and editors became the most visible figures in the movement. As Huang Yong Ping wrote in 1987 in a private letter,

I think in this art movement, the most important ones were not artists

¹⁴⁷ Wu Yongqiang, 'Zai Yishushi Shiye zhong de Meishu Qikan — Touguo '85 Sichao de Anli GuanCha' [Art Journals from the Perspective of Art History, An Observation through Cases of '85 Thoughts'], *Art and Design*, 12, 2009, 257–59.

¹⁴⁸ 85 Qingnian Meishu Sichao Daxing Huandengzhan ['85 Youth Fine Arts Trend Grand Slideshow], 1986, Zhuhai.

making works in different places, but a group of young editors. [...] In present-day China, editors of the art journals in different places are the patrons and critics of art. Publishing a work equals collecting a painting. Surely the meaning doesn't lie here but in wide circulation.¹⁴⁹

When Lu arrived at Shanghai in the end of 1988, the heat of '85 Art New Wave was dimming down and he did not become an editor as Huang described. Lu's in-house work was quite miscellaneous: traditional and contemporary, domestic and foreign, art and beyond. He was in the editorial team of *The Complete Works of Chinese Fine Arts* which involved close collaboration with local museums. With access to English materials, he also acted as the editor for a menswear magazine *Him* as more Chinese people were interested in fashion. Lu also co-translated *The Shock of the New* by Robert Hughs together with his colleagues, including Shen Kuiyi (1954–) who later moved to the US and became an established scholar of Chinese art.¹⁵⁰ With these works as a young man, Lu did not make a name for himself as an influential editor. But he found a new way. With access to the letters, slides and government files flowing to the publishing house, Lu Jie quickly became a role model of providing information for artists and also visitors from abroad.

After the '85 Art New Wave Movement, the next tide of stimulation came from abroad. The massive 'China/Avant-Garde' (*zhongguo xiandai yishu zhan*, literally translated as 'Chinese Modern Art Exhibition') presented over 290 works by over 180 artists in the National Art Gallery in Beijing. Fei Dawei, who was on the curatorial committee and managed the public relations of the exhibition, sent many telegraphs to overseas journalists and curators to inform them of the event.¹⁵¹ Several months later, the 'Magiciens de la Terre' exhibition in Pompidou curated by Jean-Luc Martin included several Chinese artists Huang Yong Ping, Gu Dexin (1962–) and Yang Jiechang (1965–), along with many other artists around the world. It marked a moment when Western institutes began looking at art in other cultures and more people developed interests in the new artistic practices in China. Lu Jie acutely grasped the need of bridging the domestic and overseas art worlds when the international art world extended to China. As China opened up more to the West, scholars, curators and collectors from neighbouring areas like Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong and the

¹⁴⁹ Huang Yong Ping, 'Huang Yong Ping gei Wang Xiaojian de Xin - yi' [Huang Yongping's Letter to Wang Xiaojian - One] (1987), in *'85 Meishu Yundong Lishi Ziliao Huibian (Collected Historical Materials of '85 Art Movement)* (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008), pp. 518.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019. .

¹⁵¹ Fei Dawei Archive and Asia Art Archive, 'China/Avant-Garde Exhibition — External Communications' <<https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/archive/fei-dawei-archive-exhibition-documents/archive/fei-dawei-archive-exhibition-documents/object/chinaavant-garde-exhibition-external-communications>> [accessed 16 December 2021].

West came in person to China.

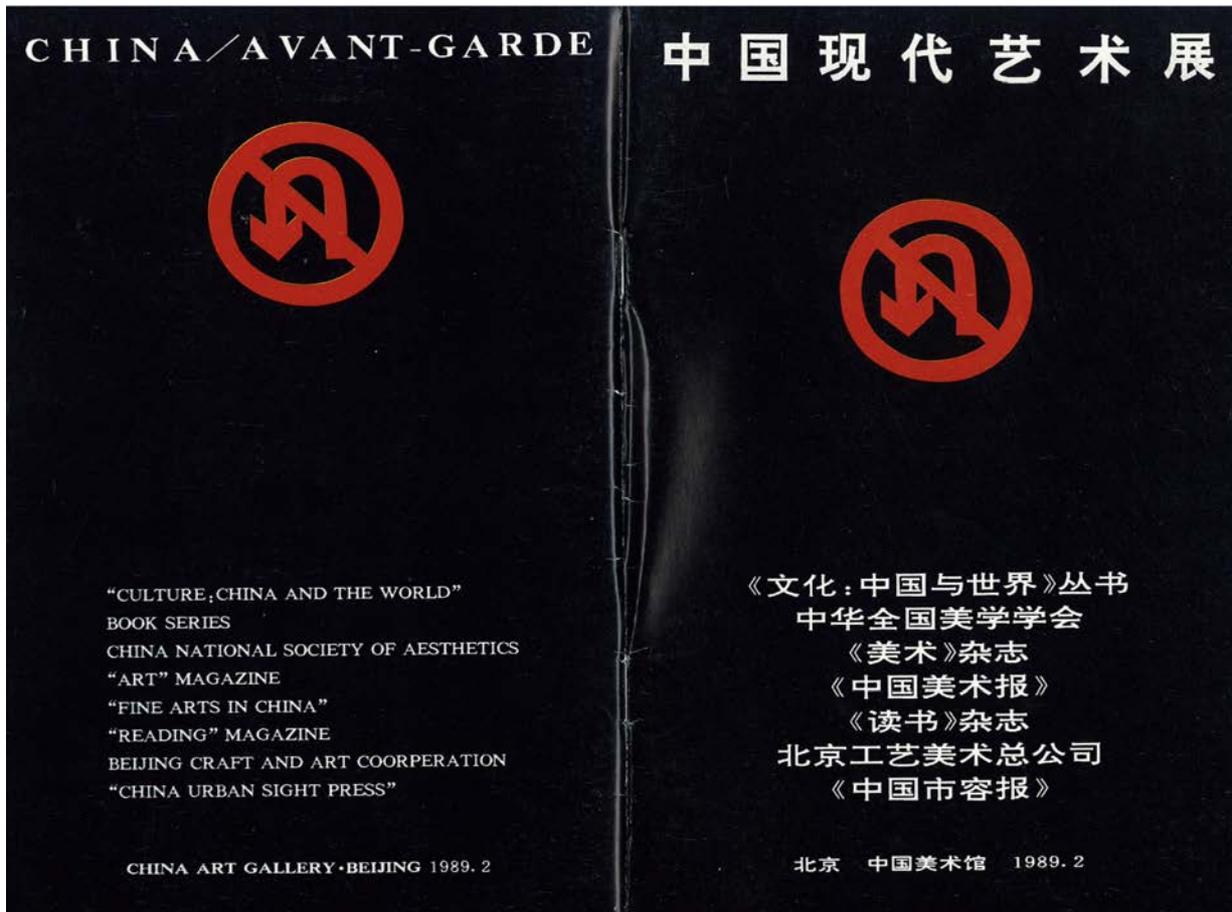


Fig. 17 Catalogue of exhibition 'China/Avant-Garde Exhibition' in Beijing, 1999. Fei Dawei Archive. Courtesy of Fei Dawei and Asia Art Archive.

Shanghai was an unmissable destination for these global visitors. As they arrived, they would need local guides to help them dive into the local situation: since there were no commercial galleries or public museums of contemporary art, where should they head to, who were the most inspiring artists, and whose works they should not miss? Lu, who often acted as the translator, was the perfect candidate to ask. If they were interested to know more about 'New Ink Wash Paintings' (*xin shuimo*) in ZAFAs, Lu Jie could answer their questions and introduce them to meet the artists. Lu also served the local artists. Lu's knowledge of practices in different regions in China and in the West allowed him to give suggestions to artists: whether their works were bold experiments or just a repetition of something that already existed. Moreover, Lu also facilitated deals.

Editors like Gao Minglu and Li Xianting, who were older than Lu, were not involved in the art business directly. But Lu did not hide from the commercial scene. In the early 1980s, most Chinese artists did not have an awareness that there could be a 'market' for their

artworks. They had salaried employment working in the academies or art departments in factories, receiving contribution fees when their works got published on journals or used by calendars or picture-story books. When artists made experimental practices, they did not make works for sale. However, awareness of the art market came rapidly together with knowledge of Western art, while most artists refuted the commodification of their practices. The group Xiamen Dada burnt all their works into ashes after their temporary open-door exhibition in 1986. Its core member Huang Yong Ping claimed that ‘it is good that there is no art market in China, artists can dispose of their works at will without caution’.¹⁵² Zheng Shengtian introduced American collectors to Chinese artists, but he recalled that there was still a taboo of making money with art in the 1980s; artists would sell their works to foreign collectors but keep it quiet.¹⁵³

Lu brought curators and collectors to artists’ studios and sometimes artists sold their works at a price much higher than artists’ expectation. As a middleman, Lu catered to different people’s needs with flexibility: collectors wished to buy works, Western curators needed to find new talents and Chinese artists needed to sell their artworks and network. Lu naturally went beyond the identity of an editor and became a network-broker, strategically operating among different people. He acted as agents for different sides. Nonetheless, international trade was welcomed, as it was substantially better paid. For Lu Jie, his salary from the publishing house was only 50 yuan every month.¹⁵⁴ As he became more and more involved in marketing and sales, he also found that the rewards of facilitating this business were astonishing. Overseas visitors would usually pay him at European or North American rates. A one-time reward would sometimes exceed his three-year income of salaries. Within several years, Lu quickly accumulated experiences and connections with overseas collectors and institutes, as well as wealth.

What was the role of Lu Jie? Was he an art dealer? If becoming an editor meant being deeply involved in communication with people of different roles, facilitating deals made Lu a direct participant in the early stage of art business. Lu’s Chinese peers around him recognised him as the one connected with the international world. In this sense, Lu could be regarded as an art dealer. But Lu was quick to remind me of this when I interviewed him, thinking I might consider him purely as a businessman:

¹⁵² Huang Yong Ping, ‘Guanyu Feishao Xiamen Dada de Shengming’ (Statement about Burning Xiamen Dada) (1986), in *’85 Meishu Yundong Lishi Ziliao Huibian (Collected Historical Materials of ’85 Art Movement)* (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008), pp. 512-3.

¹⁵³ Interview with Zheng Shengtian, May 2021.

¹⁵⁴ About \$13.4, based on the rate 1: 3.73 in the year of 1989.

It was not like a professional art dealer of today — at that time, the foreigners would like to discover new talents, and the local artists were short of funding and resources, so I came in to make the sales, exhibitions and sponsorship come into being when there was no such system for them to happen.¹⁵⁵

Lu was conscious of the complicated roles he was playing. As a middleman in an environment without open information, he benefited from the work of mediation. However, he did not only see such mediation as a money-making job. It was one such way for Lu to enter into the lively scenes of contemporary Chinese art. As a bilingual person talking to audiences from a variety of backgrounds he witnessed their mutual interests, misunderstanding and deepening bond. Despite the Tian'anmen Square Incident in 1989, which brought a long-lasting depression in the cultural and art world, Lu himself did not give up his role as a transcultural mediator. He befriended many international visitors. To some extent, when he lived in Shanghai, Lu readily benefited from the city's newcomers. They spoke English. They brought news from the outside. They were in a new extended group of international visitors in China. The artists and critics in China at that time could meet directly with them instead through books and slides. In this changing environment, Lu was a central figure because he was the translator, the mediator and the information hub. In other words, he was not only local, but also international.

In 1992, Lu married an English citizen, a scholar who was teaching in Nankai University as an exchange fellow. As his partner's term in China ended, Lu left China for Leicester, U.K., where his partner used to live. This transnational marriage could help us understand his optimism for the international world and his confidence in going to a remote land. To some extent, he did not perceive the remote land as a strange place because in his opinion, he was already *international*.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 3 Disillusion and Confession

In 1992, Lu went to Leicester in the north of England. However, he only stayed there for several months. Moving to Leicester was the first time that Lu lived in a Western environment. Very quickly, he realised that Leicester was not the international world he had been familiar with. As one of the most multicultural cities in England, non-white ethnic groups counted for 30% of the whole population of Leicester city in 1991; 23% were Indian.¹⁵⁶ On an occasion, Lu was introduced to the local Indian intellectual community and got to know some residents with Caribbean heritage. He realised for the first time that, including himself, they were all called ‘people of colour’. He had never thought about this before. He also found it difficult to join conversations, which were often about ‘blackness’, ‘colonialism’ and ‘postcolonialism’ – strange terms for him at the time. ‘Colonialism’ appeared in the official discourse in China: the history textbook teaches that China was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country, but the establishment of the People’s Republic of China eradicated these exploitations by setting up a proletarian government and driving out all colonisers. In socialist China, colonialism and colonisation belonged to the past. Besides, in eastern China where Lu had grown up and lived, Han was the dominant group and ethnicity was always a secondary matter to the nationality of ‘Chinese’. The issue of ethnic identity was also inferior to the issue of social class. By contrast, in Leicester, colonialism was still recognised as an urgent issue in the present and lively in the intellectual conversations. As for the critical discourse of postcolonialism, though it had emerged in the West since the 1970s, its foundational work, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, was not translated into Chinese until 1999.¹⁵⁷ Lu was familiar with Hegel, Nietzsche and Satre through translated books, but not *Orientalism* and postcolonialism.

This experience demonstrated to him the difference between the perception of ‘the international’ and the lived experience of being a local resident in the West. ‘There was no position for me in Leicester’, he said.¹⁵⁸ In this English city, Lu was desperate to find traces

¹⁵⁶ Stephen Jivraj and Nissa Finney, ‘Geographies of Diversity in Leicestershire (Local Dynamics of Diversity: Evidence From the 2011 CENSUS)’ (Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE), 2013) <<http://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/code/briefings/localdynamicsofdiversity/geographies-of-diversity-in-leicestershire.pdf>>.

¹⁵⁷ Luo Houli, “‘Dongfang zhuyi’yu ‘Dongfang Xue’” (‘Orientalism’ and ‘Oriental Studies’), *Dushu*, 5, 2002, 3–12. The first translated Chinese version of *Orientalism* was translated by Wang Yugen and the books was published in 1999 by Shenghuo Dushu Xinzhi Sanlian Shu Dian as part of the ‘the frontiers of academia’ series.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019 in Beijing.

of Chinese culture and his hometown.

I went to the only Chinese restaurant in Leicester run by Fujian immigrants. I stayed there reading the *Fujian Agriculture Newspaper*. They were published one month ago. I was totally indifferent to the ‘colonialism’ discourse and the only thing I could feel in Leicester was that I missed my home country, Chinese food and Chinese language so much. It was deep solitude.¹⁵⁹

It now turned out that Leicester, part of the developed Western world, was not equal to ‘the international world’ that Lu had engaged with while in Shanghai. When becoming a local of Leicester, Lu found that his previous perception of another place was based on so many assumptions. ‘The international’ was not a smooth and flat plane spreading across the so-called West. The West was also composed of numerous localities and each had their own particular histories, politics, cultures, demographics, discourses, food, landscape and society. Leicester was a post-industrial city whose histories had already been strongly shaped by immigrants. Diverse ethnicities lives together in Leicester and many immigrants had claimed the place as their home. This was totally different from the situation in Shanghai where most overseas visitors only stayed for a short while for business, and Shanghai had only become international because of the ‘Opening Up’ policy and globalisation.

While in Shanghai, Lu had an illusion that he had known the West well, and now he realised he did not. When Lu told me about this setback, he mentioned his travel to Tibet in China before going to Leicester. He met two British travellers. Together, they discussed artist David Hockney’s works. Lu knew Hockney from catalogues in the academy library and he had translated an article on Hockney by checking each word in the dictionary. The two British travellers, who happened to be a gay couple, told Lu that Hockney was homosexual and how important this was for his art. Lu was shocked and realised that he had ‘completely misunderstood this British artist’s works’.¹⁶⁰ He realised that there were many inaccuracies and mistakes in his understanding towards the West. Similarly moving to Leicester was a reckoning. He began forming a concrete scene about English culture from his lived experience. The frustration in Leicester enabled Lu to realise that his lived experiences, both in England and China, were valuable for understanding the localities and people living there.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Soon, Lu decided to leave Leicester and go back to China. Lu did not feel he needed to integrate himself into Leicester — why should he change for a strange land, when the knowledge he already acquired could benefit his compatriots back home?

Several months later, in 1992, Lu came to Hong Kong and helped businessman Manfred Schoeni (1946–2004) set up the Schoeni Art Gallery (*shaoli hualang*). Born in Germany to Swiss parents, Schoeni lived in Hong Kong after the 1970s and made acquaintances with contemporary artists including Fang Lijun (1963–) and Yue Minjun (1962–) when he visited mainland China to collect old furniture for his antique store.¹⁶¹ In the early 1990s, Schoeni sensed that there was a chance to promote new artistic practices from China. The disintegration of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 and the Tian'anmen Square Incident all stimulated European and American art institutes and collectors to pay more attention to China, especially its culture and art. Schoeni became one of the agents for Chinese artists and sold their works to overseas collectors. But as he did not speak Chinese well, he needed a Chinese collaborator, so Lu Jie joined. Furthermore, most artists whom Schoeni had collaborated with, including Zeng Fanzhi (1964–), Fang Lijun, Yue Mingjun, Liu Ye (1964–) and Liu Dahong (1962–), were based in Beijing. Lu frequently flew between Hong Kong and Beijing and befriended artist communities in the Old Summer Palace (*yuanming yuan*) and the East Village (*dong cun*) in the suburb of Beijing. Compared with Lu's subtle engagement in the market in Shanghai, Lu now publicly worked with the market as a professional. Xiao Xiong was then living in Beijing and he recalled that most Beijing artists recognised Lu as a professional, an international gallerist.¹⁶²

The community of artists existed in Beijing, the community of gallerists was in Hong Kong: Johnson Chang (Chang Tsong-zung, 1951–) founded Hanart TZ Gallery (*hanya xuan*) in 1983; Sir David Tang (1954–2017) opened his private art club China Club (*zhongguo hui*) in 1991 with exhibitions of his own collection of Chinese contemporary artworks; Pearl Lam (Lin Mingzhu, 1970–) started organising exhibitions in Hong Kong and set up her own gallery later; Lorenz Helbling (1957?–), also a Swiss, worked in Hong Kong at that time and later founded the long-lasting ShangArt Gallery in Shanghai in 1996. Besides Schoeni, Lu also worked together with Johnson Chang and possibly Stephen

¹⁶¹ Adeline Chia, 'Cong Xuesheng Dao Da Jiaoyishang: Shaoli Hualang Zongjian Wenhui Xian Fangtan' [From A Student to A Big Dealer— Interview with Nicole Schoeni, Director of Schoeni Art Gallery], *Yixun Zhongguo*, 2013 <http://www.artnow.com.cn/Finance/FinanceDetail_642_36166.html> [accessed 16 April 2020].

¹⁶² Interview with Xiao Xiong, December 2019.

McGuinness who founded the Plub Blossoms Gallery.¹⁶³ Lu recalled that though there were competitions among gallerists, there was a shared belief that ‘contemporary Chinese art’ was emerging on the horizon and they were together in making that happen soon. In this emergence, Hong Kong was of incredible importance for consolidating the international scene of the ‘new’ Chinese art.

In 1992, Lu sensed that the international exposure of contemporary Chinese art was rising. There was no exact data on the sum of transactions in the market of contemporary Chinese art, but the number of related overseas exhibitions could be a strong signal that ‘Chinese new art’ was forming a scene itself outside of China. If we consult scholar Britta Erickson’s work on overseas exhibitions on contemporary Chinese art, we can find that in the year 1993, just one year after Lu became a professional gallerist, many important exhibitions were held.¹⁶⁴ For example, in 1993, Johnson Chang and critic Li Xianting co-organised the phenomenal ‘China’s New Art, Post-1989’, which embarked upon a three-year worldwide tour from Hong Kong to Australia, the US and Scotland.¹⁶⁵ In the same year, in the US, art historian Julia F. Andrews collaborated with critic Gao Minglu and organised ‘Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant Garde in Exile’ in Wexner Center for the Arts. In Europe, Jochen Noth (1941–2022), Andreas Schmid (1955–) and Hans van Dijk (1946–2002) put up the first exhibition about Chinese contemporary art in Europe, ‘China Avantgarde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture’.¹⁶⁶ The show travelled from Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin to Rotterdam, Oxford, Odense, and Hildesheim. In 1993, David Elliott and Lydie Mepham put on a group of show of eight Chinese artists in the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford in England, under the title ‘Silent Energy’.¹⁶⁷ Still in 1993, fourteen Chinese artists were selected into the 45th Venice Biennale in a section called ‘Passaggio a Oriente’.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Andrew Maerkele, ‘The Long March Project: Backward Progress.’, *Art Asia Pacific*, 56, 2007, 150–55.

¹⁶⁴ Britta Erickson, ‘The Reception in the West of Experimental Mainland Chinese Art of the 1990s’, 2002.

¹⁶⁵ *China’s New Art, Post 1989*, ed. by Valerie C. Doran and Johnson Tsong-zung Chang (Hanart TZ Gallery, 1993).

¹⁶⁶ *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture*, ed. by Andreas Schmid and others (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Chinese artists call Hans van Dijk *lao hanshi*, ‘Old Hans’.

¹⁶⁷ *Silent Energy: New Art from China*, ed. by David Elliott and Lydie Mepham, (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993).

¹⁶⁸ *La Biennale di Venezia, XLV Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte*, vol. 2 (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1993).



Fig. 18 Documentation of the exhibition 'China's New Art, Post-1989' at Hong Kong City Hall, 1993. Francesca Dal Lago Archive. Courtesy of Francesca Dal Lago and Asia Art Archive

Looking at these exhibitions, one could find that there was no clear separation between the roles in these exhibition-making. For example, Johnson Chang successfully performed the roles of a curator, a consultant, a gallerist and a researcher. Lu Jie himself also curated exhibitions together with other critics. As he said, the work was comprehensive, including administration, business, discourse and curating.¹⁶⁹ The profound integration between the market and the academic, was possibly a natural outcome of the absence of public institutes supporting contemporary art in mainland China. It was also around 1994, according to scholar Wu Hung, the term 'contemporary art' and 'experimental art' gradually replaced 'modern art' when artists referred to their works. This change of notion could also be seen as an indication of the increasing interaction between Chinese art practitioners and the scene of international contemporary art. The terms used by both were synchronised and the art in China caught up from the modern to the contemporary. The distance between China and the international community was diminishing.

¹⁶⁹ Yishu Journal, 'Yishu Interviews – Lu Jie', 2019
 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQbZyn1PQZk&t=866s>> [accessed 23 July 2021].

In the beginning, Lu was excited about flying between Beijing and Hong Kong, feeling 'the dusty and dirty Beijing' and 'the clean and glossy Hong Kong' were getting closer.¹⁷⁰ This fluidity enabled him to interact with the art scene in Beijing as both an insider and as an outsider. As an insider, he could have intimate and private conversations with the local artists; As an outsider, he could speak with different local artist cliques without identifying with only one of them. From the mid to late 1990s, the marketisation of contemporary art and the overall economy became a decisive force in creating a contemporary art ecology in China which was independent from the official art system. But the distribution of resources in this system was very much based on networks: close friends would introduce overseas curators or collectors to each other. These international visitors would possibly buy their works or offer exhibition opportunities and therefore, the connection with them was crucial. Lu, as an agent of such resources, 'could talk to painters in the realistic school, conceptual artists as well as Political Pop artists' and sold the local artists' works to overseas collectors.¹⁷¹ In the 'the international art circuit', a term Johnson Chang coined for the ecology of the new art in China, Hong Kong was described as 'an important transit point for Chinese goods, including Chinese art'.¹⁷²

Lu's career as a gallerist was very successful. As he said proudly, 'The success rate of the artists I represent is a hundred percent.'¹⁷³ According to Lu, he and Li Xianting curated the first exhibition for Yue Minjun and Yang Shaobin and he also promoted some artists of the younger generation including Zhong Biao (1968–), He Sen (1968–) and Xie Nanxing (1970–).¹⁷⁴ These artists in Beijing rapidly had access to many exhibition opportunities and accumulated a considerable amount of money in this accelerated circulation. So did Lu. However, as the party seemed to be on the right track climbing to the climax, scepticism and doubt emerged in Lu's mind.¹⁷⁵ Due to the lack of art museums and galleries in China, exhibition opportunities for artists mainly came from Europe and North America. In a relatively passive position, many artists on the one hand strived for overseas chances, on the other hand felt they were reviewed in an oriental gaze and for political stereotypes. As Qiu Zhijie recalled, for Chinese artists in the 1990s, the initial excitement of 'striding to the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Lu Jie, 2018.

¹⁷² Oscar Ho Hing-Kay, '1989 and New Art Post-1989', *China's New York, Post 1989: With A Retrospective From 1979-1989*, Hong Kong: Hanart TZ Gallery, 1993.

¹⁷³ Yishu Journal, 'Yishu Interviews – Lu Jie'.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

world' (a slogan of the reform era) was gradually replaced by the anxiety of 'being selected by Western curators and exhibited in international biennials for the international audience'.¹⁷⁶

The Western art market was widely considered to be a threat, though scholar Jane Debevoise has reminded that the prosperity of the market and the threat of the market on independent art practices have been exaggerated in many narratives about the 1990s.¹⁷⁷ According to Debevoise, before 2000, the overseas and domestic market for 'Chinese contemporary art' did exist but it was far from mature.¹⁷⁸ Debevoise found that in an auction 'Asian Avant-garde' organised by Christie's London in 1998, among the 50 lots by mainland Chinese artists in a total of 170 lots, only three were sold.¹⁷⁹ It is possible that this exaggeration on the influence of the Western market was already in place from the early 1990s in order to emphasise the importance of building an independent and local art ecology. As early as 1992, critic Lü Peng initiated 'the First 1990s' Biennial Art Fair' (the 'art fair' didn't appear in the Chinese title) in Guangzhou, partly as a response to the overhaul of the 'socialism market economy' marked by Deng Xiaoping's speech in 1992.¹⁸⁰ Academy, critic and the market were consciously brought together to create a 'market awareness' for the 'new' art. In the catalogue of this particular Biennial Art Fair, Lü Peng predicted that Chinese art would turn from state-sponsorship to commercial investment. But he also stayed alert to the distortion of the local artistic practice by the export industry. He called for a rise in the domestic market to help new art in China retain independence from the state and the West. Among the young critics who participated in the biennial, there were different opinions towards the market, but they agreed that it was time to establish an alternative system, of which the underlying standards should be determined by the Chinese people themselves.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Qiu Zhijie, 2018.

¹⁷⁷ Jane Debevoise, 'Shanghai 2000: Let's Talk About Money', in *Uncooperative Contemporaries: Art Exhibitions in Shanghai in 2000*, Exhibition Histories (London: Afterall, 2020), pp. 20–57.

¹⁷⁸ Jane Debevoise, 'Shanghai 2000: Let's Talk About Money'.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ A detailed case study could be seen at Jane Debevoise and Anthony Young, 'The 1992 Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair', *Post (Museum of Modern Art)*, 2015 <https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/590-the-1992-guangzhou-biennial-art-fair> [accessed 18 April 2020].

¹⁸¹ Ibid.



Fig. 19 China Art Expo in Guangzhou (The First Guangzhou Art Fair), 1993. The man dressed in a black suit was Zheng Shengtian. Courtesy of Zheng Shengtian and Asia Art Archive.

In other words, behind the pursuit of a local ecology, artists' anxiety lied in the absence of discursive power. Concerns about the imbalanced discursive power in the international art ecology between Chinese artists and international institutes and collectors were also demonstrated directly in artworks. In this biennale, artist collective New History Group conducted a collective performance, *Disinfect (xiaodu)*. They dressed in protection suits and sprayed sanitising liquid in the exhibition space. This metaphorical action can be read as a determination to retain the cleanness of the art, criticising the integration of critics, businessmen and artists. In their opinion, the Political Pop and Cynical Realism artists, using the style of pop and socialism political symbols in their works, were self-orientalising for the gaze of the West.¹⁸²

While the overseas market for contemporary Chinese art might be not so prosperous, this did not ameliorate how Lu Jie, a Chinese gallerist, was viewed as a comprador

¹⁸² Hu Bin, 'Shidai Yu Shijian Zhongde Duowei Zhixiang—Xinlishixiaozu de Xiaodu Yishu Xingdong' [Multiple Directions in the Era and Event: The "Disinfect" Performance by New History Group], *Yishu Dangdai*, 5, 2013, 56–61.

(*maiban*).¹⁸³ A comprador is a word come from Portuguese and it refers to a Chinese manager of a foreign firm in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when China was partially colonised.¹⁸⁴ As the agent of Western companies for purchasing domestic goods, compradors dealt with language barriers, the complexity of monetary systems and the variety of commercial and social customs for the employers. The term ‘comprador’ was appropriated in the 1990s to denote the middle person in art business. For example, Australian scholar Geremie Barme suggested in his essay ‘Exploit, Export, Expropriate: Artful Marketing From China, 1989-93’ that some critics were ‘increasingly anxious to become the insider-traders/compradors of the arts scene’, taking advantage of the gap of information.¹⁸⁵ Though Lu was directly working on the commercial side, his position meant that he was restrained by the art circulation he was embedded in. He was bearing the stigmatisation of comprador. Li Shurui, one of the youngest participant of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* provided a vivid description, which was popular in the art circle in the 1990s and the 2000s.

Contemporary art was like an expressway that started from the West, run by China and took a detour here. Chinese took some golden fruits from the West but this expressway just ran off to other places — it didn’t have any connection with the local.¹⁸⁶

Such description echoes greatly with the colonial history in that the majority of the local ecology was exploited by the West and the local was incorporated into a global circulation. Like the capitalist West needed to expand their market by exploiting new colonies abroad, the international art world found China. However, we should be careful that such widely-held opinion might not be a fact but only a shared impression by Chinese artists at that time. It should be read more as an evidence of the mentality and perspective of how Chinese artists perceived the international circuit of art. Apart from the fact that Lu was considered as a ‘comprador’, Chinese artists were considering themselves as art labourers and their works as commodities. When Western modern art and philosophy were introduced to China in the early 1980s, there was already the tension between Chinese traditional art and

¹⁸³ In interviews with an artist, they mentioned this. Their name is made anonymous here for protection.

¹⁸⁴ Oscar Ho, critic, artist, and policy researcher of contemporary art in Hong Kong, considered the culture of Hong Kong is a mixture of comprador and refugee. In this discussion, ‘comprador’ is not necessarily a negative role. See Oscar Ho, ‘Ganghui de Bianyuan Wenhua Tese’ [Specific Peripheral Culture of Hong Kong and Guangzhou], *Sohu*, 2021 <<https://m.sohu.com/n/471128034/>> [accessed 19 December 2021].

¹⁸⁵ Geremie Barme, ‘Exploit, Export, Expropriate: Artful Marketing From China, 1989-93’, *China’s New York, Post 1989: With A Retrospective From 1979-1989*, Hong Kong: Hanart TZ Gallery, 1993, p. XLVII-LI.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Li Shurui, September 2019.

Western modern art in Chinese artists' work. Among all kinds of media — literature, drama, dance and music — contemporary art was the field in greatest contention with the West. The reason in fact lies in the art market's entanglement with the West: on its form and its existential state. The so-called 'avant-garde art' or 'experimental art' was directly influenced by Western modern and conceptual art. The challenge was then to create a unique form, instead of an imitation. In an interview named *Challenging Modernism*, contemporary artist Gu Wenda, who graduated from the master programme of Chinese painting from ZAFPA in 1981, shared his concern about the West in 1986:

I recognised that purely studying Western modernism might be valuable in China, but seen from a global perspective, this was still repeating the same old path that Western art had already traversed. [...] I realised that many young artists had become captives of Western modernism. I needed to change. [...] China is a plot of land on which modern art has yet to be reclaimed.¹⁸⁷

In the 1990s, the reservation to Western 'modern art' evolved into a suspicion of the Western art system and an emphasis on Chinese context. This tension between China and the West was translated into a discussion between some Chinese artists staying in mainland China and some who moved abroad. From the late 1980s and especially after 1989, some Chinese artists like Chen Zhen, Huang Yong Ping and Cai Guoqiang moved to Japan, America and Europe and these artists' practices also developed differently from their peers in China. In a letter to Fei Dawei, who worked in Paris since the end of 1980s, Beijing-based critic Li Xianting called overseas Chinese artists as 'cultural exiles'. Furthermore, Li considered that 'if art leaves its cultural motherland, it necessarily withers.'¹⁸⁸ In response,, Fei argued back and called for more focus on 'common issues' in 'an age of globalised culture'.

I believe that [...] the particular quality of thought and the manners of thinking with which the artists were raised in their 'cultural motherland' prevent them from engaging in contemporary cultural questions in their new environment. [...] This kind of "withering" of creativity is the result of artists lacking the means to transform the things that they learned in China into something that can cross cultural boundaries while still remaining valid and

¹⁸⁷ Originally published as Fei Dawei, 'xiang xiandai pai tiaozhan — fang huaja guwen da', *Meishu*, 223.7 (1986), 53–56, 63. Its translation was published as Fei Dawei, 'Challenging Modernism — An Interview with Gu Wenda', in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, pp. 106-11.

¹⁸⁸ Fei Dawei, 'Does A Culture in Exile Necessarily Wither? — A Letter to Li Xianting (1991/2003)', *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, 2010, pp. 252-54.

effective. And this ‘lack of means’ is a consequence of the artists’ having been inculcated over a long period of time within the particular closed and conservative cultural spirit of Chinese society. Thus I think that your words could be completely reversed: ‘If art does not leave its cultural motherland, it will necessarily wither.’ Of course, what I mean by ‘leave’ is that it is only in having some trait that transcends local culture that art is able to develop. The world today is currently experiencing an age of globalised culture. Only by perceiving and becoming involved in common issues that transcend cultures and that possess a certain universalism can we discover our own uniqueness; and only in doing so can we ensure that our local culture achieves vitality.¹⁸⁹

The 1990s thus saw two tendencies. Critic like Li Xianting emphasised the importance of holding onto the Chinese context and he raised the term ‘ethnic contemporary art’ (*minzu dangdai yishu*) in 1995, suggesting that artists could search for inspirations from traditional art and culture in their own locality.¹⁹⁰ On the other hand, curators like Fei Dawei and Hou Hanru (who also worked overseas) emphasised that Chinese artists should open up to other cultures and speak to a global audience. Behind these debates, there were questions faced by not only the Chinese art world but the whole Chinese society: how should contemporary China relate to the West? The question was in fact not new and had been asked from the nineteenth century, from Chinese intellectuals’ discussion during the May Fourth movement in 1919 and through the entire twentieth century, along with the path of China’s modernisation. The question could be translated as, ‘Should China import and imitate Western modernisation? If not, which path should China take?’ The debate around alternative modernity became prominent because after 1979 with China’s economic reform and its turn from planned economy to free market.

As the letter between Li Xianting and Fei Dawei suggested, the division of the positions in the debate was in fact mostly within the Chinese community, while Western curators, collectors and audience were largely absent from this debate. This relatively closed discursive environment made Lu feel that artists and critics in China often fell into a narrow comprehension of the West. His experience in Leicester also reminded him that in the West, they also had their own agenda of discourses such as post-colonialism, multiculturalism and internationalism, which the Chinese artists were not concerned with. Possibly as Fei Dawei suggested in his letter, the Chinese discourse and environment sometimes was too self-

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Li Xianting, ‘Guojihua, Minzuhua He Dadaihua’ [Internaitonalisation, Nationalisation and Contemporarisation], in *Zhongyao de Bushi Yishu [What Is Important Is Not Art]* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 2000), pp. 151–57.

closed and became a reiteration of 'Chinese' without a concrete ground of the question 'what is China'. The West indeed had stereotypical perceptions of contemporary art in China and the power of discourse was imbalanced in the system; but Chinese artists also lacked understanding of other places or the motivation to build mutual understanding. After four years in the art market, Lu became conscious of this blindness and nativism, which were often propelled by the passionate dedication to China. Lu found that many Chinese artists 'thought they had already known the outside because they had read the foreign catalogues or seen the original artworks already'. By contrast, Lu admitted that 'we Chinese were still so ignorant about the outside world'.¹⁹¹

In this environment, Lu felt that staying in the market would only be repetitive work. He claimed the art market 'was a huge restriction to my personal growth, as well as my judgement, knowledge and my prospects in experience'.¹⁹² He started to question,

Why did I go into the market? Originally I was a creator, writer, critic. Why did I get into the administrative and functional work, instead of refraining a critical distance? Every day, I did things that I was sceptical about. I worried about regretting it in the future. I worried if I promoted people who might leave a wrong mark in history.¹⁹³

In 1996, Lu Jie chose to step down from the fast-train of the market of Chinese contemporary art. As a mediator and a gallerist, Lu was at the heart of the tension between Chinese art practitioners and the Western collectors. At the same time, as Lu admitted, being a gallerist was mainly about administration work and it did not allow much space and flexibility for personal exploration or expression. The role of the gallerist and the system of the art market suppressed his pursuit for creativity and he needed to look for a new way to engage with art.

Lu quit the role of the gallerist, left China and decided to 'travel around the whole world and be a real traveller'.¹⁹⁴ Lu was in a privileged position. He had accumulated a considerable amount of savings to support himself for some time of travelling, which he estimated to be about three years. Travel was a hobby passed on in his family. His hometown Putian was also famous for international migration all over the world. As he recounted,

¹⁹¹ Interview with Lu Jie, 2019.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Yishu Journal, 'Yishu Interviews – Lu Jie'.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Lu Jie, 2019.

My maternal grandmother used to walk for three days from Putian to Shanghai when my grandfather was doing business there. [...] My paternal grandfather also went around because he was a geomancer and a folk doctor. Also, my parents are only doing one thing now after they retired: travelling.¹⁹⁵

Like his family, Lu developed a wanderlust from a young age and this coincided with the tradition of ‘painting from life’ (*xiesheng*) in art academies. When he was in ZAFa, students were required to travel to a scenic rural area in groups and live there for a period of time to paint on site and experience different social contexts and landscapes. This tradition was also influenced by the ‘the Great Networking’ (*da chuanlian*) movement during the Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong advocated that young people with revolutionary minds, who self-claimed to be ‘red guards’ (*hongweibing*), could travel around China by free means of transportation and connect with each other; thousands of young people then travelled around China. Though ‘painting from life’ is a training method for painting and sculpturing, the collective travelling in art colleges acted more as an approach for students to experience different local cultures in person. It denotes that each place has its own natural and social scene and the visual outcome like art is situated in the contexts of local histories and cultures. During his years in college, Lu and his classmates travelled to the ‘Oriental Venice’ Wuzhen (a region of rivers and lakes in Zhejiang), Yimeng Mountain (a mountainous area in Shandong Province and famous for a fierce anti-Japanese battle during WWII), Beijing (the capital bearing young people’s revolutionary imagination), Inner Mongolia (an ethnic autonomous region bordering Mongolia) and Hui’an (a fishing village in Fujian and famous for an old custom that women still lived in their maternal families after marriage).

As mentioned earlier, in his final year in ZAFa, Lu travelled by himself following the route of the historical Long March. In that journey, travel became something more than a hobby of going to strange places, but an interaction between the places and the traveller. Lu brought in his personal memories and imagination about the Long March. When Lu came across the bottleneck of his career in 1996, his natural response was also to travel. In 2019, when Lu received an interview from his professor Zheng Shengtian, Lu gave a brief of his travelling.

The first thing I did after I left was to hike the Himalayas, [...] I just wanted to test my limits and as an amateur hiker, I made it to 6400 meters. [...] I figured out many things on the way. After I came down, I stayed at a farm in Myanmar and when I was about to come back, I decided to go to Bangladesh.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

[...] It seemed unrelated to my long term career in art, but it's an attitude I took upon to seek answers in life. I wanted to go beyond the concept of contemporary art and realised that it's closely related to economy, politics, culture and life. I wanted to do it in the approach of thinking and learning all while I travelled. What came next was to travel through Europe. After I travelled all over Europe, I went to New York. From New York, I began my journey to South America that lasted for over six months.¹⁹⁶ I went to the South Pole. I went to Argentina, Chile [...] Venezuela[...] Brazil [...]

Lu took this trip to answer his confusion about the contemporary art market and China. If the initial trip to Nepal and Myanmar was more like an escape, his trip to South America was much more planned. He did research on countries in South America, which represented modernities different from the West. He brought four cameras documenting the journey: a video camera, a 135mm Chrome, a 120 Chrome and a digital camera (considering it was still 1997). For each destination, he read books on local histories and cultures, making extensive notes, writing diaries. He paid special attention to cultural figures related to the political turbulence during the 1960s and the 1970s. For example, in Chile, he visited the socialist poet Pablo Neruda's memorial house and read out Neruda's poems there. Neruda was famous in China during the Cultural Revolution and Lu recited Neruda's poem during the teenage time. In Chile, Lu found he 'started to form a connection with my sense of history'.

For Lu, these trips were not adventures for fun, but a way to figure out his relation to the world and the current era. He was searching for an approach other than contemporary art, through which he could engage more deeply with the world. The approach he found was this particular way of travelling with 'confession'. As he said,

I call it a confessional journey. My curating is called confessional curating. My business today is called confessional business. I wanted to reason and investigate the age of time in which we reside. [...] My point of departure was from politics, history, humanities, democracy and the modernity of these Latin American countries that unravelled into the life experiences of eminent cultural figures.

'A confessional journey' meant that while travelling on this remote land, Lu also examined and unravelled his own life. Chile became familiar for him because of Neruda's poems. In the rainforest along the Amazon River, he saw the landscape in Chinese ink and brush paintings. To some extent, the journey reassured Lu that he was deeply connected with this world and the clues were already in himself.

¹⁹⁶ Yishu Journal, 'Yishu Interviews – Lu Jie'.

During this process, Lu also bodily experienced the conditions of postcolonialism. He paid \$6000 for boarding a Russian scientific ship to the South Pole, which also accommodated tourists like Lu who would like to pay for a high-end adventurous tour. On the ship, among the passengers and the staff, Lu was the only non-white person. On this 21-day trip, when passengers complained about the poor service on the ship, Lu was always asked to negotiate with the captain. Their only reason was ‘You are the only foreigner.’ Lu said,

We are on international waters, on an international ship, on an international tour, going to the South Pole, an oversea territory. Yet you guys think I’m the only foreigner?¹⁹⁷

Such real-life experiences made Lu become more conscious about his identity as Chinese. They also pushed Lu to directly engage with frameworks embedded in people’s minds, especially their perception of the West and the non-West. Before going to South America, Lu stayed in New York for a while. By that time, he had ended his first marriage. In New York, he reunited with his ex-lover Shen Meng (his current wife) and after the South America trip, he went back to New York. Lu shunned away from art galleries and did not access the Chinese or local contemporary art circles. He still wrote for newspaper and magazines but the articles were about his global travelling and the audience was the general public, instead of art professionals. Instead, he tried to experience the daily life of a typical New Yorker, possibly an intellectual one — living in Central Park West, gardening, reading the local newspaper. In New York, Lu ‘felt an unprecedented freedom’. From time to time, he went to the Asia Society for breakfast lectures, visited public libraries, read Susan Sontag and drove to Massachusetts for a lecture at Harvard about politics. Through living such a life and going onto these international journeys, Lu came to build a confidence that finally, he could understand the Western society as well as the intellectual discourses with his own lived experiences.

These trips allowed Lu to jump out from a reductive perception of the relation between China and the West and to see the other countries and a larger world. Four years earlier, the frustration in Leicester pushed Lu back to his original cultural zone and reiterated his identity as a Chinese. In 1996, Lu voluntarily dived into other societies to acquire a position of an insider in a different culture. Travelling globally, becoming a local in a strange land, understanding the people belonging to a different identity all became Lu’s approaches to

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

equip himself with a ‘double perspective’ that scholar Stuart Hall has described. Hall, who migrated from Jamaica to England and dealt with his identity as an immigrant, argued that

I think you always need a double perspective. Before you say that, you have to understand what it is like to come from that ‘other’ place, how it feels to live in that closed world, how such ideas have kept people together in the face of all that has happened to them. But you also have to be true to your own culture of debate and you have to find some way to begin to translate between those two cultures. It is not easy, but it is necessary.¹⁹⁸

For Lu, it was the ‘confessional journey’ that enabled him to translate between different cultures. At the same time, leaving China and the cut-off from the Chinese community also created a distance between Lu and China. While he became open to other cultures and localities, the constitution of his knowledge and experience of the world also changed. To some extent, this allowed Lu to de-centre China in his perception of the world, and he found many more reference points in understanding his own culture and country. Standing on the position of other localities, the distance with China enabled Lu to grasp China in an integrated way and comprehend its uniqueness in comparison with others, as well as China’s interrelations with the rest of the world. In the past, Lu related to ‘China’ with his own experience; but now he could also relate to China in the experience of others. As he reflected, ‘After all, my wandering was also keeping going to China. Or you could say it was finding China in the world, finding China in China and finding myself.’¹⁹⁹

Moving to different places allowed him to understand different cultures, which used to be incomprehensible (as in Leicester). One particular difference between his global travelling and his stay in Leicester was that this time, he no longer needed to become a local. Moving permitted him to dive temporally into each place. As he said,

Moving has allowed me to not be solidified by the alleged differences. Within the connections between people, location, materials, memory, life and society, your movement creates connections, which perpetuates in a dynamic but also contradicting state. You can go forward, be sceptical and appreciate at the same time.²⁰⁰

In ‘The End of Area’, scholar Gavin Walker and Naoki Sakai analysed that according to the logic of international laws, ‘The international world is a name for the schema — image,

¹⁹⁸ Stuart Hall and Adams, T., ‘Cultural Hallmark’. [Stuart Hall interviewed] by Tim Adams, *The Observer*, 2007 < <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2007/sep/23/communities.politicsphilosophyandsociety> > [Accessed 10 June 2020].

¹⁹⁹ He Wenzhao and Lu Jie, 2003.

²⁰⁰ Yishu Journal, ‘Yishu Interviews – Lu Jie’.

figure, or plan — of a global geopolitics.’²⁰¹ Subjects such as area studies emerged in service of hegemonic countries’ political need after World War II; therefore transforming a place into an ‘area’ is often to objectify a place and its population for measurement and governance. As Walker and Sakai noted, such process is a separation between the knower and the known. In fact, this model of abstraction could not only be seen in international politics, but also in cultural and artistic fields. Often in cultural exchanges, the image of the other is abstracted, distorted and recreated. As Lu reflected, ‘contemporary art’ or ‘China’ often became narrow frameworks, through which one cannot genuinely understand the people living there. He reflected that ‘Today we often travel around the world for the sake of contemporary art, mostly to make perfunctory reinforcements to our shallow comprehensions.’²⁰²

Lu’s alternative approach to solving this problem of contemporary art was to re-understand these places through a larger framework. By researching, reading about, feeling and bodily experiencing the places, the unified, glossy and constructed international world gets to be replaced by textured experience with specific historical and cultural contexts, which weaved together with Lu’s own life experience. This travel-writing approach was not an outcome of engaging with contemporary art, but from his own life experience: from the literati education, from going to the countryside, from travelling along the Long March route, from his pursuit of critical distance with the society, from the desire to be a creator. He still had concerns over China and over contemporary art, but travelling liberated him from the dualism between China and the West, or the traditional and the modern. This research-based and confessional journey laid the ground for his lifelong practice. As he said,

It’s an experience that gave me one of the greatest leaps on my outlooks in life. Whether if it’s contemporary art or art in general, whether it’s artworks, practice, the concept of community, or the general history, everything is definitely unseparable. That’s the groundwork of Long March Project.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Gavin Walker and Naoki Sakai, ‘The End of Area’, *Positions: Asia Critique*, 27.1 (2019), 1–31.

²⁰² Interview with Lu Jie, 2019.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

Section Two: Proposal

A proposal refers to an action ‘to propose’, which involves two parties and at least one object: a request, a plan, a suggestion, an agenda etc., which are often given in a written form and becomes a proposal to be presented and passed on from one to the other. Every proposal provokes the question: will it be realised? *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* was initially a proposal as ‘Long March: A Walking Exhibition’ in 1999, but it was not concerned with such a question at the time. As a curatorial proposal, it was not tailored for any hosting venue like a museum or gallery nor made specifically for an artist. As Lu Jie’s submission to the ‘Creative Curating’ MA programme in Goldsmiths, University of London, the proposal stood by itself.

In this pedagogical environment, writing an exhibition proposal was a speculative practice to liberate students from institutional and commercial conventions and train them to practice independent and ‘creative’ curating. Without objective limitation, Lu took this proposal as an opportunity to fully release his imagination and devise a narrative-based project in social spaces without concern for its practicality. This proposal thus became a particular work authored by Lu. Though in the form of a proposal, it was written primarily for the writer himself. Its life as a work, printed on paper, also outlived the transient on-road journey. It has been kept in the Long March Archive and exhibited as an independent work in representations of the project. How did a curatorial proposal, a communicative tool, become a creative work claimed by a curator? In this chapter, I will review this question in London’s galvanising experimental art scene at the end of the 1990s, which also saw the emergence of curating as an independent practice and the arrival of a new type of curator like Lu, whose curating practice did not sprout out from art historical research, a collection of artworks, an artist’s practice or the need of art institutions or commercial galleries, but from his experience, emotions, and the haunting questions about ‘contemporary Chinese art’.

Chapter 4 Creative Curating

In 1998, Lu decided to temporarily leave New York and pursue an MA in curating at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He saw higher education in the US as overly profession-oriented but he needed a refreshing change in the way of seeing art and the world. Lu was admitted into the art history department by the Courtauld Institute of Art, but he gave up going to the Neoclassical marble building in Somerset House after meeting the scholar Irit Rogoff in London.²⁰⁴ According to Lu's own words, Rogoff, who just moved to London from the US and came to teach at Goldsmiths as Professor in Visual Culture, 'smashed' all Lu's presumptions of the future. If he had chosen the Somerset House, Lu thought he would possibly extend his gallerist career to work in an auction house with the endorsement from Courtauld. Lu still vividly remembered his meeting with Rogoff and he paraphrased to me that conversation:

She told me, 'In Goldsmiths, we don't have art history.' My reaction was like 'What?!' And she continued saying that programmes in Goldsmiths were open to everyone and it was okay to study curating but attend lectures in other programmes, because these programmes were combined together. 'We are all together.' This was what she said. It was a very important sentence for me.²⁰⁵

Although this anecdote may have been somewhat exaggerated and inaccurate in its choice of vocabulary, this conversation left a fundamental influence on Lu. He dropped his previous plan and followed Rogoff's suggestion to study curating at Goldsmiths. He described Goldsmiths as 'a very open place, very provocative and controversial' as it was the alma mater of many rebellious Young British Artists (YBA).²⁰⁶ Rogoff's phrase 'We are all together' referred to the rise of Visual Culture as a multidisciplinary, inter-connected research field, breaking the boundary and limitations of classic 'Art History'. In UC Davis where Rogoff left in 1997, she merged the graduate programme of Art and another programme of Critical Theory into the same Department of Visual Culture.²⁰⁷ Rogoff also just published 'Studying Visual Culture' (1997), in which she explained the expanding field

²⁰⁴ Irit Rogoff was one of the initiators of the transdisciplinary field of Visual Culture and founder of the department at Goldsmiths during the 1990s. She has also contributed considerably to the critical thinking of curating and the emergence of the discourse 'the curatorial'. Lu Jie met her in 1998 in Goldsmiths and this meeting greatly influenced his trajectory.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.

²⁰⁶ Philip Tinari, 'A Conversation with Lu Jie'.

²⁰⁷ André Chêdas, 'Son[i]a #291 Irit Rogoff', Radio Web MACBA, 2019, <<https://rwm.macba.cat/en/sonia/sonia-291-irit-rogoff>> [accessed 20 September 2020].

as such:

How can we characterise the emerging field ‘visual culture’? To begin with, we must insist that it encompasses a great deal more than the study of images, of even the most open-minded and cross-disciplinary study of images. At one level we certainly focus on the centrality of vision and the visual world in producing meanings, establishing and maintaining aesthetic values, gender stereotypes and power relations within culture. At another level we recognise that opening up the field of vision as an arena in which cultural meanings get constituted, also simultaneously anchors to it an entire range of analyses and interpretation of the audio, the spatial, and of the psychic dynamics of spectatorship. Thus visual culture opens up an entire world of intertextuality in which images, sounds, and spatial delineations are read on to and through one another, lending ever-accruing layers of meanings and of subjective responses to each encounter we might have with film, TV, advertising, art works, buildings or urban environments.²⁰⁸

By centring visual materials, visual culture opened up the interpretation of images in relation to their contexts, situatedness and circulation, thus bringing in ‘intertextuality’. This was also connected with curating, which was also taking place increasingly in social spaces outside of white-cube gallery spaces, with more videos, performances and participatory activities. When Lu arrived at Goldsmiths in 1998, students in the curating programme were encouraged to attend cross-college lectures, especially a programme called ‘Re-Visions’ jointly organised by the Visual Arts Department and Historical and Cultural Studies Department.²⁰⁹ Such an epistemology towards art and visual materials repositioned art away from the discipline of art history, towards an acknowledgement of visual presence at all levels of society. In 1999, researchers Sandywell and Haywood articulated this awareness clearly.

[W]e are gradually realizing the extent to which the project of modernity has been saturated by the problematics of viewing and visualisation. We are also now fully aware that the latter are themselves open to sociocultural and historical analysis in their own right.²¹⁰

Being introduced to visual culture and cultural studies completely transformed Lu’s

²⁰⁸ Irit Rogoff, ‘Studying Visual Culture’, in *The Visual Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 24–36.

²⁰⁹ Student Handbook for MA Fine Art Administration and Curatorship (Creative Curating) 1999–2000, p. 10.

²¹⁰ Barry Sandywell and Ian Heywood, ‘Critical Approaches to the Study of Visual Culture: An Introduction to the Handbook’, in *The Handbook of Visual Culture*, ed. by Michael Gardiner, Gunalan Nadarajan, and Catherine Soussloff, 1st edn (London: Berg, 2012), pp. 1–56.

perception of art. As he said,

Before going to the UK, I was planning to find out how they did research on visual art but later I found they have turned visual art to visual culture. The whole visual culture was already entangled with the society and economics, politics and ideologies in the whole ecology. By contrast, what was being taught in the department of art history and theory in the fine art colleges in China? When fresh students came to the college, they were welcomed by learning the historical paintings in the Dynasties of Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing. So I was in a completely refreshing environment.²¹¹

Visual culture enabled Lu to look comprehensively at his experience from different stages of life having been exposed to different environments: practising calligraphy and traditional Chinese painting as a teenager, working with propaganda and with amateur artists as a socialist art worker, engaging in dealings of oil paintings by Chinese contemporary artists as a gallerist. Visual culture positioned the versatile ‘culture’ instead of formalised ‘Art’ as the expanding territory for him to work with.

‘Art’, translated as *yishu* in Chinese, denotes a cross-generational struggle of definition in twentieth-century China, when Western art history and techniques met across traditional literati practice, entangled with the invention of photography, mass media communication and ideological influence. Generations of art practitioners have engaged with the tension in the choice and regeneration of media, style, form, content and nature of art. Earlier artists like Lin Fengmian, Xu Beihong (1895–1953) and Wu Guanzhong (1919–2010) were committed to exploring the combination of techniques and aesthetics of ink wash paintings and oil paintings.²¹² When it came to Lu and his peers, this question was transformed into the tension between ‘Chinese art’ and ‘contemporary art’. Previously in the West, art from China and other non-western areas was often excluded from ‘art’ defined by Western art history and reviewed under an ethnographic view as cultural representations. In the early 1990s, ‘contemporary art’, as curator Hou Hanru pointed out, had also become a newly invented heritage by the West.²¹³ As he said, Chinese conceptual and installation artists like Huang Yong Ping was criticised by some Western critics to have imitated conceptual art

²¹¹ Interview with Lu Jie, 2018 August.

²¹² All these experiments were challenging and controversial, adding tension to debates on what constitutes ‘Art’ in China. David Der-wei Wang, ‘The Riddle of the Sphinx: Lin Fengmian and the Polemics of Realism’, in *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Modern Chinese Intellectuals and Artists Through the 1949 Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 237–70.

²¹³ Hou Hanru, ‘Entropy: Chinese Artists, Western Art Institutions, A New Internationalism’, in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. by Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press in association with Institute of International Visual Arts, 1994), pp. 79–88.

because of the absence of obvious Chinese techniques and cultural symbols. In the West during the 1990s, institutional and museum conventions, like collection management and funding allocation policy, were still stubbornly shaping reality and establishing barriers between 'fine art' and ethnographic view of minority culture (from a Western-centric position). The emergence of visual culture, in a sense, suddenly shed light on the dilemma of contemporary Chinese artists. As a theoretical lens, visual culture has put art in a much wider and complicated context in the space of everyday life.

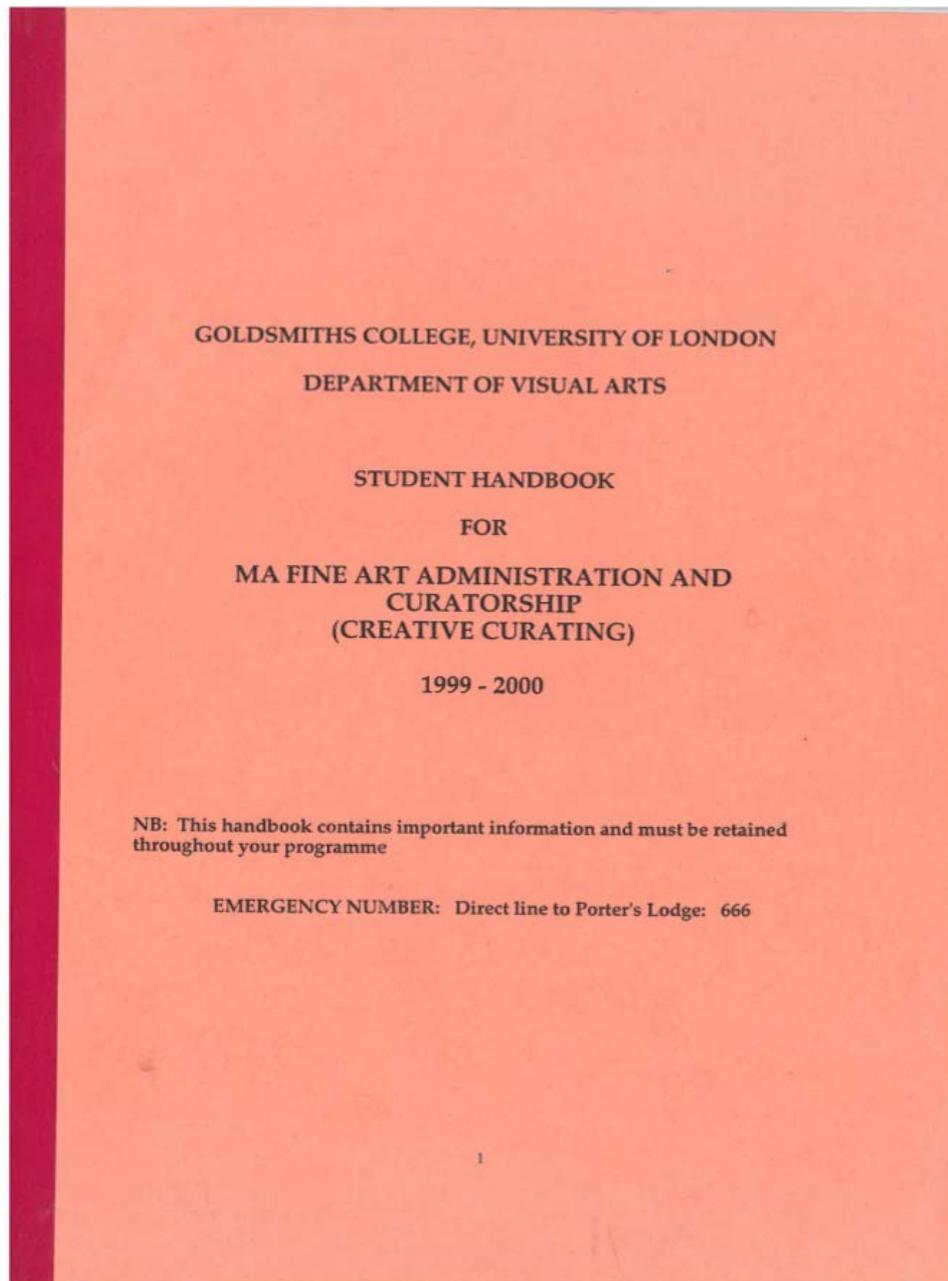


Fig. 20 Cover of *Student Handbook for MA Fine Art Administration and Curatorship (Creative Curating) (1999–2000)*, Goldsmiths College. Grant Watson Archive. Courtesy of

Goldsmiths University and Grant Watson.

The emergence of curating as a discipline in pedagogy, in opposition to museum studies which centres around institution and the space of museums, was contemporaneous with the rise of visual culture. Curating was not a purely theoretical field, but also differed from art administration, museum conservation or collection management in that it actively engaged with intellectual discourse and critical theories. The official title of Lu's programme was MA in Fine Art Administration and Curatorship, but the programme went around with its unofficial name (which was also printed on their leaflets and advertised publicly) – 'Creative Curating'. The unofficial name, adding the rebellious characteristic absent in its official title, was coined by its director Anna Harding who was trained in the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York and started organising the programme from 1995.²¹⁴

What is 'creative curating'? According to Harding, she was invited by Michael Craig-Martin, who was teaching in the Department of Visual Arts at the time, to set up a curating programme in the art department. As one of the tutors of the rebellious group YBA, Craig-Martin also had an anti-institutional expectation towards curating. The curating programme was set up also in the Department of Visual Arts, together with the Fine Art programme, instead of in a traditional humanities department. Craig-Martin and Harding aimed 'to teach curating the same as teaching art' and they took curating as an equally creative practice as art. As Harding said, they believed that 'artists can do equally good exhibitions without the prestige of having a large budget and institutional recognition.'²¹⁵ As Damien Hirst organised the exhibition 'Freeze' (1988) in his second year in Goldsmiths without the aid of institutions, the curating programme was committed to an independent approach.²¹⁶ Starting from student recruitment, the programme clarified explicitly that they were aiming at those 'independent' spirits not wishing to be assimilated to the existing institutional system. Its promotion leaflet introduced that,

The programme is especially designed to appeal to those who wish to take an individual creative line in the development of their careers as fine art curators/administrators. [...] The course is aimed at those with a

²¹⁴ Anna Harding was the Programme Director of the MA Creative Curating at Goldsmiths College 1995-2003 and formerly Curator/Director of Kettle's Yard in Cambridge and Exhibitions Organiser at Camerawork in London. Interview with Anna Harding, May 2021.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ 'Freeze' was held in Surrey Docks, London, United Kingdom from 6 August to 29 September 1988. 'Freeze', *Damien Hirst* <<https://www.damienhirst.com/exhibitions/group/1988/freeze>> [accessed 10 December 2021].

commitment to current art practice who wish to develop their curatorial expertise with an independent approach.²¹⁷

We might understand this better by comparing the programme with its predecessors. As one of the first programmes on curating in the UK, the ‘Creative Curating’ programme was set up following other curatorial training programmes in the West including the Whitney Independent Study Program (which reconstituted its Art History/Museum Studies Program into two separate programmes, the ‘Critical Studies Program’ and the ‘Curatorial Program’ in 1987) and the Visual Arts Administration: Curating and Commissioning Contemporary Art MA programme in Royal College of Art (RCA) (1992-1996).²¹⁸ This latter course was initially co-funded by RCA and Arts Council of England, and its founding director Teresa Gleadowe previously also worked as Head of Information at the Tate Gallery and curated exhibitions for the British Council.²¹⁹ Its two-year course was split into two stages, one dedicated to theory and the other to collaborative practice, with many of its second-year students undertaking placements or internships in art institutions. Compared with the Goldsmiths programme, the RCA programme was more closely associated with institutional curating. It aimed to foster a new generation of curators dedicated to contemporary art, facing the changing need of museums and galleries. As Gleadowe recounted about the early 1990s in Britain,

[I]t was the time when museums began to question their own art historical narratives, exposing the lacunae and underrepresented aspects of their collections and introducing particular readings in the form of changing displays from their collections.

The Tate Gallery presented its first ‘rehang’ in 1990 and the principle of ‘rotating’ displays – often organised according to thematic rather than strictly art historical principles – would soon be adopted by museums around the world.²²⁰ In December 1992, the Tate Gallery announced plans to ‘redefine the display of the collection’, leading to the creation of a new Tate Gallery of Modern Art, which later developed into today’s Tate

²¹⁷ Goldsmiths College, University of London, *Creative Curating: MA in Fine Art Administration and Curatorship*, Self-published leaflet, p. 7.

²¹⁸ ‘The Independent Study Program 1968-2008’, in *Independent Study Program: 40 Years* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art), pp. 13–22. RCA’s programme was renamed to ‘Curating Contemporary Art’ in 1996.

²¹⁹ ‘In Conversation With... Victoria Walsh’, *Royal College of Art*, 2019 <<https://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/rca-stories/conversation-with-victoria-walsh/>> [accessed 15 April 2021].

²²⁰ ‘1991: Then and Now by Teresa Gleadowe’, *Axisweb* <<https://www.axisweb.org/archive/news-and-views/in-focus/1991-then-and-now-by-teresa-gleadowe/>> [accessed 15 April 2021].

Modern.²²¹ This was accompanied by other institutional formation and reformation in the publicly funded art system in the UK. For example, in the early 1990s, the Institute of (New) International Visual Arts (INIVA) was established in London with funding from Arts Council England.²²² Following exhibitions like ‘the Other Story’ curated by Rasheed Araeen in Hayward Gallery in 1989 that brought neglected African, Asian and Caribbean artists in post-war Britain to people’s attention, and the disputed ‘Magiciens de la terre’ exhibited in Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris in the same year, debates on identity politics quickly escalated. Blind spots and inadequacies in perceiving art outside of Western art history and contemporary practice were reflected by a group of curators around the world in the conference ‘New Internationalism’ hosted by the Institute of International Visual Arts and the Tate Gallery in 1994. These discussions took place along the increasingly self-organised grass-root artistic events, which formed an atmosphere of critical reflections Lu would be exposed to and be inspired in thinking over the problem with contemporary Chinese art.

As Grant Watson, an artist and editor before joining the ‘Creative Curating’ programme, remembered, the early 1990s London art scene was still quite parochial and mainly consisted of art in Britain.²²³ But the crash in the stock market in 1987 laid the basis for the general thriving of clubs, bars, artist-run alternative spaces and artistic experiments in the following decade, as the economic recession left many buildings vacant which were later squatted by artists.²²⁴ The ‘Creative Curating’ programme was also in tune with this blossoming of art outside of museums and galleries. Designed as a one year full-time or two years part-time programme, the programme attracted students from a wide range of backgrounds who previously worked or were still working part-time as artists, critics, researchers, art workers and curators. In Lu’s year, there were about 15 students. Focusing on individuals’ practices instead of institutional practices, the programme’s teaching was also structured around each student. In this sense, the programme was more like an incubator providing intellectual support via certain courses instead of vocational training.

Imbued with a desire for experimentation, the programme named their ‘Curating Project

²²¹ Chris Dercon and Nicholas Serota, *Tate Modern: Building a Museum for the 21st Century* (Tate Publishing, 2016), p. 225.

²²² The ‘New’ was latter removed from the organisation’s name. Lotte Philipsen gave a thorough and detailed analysis of the emergence of ‘New Internationalism’ and its connection to other subjects such as visual culture in *Globalizing Contemporary Art: The Art World’s New Internationalism* (ISD LLC, 2010), pp. 8–9. The content of the direct quote is from Gavin Jantjes and Sarah Wilson, *Final Report. The Institute of New International Visual Arts*, (London Arts Board; Arts Council, 1991), p. 7.

²²³ Interview with Grant Watson, December 2019

²²⁴ Tate, ‘Century City: London 1990–2001’, *Tate* <<https://www.tate.or.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/century-city/century-city-london-1990-2001>> [accessed 25 September 2020].

Space' on campus as 'a working "laboratory" where curatorial experiments were tried out'.²²⁵ It was managed by students, allowing them to polish their 'curatorial sensibilities'. In their core course 'Artist/Curator/Audience', conventions of curating were all called into question: timing, context, venue, approach, curator's role, position, responsibility.²²⁶ It echoed the sociological perspective in Howard S. Becker's book *Art Worlds* (1982) which saw art as an ecology of production in which all actors are connected. As the course's introduction read:

The course examines relationships in the field of fine art, between artists, curators, critics, dealers, audiences and institutions and how these relationships affect programming, exhibition/event production, touring and collaboration as well as issue of education, interpretation and access.²²⁷

The course positioned 'creative curating' in a fast-changing ecology. 'Creative curating' then also meant to intervene in existing relations that the curator inhabited and to reinvent the role of the curator. Having experience of organising commercial exhibitions in Hong Kong, Lu said he was 'shocked' when suddenly thrown into such a discourse, when he heard one of the tutors asking the students to 'counter-curating' in a programme about curating.²²⁸

The word 'curating' comes from the Latin 'cura' which means 'to take care'. Before the 1990s, in the West, curators were more often performing their role as collection keepers in museums, where exhibitions were still usually rooted in frameworks of national art histories or traditional media and categories like oil paintings or portraits. The transition in curating, from an object-centred mode to a subjective and criticality was tangible. Hans Ulrich Obrist conducted a series of interviews with preceding curators in Europe like Harald Szeemann and Pontus Hultén in the late 1990s to compile 'a brief history of curating'.²²⁹ This little history provided exemplary footnotes to what Bruce Altshuler phrased as 'the rise of the curator as creator' since the 1960s when looking at the avant-garde experiments in exhibition-making in twentieth century Europe.²³⁰ The proliferation of biennials and triennials around the world in the 1990s also led some curators to travel outside of Europe

²²⁵ 'Curating Project Space', Student Handbook for MA Fine Art Administration and Curatorship (Creative Curating) 1999-2000, p. 5.

²²⁶ Student Handbook for MA Fine Art Administration and Curatorship (Creative Curating) 1999-2000, p. 5.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Lu Jie, 'Weishenme Yao Changzheng?' [Why Do We Long March?], *ARTCO Monthly*, September 2002 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20030913031907/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/huayu/meiti-16.htm>> [accessed 29 November 2020].

²²⁹ Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, Documents Series (JRP / Ringier, 2008).

²³⁰ Bruce Altshuler in *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p. 236.

to destinations like Hong Kong, Sao Paulo and Johannesburg to stage experimental exhibitions. Independent curators were provided with more funding opportunities out of the museum system, no longer needing to commit only to one institution. Curators emerged as freelance practitioners, with greater creative licence than ever before.

Following Szeemann, who has been celebrated as the prototype of the curator as ‘a maker of exhibitions’ (*Austellungsmacher*) by organising images and objects to weave out bold narratives, there appeared a new type of figure in the international art scene. Curators like Okwui Enwezor, Charles Esche, Maria Lind, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru turned curating more towards critical, reflexive discourse, programming and audience experience. Moreover, the phenomenal attention in the expanding art world also foregrounded curators like Obrist as celebrities. As Grant Watson recalled, ‘When Hans Ulrich came to the college, he gave us a lecture and it was packed with people and rammed[...] It was like a new discipline had just emerged.’²³¹ The path of Hans Ulrich Obrist, who rose onto the international art stage from self-organising exhibitions in the kitchen of his own apartment, has become a legend that has amassed a huge following. Obrist proved that as an independent curator, you could earn remarkable success and be critical, radical and liberated at the same time. As Paul O’Neil pointed out, the 1990s saw the ‘re-mystification’ of the role of curators with the emergence of celebrity curators and, in turn, the ‘individualisation of the curatorial gesture’.²³²

‘Creative Curating’ therefore was born in response to the changing art landscape where young curators were expected to renovate and create like entrepreneurs – similar to the expectation for a new generation of artists following the success of Damien Hirst. The course gathered a group of tutors among whom many had their own artistic practice: Tim Brennan (artist, curator and writer, who was the assistant programme director), Rita Keegan (artist), Felicity Allen (who worked in the field of art education), Andrew Renton (curator and scholar), Jean-Paul Martinon (who was running the guerrilla curatorial project ‘Rear Window’ in London) and visiting contributors.²³³ Still exploring how to teach curating, as Watson remembered, the ‘Creative Curating’ programme was a bit chaotic.²³⁴ Apart from the earlier mentioned ‘Artist/Curator/Audience’ course, there were also two other courses,

²³¹ Personal recorded interview with Grant Watson in London, December 2019.

²³² Paul O’Neil, ‘The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s): The Development of Contemporary Curatorial Discourse in Europe and North America since 1987’ (Middlesex University, London, 2007).

²³³ ‘Programme Staff’, Student Handbook for MA Fine Art Administration and Curatorship (Creative Curating) 1999-2000, p. 5.

²³⁴ Interview with Grant Watson, December 2019.

‘Critical Studies: Art Since 1960’ and ‘Professional Practices’, respectively focusing on contemporary art practices and practical curatorial abilities such as making budgets, writing contracts, devising marketing plans and managing international shipping. Lu already mastered these practical techniques.

But in Goldsmiths, Lu benefited considerably from college lectures by scholars like Stuart Hall, Irit Rogoff and Sarat Maharaj. They introduced him to a range of critical discourses. Even twenty years later, when he was recalling his time there, he could still feel that fluid and sometimes messy atmosphere of sharing knowledge which overwhelmed him. It was in these lectures that he encountered concepts like ‘geography’ and ‘context’, which were crucial for his later development of *Long March*. He came across ‘geography’ in a lecture by Irit Rogoff in which he heard Rogoff say ‘I only teach geography.’²³⁵ Later in 2000, Rogoff published the book *Terra Infirma*, in which she wrote about how geography spatialises conflicting histories and powers — ‘geography [...] mediates between the concrete and material and the psychic conditions and metaphorical articulations of relations between subjects, places and spaces’.²³⁶ But when Lu heard Rogoff talk about ‘geography’ for the first time, he was extremely confused.

I thought I had gone to the wrong classroom. [...] What could geography possibly have to do with art and curating, I wondered? So I tried to put Chinese art into this general atmosphere, and looked at it.²³⁷

Xiao Xiong remembered vividly when Lu came back from London to Beijing in the winter of 1999, Lu could not stop talking about his tutors in the programme and all the philosophies he just learned at Goldsmiths. ‘London totally transformed Lu’s thoughts’, Xiao said, ‘It was critical to Lu’s development.’²³⁸ Here we might reflect upon what ‘creative curating’ meant for Lu Jie. Though I have described the changing art climate in London behind the emergence of ‘creative curating’, participants in this phenomenon all had their own perspectives and intentions. For Lu, when he left Beijing in 1996, the frustration with contemporary Chinese art and the desire to find the connection between China and the outside world pushed him to start travelling around the world. But the reflection upon contemporary Chinese art had stayed with him and became clearer more than ever in his mind during his time at Goldsmiths. Travelling between his dormitory near Russell Square

²³⁵ Tinari, ‘A Conversation with Lu Jie’.

²³⁶ Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography’s Visual Culture*, v. 49 (Routledge, 2000), p. 16.

²³⁷ Tinari, ‘A Conversation with Lu Jie’.

²³⁸ Interview with Xiao Xiong, December 2019, .

in the extravagant city centre and Goldsmiths' campus in the deprived area of New Cross in southeast London, where many immigrant communities were living, Lu's life in London was not only about attending seminars, visiting exhibitions and rushing to lectures.

Conversations with friends and strangers, going to political assemblies, witnessing the anti-capitalism turmoil in the city, hanging out in Chinatown, and continuing travelling in Europe all influenced his thinking.

These encounters were part of his re-education, during which he was trying to find a new axis to connect his split worlds, China and London, where he came from and where he was in. As he said, 'There was an anxiety and responsibility to articulate contemporary China to the world.'²³⁹ He considered that such a grand topic should have been the work of public art institutions, but as there were no contemporary art institutions in China, the responsibility fell on individuals like him. He was in a privileged position to have been exposed to different professional and intellectual opportunities. There were indeed other overseas Chinese curators like Fei Dawei and Hou Hanru, but they had different thoughts on how to overcome the transnational predicament. Lu was the one living in the West but deeply haunted by the attachment with China. Though he was in London, immersed intellectually in critical discourses, what he was concerned with the most was still his homeland and the dilemma of 'contemporary Chinese art' or 'Chinese contemporary art'. Between London and him, there was a distance. What he was concerned with and what he was exposed to were not organically integrated.

The critical moment, when the distance disappeared, came one day when he was on the Goldsmiths campus. He recounted that experience in 2002,

One day when I was in the dining hall, I was approached by an English student asking me to join the communist party. This to me sounded bizarre; I was very arrogant. I said to him, you cannot possibly want to talk to me about communism, I am from communist China. But as the dialogue went further and deeper, I realized that there are so many interpretations of communism, idealism and the quest for an ideal world. And I still think that it's right in the centre of discourse in Western Europe. So I suddenly realised how ignorant I was. I discovered that many British intellectuals are quite pro-left in their thinking, something of which my fellow artists in China and I were not aware before.²⁴⁰

It was this conversation with a Western communist that made him realise his self-

²³⁹ Interview with Lu Jie, August 2018.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

ignorance: 'The connection between China and the World' was already there and had always been there, but he and his fellows were blind to it.'²⁴¹ He did not realise that socialism and communism had also been shaping the sociocultural reality of the West, especially in London where there had been a long history of workers' union. This interconnection between China and the UK might seem apparent today, but for Lu who grew up in the Cultural Revolution when propaganda depicted the West as imperialist and capitalist, this discovery was only earned after living for a long time in the West. It helped him connect emotionally with the intellectual and art scene in London. Finding what he was deeply familiar with in London was an experience of 'discovering and knowing oneself on a remote land'.²⁴² Before this, Lu always asked himself: 'why am I here?'²⁴³ But this revelation made London no longer irrelevant to him. This emotional understanding enabled Lu to activate the theoretical frameworks like visual culture and concepts like 'contexts' and 'geography' to articulate his own thoughts. Such articulation could be seen in Lu's two curatorial proposals written in his time at Goldsmiths.

²⁴¹ These are phrases translated by me. Lu Jie, 'Weishenme Yao Changzheng?' [Why Do We Long March?].

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

Chapter 5 From ‘Chinatown’ to *Long March*

‘Chinatown’ and ‘Long March: A Walking Exhibition’ were Lu’s two curatorial proposals for the ‘Creative Curating’ programme. Each student in the programme needed to devise and develop one minor and one major ‘practical projects’:

These are the most important elements of the programme. The scope of these projects is wide, addressing your personal interpretation of Creative Curating, and can include events and projects as well as more conventional forms of exhibition.²⁴⁴

‘Chinatown’ was written out first as his minor submission. The project was devised to locate in the Chinatown, where it only takes a few minutes to walk to Trafalgar Square (where the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery sit) and Piccadilly Circus in central London. Lu’s plan was to stage installations and performances of internationally renowned contemporary Chinese artists like Huang Yong Ping, Cai Guoqiang, Lin Tianmiao (1961–) and other younger artists in grocery stores and on open-air streets in Chinatown. Absorbing the thinking of Rogoff, Lu took Chinatown not only as a social space outside of galleries and museums, but also a body of ‘geography’ where histories and narratives of diaspora Chinese intersect, forming its own complicated cultural identity. ‘Geography’, to some extent, extends the ‘intertextuality’ from the visual culture to the invisible issues in space. The architectural and spatial elements of Chinatown formed part of the ‘display’, conveying meaning together with rich aesthetics. As Lu stated,

I took Chinatown as an economic, social, cultural, anthropological and archaeological artistic space. Chinatown has four grand gates. These gates represent self-celebration as well as a refusal to the others. They can be opened to allow exchanges and they could also be closed. They represent a boundary.²⁴⁵

According to Lu, the ‘Chinatown’ proposal got a nearly full score in the Creative Curating programme; and when talking about the proposal after nearly twenty years, he was still proud of it, considering it to be ‘possibly the best student work for a curatorial project in that early stage of curating study’.²⁴⁶ But when looking back, he realised that that high score

²⁴⁴ ‘Practical Projects’, Student Handbook for MA Fine Art Administration and Curatorship (Creative Curating) 1999-2000, pp. 6-7.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Lu Jie, August 2018.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

began to say something other than 'it is brilliant.' Lu became critical of the 'Chinatown' project, because it was too safe. It would definitely succeed and not fail anyone's expectation.

This project was a professional behaviour: put available resources and problems one tried to address in an international context, deliver a normal curatorial practice, be open and challenging as much as possible. In terms of discourse, community policy and all perspectives, it suits all perfectly and precisely.

In 1996, theorist Mieke Bal highlighted that the most important thing that differentiated 'new' museology from the 'old', was 'the serious follow-up on the idea that a museum installation is a discourse, and an exhibition is an utterance within that discourse.'²⁴⁷ This 'discursive turn' was partly due to the tendency of viewing objects as symbols coded with cultural and social significance. As Bruce W. Ferguson summarised, also in 1996,

Art objects have been included within the larger semiotic field of a 'language paradigm' or 'linguistic turn' and are transliterated as the equivalents of 'texts'. Art is treated as a semiotic object with something to say that can be coded, decoded and recoded in a syntactical and critical manner by methods like those used in academic literary criticism and cultural studies in general.²⁴⁸

Apart from objects, discourses also saturated spaces. In 1997, art history scholar Miwon Kwon criticised in her paper 'One Place after Another: Notes on Specificity' that many site-specific art projects saw the deterritorialisation of the place from a physical and empirical space into a 'discursively determined site'.²⁴⁹ Kwon pointed out a tendency that the site was no longer a 'precondition' but rather a prop for discussion as it could be 'verified' by existing discourses. If we borrow terms from Kwon, Lu's self-critique possibly had come from his realisation that Chinatown as a place could be exploited for its rich social, historical and cultural contexts, laying out a parameter to include 'site-oriented art practices that mobilise the site as a discursive narrative'.²⁵⁰ As he realised, the 'Chinatown' project ticked all the boxes of the on-trend discourses and new forms of curatorial practice at that time: diaspora, post-colonial, minority groups, grassroots, social engagement, alternative spaces and new

²⁴⁷ Mieke Bal and Edwin Janssen, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (Psychology Press, 1996), p. 88.

²⁴⁸ Bruce W. Ferguson, 'Exhibition Rhetorics: Material speech and utter sense', *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 126-136.

²⁴⁹ Miwon Kwon, 'One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity', *October*, 80 (1997), 85-110.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

media... Lu admitted that he researched a lot on ‘the representational culture and the politics in museum space’ while in London, and he had also noticed in contemporary Chinese art, critical discourses like gender and post-colonial studies had been enlisted often just as ‘formulae’ for international exhibitions. In 2002, Lu shared such a thought:

In contrast to ‘context’, ‘strategy’ has been a key word for the Chinese art world in the last 15 years or so. I got to thinking that these kinds of strategies bring you something very effective for the short-term [...] But when you are attracting people’s attention, when you are creating this political exoticism, what comes next? [...] [I]t’s very easy to simply criticize the elitist or careerist tendency of contemporary Chinese art, or criticize the power of the market. I rather think all the problems have more to do with a poor theoretical base and a wrong curatorial impulse. In one sentence, the theory and art practice are separated. You see lots of Western jargon introduced and overused, but it has little to do with practice.²⁵¹

Apart from the over and simplified use of theories, Lu was also alert to the inadequacy and risk in over-stressing theories.

When Xu Beihong and his descendants brought ink wash paintings to the West, all meanings were lost in translation. Such embarrassment cannot be resolved by just saying something like ‘colonial’ or ‘otherness’ in an intellectual’s study in Beijing. How to present the context of Chinese art, instead of leaving it hanging in the air, stripped from its origin and fragmented in different spaces and contexts of the audience? This cannot be solved by the strategies in Political Pop, marketisation or trendy curating.²⁵²

What Lu became conscious of was that even out of the space of institutions or commercial galleries, there were still curatorial conventions in the name of ‘avant-garde’. ‘You already know the destination when you depart’, Lu complained in our interview, ‘what is left is only about how to make it happen practically and ask the artists to make a better work.’²⁵³ Lu self-criticised harshly:

In fact, [the ‘Chinatown’ proposal] was a ready-made dish and didn’t go ahead of other practitioners. [...] It was a very safe project. [...] It is actually ‘curator’s cooking’, putting artists in the space according to their previous works.²⁵⁴

In the metaphor ‘curator’s cooking’, the curator is the chef, taking artworks as his raw

²⁵¹ Tinari, ‘A Conversation with Lu Jie’.

²⁵² Lu Jie, ‘Weishenme Yao Changzheng?’ [Why Do We Long March?].

²⁵³ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

ingredients to be selected and mingled. The final exhibition is then the display of the dish, presented to audiences. The metaphor implies a position of the curator — he is the one standing out of materials, looking down at the hob from a vantage point.

We can recognise the deep boredom in Lu's description about the 'trendy curating': not only is the curator out of the situation, all artists and audience are also separated from each other despite being inside the scene. The situation is already so safe and predictable that one does not need to stay alert. As Lu said, 'Artists would know how to deal with it, which means that if I send out an invitation, Huang Yong Ping would join.'²⁵⁵ In his reflection of 'Chinatown', Lu demonstrated a complicated feeling towards the art system. On the one hand, he was proud that he mastered the curatorial strategies which would effectively enable a successful exhibition. On the other hand, he was doubtful if museums and artists in the system could break from predictable conventions and work on an alternative future. Lu despised 'curator's cooking', but at the same time, he was not confident whether artists like Huang would join an unconventional exhibition that would possibly grow out of control. He saw the drawback of simplified application of theories, but there was also the question for himself about how to bring critical discourses into curating.²⁵⁶

The answer Lu found in 1999 was to turn to himself. Lu's dissatisfaction with 'Chinatown' led him to another direction: to make the project more an expression of himself and to push the 'creativity' in curating more to the degree of writing out of his own thoughts and vision of the world. When I interviewed him in 2018 about the proposal of *Long March*, seemingly a crazy idea of putting on a series of exhibitions of Chinese and international contemporary art in the hinterland of China, Lu turned to me, and questioned,

I need to bring everything together: my life, my era, myself as an individual, my collective, the interrelations between China and the West, the history and the present, besides [my experience] as an artist, a writer, a poet, a traveller and a curator learning the curatorial studies in London, and my anxiety, desire and passion..... If I need to bring all these together, what should I do? What would you do if you are interested in A, B, C, D, E and F?²⁵⁷

The direction Lu set for himself was to find a curatorial structure, an 'organic' one that could host all seemingly irrelevant themes and materials to 'include many issues connecting

²⁵⁵ Interview with Lu Jie, August 2018.

²⁵⁶ Huang was referred to by Lu as a representative for artists in general, especially Chinese artists who would appear in overseas exhibitions on Chinese contemporary art. In reality, Huang participated in an exhibition 'Promenade in Asia 2' (Tokyo, 1997) in which curator Fei Dawei invited a Taoist priest to disrupt artists' commission and the exhibition indeed evolved in a series of accidents.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Lu Jie, August 2018.

with contemporary Chinese art'.²⁵⁸ Such desire was because Lu himself would like to bring the separate worlds — China and the West and the different 'art worlds' like the market and artists' self-organised projects — in his life together. Lu was also diminishing the distance between the project and himself. He was intentionally turning away from conventions and strategies in curating, even the professionalised 'creative curating'. He stepped forward in the path of 'curator as creator', and naturally, he arrived at the point of determination to curate for himself, instead of for the system. This ultimate resolution led Lu to form something of his own.

As Lu said, the idea of taking the historical Long March as the structure came to him on the evening of the day when he saw 'London was paralysed because of a critical mass against the globalisation of capitalism attended by artists, anarchists, Green Party members, union workers, intellectuals, students and hippies.' It was possibly the Carnival Against Capital on 18 June 1999.²⁵⁹ Lu's choice of taking the Long March as the structure for his major curatorial proposal echoed the slogan of the political assembly that day — 'Our Resistance is as Transnational as Capital'.

As introduced earlier, the Long March was a historical fact and a revolutionary narrative that Lu had been so familiar with. The CCP saved its core force through this arduous march and established new bases leading to their rise to power in 1949. But the story of the Long March also goes beyond national boundaries and language barriers. Mao Zedong, who got unprecedented recognition within the Communist Party during the Long March, recognised that the fact of this march was already an enchanting cross-cultural story about breaking up an impasse and turning failure into success. At the same time, the Long March marked the independence of the CCP from the direction of Moscow and Mao sought for support from the West. Mao received interviews from American journalist Edgar Snow. In 1937, Snow published *Red Star over China* sharing the military legend of the Long March to the West. As Snow carefully noted down the fact,

According to data furnished to me by Commander Tso Ch'uan, the Reds crossed eighteen mountain ranges, five of which were perennially snow-capped, and they crossed twenty-four rivers. They passed through twelve different provinces, occupied sixty-two cities and towns, and broke through enveloping armies of ten different provincial warlords, besides defeating, eluding, or outmanoeuvring the various forces of Central Government troops sent against them. They crossed six different aboriginal districts, and

²⁵⁸ Tinari, 'A Conversation with Lu Jie'.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

penetrated areas through which no Chinese army had gone for scores of years. [...] [I]t was impossible to deny recognition of their Long March — the Ch'ang Cheng, as they called it — as one of the great exploits of military history.²⁶⁰

Domestically, the Long March has been framed as a founding legend of the new socialist China. The frequent appearance of stories of the arduous Long March in paintings, prints, films, songs and literature in the nationally-wide propaganda has made the word 'Long March' a collective memory and emblem of the socialist revolution. Beyond China, the Long March is also a fact widely known about China. Therefore, the Long March was taken on by Lu not only for its form of a spatial journey, but more for its invisible and immaterial space — its rich discursive and cultural connotations, its nature as a process of transformation, and a narrative inscribed to contemporary Chinese memories. The vast physical and discursive scale of the framework allowed him to bring in his long-lasting thoughts about the mutual understanding between China and the West, from the question of the particular modernity in China to the tension with the West in contemporary Chinese art.

I decided that the Long March must be the ideal way to examine all of these themes. Because in every Chinese mind, the Long March is the narration, the story of the beginning of conflict, the rupture with tradition, the problem with modernity, and then, the search for utopia.²⁶¹

This curatorial proposal in 1999 was named 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition'. Today we can still access this 26-page file in 1999. It was not a typical curatorial proposal constructed by parts like 'mission', 'background', 'theme', 'venue', 'budget', 'list of artists' and 'potential risks'. Such information was absent here possibly because the file available today was only the 'appendi[c]es'. But the ten appendices in a sequence constituted another form of a curatorial plan. It presented an extensive description of a journey through a series of events. Each appendix corresponded to a place along the route of the Long March and had its own theme and events like exhibitions, screenings and discussions. The first appendix was titled as 'Appendix 1, Event 1, Day 1' and the proposal unfolded until the 'Appendix 10', the 17th event and the 'Day 170'...²⁶² The concrete and detailed history of the

²⁶⁰ Edgar Snow, 'Across the Great Grasslands', *Red Star Over China - The Rise Of The Red Army*, Ebook (Atlantic Books, 2017) of the edition published in 1968 by Grove Press (New York), which was a revised and extended of the first edition (London: Left Book Club, Victor Gollancz, 1937).

²⁶¹ Tinari, 2002.

²⁶² There is only a digital scanned version of this file that is available. Though the cover page is dated to the year '2002', by comparing it with other versions and also consulting Lu Jie, this file should be the initial version. It is possible that the date was changed in 2002.

Long March and the local geography served as the solid narrative as well as the extensive and ‘organic’ structure of the project, onto which Lu brought in conceptual issues such as ‘how China [wa]s read in the West’ and how China responded to such reading. In fact, each appendix could be considered as a comprehensive writing composed by words and images on its own, concerning the three clues entangled together in each site: the Long March and the Chinese revolution, Chinese contemporary art, and the relation between China and the West. Besides, the project also included discussions on feminist art, performance art, conceptual art in China and the international scene. By taking the Long March as the ‘organic’ structure, Lu did not choose to re-enact historical actions, but to bring several different worldlines together in the same geographical space. Though the geography could not be moved or repositioned, humans and objects could move to the original space to form a new situation changing the original and local context.

Lu used ‘juxtaposition’, ‘reposition’, ‘mistranslation’ and ‘geographicalisation’ to describe his methods in assembling discursive themes in contemporary art and the Long March.²⁶³ Through repositioning and assembling hybrid artworks, writings, visual materials, and social mechanisms, he would like to overlap double, triple and more layers of contexts with each other. The curatorial plan was also filled with images. Artworks which are usually the key part of a curatorial project here mingle with historical photographs, films, books and mass media reports. Perhaps initially developed in Word on a Macintosh and printed in black and white, the file was filled with separate colourful images which were printed and pasted onto the paper by hand. For a great possibility, these images of photos, book covers, film screenshots, newspapers and artworks were also downloaded from the newly available Internet. When Lu said he ‘review[ed] artistic practice by putting it into the relations of visual culture’, the technical conditions of digital files and the Internet also made it much easier than the analogue film slides and prints.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Lu Jie, ‘Weishenme Yao Changzheng?’ [Why Do We Long March?].

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

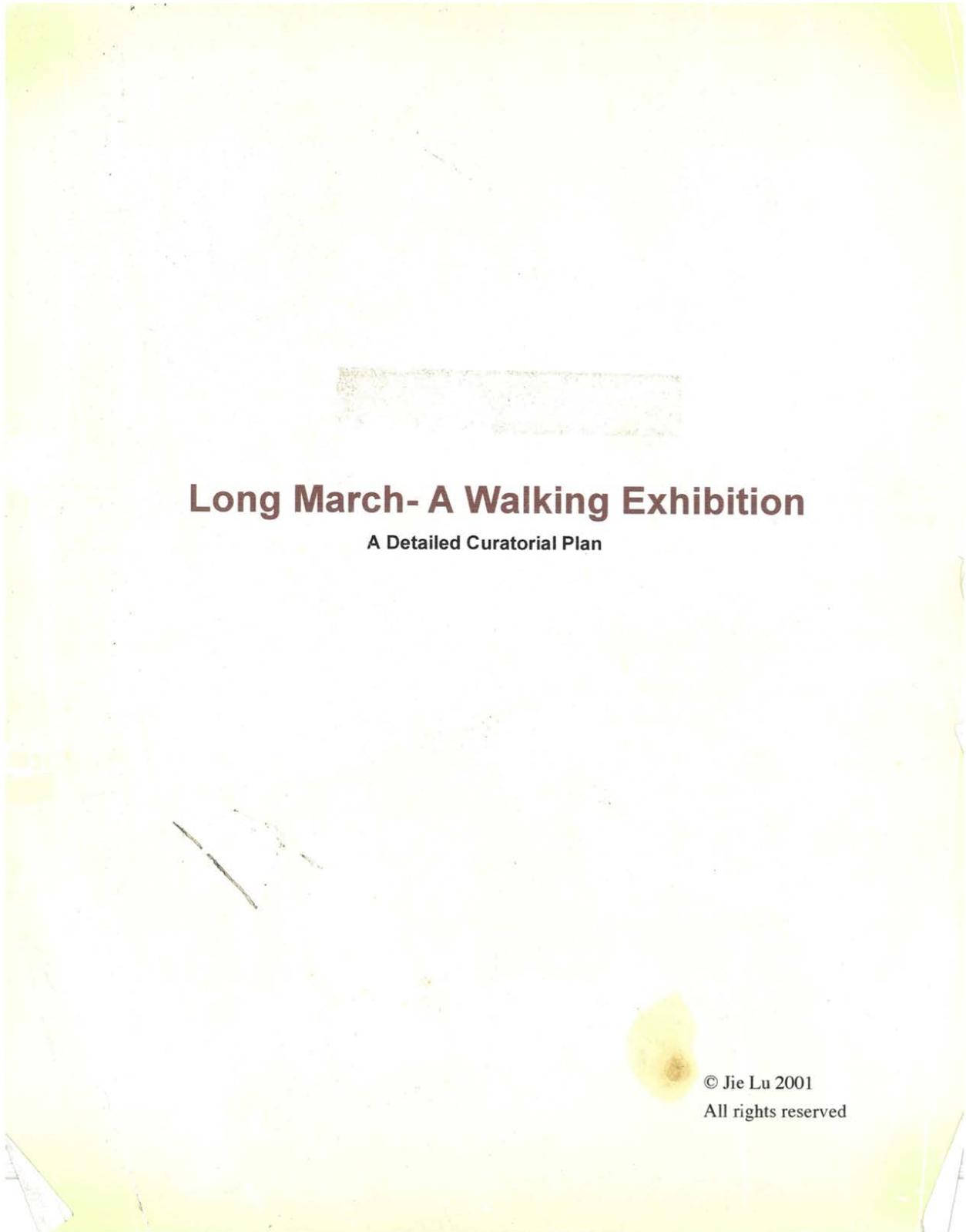


Fig. 21 Cover of Lu Jie's Curatorial Proposal 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition — A Detailed Curatorial Plan' written in English and dated in 2001. Courtesy of Lu Jie and Long March Project.

Appendix 1, Event 1, Day 1

History

Jinggangshan Mountains, Jiangxi soviet. After the Communist Party was formerly organized in 1921, it took the form of Russian revolution based on organizing workers in the cities. Defeated by the Nationalist government, they went underground in foreign-controlled Shanghai. However, unsatisfied with the urban insurrections policy guided by the Comintern's representatives in the Communist headquarters in Shanghai, Mao took the route of organizing peasant revolutions in the mountain. He formed Red Army and created his theory of 'rural soviet movement' - Marxist-Leninism must be redefined with Chinese reality. He successfully build the Jiangxi soviet in 1929. The Chinese Communism has its own route through the peasant's uprising which also has a history of changing many dynasties. The 'Sharing Wealth Party'-the Communist party's name in Chinese, echoed the slogan 'The Wealth must be Shared' by the Taiping Movement, a combination of peasant rebellion and Christian belief. At one point Taiping took over half of the China in the south and in 1853 set up their capital in Nanjing. Taipings were suppressed by the imperial government and the foreign powers who shared interests in China, 'which postponed Chinese Revolution for sixty years'. Captain Charles Gordon of the Royal Engineers played key role in the final defeat of the Taiping movement.¹

Mao said, 'The Chinese bourgeois-democratic revolution is in essence a peasant revolution...the basic task of the Chinese proletariat in the bourgeois-democratic revolution is therefore to give leadership to the peasants' struggle.'² Combining Marxism-Leninism and Chinese traditional pattern of peasant revolts, Mao's principle contribution to Communism is, in semi-feudal, semi-colonial countries such as China, a revolutionary Leninist Party could successfully carry out revolution and remain Marxist without relying on the proletariat.



Li Shan 'The Rouge Series: No. 8, 1990, Acrylic on Canvas



Mao, Yanan, 1937

Exhibition - Revolution

Read Leon Trotsky's *Problem of Chinese Revolution*,³ which he started to write in Moscow but finished on exile in Alma Ata and Turkey. Trotsky was the most criticized communist in Chinese political life. Being a Trotskyist meant being dead in political life in China. Trotsky's writing is not banned any more, but few have interest in reading them. Are Maoism and Stalinism orthodox Marxist communism? Has communism failed? Has it started yet?



Show Michelangelo Antonioni's famous four-hours documentary of China *Chung Kuo Cina* (1972), the longest film he had ever made, to the people in Jinggangshan Mountains, the Red Army headquarters where the Long March began in 1934. Like other Chinese, these villagers had daily meeting for one month in 1973 to criticize the movie by the 'anti-China Clown', the most criticized western artist in China, though most had never seen the movie yet. Because his revolutionary approach however, Antonioni was invited by Chinese government to China to make a documentary of the fruit of its revolution to show to the West, after many years of a closed door policy to the world. To their disappointment, Antonioni took a 'mere tourist's' glance, as he claimed, with a focus on daily life.

Antonioni and *Chung Kuo Cina*

Fig. 22 The first and second page in the curatorial proposal 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition' in 1999. Courtesy of Lu Jie and Long March Project.

In this sense, the file itself could be regarded as an embodiment of the visual culture conditions at the time. Lu recreated, collaged and amplified the visual culture from multiple realities in the curatorial proposal. In this plan, Lu mentioned many classical writings in different discourses, for example, Russian revolutionist Leon Trotsky's *Problems of The Chinese Revolution* (1927–1931) and French feminist Julia Kristeva's *About Chinese Women* (1974). But he challenged these classical writings by messing up the spaces of reading them. Trotsky's articulation would be read in the space of the Long March and Kristeva's thoughts would be discussed in relation to Chinese female artists' works.

The hybridisation of images, objects and discourses imitated the postmodern reality at the end of the twentieth century. As a foreigner living far away from his home country, Lu considered he 'experienced the most postcolonial conditions in London'. That vertiginous experience was also shared by the fast-changing China in the early 2000s. Inside China, the different stages of urbanisation and industrialisation already made the place a co-existence of different temporalities. In the plan, the name and image of Mao Zedong appeared again and again in the 'history' of the Long March, in the Political Pop artists' oil painting, in the references of books. The connotation of Mao's portrait had changed considerably since the

Mao era. Lu threw out his question to readers, '[I]s Mao a Nationalist or Internationalist? Or both, or neither of them?'²⁶⁵ In such a question, Lu pushed readers to reconsider the Chinese revolution as an international phenomenon and not simply a movement.

In Lu's proposal, the walking of the exhibition was embodied by the extensive writing, connecting all visual elements and planned events, filling the interspace with information and reflection. There were narratives, questions, analysis and lyrical expressions. The different tones in writing left an impression that the exhibition was in fact a person speaking: the walking exhibition might be a person travelling, thinking and sharing his/her thoughts. As the curator was the only one present through the whole journey, we could even regard this exhibition as the curator's incarnation. Compared with saying the exhibition was imagined as a journey, it might be more accurate to say, in this proposal, Lu embodied the exhibition in travelling.

Lu later considered that this rudiment in 1999 was 'not an essay or a curatorial plan, but an illustrated poem'.²⁶⁶ My understanding is that it is not about the format of the writing but more about how the curatorial proposal became a long reflection upon the experience of himself and his peers. When he said 'all has roots in the Long March', he projected his personal experience of and the thoughts on China and contemporary Chinese art onto the Long March. In 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition', Lu finally put himself into the curatorial project. He decided to work with Chinese audiences and artists in the project and call upon them to reflect together on the conditions of China and contemporary Chinese art, especially their relation to the West.

However, from the start, the curatorial proposal aroused much debate. In the class of 'Creative Curating', Lu presented the proposal to his classmates. According to him,

On the second day after I drafted the plan, in the discussions in the class, someone cried [...], someone got angry. My Italian classmate Savino revealed his identity as a Communist member and called me as a revisionist. I was not mentally prepared to hear this word in London and startled.²⁶⁷

These oppositions did not make Lu Jie doubt. On the contrary, they made Lu believe that *Long March* could ignite people's interests and reactions around the world. From 1999, *Long March* became a curatorial career for Lu Jie.

²⁶⁵ Lu Jie, 'Long March — A Walking Visual Exhibition: A Detailed Curatorial Plan', 2001, p. 13.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Lu Jie, December, 2019.

²⁶⁷ Lu Jie, 'Weishenme Yao Changzheng?' [Why Do We Long March?].

Chapter 6 ‘A Detailed Curatorial Plan’

After graduation from Goldsmiths, Lu did not work on realising the proposal immediately but went back to New York and, as he said, continued ‘researching’ and developing the proposal until the end of 2001. During the research stage from 1998 to 2001, Lu travelled about four times along different parts of the Long March route.²⁶⁸ The 26-page draft written in English in 1999 gradually evolved into the over-90-page ‘A Detailed Curatorial Plan’ in both English and Chinese with references to about 150 artists and intellectuals in 2001. Comparing the two versions, we can easily sense the large amount of ‘details’. In the 1999 version, apart from several ‘appendices’ that were fully presented through Lu’s discussion and speculation in writing, many only stayed as a collage of images outlining potential themes. ‘A Detailed Curatorial Plan’ extended the initial 10 ‘appendices’ into 20 ‘sites’ along the route of the Long March and each unfolded into a much more mature discussion.

In Lu’s plan, ‘a core team (curators, camera crew and artists)’ would travel through all events from one site to the next with different artists joining on different places.²⁶⁹ The Longman dictionary defines ‘site’ first of all as ‘a place where something important or interesting happened’ and it also denotes an area selected ‘for certain particular purposes’. In the project plan, ‘sites’ correspond to the sites of historical battles between the Red Army and Kuomintang army and other historical events during the Long March, as well as the coming events devised in the plan. In some sense, ‘sites’ are also ‘camping sites’, in line with the Chinese translation of ‘site’ – *zhan*, which means courier or post stations for delivery. From the first site as the start to the twentieth site as the end, the project can also be seen as a long delivery. The various connotations of ‘site’ therefore suggest a human intention about a place, as well as a sense of uncertainty, which is similar to the tension embedded in the word ‘proposal’. Terms like ‘on-site’ and ‘site-specific’ in art discourses, which are also applicable to the project, also carry such dynamic. ‘Site’ therefore not only formed the basic structure of the project, but also gave a lively rhythm to the journey, to the continuous ‘walking’ of the ‘exhibition’. Each site was self-contained, like a themed detour, breaking the lengthy journey into sub-events on a manageable scale.

²⁶⁸ Shu Kewen, ‘Yishu Bupa Yuanzheng Nan’ [Art Is Not Afraid of Marching Far], *Sanlian Shenghuo Zhoukan*, 10 October 2002, pp. 58–60. This article was first published online on 9 July 2002. By the time the article was in print, the project had changed a lot.

²⁶⁹ Lu, ‘Long March — A Walking Visual Exhibition: A Detailed Curatorial Plan’, 2001, p. 15.

But the content of each 'site' in 'A Detailed Curatorial Plan' (2001) was still not as practical. Like the 'appendices' in the 1999 version, there were no logistics for realisation. Most 'sites' in the plan included three sections: 'History', 'Exhibition' (or 'Show'/'Discussion') and 'Site-Specific Works'. The 'History' part introduced the corresponding history in the Long March and presented social-cultural facts and in some cases it provided more contexts for the themes of exhibitions or discussions. For example, the 'History' section in Site 8 elaborated on the history, culture and customs of Lijiang, Yunnan Province, an area inhabited by the local ethnic minority Na. The Red Army passed through this land during the Long March and a nationally famous song *Ten Farewells to the Red Army (shisong hongjun)* was adapted from a local ballad at that time. But for this site, Lu focused on how the place had been depicted as a heavenly fairyland by Western explorers. The planned 'exhibition' was 'A Field Study of Lijiang - Identity, Locality and Nationality', to be conducted by artists, philosophers and anthropologists. The discussion touched on how the identity of ethnic minorities were overshadowed by the national identity of 'Chinese' and the local residents' self-construction and performance as 'the other' to attract tourists.

'History', 'Exhibition' and 'Discussion' were thus inter-connected through the narrative of histories, sociocultural materials and artworks. 'Exhibition' and the planned events to be realised were fused into the past, with different temporalities projecting onto each other. Lu also already made many speculative descriptions of the process, including participants' past experiences and possible reactions in mind. For example, in the exhibition 'Journey' planned for Site 3, Lu says,

This event will take place on the roads of Jiangxi, Hunan and Guangxi provinces, which were the first roads of the Long March. Along the way, on the bus, in the markets and elsewhere, we will talk with local people about the passage, pilgrimage and the construction of the icons of the Long March. [...] What do these tourists of the 90s and early 00s China think about the passage of the Red Guard through this area during the Cultural Revolution in the 60s, and how are they linked with the heroic Long March in the 30s? [...] The Red Guards, organised by Mao to defend his left wing radical ideology against so called Counter Revolutionists and Revisionists, traveled all over China, privy to free bus and train rides nation-wide. They camped in the farms, factories and army camps along the road of Long March, making special pilgrimages to those holy revolutionary lands in search of the old

revolution's spiritual inspiration.²⁷⁰

The relative independence of each site from each other allowed Lu enough space to cover a broad range of topics without the need of interconnecting them logically. Lu weaved a large variety of references into each site, turning the project into an index of contemporary art and culture. There were themes like Political pop, conceptual art, feminism art ('women's art' in the Chinese context) and performance art and all these were reviewed in 'Chinese contemporary art' in relation to their counterparts in the West. There were also themes obviously influenced by Lu's experience in the West like 'Convergence of Communism and Modern Art' and the 'Do It Yourself' movement.

The plan was laden with phrases like 'related to', 'linked with', 'in connection with' and 'influenced by'. Lu thought that his own working method was to present all the elements and let the relations take shape by themselves. He listed names of artworks, people as well as books, building smaller structures under the whole. To present these rich elements, the framework of the Long March became more important. It integrated with Lu's decision of physically revisiting the current and corporeal reality of the Long March. Such commitment to geography distinguished Lu's project from many other practices that also referred to the historical Long March. For example, in 1997, curator Chris Driessen and Marianne Brouwer brought 18 Chinese contemporary artists' works to the Netherlands and staged the exhibition 'Another Long March: Chinese Conceptual and Installation Art in the Nineties' in Breda.²⁷¹ In 2002, Chinese artist Zhang Qikai organised an art event 'Red Star Over Europe' in 2002 and a group of participants dressed in Red Army uniforms marched from Berlin to Kassel to revive the memory of the Long March in Europe.²⁷² Both projects have also used the Long March as their reference and excavated its rich metaphorical denotations, but the former took the Long March more as a rhetorical reference and the conceptual artists' works were not directly related to the Communist revolution; while the latter, though a performative re-enactment of the Long March, took place in Europe and targeted especially the on-going Documenta in Kassel.

Lu's 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition' aimed at an engagement with the flesh and

²⁷⁰ Lu, 'Long March — A Walking Visual Exhibition: A Detailed Curatorial Plan', 2001, pp. 12-13.

²⁷¹ The exhibition 'Another Long March: Chinese Conceptual and Installation Art in the Nineties' was curated by Chris Driessen and Marianne Brouwer from 31 May to 3 Aug 1997 in Chasse Kazerne, Breda, Netherlands. It included 18 Chinese artists: CHEN Shaoxiong, CHEN Yanyin, FENG Mengbo, GENG Jianyi, GU Dexin, LI Yongbin, LIANG Juhui, LIN Tianmiao, LIN Yilin, LIU Xinhua, MA Liuming, WANG Jianwei, WANG Youshen, XU Tan, YIN Xiuzhen, ZHANG Peili, ZHOU Tiehai, ZHU Jia.

²⁷² Zhang's art event in Europe provides a great example for a comparative study with *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*.

blood of the Long March in its historical space, and most importantly with the living memories of the Long March by interacting with the general public in China. Such a strong presence made the Long March not only serve as the curatorial framework, but also deeply shape the content, organisation and discourse of the project. This deep integration led to the misunderstanding by some Chinese artists that Lu was making an official propaganda project for the Chinese government. Apart from the framework of the Long March, the 150 names he referred to in the curatorial plan could also confuse audiences about the project's real concern. Among the referred names, about 60 of them were artists, and many were historical figures in the Long March or Western explorers and intellectuals who published travel journals and books. The historical and the contemporary figures were mixed together, without a clear indication as to who was referred to for discussion and who would be a participant in the project in person. But more importantly, Lu identified groups of audience and participants such as school students, local villagers and cadres in the local governments, who were usually not the typical audiences for contemporary art. Their interaction and opinions with artworks and discourses were emphasised.

Despite all the differences in participants, Lu always addressed the cohort as an integrated 'we'. This impulse of inclusion in fact grew exactly from Lu's initial concern with contemporary Chinese art. After all, contemporary Chinese art for him was not an objective and abstract phenomenon but a personal experience of his peer artists and friends in China and overseas. When Lu left China in 1996 and when he wrote the plan for the time in 1999, he was faced with questions like how Chinese artists could develop their own practices liberated from the Western gaze, about how the Western audience could understand Chinese art as it was. It was about epistemology, about how people perceived the world they were inhabiting. No matter how much visual materials were brought into the structure of the Long March, what Lu tried to create was not an exhibition but an assembly of people, a collective journey and a journey of transformation. In some sense, if we take 'transforming and instigating participants' as Lu's primary concern for exhibition-making, the selection of the Long March and the curatorial methods could all be comprehended. The Long March was a framework as well as a content that could speak to all. The variety and quantity of references were set to 'overexpose', in order to nudge participants, including Chinese artists, to go out of their comfort zones.

In this proposal, Lu often planned to reposition participants into a strange situation and gain a multi-perspective view. At Site 3 about 'Journey', Lu presented two artists' depiction about the journey and landscape — Philip Haas and David Hockney's documentary film *A*

Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China or: Surface Is Illusion But So Is Depth (1988) and Chinese artist Hong Hao's photo-collage work *Streams and Mountains Without End* (2000). In the film, Hockney discussed the difference between the single perspective in Western paintings and the multiple and flowing perspectives widely used in Chinese ink wash paintings, especially horizontally unfolding scrolls of panoramas. He compared a scroll and a single tableau respectively depicting the tour to the southern empire by Emperors Kangxi and Qianlong along the Grand Canal. The fluid and continuous narrative in the earlier scroll about Kangxi, with numerous details of different people, was contrasted with the single tableau that foregrounded Qianlong Emperor, influenced by the Western single-perspective. But through introducing Hockney's reflection, Lu was not merely limited to perspectives in terms of painting and visual representations. He planned to move the discussion of 'perspective' from art to 'a point of departure for social, political and geographical understandings'.²⁷³ The different techniques in ink wash painting and oil painting were seen as a synecdoche for the differences between China and the West.

Hong Hao was also interested in the form of scroll and multiple perspectives around 2000 and in *Streams and Mountains Without End*, he appropriated the title from a famous ancient landscape scroll and formed a new horizontal work using the photographs he took on his return trips from Europe and North America to China. In this contemporary scroll, the traveller has been elevated from the ground to a height in the air. 'Streams and Mountains Without End', which was used to be a description of the subjective feeling and imagination though months' journey, was short-circuited into a single look out of the window, like a synecdoche of a participant's experience of globalisation when the bodily experience of time and scope was extracted from immersiveness to a vantage point. Such a 'global vision' could also be found in the curatorial plan, not in the sense of taking the globe as an overall object, but about approaching a locale with reference to another one — an experience that had come from Lu's global travelling, when he was 'searching for China in the world'.

The 'Exhibition' of Site 2 in Jinggangshan Mountains, where Mao Zedong first established a military base for the CCP, was a screening of Italian left-wing filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni's *Chung Kuo, Cina* (1972) near the house that Mao used to live in. Lu brought in *Chung Kuo, Cina* as an example to illustrate the blind spots and misunderstandings about each other between China and the West. Antonioni was invited to

²⁷³ Lu, 'Long March — A Walking Visual Exhibition: A Detailed Curatorial Plan', 2001, p.14.

China by the Chinese government in 1972 to make a documentary about the miraculous development in China, shortly after the US president Richard Nixon's visit to China during the Cultural Revolution. While making the film, Antonioni was conscious about his position as an outsider and the effect of his gaze — 'I do not like to travel as a tourist... [Y]our very presence is enough to modify their workings.'²⁷⁴ Therefore he used many long close-up shots of details, such as an ordinary person's facial expression, the drape of clothes or a mundane everyday-life scene in the 220-minute film to modestly and honestly present what he saw, trying to deliver 'a non-idealised realism that leaves things open to interpretation'.²⁷⁵ While some might perceive the film as peaceful, humane and uninflected, the film was so different from the heroic narratives in the propaganda films in China and it was quickly forbidden. It was severely criticised by the Chinese government to be 'an openly anti-Chinese, anti-Communist and counter-revolutionary work' 'out of the pack of imperialists and social imperialists'.²⁷⁶ In the summer of 1973, the mass critique of the film was held intensively and in some places lasted for a month, though most participants did not even see the film themselves. Lu questioned the politics of Antonioni's perception of China and the severe protests the film met in both China and Italy.²⁷⁷ He threw out these serious questions,

Was the attack a failure to understand Antonioni, for historical reasons, or for reasons of political desire and ideological commitments? Was it a classical problem of East meets West, of mutual incomprehensibility, of a notion of an oriental world that couldn't be ever fully known, that would remain mysterious as Antonioni repeatedly narrated in the film? Had he tried to go beyond a 'glance of a tourist', would it ha[ve] shortened the distance between the film and the Chinese needs, sensibilities and history?²⁷⁸

In such a discussion, Lu's position kept shifting as if he could travel fast in a panorama. More importantly, Lu grasped the 'mutual incomprehensibility', a problem that had haunted the Chinese for long but especially in the modern times, which considerably contributed to the fetishisation and stereotyping of China and Chinese culture in the West.

²⁷⁴ Cited from Antonioni, 'China and the Chinese', trans. Cooper, in *Michelangelo Antonioni: The Architecture of Vision*, pp. 114–15. Originally published as 'La Cina e i cinesi', *Il Giornio* 22, no. 25 (July 26, 1972). Re-cited from Jenny Lin, 'Seeing a World Apart: Visual Reality in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Chung Kuo/Cina*', *ARTMargins*, 3.3 (2014), 21–44.

²⁷⁵ Jenny Lin discussed Antonioni's 'visual reality' in the article 'Seeing a World Apart' which is cited above.

²⁷⁶ Lu, 'Long March — A Walking Visual Exhibition: A Detailed Curatorial Plan', 2001, pp. 6-7.

²⁷⁷ J. Hoberman, 'Forgotten Masterpiece: Antonioni's Travelogue From China', *The New York Times*, 28 December 2017, section Movies <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/28/movies/chung-kuo-cina-antonioni-moma-forgotten-masterpiece-a-china-travelogue.html>> [accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁷⁸ This part appears first in the curatorial proposal 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition' (1999), p. 3 and then in the curatorial proposal's 2001 version, p. 7.

The film and the critique it received were a symbol of the long-lasting pain in transcultural communication. This echoed Lu's quote of Umberto Eco's sentence 'It's difficult to be Marco Polo' mentioned earlier. In the initial version in 1999, Lu planned to present the film together with Russian revolutionist Leon Trotsky's *Problem of Chinese Revolution* (1932) because Trotsky and Antonioni 'were the most hated', depicted as traitors in Communist propaganda. As a result, they have borne the most misperceptions: 'yet most Chinese people have [not seen] their works'.²⁷⁹ Lu planned to let the audience 'see' the originals. 'What do the peasants think of Trotsky, Antonioni and [the] Long March?', he wondered in writing.

Could the villagers step out of their presumptions which were repeated in propaganda? By showing the film to the audience, Lu planned to intervene into the local audience's perception of the film as well as to invite them to reflect upon their own experience and the prejudice implanted about the West. This screening, together with the planned discussion, embodied Lu's expectation to bring changes to the audience. In the proposals of 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition', Lu envisaged many more situations in which the participants would be confronted with unfamiliar materials. For example, he planned to distribute flyers and posters of contemporary art in places such as the Revolution Museum, Mao's former residence and a Taoist temple. In his imagination,

The tourists and workers in these revolutionary spaces will be confronted with experiences they would never likely associate with these sites, specifically, local and international contemporary visual art. It is impossible to predict the outcome of this encounter, our only certainty is that we will continue to progress on our Long March. Shall we call the action 'to seed the art for future harvest', as Mao suggested?²⁸⁰

The repeated appearance of such proactive designs and the clear articulation about his expectations of audiences' reactions demonstrated that Lu consciously applied such curatorial methods aimed at participants. The historical Long March was described as 'the biggest armed propaganda tour in history' as the Red Army spread Communist ideas to the locals along the route by distributing flyers, painting slogans on the wall as well as conducting direct conversations.²⁸¹ Similarly, Lu's plan of distributing flyers could be seen as a promotion of contemporary art to a bunch of unprepared audiences, but the choice of presenting contemporary art in a strange context for an unprepared audience proved that

²⁷⁹ Lu, 'Long March — A Walking Visual Exhibition', 1999, p. 3.

²⁸⁰ Lu, 2001, p.10.

²⁸¹ Edgar Snow, 2017, p. 397.

Lu intentionally misplaced objects and challenged participants. To some extent, Lu applied the approach of misplacing towards both objects and people. Participants, especially those audiences suddenly exposed to contemporary art in their everyday life and artists who would be invited to strange situations, might find strange and fresh encounters and their minds would be opened up. At Site 6, Lu planned to turn a dining carriage on a long-distance train from Guiyang to Kunming into an exhibition,

We expect that these passengers will be quite surprised when they stumble upon our travelling exhibition and are confronted with a seemingly out of context encounter with art. We have purpose[ful]ly selected provocative works for this leg of the journey[...] In the evening, the Art Car will revert to a normal rail car, and the artists and curator's crew will be ordinary passengers. When we arrive in Kunming and after we disembark, the Art Car, as with the nature of the commodity, no longer carries its past, [and will be] returned to the people, who will immediately fill it, scrambling for available seats necessary for their long journeys to Beijing. ²⁸²

The general audience's impression of the Long March as national pride and ideological content set up a perfect ground for the project to overturn or complicate the audience's perception. Apart from pastiching elements from different contexts and genealogies, Lu also planned to create temporary assemblies of people from different ecologies and backgrounds. Like at Site 10, Lu designed a joint exhibition of traditional Chinese ink wash paintings made by amateur worker-artists and contemporary art by art academy students, who often would not easily be in the same exhibition.²⁸³ Harking back to its intention to change perceptions, I consider that these curatorial approaches, concerning both people and communities, as an attempt to spark participants' awareness of their own environment by interrupting existing on-site contexts. To reach this, Lu widely applied the curatorial method of confrontation in the curatorial proposal (2001). If juxtaposition is the curatorial approach for objects, Lu aimed to surprise and shock participants, amplify their 'incomprehensibility' of the situation presented to them, until they can no longer ignore it. In this curatorial project, Lu anticipated a collective awakening.

²⁸² Lu, 2001, p. 31.

²⁸³ Lu, 2001, p. 50.

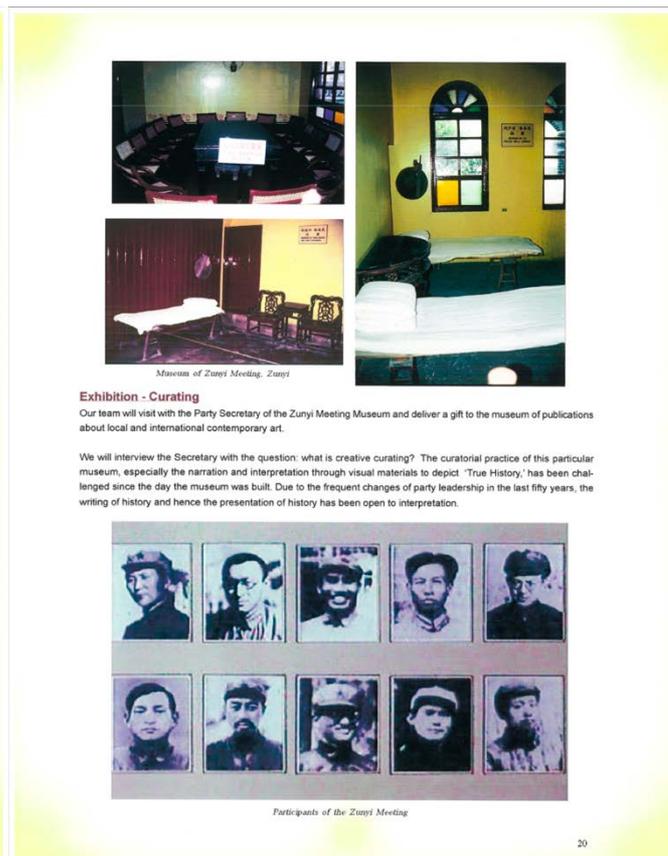


Fig. 23 The first two-page content of Site 4 Zunyi in 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition — A Detailed Curatorial Plan' (2001) by Lu Jie. Courtesy of Lu Jie and Long March Project.

However, 'A Detailed Curatorial Plan' (2001) was still a speculative writing. What would really happen to participants? Would participants really react as Lu imagined? Lu seemed to have avoided this question in his writing by intentionally evading the importance of outcomes. In Lu's writing, most encounters, especially those 'provoking' situations between the project and participants, would already be complete once they take place, no matter how these participants would react to them. Like Lu said about the viewers who would see flyers of contemporary art, 'It is impossible to predict the outcome of this encounter. Our only certainty is that we will continue to progress on our Long March.'²⁸⁴ When 'peasants' 'villagers' and 'travellers on the train' were mentioned in the plan (with a third-person addressing tone), it is also alarming that these participants were at most times considered as receivers for information instead of active participants capable of shaping the project. Their voices or unvoiced feelings, after being presented with the new materials or meeting people out of their contexts, were not included in the plan. In a sense, Lu's curatorial plan was only for the curators' and artists' actions and it lacked consideration including other

²⁸⁴ Lu, 2001, p. 10.

subjects' feeling, thoughts and agencies.

The curator, Lu, in a sense, was immersed in the excitement of finding the new practices of curating. At Site Zunyi, Lu planned a visit to the Memorial Museum of the Zunyi Conference (Zunyi conference was a historic conference in which Mao was given the authority of military direction during the Long March). Lu intended to give the museum a set of publications about 'local' – 'Chinese' – and international contemporary art, and sought to interview the Party Secretary (the leader of CCP members in this museum), 'What is creative curating?'²⁸⁵ When 'curating' as a concept was still not widely known in China at that time, Lu's intention behind this imagined act was to reveal the gap between different curatorial practices as well as the great potentialities in unconventional forms of curating.

What the curatorial plan presented was an experience designed for participants, yet no participant had claimed that they would like to join the project yet. Then what would be the meaning of participating in this project? If there were participants, would the project also transform itself during the process, like its anticipation of its participants? In 2000, when installation and conceptual artist Huang Yong Ping was having an exhibition in New York, Lu Jie presented the plan he was writing to Huang, his elder Fujian fellow. According to Lu, Huang looked through the plan and said to him, 'Writing a book is good enough... It's not necessary to really carry it out.'²⁸⁶ This comment from the conceptual artist demonstrated that in the artist's opinion, the curatorial proposal was already a complete work by itself. Although the curatorial plan did not include any information on the organisational structure of the project or the role of Lu, on the over page of the 2001 version, a credit information 'Jie Lu © 2001/All rights reserved' was printed on the lower right corner. This marker of copyright acted like an artist's signature, or as a marker of ownership. Lu authored the plan. This plan was an independent 'work' by itself. The spatial position of Lu's name on the cover page, in stark contrast to his relative absence within the text, which included works authored by 150 or so contributors, worked as a metaphor commenting on the curator's relationship to what he curated – a kind of omnipresence, which marked presence even in absence. The 2001 plan thus demonstrated an emphasis on participation

²⁸⁵ Lu, 2001, p. 20.

²⁸⁶ The two possibly met when Huang Yong Ping was having an exhibition 'Taigong fishing, Willing to Bite the Bait' in Jack Tilton Gallery in New York in 2000. Holland Cotter, 'ART IN REVIEW; Huang Yong Ping', *The New York Times*, 2000 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/01/arts/art-in-review-huang-yong-ping.html>> [accessed 31 August 2021]. The original response from Huang was quoted here from my interview with Lu Jie in 2019.

but there was an unmatched absence of a comprehensive encouragement or evaluation of participation. The participants, in fact, would play a key role when the project embarked on road. When the plan was turned into a project, without much limitations on its participants, each participant would personalise the project into their own trip regardless of the proposal.

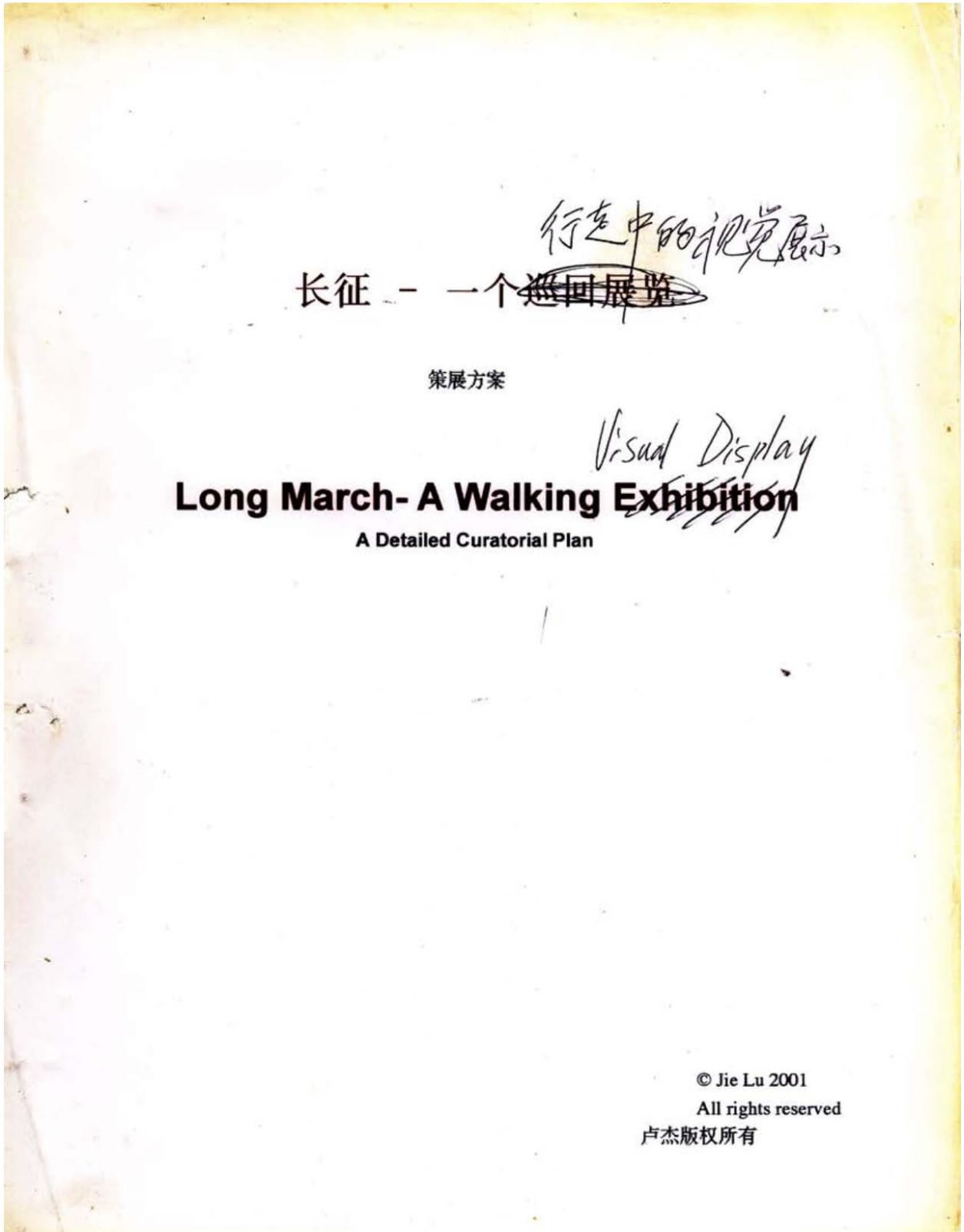
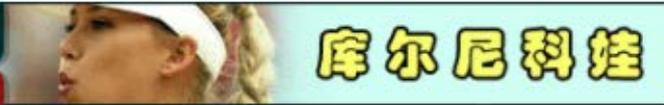


Fig. 24 Cover Page of Lu Jie's Curatorial Proposal 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition — A Detailed Curatorial Plan' written in Chinese (2001). The title was changed in 2002 to 'Long March: A Walking Visual Display'.



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长征

一个行走中的视觉展示

《长征：一个行走中的视觉展示》系列艺术活动由长征艺术基金会主办，与当年红军长征沿途各地方政府和文化机构合作，是一个大型的当代艺术和视觉文化的创作、展示、整理和讨论活动。该活动将于今年六月开始在长征沿线三十个地点实施。每个地点将与当代视觉文化中的重要课题相对应。如在瑞金将讨论乌托邦的意义，在泸定将涉及前卫的概念等等。活动的第一阶段将于十月在延安结束。第一阶段过程中所创作的作品和形成的文本、影像将在国内外六个美术馆中巡回展览，此为其第二阶段。

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Fig. 25 The promotion page of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* on arts.tom.com on 2 August 2002.

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20020802060157/http://arts.tom.com/zhanlan/czheng/index.php>> [Accessed through Wayback Machine, Internet Archive on 17 October 2020]. Courtesy of Long March Project, arts.tom.com and Internet Archive.

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On the Road



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Long March Lecture Series

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The Long March - A Walking Visual Display

This project is organized by the Long March Foundation, New York, with the cooperation of local cultural institutions along the route of China's historical Long March. Its aim is to take both contemporary Chinese and international art to a sector of the Chinese public that is rarely, perhaps never, exposed to such work. In this respect, this is the first such project in China's history. Specifically, we will bring art to those people who live in communities along the route of Mao Zedong's historic Long March. Mao's March symbolized the deliverance of the Communist ideal to the Chinese proletariat. It is with this symbolism in mind that we now choose to march contemporary art out to China's peripheral population.

The project is composed of two parts: First, we hope to expose China as a space for public art and a forum for the cultural exchange. The curatorial team and two camera crews will travel for a five-month period along the route of the Long March, documenting the journey and compiling an archive of the experience. Along the way, local and international artists will join in at different venues to participate in the project by creating and/or showing their art works. There will be 20 events taking place in specific locations, each chosen to represent a certain historical, political, geographical and/or artistic context. Every event will include an exhibition and a forum for debate. In these exhibition venues, original artwork will be shown, but secondary sources such as slides, videos and exhibition catalogues will also be displayed. Following the exhibition we will hold discussions with invited artists, curators, critics and the local public.

Once the five month tour has been completed, the second leg of our journey will begin. The works that were created, including video, photographic and written documents, will be packed-up and sent on a touring exhibition throughout international museums and other art institutions. This touring show will be accompanied by a website and a documentary film, detailing the most intriguing developments of the five-month journey. The collection of objects and texts created during the march will include the re-creation and re-enactment of some site-specific works realized on the road.

Chief Curator Lu Jie
Co-Curator Qiu Zhijie

Billboard:

- [A Long March Glossary](#) [New](#)
- [Long March Archive -Books with titles including "Long March"](#) [New](#)
- [Qiu Zhijie is voted as the "New Model Long March Soldier" for August](#)
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The Long March flag designed by Xu Bing

Fig. 26 Homepage of longmarchfoundation.org on 9 December 2002.

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20021209222543/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/english/homepage.htm>> [Accessed through Wayback Machine, Internet Archive on 17 October 2020].

Courtesy of Long March Project and Internet Archive.



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Artists Participating in "If Women Ruled the World"

Project Initiated by
Judy Chicago

Artists

Cai Jin
[Chen Mingming](#)
[Chen Yu](#)
[Fang He](#)
[Feng Jiali](#)
[FU LI YA](#)
[Guo Fenyi](#)
[He Chengyao](#)
[Huang Ru](#)
[Huang Yin](#)
[Lei Yan](#)
Li Hong
Li Rui
[Li Yuying](#)
[Ma Yanling](#)
[Mu Zi](#)
[Pan Xuan](#)
Qing Qing
[Qiu Yanli](#)
Su Yabi
[Sun Guojun](#)
[Tao Xiaoyi](#)
Wang Xingyi
Wu Weihe
[Xiao Xiaolan](#)
Zeng Hui
[Zhang Lun](#)
Zhang Qiongfeng
[Zhang Xin](#)
[Zhang Yingzi](#)
[Zhao Biqin](#)

International Artists

Luchezar Boyadjev
Nancy Burson
[Judy Chicago](#)
Ingo Gunther
Dmitri Gutov
Cati Laporte
[Vong Phaophanit](#)
Yao Ruizhong

Overseas Chinese Artists

Cai Guo Qiang
[Emily Cheng](#)
Shen Meng
Tang Song
Xiao Lu
Xu Bing
Zeng Kongjie
Zhang Huan
Zhao Gang

List of Participating Artists

L [Chen Shaoxiong](#)
O Chen Wenbo
N Chen Shaofeng
G Chen Xiaoyun
M Chu Yun
A [Dai Guangyu](#)
R Deng Aiguo
C Ding Bin
H Du Yan
F Feng Qianyu
O Fu Xinming
U He Chi
N [Hong Hao](#)
D [Hu Jieming](#)
A Hu Liu
T [Jiang Jianqiu](#)
I [Jiang Zhi](#)
O Kong Changan
N [Li Chuan](#)
Li Fang
Li Jincheng
Li Pinghu
Li Shurui
[Li Tianbin](#)
[Li Yong](#)
Liang Juhui
[Lin Tianmiao](#)
Liu Chengying
Liu Jin
[Liu Wei](#)
Lu Hao
Lu Jie
Ma Han
Ma Jie
[Ma Liuming](#)
Peng Yu
Qin Ga
Qiu Zhenzhong
Qiu Zhijie
Qu Guangci
Ren Qian
Shen Xiaomin
[Shi Qing](#)
Shi Xinning
Shu Yong
[Shi Yong](#)
[Song Dong](#)
[Song Yonghong](#)
[Sui Jianguo](#)
Sun Ping

Sun Yuan
Tang Shaolu
Wang Bo
Wang Chuyu
[Wang Gongxin](#)
Wang Jian
[Wang Jianwei](#)
Wang Jin
[Wang Jinsong](#)
[Wang Wei](#)
Wang Wenhai
[Wei Jun](#)
Sasha S. Welland
Wu Ershan
Wu Meichun
Wu Wenguang
Xiao Xiong
Xu Tan
Xu Zhen
[Yang Fudong](#)
Yang Jinsong
[Yang Shaobin](#)
Yang Shiping
[Yang Zhenzhong](#)
[Ye Yongqing](#)
[Yin Xiaofeng](#)
Yin Xiuzhen
Yu Congrong
[Yu Ji](#)
Yu Xiaofeng
Yue Minjun
Zeng Zaocai
[Zhan Wang](#)
[Zhang Guangtian](#)
[Zhang Peili](#)
Zeng Yinquan
Zhang Qiang
Zhang Xiaogang
Zhang Yu
Zhao Liang
[Zhang Hui](#)
Zhao Bandi
Zheng Guogu
Zhong Biao
Zhong Longfa
[Zhou Shaobo](#)
[Zhou Tiehai](#)
Zhou Xiaoguang
[Zhou Xiaochu](#)
Zhu Fadong
Zhu Qingsheng
Zhu Yan

(in alphabetical order)

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Fig. 27 Webpage 'Artists' on longmarchfoundation.org on 10 Aug 2002, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20020810023758/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/english/homepage.html>>. [Accessed through Wayback Machine, Internet Archive on 17 October 2020]. Courtesy of Long March Project and Internet Archive.

Section Three: Journey

As an intellectual and artistic experiment, utopia cannot re-establish itself. Utopia has only a past and not a future. Utopia is also impractical, so as soon as you create a utopia, every problem is neatly condensed.

— Wang Hui²⁸⁷

Wang Hui (1959–) is a widely respected Chinese intellectual who witnessed the development and realisation of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*. In 2003, seven months after the project returned from its journey along the Long March route, Lu sat down with a group of intellectuals and artists to reflect upon the process of the project, especially its halt half way. Wang raised the point that *Long March* was an intellectual and artist experiment which envisioned an utopia. Nonetheless, the process of establishing an utopia is so different from the way of imagining it, and the imagination is often based on the past — at least in the case of *Long March*, the Red Army's Long March as an utopia was in the past. Wang considered that there was an absence of utopia in the present day and the process of establishing an utopia brought many more practical problems rather than imagination.

How to realise 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition'? This was the question that Lu Jie faced as he was developing 'A Detailed Curatorial Plan' in New York — in some sense, the conceptual plan became the blueprint of the utopia. Apart from conducting research and polishing the proposal, in order to convert the proposal into a project in reality, Lu needed substantial resources and support. Shuttling between the US and China, in New York, he actively reached out to museum curators, artists and potential sponsors; in China, he devoted himself to site-scouting and re-familiarising himself with the fast-changing art scene. However, an obstacle lay in the location of the project: *Long March* would primarily take place in the hinterland of China. There was hardly any contemporary art space there, let alone its geographical distance from a Western museum or biennale. This innate feature of the project — staging exhibitions and events along the historical route of the Long March, made it geographically and psychologically distant from the existing art system. Lu was not

²⁸⁷ '5.11 Xianchang Bangonghui Jilu' [Documentation of 5.11 On-Site Office Meeting], *Long March Foundation*, 2003
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20030710231837/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/huayu/5.11.htm>> [accessed 29 August 2021].

an outsider to the art world, but the project he initiated, in terms of its location and form, was not a natural outcome of the local Chinese art ecology or a project tailored for Western museums and biennials. The proposal was imaginative, but also really difficult and there was no precedents for reference.

This section looks at the process in which Lu invited collaborators, supporters and volunteers in China and abroad and how the project unfolded from Beijing to the sites along the Long March route with participation. Lu's repeated failure to persuade Western institutions to give their support revealed the innate logic and risk control of Western art institutions when collaborating with external art projects. Moreover, the project demonstrated how new potentials were explored in the absence of art infrastructure. In 2000, Lu set up the Long March Art Foundation in New York. At the end of 2001, he invited Qiu Zhijie to join *Long March* as the executive curator and the preparation accelerated. With little external support, Lu utilised his personal savings to fund the project and established the 25000 Li Cultural Transmission Center in Beijing. On 28 June 2002, the curators and artists finally embarked on the journey of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*.

Chapter 7 Embark

The Price of An Experiment

During my interviews with Lu, he once mentioned that *Long March* definitely could not be welcomed by the mainstream art world. ‘Can you imagine *Long March* entering Documenta?’, Lu asked. I was not quite clear about the inter-connection between the two until later I found out that *Long March* was once nearly selected into the 2002 Documenta. Lu Jie presented the project’s proposal to Okwui Enwezor, who curated the 2002 Documenta XI, in 2000. This marked Lu’s early attempts to seek support from the international art system.

In April 2000, a group of eight international curators led by Enwezor arrived in Hangzhou, China.²⁸⁸ This trip was facilitated by Zheng Shengtian and sponsored by the Annie Wong Art Foundation.²⁸⁹ In 2000, Enwezor was preparing to curate Documenta. As the first non-white and non-European curator in the history of Documenta, he was initially invited to visit China by Ken Lum. Lum, a conceptual artist and writer living in Canada, came to China for a month of teaching in the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou. There he invited Enwezor to visit China and give a speech to the students in CAA.²⁹⁰ After receiving the invitation, Enwezor considered it a good chance to meet more local artists. As the news spread, apart from Documenta’s co-curator Sarat Maharaj and Susanne Ghez, high-profile curators working for Western foundations and museums were also attracted and a group of international curators was formed. 2000 was a particular historical moment, as China was confidently embracing globalisation more than ever. Finally, the international curators decided to spend ten days in mainland China and Taiwan, travelling from Hangzhou to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hong Kong and eventually Taipei.²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Philip Tinari, ‘Ten-Day Tour’.

²⁸⁹ Annie Wong (Leung Kit Wah) was a Hong Kong-based philanthropist and art sponsor. Since 1995, she also ran the commercial gallery Art Beatus (*jing yi xuan*, in Vancouver and Hong Kong) and invited Zheng to be the gallery manager in Vancouver and the city quickly became an important transit point of Chinese artists exhibiting in North America. With Zheng’s suggestion, Wong chose to set up a non-profit foundation to separate sponsorship from art business.²⁸⁹ As almost the only foundation dedicated to promoting Chinese contemporary art internationally, within only several years, Annie Wong Art Foundation supported some important artists’ works and exhibitions, including the tour of exhibition ‘Cities on the Move’ (1997–1999) curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru, and Cai Guoqiang’s *Venice’s Rent Collection Courtyard* on Venice Biennale in 1999. As the manager of the foundation, Zheng also became a widely connected and respected mediator of contemporary Chinese art. Zheng Shengtian, ‘Ouyu Rensheng — Ba Ziji Saomiao Yibian’ [A Life of Coincidences: Scan Myself], *SHENG PROJECT*, 2014 <<http://shengproject.com/texts/art-browsing/id.html>> [accessed 12 May 2021].

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ The visit to Taipei was sponsored by a Taiwanese foundation Fubon Charity.

The trip was not like a typical curator's trip with booked visits to artists' studios in advance. Though most discussions were intended to be close-door, the trip was intense and fast with many unexpected encounters. Zheng Shengtian acted as an agent for the curators to arrange meetings and events. According to Lum, 'Chinese artists from all over China caught wind of the tour (and the itinerary). Literally hundreds took trains to the next stop on the tour to try to get a meeting with the curators, most unsuccessfully.'²⁹² While in Beijing, artist Jiao Yingqi (1958–) rented an auditorium located in a government building which hosted offices for cadres. Well-known artists and critics, including Li Xianting and Wu Hung (who was conducting field research in Beijing) were invited and they gathered for screenings of video works, presentations by artists and discussions. In Zheng's words, it was almost like a two-day 'audition'. Lu Jie also attended the event and gave an extended introduction of 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition'. Lu was one of the few who directly presented in English and he demonstrated much of the theories he learnt in Goldsmiths, in contrast with the reticence of most Chinese artists.²⁹³

Long March did not appear in Kassel in 2002, but Lu hinted that there was serious consideration of that possibility. Lu and Enwezor's encounter in Beijing in 2000 was especially revealing about China as the place of attention for the international art system. Having lived outside China from 1996, Lu could not count as a member of the local Chinese art community. Like the international visitors, he spoke fluent English and was familiar with cutting-edge critical theories. However, he did not meet Enwezor in London or New York, but in China. To grasp this opportunity to meet Enwezor and those high-profile international curators, Lu went back to Beijing especially. Was Lu considering borrowing the resources of Western art institutions to stage *Long March* in China? Or was he considering actually taking a ride to Kassel? This was not so clear and possibly he was open to both possibilities.

Lu and his wife Shen Meng also registered a private and non-profit foundation in New York in 2000.²⁹⁴ Through this foundation, Lu tried to build connections with more institutes. Lu also invited Zheng to be a trustee on the board. The mission statement of the Long March Foundation reflected that Lu and Zheng shared a similar aspiration: to enhance the international profile of contemporary Chinese art. There is not much publicly accessible

²⁹² Ken Lum's email reply to me (26 February 2021).

²⁹³ Philip Tinari, 'Ten-Day Tour'.

²⁹⁴ Private foundations in the US were qualified for tax exemption; with wealth accumulated from business during the 1990s, the couple were able to invest funds into the foundation.

information about the Long March Foundation, but Zheng shared some emails from 2000 to 2001 he received from Lu concerning the registration of the foundation. In 2000, Lu wrote an introduction in Chinese, stating the foundation would aim at ‘promoting contemporary Chinese visual art’. ‘Chinese’ here referred to ethnicity instead of nationality, which included all overseas Chinese diaspora and descendants. The foundation was also intended to facilitate cultural exchanges between the US and China or among different Asian communities in America and to help artists using ‘new media’ such as performance and video art.²⁹⁵ By June 2001, the Long March Foundation was legally established. Zheng agreed to join the board as one of the five trustees. They planned to work on several projects together, including (a). organising a short seminar course on curating in China; (b). starting an English journal on Chinese contemporary art (which later became *Yishu: Journal on Contemporary Chinese Art*); (c). raising funds for the next Shanghai Biennale.

Setting up the Long March Foundation brought Lu a new identity, the founder and head of the Long March Foundation. It also marked his return to the art scene of contemporary Chinese art. This time, he was no longer a gallerist. Instead, he had distinct propositions: to open up the scene of contemporary Chinese art, especially through introducing curating to mainland China. In April 2001, Lu drafted a file ‘Plan of Seminars for Curators’ (*cezhanren jiangxiban jihua*) which aimed to set up a diploma programme in his alma mater the CAA for Chinese-speaking students from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and other countries in East Asia, with overseas Chinese and international curators as tutors. As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, the curriculum was very much based on the ‘Creative Curating’ Programme in Goldsmiths; but Lu added the emphasis on promoting translocal and international exchanges.²⁹⁶ Lu thought that, ‘Mainland China [...] as a centre in this area, was going through a complicated and empowered period of transition especially in its art ecology.’²⁹⁷

In his opinion, such an ‘international and translocal’ seminar on curating would be timely. It would enable overseas curators to test their articulations on contemporary Chinese art in its original context, while at the same time help local students ‘eradicate their parochialism out of general nativism’, ‘learn how local art and visual culture are integrated

²⁹⁵ During the application process, the Internal Revenue Service in the US unexpectedly chose to grant the Long March Foundation the identity of a ‘public non-profit organisation’, which was allowed to apply for governmental subsidies and raise funds publicly. Lu was excited, but a requirement for a public organisation was that a certain percentage of their funding should come from the public.

²⁹⁶ Lu Jie’s Email to Zheng Shengtian (24 April 2001), Zheng Shengtian Archive.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

into the international map' and therefore more actively build the local art system.²⁹⁸ The curriculum included the analysis of the art ecology and the identity of the curator, explaining the integration of 'artist/critic/curator' and the difference between institutional curators and independent curator. What Lu tried to offer to the Chinese art world was a critical and theoretical framework about curating, which was still absent in China. His expectation for the programme also illuminated his diagnosis of the art circle in China: bound by parochialism and nativism. Through Zheng Shengtian, the proposal was passed to the CAA. Lu assured Zheng that the Long March Foundation would sponsor some of the cost. If the proposal was realised, it would be the first curatorial course in China. The administrators of CAA welcomed the proposal but hinted that there might not be enough students interested in the course to balance the cost.²⁹⁹ Unfortunately, this proposal was not realised.

These efforts to set up the curatorial course demonstrated that Lu was not only seeking support for *Long March*, but also tried to establish an awareness and knowledge of curating and the international art ecology in China. To some extent, the Long March Foundation was not only for *Long March*, but for Lu to find more collaborators. These relations might not be directly related to the curatorial project *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, but they would also contribute back to it in the long round and in different ways. Lu's ambition for *Long March* had already grown to such a scale: a reconstruction of the ecology of contemporary Chinese art. There would be not only a series of events along the Long March route in China but also an international tour of museum exhibitions.³⁰⁰ Wang Hui also noted that, when Lu Jie was discussing the project with him, Lu suggested *Long March* might become a recurring project in the future, like a biennale.³⁰¹ For such a large global relay, the foundation would need to collaborate with other institutions to co-organise exhibitions. Lu made tremendous efforts to find institutional collaborators. These institutions were generally in the West, because there was barely any governmental funding, local private foundations or institutions on contemporary art in China. According to Lu, he got in touch

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Letter from CAA to Zheng Shengtian (28 June 2001), Zheng Shengtian Archive.

³⁰⁰ Long March Project, "Changzheng: Yi Ge Xing Zhou Zhong de Shijue Zhanshi" Xilie Yishu Huodong Jiben Jiagou' [The Basic Structure of the Series of Art Events in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*], *Meishu Tongmeng* [Arts.tom.com], 2002
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20021020103634/http://arts.tom.com/Archive/2002/4/30-56516.html>> [accessed 1 December 2020].

³⁰¹ "Changzheng — Yige Xingzou Zhong de Shijue Zhanshi" Xianchang Pipan Hui' ['Long March: A Walking Visual Display' On-Site Critique], 2003.

with over fifty Western institutions.³⁰² In March 2001, Zheng Shengtian wrote a recommendation letter to persuade an American fund to sponsor Lu Jie's *Long March*. Zheng spoke highly of the project:

The spirit of Jie Lu's Long March is to erase, or at least blur, the class and cultural borderlines that have been drawn through innovative curating. The idea of bringing and sharing contemporary art and ideas to the people who live along the historic Long March road is a remarkable endeavor. His methodology is unique in the sense that the Long March Project will foster the idea of reciprocity between west and east. [...]

We are all aware of the discrepancies, gaps and paradoxes that emerge when one is confronted with the issue of audience's accessibility. Too often, and regrettably so, art is subjected to a process of distancing itself from its origin, and instead of reaching and serving the very people that it addresses, it becomes commodified and reserved to the viewing of a minority. And, very often the artwork is de-contextualized as it is installed in a white cube. This project's aim is to recontextualise the artwork.³⁰³

Apart from the 'innovative curating' of taking the Long March route as the project's framework, as Zheng pointed out, Lu's project would aim to blur geographical, social and cultural borderlines. In Lu's project, the trajectory of the migration of theories, artworks and books between the West and the East would be mapped and projected onto the Long March route, including works of contemporary Chinese art which were usually exhibited overseas. In Lu's expectation, such a project should appeal for potential sponsors who would value cultural exchanges. However, Lu won little substantial support. Only a few museums showed interest, and offered to exhibit the project in their spaces after the project's realisation in China. As for funding for the project's realisation along the Long March route, Lu used 'not a single grain' to describe the initially much expected harvest.³⁰⁴ Lu's optimism might have been based on the trend of exhibitions on Chinese art in the West, but soon he was confronted by the cold reality that not many institutions would invest in a project which grew out of a conceptual proposal and would stage in China. In 2002, when explaining why nearly the entire budget, which would mount to over 1,300,000 RMB (about 145,000 USD), needed to come from his own savings to artists, Lu explained that:

³⁰² Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.

³⁰³ Quoted from Zheng Shengtian, 'Letter to Ernest. R. May (The John Anson Kittredge Fund)', 20 March 2001. Zhengs Shengtian Archive.

³⁰⁴ Shu Kewen, 'Yishu Bupa Yuanzheng Nan' [Art Is Not Afraid of Marching Far], *Sanlian Shenghuo Zhoukan*, 10 October 2002, pp. 58–60.

Last year, I wanted to find a so-called conscientious or idealistic overseas institution to invest and do the project, but found it completely impossible. Institutions with funding do not want to give you the opportunity to speak for China. Even if they academically agree with the project, they may not definitely do it; or at least, they acknowledge its value but feel it is not their business. Moreover, many organisations are still stuck in Cold War thinking or an exotic imagination of China. They will not give you an impartial platform for speech and presentation.³⁰⁵

The bleak outcome in fundraising made it obvious that Lu's plan for 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition' was not for most institutions. If we evaluate the project from the perspective of a major museum in the West, the result might be more understandable. This project was intellectually enlightening, but its realisation would be full of uncertainties: its moving mode meant that the project would be exposed to various unexpected situations; its participants and audience could not be easily identified; the duration was not clear and would very likely be extended; the project was proposed by an independent curator in his early career. In conclusion, there would be many risks in realising the project and the outcome was unpredictable. Besides, for institutions in the West, which took responsibility for their expenditure and reputation, the project, though involving transcultural exchanges, would still mainly happen in China's hinterland, which were difficult for overseas museums to sponsor projects outside their homelands. An institution's work is usually calculated by visible and quantified data: the number of exhibitions and events, the number of audience and the number of new works entering the collection... In this mechanism, plans, schedules, distribution of labours, contracts and spaces (named as 'galleries') are controlled to reduce risks — such nature is by essence contradictory to the conceptual and intellectual characteristics of the curatorial proposal of *Long March*.

In the end, Lu realised that he had to pay for the project himself, for the experimental way of the project. In 2002, Lu said that,

The current mechanism of the biennale, the mechanism of art museums, and the creation of Western contemporary art were exhausted. But there were some very exciting things happening in China, which were closely related to China's history, the appearance of modernity in China, and the path of China. So they were very excited. But the board of directors of all art museums

³⁰⁵ '5.11 Xianchang Bangonghui Jilu' [Documentation of 5.11 On-Site Office Meeting], *Long March Foundation*, 2003
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20030710231837/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/huayu/5.11.htm>> [accessed 28 August 2021].

The average exchange rate between USD and CNY in 2002 was that one dollar could buy 8.2770 Yuan.

refused to pay for the project's part in China because they did not know how the project would turn out to be. Some people say that exhibitions like *Long March* should be easily sponsored by foreign foundations. Well, do you expect Rockefeller or Ford Foundation to pay for *Long March*? So I had to use my own money to do this. When the part in China is ready, they will only use conventional methods when exhibiting in art museums and only have relationships with artists, and my investment is just to promote the implementation of the Chinese part and to materialise the works to be exhibited, for artists and museums. It's almost like I am investing in artists and museums.³⁰⁶

1,300,000 RMB was a large amount of money for an individual at the time. Lu was also hesitant for some time. It was only after he invited Qiu Zhijie, the later executive curator of the project, on board into the project in late 2001, that Lu was encouraged by Qiu to act and start the project immediately because, according to Qiu, contemporary Chinese art needed the project and the situation would not wait for anyone.

'An Era of Post-Exhibition' in China

Qiu Zhijie was an active and independent artist and curator in China during the 1990s. He was born in 1969 and like Lu, he was also from Fujian Province. He too was admitted to Zafa in Hangzhou in 1988 (four years after Lu) and majored in printmaking.³⁰⁷ Making conceptual art with calligraphy, Qiu made his name very young. His graduation work *Homage to Vita Nuova* was a large installation made of 26 glass panels and images, with words silk-screened and hand printed on the panels. When walking through, the audience would be dizzied by the interwoven reflections of various images on the glass. Fascinated with 'chance, time and dissonance', Qiu brought 'accidental happening' and the omnipresent pastiche of images in the fast-changing urban life in China into the work.³⁰⁸ This work was selected into the influential global tour of 'China's New Art, Post-1989' in 1993 and Qiu was the youngest artist in the exhibition.

In 1994, Qiu moved to Beijing and quickly became a figure bridging art communities in different places, especially between Beijing and Hangzhou. He co-curated a series of exhibitions with his partner Wu Meichun (1969–) at the time, playing a key role in shaping the scene of experimental art in China. In 1996, they curated 'Image and Phenomena: '96

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts was renamed as China Academy of Fine Arts in 1993. Also according to Qiu, he was allocated to the same bed in the dormitory that Lu Jie had when he was at the university.

³⁰⁸ Valerie C. Doran and Johnson Tsong-zung Chang, *China's New Art, Post 1989* (Hanart TZ Gallery, 1993), p. 62.

Video Art Exhibition' in Hangzhou.³⁰⁹ Featuring fifteen artists, it was considered to be 'the first significant engagement with video art in China'.³¹⁰ In 1999, they staged 'Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion' in Beijing. In the exhibition essay, Qiu demonstrated clear propositions in art. He coined the term *houganxing* while its English translation 'Post-Sense Sensibility' was suggested by Johnson Chang. As part of a younger generation of contemporary Chinese artist who did not participate in the '85 New Art Wave moment, Qiu and his peers put forward very different propositions, one of which was the abnegation of grand concepts and discourses in art. As Qiu explained, 'as an art movement, Post-Sense Sensibility, first of all, refutes conceptual art.'³¹¹ By 'conceptual art', Qiu referred to artworks which were based on clear political stance, identity (gender or place) or social facts.³¹² His critique directly targeted at some other Chinese artists and their works during the 1980s and the early 1990s like Wang Guangyi's series of painting *Great Criticism*, which replaced the slogan in typical printmaking images of socialist workers with names and logos of commercial brands like Coca Cola, Marlboro and the World Trade Organisation.

As a curator, Qiu not only actively engaged in serious debates in art with discursive essays, but he was also mediated among different participants when there was nearly no institutional support for contemporary art in China. Most of the exhibitions Qiu co-curated were self-organised in various alternative spaces. 'Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion' took place in a rented basement in a residential building in Beijing and the cost of rent and catalogues was shared by participating artists. The exhibition 'Home?', co-curated by him and Wu Meichun in 2000, was held in a furniture mall (about 20,000 square metres) in Shanghai. Qiu's access to these spaces was also a result of his wide connections: he made friends in various circles and could navigate through complicated situations. For example, in the exhibition 'Home?', Lu was informed through friends that the boss of a furniture mall was interested in staging an exhibition; Qiu then persuaded officers of an art bureau to introduce him as an 'institutional curator'. As a result, the furniture company funded the three-month exhibition.³¹³

³⁰⁹ 'Image and Phenomena: '96 Video Art Exhibition' (xianxiang yingxiang: jiu liu lu xiang yishu zhan) was curated by Qiu Zhijie and Wu Meichun in Zhejiang Academy of Art, Hangzhou in 1996.

³¹⁰ Katherine Grube, 'Image and Phenomena: The Development of Video Art in China, 1988 to 1998', *Asia Art Archive* <<https://aaa.org.hk/en/resources/papers-presentations/image-and-phenomena-the-development-of-video-art-in-china-1988-to-1998/page/1>>.

³¹¹ Qiu Zhijie and Wu Meichun, *Hou gan xing : Yi xing yu wang xiang* [Post-sense sensibility : alien bodies & delusion] (Beijing: Shaoyaoju, 1999), 1-4.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Qiu Zhijie, "'Jia?' Zhanlan Cehua Shimo' [The Process of Curating "Home?" Exhibition], in Guanyu Zhanlan de Zhanlan: 90 niandai de Dangdai Yishu Zhanshi [An Exhibition about Exhibitions: Displaying

Qiu's experience showed that making exhibitions in China, before the emergence of institutions, had to be a creative process. As there was no systematic support or stable sponsorship, state censorship posed a threat throughout. Curators like Qiu needed to make deals with intellectuals, officers and businessmen to make exhibitions happen. Qiu was also aware of the protocols of exhibition-making in Western institutions. After 1993, his works were often exhibited overseas and he also travelled to Europe and the US.³¹⁴ But Qiu never dreamt of depending on museums in China — he had always realised exhibitions in China as part of an experimental approach. Moreover, Qiu was alert to the mainstream exhibition format, which was demonstrated in his co-ordinating an event instead of a white-cube exhibition, 'Post-Sense Sensibility: Spree' (2001).

'Spree' was initially aimed to take place in Shanghai along the third Shanghai Biennale in 2000. As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, this iteration of the Shanghai Biennale was a watershed in the development of contemporary art in China because it marked the government's official acknowledgement of such kinds of art. Apart from the international curators, the 67 artists in this biennale included international names like Lee Bul, On Kawara and Anish Kapoor. Chinese artists selected into the biennale included those who specialised in ink wash paintings and some in contemporary art like Huang Yong Ping. However, many contemporary Chinese artists were not selected; some of them self-organised exhibitions in Shanghai to take advantage of the upsurging number of visitors. The most famous one was 'Fuck Off', curated by Ai Weiwei (1957–) and Feng Boyi (1960–). It included some extremely provocative and experimental works. The Chinese title of 'Fuck Off' was translated as an 'Uncooperative Approach' and the exhibition reinforced the stance of 'avant-garde' and 'raised a middle finger precisely at the attitude of those members of the local artist community who appeared eager to embrace and celebrate these new systems of legitimation and authority'.³¹⁵ Feng Boyi claimed the exhibition to be 'a rejection to the offer of amnesty and the stance of reformism' embodied by the third Shanghai Biennale.³¹⁶ Qiu, instead, pointed out that the difference between the underground and the mainstream was not obvious as both had been confined by the form of exhibitions.

Experimental Art in the 1990s] (Beijing: OCAT Institute, 2016), pp. 243–48.

³¹⁴ According to curator Fei Dawei, it was also after 1993 that it became easier for Chinese citizens to apply for a passport. Interview with Fei Dawei, December 2019.

³¹⁵ Liu Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu, "Fuck Off": Searching for the Way in Which Art Lies as "Wildlife", in *Uncooperative Contemporaries: Art Exhibitions in Shanghai in 2000* (London: Afterall, 2020), pp. 98–115.

³¹⁶ The latter words were by Feng Boyi, cited from Feng Boyi and Biljana Ciric, 'Interview with Feng Boyi', in *A History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979-2006* (Manchester: Centre for Contemporary Chinese Art), pp. 590–93.

[W]hile some peripheral shows were trying to present art that st[ood] outside of the establishment and proclaimed to be underground, progressive and distinguishable from the conventional and main-stream art represented in Shanghai Museum, in our opinion, the exhibition form that they had adopted were still confined to the established system, with not much difference between the two.³¹⁷

Qiu put forward that the domination and proliferation of modern exhibitions (objects in white cubes) in the art world meant that each artwork had to quickly grasp the audience's attention, otherwise it would ultimately be neglected. Artists then competed in either magnifying their works' sensational effects or keeping their work simple and identifiable through repetition. He traced the genealogy of the format of exhibition in the West and considered it to be intricately rooted in capitalism and colonialism. The overseas exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art, in his opinion, also reflected 'neo-colonialist' ideals.



Fig. 28 Qiu Zhijie, *All the Meat Here is Clean*, 2001. Performance view, 'Post-Sense Sensibility: Spree', Beijing Film Studio, 2001.

According to Qiu, 'Spree' was an attempt to find an alternative mode for presenting and curating exhibitions. He and his peer artists abandoned having a central figure to mediate

³¹⁷ Qiu Zhijie, 'The Prediction in the Age of Post-Exhibition', in *Post-Sense Sensibility: Spree* (Beijing: self-published, 2001).

among different artists and each artist would interfere with others' works to create divergences and obstacles. 'Spree' lasted for several hours in the Photography Studio in Beijing Film Academy. Later, the audience was welcomed with chaotic and stimulating scenes which incorporated elements from nightclubs, freak shows and online dating. Qiu admitted that, already influenced deeply by exhibition culture, that they as artists could not escape from exhibitions. Instead, they sought to 'lose control' and to let the scene grow by itself. Despite the shortage of alternatives to exhibitions, Qiu predicted, 'an era of post-exhibition' would arrive.³¹⁸

Qiu's clear consciousness of the problems inherent in the exhibition culture and his attempt to find alternatives to white-cube exhibitions suggested that he was already inclined towards the thinking of a more creative way of curating beyond the exhibition form. Qiu moved one step further among his peers, in that he did not stay merely in finding alternatives for funding and spaces. In 'Spree', he tried to come up with a different format to display and experiment a non-curator-centred method. This was the shared ground for his collaboration with Lu Jie.

Qiu came across the plan of *Long March* in late 2001.³¹⁹ Lu Jie invited Qiu to his home in New Jersey, and over a feast of crabs, Qiu listened to Lu's plan of *Long March* for the first time. Judging from the outcome of Lu's fundraising, we can infer that Lu was possibly frustrated, doubting the feasibility of putting this plan into reality.³²⁰ Lu mentioned Huang Yong Ping's comment, 'Writing a book is good enough... It's not necessary to really carry it out.' When Qiu discovered Lu's doubts surrounding the feasibility of the project, Qiu opposed it completely. The quotation below came from Qiu's memory of that conversation.

I said, 'Lu Jie, according to my knowledge of you, you will just keep talking like this. But there won't be a necessity to do this after three years, unless you do it today.' Lu said, 'I have been away for some years and am not familiar with people. I have visited some places and thought about some possibilities, but it's very difficult for me to put artists' works into the proposal. Could you help me?' I then said, 'Yes, I can help you.' He then asked me what I would like to get from the project. I said, 'I don't need anything from it. I do it

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ He was visiting New York for the exhibition 'Translated Acts – Performance and Body Art from East Asia' in Queens Museum as the participating artist not long after 9/11, when the smell of fire and dust was still lingering in the air.

³²⁰ The information of Lu and Qiu's encounter came from my interview with Qiu Zhijie in 2018. The exhibition 'Translated Acts - Performance and Body Art from East Asia' in Queens Museum was curated by Korean curator Yu Yeon Kim in Queens Museum. It was first exhibited in Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin from March 8th to May 6th 2001 and then in Queens Museum, New York, from 23 October, 2001 to 1 February, 2002.

because Chinese art needs it! Chinese art needs it at this moment!’³²¹

Going through the art world during the 1990s, as an artist based in China and showing internationally, Qiu was conscious of the identity politics in overseas exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art and how this imposed influence on Chinese artists’ artworks. Qiu could see value in this project.

The two curators were of similar age, and born in the same province; both were familiar with the practice of calligraphy, their childhoods spent during the Cultural Revolution.³²² They both went to ZAFPA and embraced contemporary art. The similar trajectory meant that they shared similar concerns, especially those with relation to the West, Socialist history and the art world in China.³²³ Both Lu and Qiu remembered their initial excitement when they had decided to work together on *Long March*. In America, New Jersey, the two took out caps belonging to the Russian Red Army and put them on their heads, readying themselves for another Long March.

From An ‘Exhibition’ to A ‘Visual Display’

Qiu officially became the ‘executive curator’ of *Long March*. Instead of seeking support from major art institutions, he encouraged Lu to conduct the project with their own resources. As it turned out later, Lu decided to cover the project’s main costs with his own funding. At the end of 2001, Lu went back to China and the project accelerated. Artist Wang Yuyang (1979–), who was planning to join the last site of Yan’an in the project, said when Lu Jie came back to Beijing from New York, a bunch of friends, mainly those of ‘Post-Sense Sensibility’, often had dinner together and drank till late at night. Wang recalled,

That was the happiest time for me because we were so utopian and idealistic. No one was making art for money. Lu Jie joined us and we were very touched that there was someone who would like to devote so much money to make

³²¹ Interview with Qiu Zhijie, October 2018.

³²² Wu Hung, ‘Qiu Zhijie’ in *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Rev. ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press : David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, 2005), p. 184.

³²³ Qiu previously also co-initiated a proposal about taking a performative journey in Europe as a parody of the sixteenth century Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West*.³²³ This proposal was similar to Lu’s proposal *Long March* that both would take a classic narrative of a journey as the project’s conceptual framework. In so doing, the journey reflected contemporary transcultural issues onto notions of travelling. The story of *Journey to the West* was based on monk Xuanzang’s pilgrimage to ancient India to introduce original Buddhist sutras to China. Qiu’s proposal took inspiration from this story, but replaced India with Europe — for precisely, the present-day West, the site where China tried to import modernisation. Like *Long March*, Qiu’s proposal also engaged with the cultural exchange between China and the West. To some extent, what Qiu’s unrealised plan of ‘New Journey to the West’ tried to discuss and provoke was also shared by *Long March*.

this project happen.³²⁴

Once Lu arrived in Beijing, preparation was accelerated. In January and February 2002, Lu and Qiu travelled to several places, including Xi'an, in northwestern China and the first two sites of Ruijin and Jinggang Mountain, near their hometown Fujian to find more local artists. Qiu had already widely connected with artists in different places. However, both he and Lu took this chance to network with more artists outside of Beijing and Shanghai. Lu also flew back to the US and met some artists there, including inviting Judy Chicago to initiate a project in *Long March*. In March, Lu rented an apartment in Beijing and set up an office for the project; at the same time, Qiu travelled to Brazil to attend the 25th São Paulo Art Biennial and started introducing *Long March* there.³²⁵ In April, the office moved to a cheaper basement in the same residential block. Lu and Qiu kept meeting artists, intellectuals and potential sponsors, and set up an exclusive media partnership with the website arts.tom.com.

Although arts.tom.com (*meishu tongmeng*) was only established in about 2001, it had already become a popular platform for publishing news and opinions about art. At the end of April, Lu posted an article on this website to publicly introduce *Long March* for the first time, which had grown even more ambitious than Lu's original plan.³²⁶ Lu and Qiu stated that the project would start from Ruijin in June and end in Yan'an in October; artworks and texts formed on the road would tour to six museums in and out of China. For the first time, they clearly stated that the project would make exhibitions of not only contemporary artworks, but also local artists and folk artists. Two symposia would also be held, one on 'contemporary visual culture' and the other one on curating. The expected outcome also included a twenty-episode documentary which would be broadcast on television and four publications, including two collections of essays from the symposia, *The Power of Display* and *The Road of Modernisation and China*. In 'Curators' Words', published for the first

³²⁴ Interview with Wang Yuyang, October 2019.

³²⁵ 'Changzheng Kongjian Shengji Shi: Cong 1.0 Dao 8.0 de Changzhenglu' [The Upgrading History of Long March Space: The Long March from 1.0 to 8.0], *Artron.Net* <<https://news.artron.net/20180320/n991689.html>> [accessed 8 July 2021]. Interview with Qiu Zhijie, October 2018.

³²⁶ "Jiaru Nvren Tongzhi Shijie" Yishu Fangan Zhengji Hezuozhe' ['What If Women Ruled the World' Art Proposal Call for Collaborators], *Meishu Tongmeng*, 2002 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20020601182933/http://arts.tom.com/Archive/2002/4/28-43247.html>> [accessed 1 March 2021]. Long March Project, "Changzheng: Yige Xingzouzhong de Shijue Zhanshi" Xilie Yishu Huodong Jiben Jiagou' [The Basic Structure of the Series of Art Events in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*], *Meishu Tongmeng [Arts.Com.Cn]*, 2002 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20021020103634/http://arts.tom.com/Archive/2002/4/30-56516.html>> [accessed 1 December 2020].

time, they stated their concern in the opening sentence:

As curators, our attention to contemporary art in China focuses on the relationship between artistic creation and interactive reception by its viewers inherent in the current exhibition culture. A major characteristic of art in contemporary China is that art has left the audience, has moved from the broad masses of the people toward the elite.³²⁷

The two curators further diagnosed in the article,

The biggest problem facing contemporary Chinese art is that its audience is limited to overseas organisations and markets, and to a handful of major cities like Beijing and Shanghai. The vast majority of Chinese have no opportunity for direct contact with contemporary art.³²⁸

To bring art back to its audience, *Long March* would cancel the separation of art's production from its display and interpretation by making the three activities happen on the same site. In other words, we could understand this proposition as bringing artists' studios and galleries to the space of ordinary people's everyday life. Artworks like land art in the natural environment, actions in social situations and digital works made from a laptop have been addressed as 'post-studio' practices, in comparison to artworks born in domestic studios.³²⁹ But the curatorial idea in *Long March* did not arise from the concern over artists' studios, but more from the end of the audience. The curators' reflection started from the geography of the contemporary art system, which, in turn, led to the forms and methods of exhibitions.

The [*Long March*] is an exhibition about exhibitions. It is not an exhibition in the traditional sense, with artworks hanging in a fixed space, both literally and metaphorically. It expands the notion of human exhibition culture through the juxtaposition of temporality and permanence.³³⁰

The curators' declaration echoed their recent conversation with art historian Fan Di'an (1955–). Lu recalled that Fan advised Lu to change the subtitle of the project, which was then still 'A Walking Exhibition'. Fan thought that with the project's research-based nature, the project would not look like an exhibition. Inspired by Fan's suggestion, on the printed curatorial proposal, Lu elided '*zhanlan*' (exhibition) in the Chinese title and wrote down

³²⁷ The English translation of this quotation is cited from Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, 'Curators Words', in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (New York: Long March Foundation, 2003), pp. 5–12.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ *The Studio*, ed. by Jens Hoffmann, Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art (Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press, 2012).

³³⁰ Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, 'Curators Words'

‘zhanshi’ (display).³³¹ Lu later also altered the English title into ‘visual display’. In ‘Curators’ Words’, this consciousness about the format of exhibition extended to the mainstream exhibition culture. The two curators warned about some Chinese cities ‘buying wholeheartedly into a system based on major museums and biennial exhibitions’, with an allusion to Shanghai and the Shanghai Biennale in 2000.³³² Lu and Qiu shared their observation that, ‘Nowadays, a city looking to become a global metropolis has a de facto obligation to develop an apparatus for contemporary art.’³³³ With concerns over this direct import of the Western contemporary art system, accordingly, they called for a re-examination of the ‘fixed interpretation of the “local context”’.³³⁴ They stated that one of the main aims of *Long March* was:

To experiment a vibrant and fluid mode for the creation and display of art and the writing of art histories and theories, rooted in the folk society and local ecologies. This is aimed to provide an alternative choice to the mainstream exhibition culture constituted by modern museums and galleries. Creating a new situation out of beneficial interactions, we hope to change the current reality that contemporary Chinese art is limited to a small circle and disconnected from daily lives and the demands of the public.³³⁵

Clearly, the curators’ turn to the ‘alternative’ was out of vigilance to the authoritative museum system. Such attitude was not rare, like the exhibition ‘Fuck Off’ which embodied an independent and underground disposition and declared to ‘not cooperate’. However, Lu and Qiu’s proposition in *Long March* differed from the rebellious attitude in ‘Fuck Off’. Scholar Sasha Su-ling Welland argued that ‘avant-garde art’ in China has a typical image: ‘[t]he politics of representation that played out in these exhibits [...] resulted in a new artistic political grammar. Avant-garde became coded as *liumang* (hooligan) and masculine.’³³⁶ Lu and Qiu did not take such a stance of hooligan. Rather, they performed like Communist leaders in the revolution, taking on the mode of the Communist propaganda. The curators openly declared that *Long March* would collaborate with local governments and official cultural institutions along the Long March route.³³⁷ Instead of

³³¹ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2020.

³³² Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, ‘Curators Words’.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ “Changzheng: Yige Xingzouzhong de Shijue Zhanshi” Xilie Yishu Huodong Jiben Jiagou’ [The Basic Structure of the Series of Art Events in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*].

³³⁶ Sasha Su-ling Welland, *Experimental Beijing: Gender and Globalisation in Chinese Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: duke university press, 2018), p. 16.

³³⁷ “Changzheng: Yige Xingzouzhong de Shijue Zhanshi” Xilie Yishu Huodong Jiben Jiagou’ [The Basic Structure of the Series of Art Events in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*].

directly criticising the authority (the West or the Chinese government), they raised questions towards the contemporary practitioners themselves and self-criticised the insularity of the so-called ‘avant-garde art’, which carried the connotations of antagonism towards authority and distance from the mainstream.

As scholar Wu Hung observed, during the 1990s, there was considerable progress in exhibiting contemporary art in public spaces. However, the distinction between ‘open’ exhibitions (in public and private galleries and social spaces) and ‘closed’ exhibitions (in private apartments, foreign embassies or personal studios) still remained as the most important defining factor for an exhibition in 2000.³³⁸ For example, in the cases of ‘Post-Sense Sensibility: Delusion and Alien Bodies’ and ‘Spree’, the audience was by invitation within the artist community, while ‘Home?’, aforementioned earlier, was open to the public. These ‘open’ exhibitions were often held out of white cubes and artists were intentionally exploring multiple ways to engage with the wider public. For example, ‘Art for Sale’ exhibition (1999) was held in a supermarket in Shanghai. Artist Zhao Bandi (1966–) also took his work *Zhao Bandi and Panda* (1999) as a public service announcement, which appeared on light boxes in Beijing’s underground stations. Zhao also wrote about his action for the mass media *Southern Weekend*.³³⁹ Similarly, through mass media, Lu and Qiu hoped to ‘bring art to the people, especially ordinary people living outside of the metropolis, and to practice art around them’.³⁴⁰

Such a transition came out of the project’s transnational trajectory. When Lu Jie wrote the proposal in Goldsmiths, his reference point was mainly institutional exhibitions and non-institutional curating in the West. Lu took the Long March route as a curatorial framework to organise his ideas about contemporary Chinese art, cultural exchanges between China and the West and the value of revolutionary history. Lu Jie described *Long March* as ‘a return to the main working method of art in China which we haven’t paid attention to for long — going to the countryside’ (*xiaxiang*).³⁴¹ ‘Going to the countryside’ usually referred to intellectual youths’ ‘going to the countryside’ during the Mao era, but it was generalised as a working method to distribute resources from cities to peripheral areas.

³³⁸ Wu Hung, “‘Experimental Exhibitions’ of the 1990s”, in *Reinterpretation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art, 1990-2000* (Guangdong Museum of Art, 2002), pp. 83–97. In the 1990s, the main audience for contemporary art in China were still artists and their friends and it was difficult for outsiders to access the information and sites of ‘closed’ exhibitions.

³³⁹ Zhao Bandi, ‘Wo He Xiongmao Zai Beijing Ditie Li’ [Me and Panda in Beijing Subway], 1999 <<http://eladies.sina.com.cn/movie/movie/1999-8-16/7340.shtml>> [accessed 1 September 2021].

³⁴⁰ “‘Changzheng: Yige Xingzouzhong de Shijue Zhanshi’ Xilie Yishu Huodong Jiben Jiagou’ [The Basic Structure of the Series of Art Events in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*].

³⁴¹ Lu Jie, ‘Weishenme Yao Changzheng?’ [Why Do We Long March?]

Professional workers in medicine, education, science and art often take trains and drive cars to different villages and set up temporary working stations. Lu Jie referred to this working mode and reframed *Long March* from a curatorial project to ‘sending art to the countryside’. ‘There has been a long time before such a big scale of “going to the countryside”’, Lu lamented, and said *Long March* would ‘bring art to the people’ via exhibitions, screenings, postcards and leaflets, openly inviting artists to join the journey.³⁴² This strategy was, on one hand, borne out of a consciousness to appropriate Communist propaganda methods, already demonstrated through the adoption of the historical Long March as a curatorial framework. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the motif of the original Long March also served as a handy historical reference to explain effectively what the curatorial project *Long March* was to various people, including those outside of the contemporary art world.

Mobilisation

With the public introduction of *Long March* on arts.tom.com in April, the project was promoted in an unprecedented way. Lu and Qiu publicised the project’s email address, the physical address of their office in Beijing, and even their personal mobile numbers on the website. This meant that anyone in China who had heard about the project could reach them directly. The news of *Long March* spread quickly. As previously said, Qiu was a nexus point in connecting artist communities in different places. He widely mobilised people around, inviting artists to propose artworks for the project. Internally, the two curators also worked on the practical plans and budgets of the project. A third curatorial proposal also appeared. A digital file which I gained access to during my archival research was titled ‘Curatorial Plan Curators Version’ (*cehua’an cezhanrenban*). This file was last updated in May 2002, but had been left unedited earlier when Lu and Qiu began working out the logistics of the project.³⁴³

Opening the Word file, the title appeared to be ‘Total Plan’ (*zongti fangan*). This may have been a reference to Richard Wagner’s concept of the ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ (of which the Chinese translation is *zongti yishu*).³⁴⁴ In contrast with ‘A Detailed Curatorial Plan’, this

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Lu reminded me that there were several versions of ‘Comprehensive Plan’ and that the budget I had accessed was not the final version. For different roles in this project, from volunteers, staff, artists to curator, there were different copies of the plan because confidential information like budget and contacts were not supposed to be exposed. Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.

³⁴⁴ In 2003, Qiu Zhijie started ‘Total Art Studio’ in CAA. The naming of ‘Total Plan’ in 2002 might be related to his thoughts on ‘Total Art’. But Qiu put forward that his idea for ‘Total Art Studio’ combined both

plan was much more practicable, , including information such as personnel, budgets and logistics. Each of the twenty sites was given a concise introduction, composed of five themes: 'Background', 'Revisit', 'Theme', 'Location' and 'Time'. For example, the theme for Site Ruijin was 'utopia' and the theme for Site Daozhong was 'pilgrimage'. This abstraction reduced the curatorial proposal from the previous 90 pages to 23 pages. While simplifying the curatorial elaboration, the curators greatly expanded the range for artworks. They noted that, 'ask artists to submit any artwork proposal related to "China", "history" or the current society, without any limit on the form.'³⁴⁵ The standard for 'good proposal' (of artworks) is: low cost, simple and easy to realise.³⁴⁶

Submitting artwork proposals for exhibitions was a phenomenon that appeared after the 1980s in China and became more apparent in the 1990s. It was tightly related to the emergence of themed exhibitions and the proliferation of concept-driven artworks. As artist Zhao Chuan explained, 'contemporary art since the '90s has relied on the acceptance of proposed projects to a large extent. Art had transformed from handiwork and labour to planning and originality in thought.'³⁴⁷ Making exhibitions no longer meant to just select existing artworks and transfer them from artists' studios to exhibition sites. Rather, it was common that artists conceived new works and presented the concept through proposals to exhibition organisers. Through this new methodology of working, many artists, turning toward conceptualism, also started learning the new way of 'writing proposals' (*xie fangan*). The proposal often acted as a supporting document even in self-organised exhibitions. For example, in 'Delusion and Alien Bodies', Qiu selected proposals from artists. Every participating artist shared the cost of renting the residential basement and printing catalogues. In the procedure of submitting proposals, artists were often in a position of being selected by curators; accepting and rejecting proposals, selection of the artists' proposals into the exhibition signified the curator's recognition. Collecting Chinese artists' rejected proposals from the 1980s to the 2000s in a book called *Rejected Collection* (2008), researcher and curator Biljana Ciric pointed out that proposals 'reveal the transformation of artists' working methods, as well as the relationship between current infrastructure and its

the literati culture in China and the Total Art in the West. Qiu Zhijie, 'Total Art Creation Based on Social Investigation Methods' [Jiyu Shehui Diaoचा Fangfa de Zongti Yishu Chuangzuo], *Yan'an Yishu Jiaoyu Zuotan Hui* [Yan'an Forum on Art Education] (Long March Project, 2006), pp. 209–18.

³⁴⁵ Lu and Qiu, 'Total Plan', 2002, p. 1.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Zhao Chuan, 'Facing Rejected Proposals', *Rejected Collection*, ed. by Biljana Ciric, (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2008), pp. 14–19.

establishing process'.³⁴⁸

Lu and Qiu also invited artists to submit proposals, but their invitation approaches varied from case to case, depending on their interrelations. They invited their peers, people whom they had already known and trusted, to submit artwork proposals for the project. The invitation was often casual. For example, as Qiu said, 'I brought the whole gang of brothers in "Post-Sense Sensuality" and forced them to join *Long March*.'³⁴⁹ Chyanga, a participant of 'Post-Sense Sensuality: Delusion and Alien Bodies', also remembered that he came up with a proposal and the curators did not raise any question.³⁵⁰ For artists whose support the curators tried to win, a proposal was sometimes not needed. For example, Guo Fengyi, a folk artist they found in Xi'an, was invited to present her drawings and paintings directly. The two curators did not mention the need of a proposal. However, for those they just got in touch with, especially the young undergraduates, the artwork proposal became an important tool of negotiation. As the numbers of artists invited to propose artworks and of those who actively proposed quickly grew, the work of negotiation also increased and the usual one-on-one conversations between curators and artists were replaced by group emails.

In March 2002, Lu and Qiu sent an email titled 'A Letter for Artists Invited to Submit Proposals for *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*', the curators clarified some misunderstandings and confusions among artists about how to make proposals for *Long March*. They shared their newly updated curatorial plan, but also emphasised that *Long March* would be a highly open structure. Any form of art, including 'video, installation, photography, performance, concept, painting, sculpture and multimedia', could fit the project, because there would be exhibitions in galleries as well as interactions with the general audience in social spaces. Artists could also go to a site in person or assign the curators to implement their works. They mentioned three ways of participation:

- A. The artist can walk alone or with the core team through the whole journey.
- B. The artist can choose not to participate in the whole process and the curators can execute the artist's proposal.
- C. The artist can join for a short or long period of time to conduct the work on site. The artist can come before the team and stay longer after the team

³⁴⁸ Biljana Ciric, 'Rejected Collection', in *Rejected Collection*, pp. 4–8.

³⁴⁹ Interview with Qiu Zhijie, October 2018.

³⁵⁰ Interview with Chyanga, December 2020.

left.³⁵¹

Apart from the open structure, the curators also encouraged artists to approach their curatorial proposal creatively. The overarching ‘curatorial intention’ was also something for artists to consider. They clarified the questions on the dominance of curatorial ideas in the project:

This is definitely not an exhibition that is unserious, cynical, left, right, over conceptual or downgrading the originality of art. [...] Our proposal was just a foundation. Before the participation of artists and the putting forward and realisation of artists’ proposals, any curatorial idea is just a preposition waiting for the artist to transcend the existing curatorial theme, framework, materials, time and space.³⁵²

While there were few requirements for the form of artworks, the curators did not mention the expense of making artworks. Qiu Zhijie once made a joke of the project by appropriating and changing Mao Zedong’s poem *Long March*, ‘Red Army does not fear marching far, just because there are dollars in the pocket.’³⁵³ ‘Dollars’ referred to the savings of Lu and his wife, which would be put into the project. However, travel expenses for contributing artists and the production fee of artworks, were not taken into consideration with in Lu’s budget. In ‘Total Plan’ of *Long March*, there was an outline of an overall budget of 680,000 RMB separated into three parts: 1) about 400,000 RMB for the accommodation and travel cost of the core curatorial team along the twenty sites; 2) about 150,000 RMB for eight foreign artists and payment for translators; 3) about 130,000 RMB for the hiring of a general affair manager and for the expenses for electric equipment like digital projectors and DVCAM cassettes. There was no fee allocated for covering Chinese artists’ costs.

However, many Chinese artists thought the project would cover the cost of production, possibly because of the project’s campaign. Some also wondered how much support they would receive from the curators if they should like to realise a work on-site. On 11 May, two independent curators Li Zhenhua and Liu Yingmei helped to organise a ‘work meeting’ for *Long March* in the Loft, a luxury bar, restaurant and art space in Beijing owned by artist couple Wang Gongxin and Lin Tianmiao. A large group of artists participated and Lu and Qiu answered directly to questions raised by artists. Such an operation was rare for an

³⁵¹ Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, ‘, 2002, accessed in Long March Archive.

³⁵² Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, ‘Gei Shouyao Wei “Changzheng—Yige Xingzou Zhong de Shijue Zhanshi” Tian de Yishujia de Yifengxin’ [A Letter for Artists Invited to Submit Proposals for *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*], 2002, Long March Archive.

³⁵³ Interview with Qiu Zhijie, October 2018.

exhibition at that time and usually the first public event of an exhibition would be its opening. But *Long March* had already become a public activity at the stage of communicating with potential artists. The transcript of this meeting was even posted on the website of longmarchfoundation.com, which was newly set up.

During the meeting, the two curators were questioned repeatedly about the budget and the exact ways of ‘collaboration’ with artists. One artist asked if he would like to conduct a work in the Revolutionary History Museum, which appeared in Lu’s proposal, who would be the one to negotiate with the museum. He questioned, ‘you two curators only designed the framework, who will do the specific work like this?’ Qiu answered that they had already communicated a lot with many spaces and organisations in different localities but they hoped that ‘Artists can have more energy to think about the potentials of implementation and the possibility of “mobilising the mass to solve the problem” when devising the proposal.’³⁵⁴ Lu added that, ‘Artists shouldn’t use accustomed ways of working with museums and commercial galleries. When submitting proposals for the *Long March*, artists must realise that they could not rely on us for funding or execution.’

The remaining question was that, how should artists and curators collaborate if not in ‘accustomed ways of working with museums and commercial galleries’? Was it the way that independent curators’ self-organising exhibitions? How could they work with over one hundred artists when the specific sites for implementing exhibitions and artworks had not been confirmed? The curators were open to every artwork proposal but ultimately, admitted their inability to cover the budget or facilitate the realisation of all works. They were unable to accommodate every artist’s needs. At the ‘work meeting’, an artist hinted at the confusion tactfully, ‘Your team must be limited in energy. It’s better to present the division of labour clearly with artists and then people won’t be confused in making proposals’.³⁵⁵ Qiu answered that,

Although artists and artworks are always the most important, practically we cannot solve everything for everyone because we have to solve some other problems. We have to ask for your forgiveness on this. So we hope that we can all work together. If everyone’s resource is gathered together, it must be very substantial. We will offer whatever kind of relations we have without any hesitation, but if we are lacking in anything, we also won’t hide. We hope that everyone can regard the early stage work of solving the difficulties of

³⁵⁴ ‘5.11 Xianchang Bangonghui Jilu’ [Documentation of 5.11 On-Site Office Meeting].

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

realisation as part of the artwork.³⁵⁶

What the curators tried to inspire from artists was artists' voluntary participation and independent realisation of their works. From the point of view of the curators, their responsibility was to set up the framework and infrastructure of the project: the intellectual input, the mediation with artists, the visual documentation including the documentary film, the catalogues and the bilingual website which would 'follow the development of the project and get updated every day with the daily documentation'.³⁵⁷ In some Chinese artists' eyes, the 'work meeting' was more like a 'pep rally' (*dongyuan hui*) to attract and 'mobilise' (*dongyuan*) more artists' participation.³⁵⁸ This approach to inspire and motivate artists to join the project on their own cost was indeed more like mobilisation rather than the common understanding of invitation. In fact, the curators were also conscious about this particular approach. Lu recalled that he and Qiu frequently used the word 'mobilisation' in *Long March*, another word referring to the Communist artistic practices.³⁵⁹

One example illustrating mobilisation in the project was the call for volunteers. In an advertisement looking for translators, the curators explained,

The contribution of volunteers [...] is a working method required by the particular work content of the art project *Long March*. The historical Long March, for us, means a spirit in practice which fully excavates all potential resources to realise a shared dream, an experimental spirit of collectively working with the masses and creatively solving problems. It means to respect the local Chinese context and a desire and ability to communicate and collaborate. [...] Therefore, we consider the deed of recruiting volunteers also an embodiment and transmission of the Long March spirit.³⁶⁰

The job of volunteers covered nearly every aspect of *Long March*, from translation, video-editing to sending out packages. Such a contribution was framed in relation to the CCP's propaganda in the curatorial discourse. The curators referred to the Communist mode of collective production and also the extreme circumstances of the historical Long March, when the CCP invented methods like mobilising local farmers to deliver food for

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ APT5 / 'The Long March Project' Panel Discussion, uploaded on 2018
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9iJgT8Yl3w>> [accessed 16 December 2020].

³⁵⁹ Interview with Lu, 2021.

³⁶⁰ "Changzheng" Yishu Huodong Zhaomu Zhiyuan Renyuan Qishi' [Notice of Recruiting Volunteers for "Long March" Project], *Arts.tom.com.*, 2002
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20020613030605/http://arts.tom.com/Archive/2002/5/30-22356.html>> [accessed 1 December 2020].

them. The curators were aware that the organisation of *Long March* was against the trend of learning from the approaches of Western institutions and galleries. Instead, they proclaimed ‘the Long March spirit’. While the historical Long March was still appropriated as a curatorial framework in Lu’s earliest curatorial proposal, here it had become a source of working methods, discourse, spiritual support and branding. However, *Long March* still differentiated from the typical ideological mobilisation. For example, they encouraged artists to develop their own plans. Instead of following a given way of participation, artists were expected to come up with and realise their own proposal. In *Long March*, there were artists who were inspired and excited by the project and joined with their own cost. Shi Qing, another artist of ‘Post-Sense Sensibility’, hired an assistant and made a large installation in the eleventh site Moxi — far from Beijing, where he was living. Shi Qing devoted much of his own money into his work and organised his own production.



Fig. 29 Shi Qing, *The Flood*, performance. At Site 11 Moxi, *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, on 27 August 2002. Courtesy of Shi Qing and Long March Project.

In this On-site work meeting, the curators also shared their budget, to show their

honesty and the fact that they already covered much spending of the project. But some artists considered that the budget's distribution was not fair. According to Lu, among all the budget, 200,000 RMB was reserved for about 62 Chinese artists' travelling and about 200,000 RMB was for about a dozen foreign artists and curators. For others, there was no budget left. The unequal treatment between foreign and Chinese artists raised many Chinese artists' concern and the curators were questioned over their choice, for example, of the American feminist icon Judy Chicago.

In early 2002, Judy Chicago was invited by Lu Jie to conduct a project in one of the twenty sites, Lugu Lake. For this place known as 'the Last Kingdom of Women', Chicago came up with the proposal 'What if Women Ruled the World?'. Chicago hoped to carry it out in collaboration with Chinese female artists. To recruit participants for this particular site, Lu and Qiu issued an open call in the voice of Chicago, based on the Chinese translation of Chicago's original proposal written in English. The open call was published on 28 April 2002 on arts.tom.com and it read as,

I hope that 12 women artists will have joined me in an effort to imagine what the world might be like if it were ruled by women, as is the society in Lugu Lake. [...] I hope that the artists' work might also shed some light on the origins of patriarchy in China; women's role in the Long March; the impact of the political movements in the past on women's role in contemporary China; and the situation of Chinese women today. But these themes must be secondary to the challenge of creating images that suggest what the world might be like if women, rather than men, made most of the decisions that shape[d] life on our planet.³⁶¹

³⁶¹ "Jiaru Nüren Tongzhi Shijie" Yishu Fangan Zhengji Hezuozhe' [What If Women Ruled the World' Art Proposal Call for Collaborators'], *Meishu Tongmeng*, 2002 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20020601182933/http://arts.tom.com/Archive/2002/4/28-43247.html>> [accessed 1 March 2021]. The translation also refers to Chicago's email in Long March Archive.



· 第一届成都双年展
· “抛物线”艺术展
· 黄永砅EP—3事件

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· 中华世纪坛艺术馆“五一”期间展览项目介绍
· “女性艺术研究中心”征稿启示
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“假如女人统治世界”艺术方案征集合作者

2002年04月28日 文章来源: Tom专稿

朱迪·芝加哥为《长征》计划所做的方案, 实施地点: 长征计划第9站——泸沽湖

这个方案公开邀请12个中国女艺术家, 以及来自泸沽湖的12个女性参与者。征集方案的目的是想从历史、幻想、神话、与现实中的母系社会出发, 将历史叙述, 神秘传奇以及艺术家的思想、幻想与泸沽湖母系制的现实做一个比较。

我计划在7月20日到8月3日间在中国的一些地方考察, 在接近7月底时到达云南/四川交界的泸沽湖, 我希望12个女艺术家从现在就和我合作, 一起来努力设想: 就像泸沽湖地区一样, “假如女人统治世界”, 这个世界会是什么样子? 同时我希望艺术家的作品可以涉及到中国母系社会的起源、在长征中妇女的作用、历次政治运动对当代妇女角色的影响、今天的中国妇女地位等问题。但是这些主题必须服从于下列要求: 假如是女性, 而不男性, 做出影响我们这个星球生活的大多数决定, 那么我们现在的世界会是怎么一个样子?

这个方案对于使用各种各样媒介, 具有各种各样风格的女性艺术家都开放, 但是, 这些艺术家的艺术作品都应该易于和中国的和国际的各种各样的观众沟通的。希望每一个有兴趣参加此计划的艺术家都在6月5日前, 提出一个明确的方案, 方案应具备能在泸沽湖自然环境中以户外安装的方式加以展示。这些初步方案可以使用任何媒介、以任何方式加以展示, 在短暂的展示以后, 我将通过电子邮件回馈给报方案的艺术家, 进行交流。艺术家们可开始实现她的方案, 在2002年底前完成作品, 并参加2003年春季以及夏季在国际几大美术馆举办的长征巡回展览。

至于最初的方案, 请艺术家考虑根据泸沽湖这个室外展出地点, 制作一个简要的纸上方案, 但限制在可以过胶的普通信纸大小, 以便于邮寄和展出, 艺术家今后参加美术馆展的将是这个初步方案的完成版。假如有些艺术家住的离泸沽湖很近, 她可以在7月底到哪儿, 做一短期的展示, 但这一展示的作品能够扩展开来从而可以作为美术馆展览的作品。艺术家可以为绘画作品(或雕塑以及织绣作品的小样)画一系列的速写草稿, 使其可以临时展览, 并可以在今后的美术馆巡回展览中加以实施。最重要的一点是, 无论是方案草图还是完成的作品, 任何形式的媒介以及实施方式都必须是可以易于让观众接受理解的。

Fig. 30 “Changzheng” Yishu Huodong Zhaomu Zhiyuan Renyuan Qishi' [Notice of Recruiting Volunteers for 'Long March' Project], arts.tom.com., 2002

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20020613030605/http://arts.tom.com/Archive/2002/5/30-22356.html>> [accessed 1 December 2020].

As soon as the open call was released, word began to spread. According to the open call, Chicago would select twelve proposals and develop the proposals together with the artists. There would also be exhibition opportunities. The preliminary proposals would be exhibited with her own proposal in Lugu Lake; in the following year, 2003, realised works of these proposals would be exhibited in the international exhibition tour of *Long March*. Chicago reminded that, “The art must be accessible to a diverse audience of viewers, both Chinese

and international.’³⁶² This procedure of the open call was similar to the open-call of *Long March*.

However, soon Chinese artists found out that it was Lu and Qiu who would select twelve women artists in the name of Chicago and the local Chinese female artists’ expense would not be covered. The open call of Chicago’s project fell into crisis. Sasha Su-ling Welland, an ethnographer who was conducting field study in Beijing, recorded the escalation of anxieties and doubts among Chinese artists:

Ill will surfaced when several Beijing-based artists withdrew after being told the organisers would not help pay their expenses to Lugu Lake, something they asserted had been verbally promised to them when Lu Jie had solicited their participation[...] In Beijing, word traveled quickly about how the project represented an attempt to exploit Chinese women artists for the international reputation of its male curators. Some promoted boycotting the event as the reproduction of a male power structure unsurprisingly similar to that of the original march.³⁶³

To solve this problem, Lu and Qiu changed the structure of the project. In ‘Reports from the Road’, the two curators explained their decision in a third-name voice,

Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie began to doubt their authority, as men, to pick twelve artists, and recommended to Chicago that the limit of twelve artists be removed and the proposal exhibition opened to the more than thirty artists who offered submissions [...]³⁶⁴

Chicago also agreed to this change. Taking the dynamics in the open call of ‘What if Women Ruled the World?’ as an example, we can understand better the process of mobilising artists in the whole *Long March*. In March 2002, the invitation to submit proposals for *Long March* was still limited to selected artists. Artist Zhou Xiaohu (1960–) proposed to make a plastic and charged helium model of a US military helicopter which would provide emergency medical aid in key locations along the Long March road. His proposal was rejected for having a ‘budget [that was] too high’.³⁶⁵ But as the news of the project spread, in May, the curators gave up control over selecting proposals and declared

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Sasha Su-ling Welland, ‘The Hinterlands of Feminist’, *Experimental Beijing: Gender and Globalisation in Chinese Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 141-42.

³⁶⁴ Long March Project, ‘Reports from the Road Site 5: Lijiang’ (2002), <<https://web.archive.org/web/20021005163821/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/OSite5-1.htm>> [accessed 7 February 2021]

³⁶⁵ Zhou Xiaohu, ‘Emergency Medical Aid’, in *Rejected Collection* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2008), pp. 116–17.

anyone could realise their works in the structure of *Long March*. The curators said, they have treated ‘established artists and young graduates as equal’.³⁶⁶ Some artists also engaged in the project by just interacting with the curators. As Qiu said after *Long March* in late 2002,

Out of the Long March spirit, by principle, we consider every artist who submitted a proposal as a participating artist. According to this standard, there were about 200. [...] We in fact gave up the power to accredit. There are some proposals that you could not even reject. For example, an artist asked to participate by sending emails. He said he would send an email to me every day and has really done so. He participated in *Long March* in his own way.³⁶⁷

This transparency over curatorial choice was already unparalleled. Lu and Qiu abandoned powers usually ascribed to curators during the process. But the distribution of the project’s budget was still in debate. Though there was no selection of participation, the project would only fund selected artists. The controversy over Site Lugu Lake and the whole *Long March* project intersected on the ‘work meeting’. The allocation of budget to pay for foreign guests, such as Chicago, for their expensive international travels, instead of supporting more local Chinese artists was harshly questioned. Lu emphasised that including international artists would make *Long March* go beyond the Chinese context and demonstrate the project’s openness: ‘It would enhance the whole project’s influence and benefit every artist.’³⁶⁸ Welland, who was also present in the ‘work meeting’, noted that Lu ‘tacked on the statement that he wished to “re-educate” Judy Chicago’.³⁶⁹ This saying of ‘re-educate’ came from Mao Zedong’s proposition to transform intellectuals polluted by reactionary thoughts like capitalism and individualism. Sending thousands of intellectuals and youths to the countryside and labour camps was one of the methods of ‘re-education’. Lu solicited different discourses to ally with different participants. This strategy, sometimes effective, rendered him temporally not guilty when facing blame.

While sticking to the choice of Judy Chicago, Qiu also mentioned at the work meeting

³⁶⁶ Lu Jie, ‘women shi shui?’ [Who are we?], Long March Foundation, 2002
<http://www.frchina.net/data/personArticle_id_5152.html> [accessed 10 December 2020].

³⁶⁷ Yang Xinyi and Qiu Zhijie, ‘Zouzai Changzheng de Yinyu Shang’ [Walking on the Metaphor of the Long March], *Long March Foundation*, 2002
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20030710233932/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/huayu/meiti-21.htm>> [accessed 12 December 2020]. While on the journey, a column appeared on the project’s website and listed about 130 artists. The column was called ‘Long March Artist’.

³⁶⁸ ‘5.11 Xianchang Bangonghui Jilu’ [Documentation of 5.11 On-Site Office Meeting].

³⁶⁹ Sasha Su-ling Welland, ‘The Hinterland of Feminist Art’, in *Experimental Beijing: Gender and Globalisation in Chinese Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: duke university press, 2018), pp. 135–76.

that if artists could not afford their budget, the curators could help to find potential collectors to help subsidise them.³⁷⁰ ‘If there is a real need for funding and the artwork is of a particularly good quality, we have connections with some collectors who are willing to collect the works exhibiting in *Long March*. We can persuade the collectors to prepay for the materials.’³⁷¹ Lu added,

We hope that everyone could have a supplementary proposal with the budget or without the budget. If there is no budget, it means that the artist will pay for his or her own expenses and the work will only belong to the artist; if there is a budget included, it then means that it won’t be realised if we cannot find a buyer.³⁷²

Such a procedure was rarely talked about publicly in non-profit projects in the West, but it echoed ‘the First 1990s’ Biennial Art Fair’ in Guangzhou in 1992 — the curator Lü Peng’s vision that commercial interest would be the crucial support for contemporary art in China in the absence of governmental funding. In a situation of inadequate resources, which contrasted sharply with the ambition that *Long March* had sought for, the curatorial team also came to seek help from businesses. Some artists’ works were collected by the newly set up 25000 Cultural Transmission Center, which registered as a commercial company. As the Red Army’s Long March was often addressed as ‘25000 Li Long March’ in Chinese, the centre also sounded like an official propaganda bureau. For example, Xiao Xiong had an unsigned ‘collaborative contract’ that proposed 8,888 Yuan for buying two works to be completed by Xiao and Xiao would be prepaid 5,000 Yuan in advance for travel expenses.³⁷³ Xiao Xiong would travel in the opposite direction from the destination of the original Long March, Yan’an, to the starting point Ruijin. He planned to carry out two works: first, to exchange a bust statue of Mao Zedong bought from the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong in Beijing with a stranger in Yan’an for their object and then keep exchanging during his trip; second, to collect hammers and sickles from local farmers and re-cast them into rails. In the end, he completed his first objective, travelling by himself from Yan’an to Ruijin and documented his encounters in exchanging objects with local residents he met while on the road. After these exchanges, it was his wooden box, once holding every object he had exchanged, that was left. The work was named *Entry and Exit (jin yu chu)*.

³⁷⁰ ‘5.11 Xianchang Bangonghui Jilu’ [Documentation of 5.11 On-Site Office Meeting].

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ ‘Hezuo Xieyi’ [collaborative contract], document archived by Xiao Xiong. The contract was not signed and it was not clear that if the collaboration between Xiao Xiong and *Long March* were conducted according to this version of the contract.



Fig. 31 Xiao Xiong standing in front of the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong in Beijing, holding a bust statue of Mao Zedong in 2002. Part of his performance *Entry and Exist*. Courtesy of Xiao Xiong and Long March Project.



Fig. 32 The wooden box Xiao Xiong carried through his journey in the work *Entry and Exit* in 2002. Upon returning the suitcase at the conclusion of *Entry and Exit*, there remained one thermometer, one psychrometer, one short piece of yak leather rope. Inside the box are the signatures of the people who participated in the exchanges. Courtesy of Xiao Xiong and Long March Project.

Artists held very different understandings about their role within the project. For curators, the project was organised in such an open way, that the project was shared among all artists in collaboration. The other side of this open curatorial framework was that artists generally considered themselves to be independent from the project. As Chyanga recalled, ‘although *Long March* was nominally an integrated whole, most artists actually conducted works by themselves.’³⁷⁴ This intentional distance from a group identity was possibly a result of their experience of being oppressed and censored during the Cultural Revolution, which left them with the vigilance towards collectives. For some artists of younger generations, the historical Long March did not leave them with strong memories. For example, artist Wang Yuyang did not feel attached to the Red Army’s Long March. Rather,

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

Wang took this project more as an opportunity to create new works.³⁷⁵ The curators' questions over China's modernisation and Chinese art's path in relation to the West, though deeply related to local artists, were also not the primary concerns of artists. Some insiders of the art world even doubted the passion and sincerity of Lu and Qiu and thought that the project was only taking advantage of the symbolism of the historical Long March. Some then considered *Long March* as a platform for artistic development rather than something for the public.

These challenges revealed the great difficulty to realise *Long March*, as the project combined sponsorship, business and Lu's contributions from his own savings. While trying to realise the proposal, Lu became not only the executor of this plan, but a curator, sponsor, director and collector. At the same time, there were a lot of resources given by individuals including artists and volunteers. From the complicated composition of resources in the project, we can sense the complex influencing factors in the project. These various methods for fundraising and integrating resources made it difficult for any single person to claim full credit over the whole project. Lu and Qiu acknowledged this, '*Long March* does not belong to a few curators or a group of artists, it belongs to everyone. [...] Our communication and collaboration already mean a change in our working method as part of *Long March*.'³⁷⁶ It was with such challenges that *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* finally embarked on the road.

³⁷⁵ Interview with Wang Yuyang, October 2019.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 8 On the Road

Out of these varied perceptions of the project, *Long March* eventually attracted many participating artists, collaborators and volunteers. Qiu and Lu had secured support from a film producer to make a documentary using expensive analogue films. The main work team on the road also expanded to a group more than the two curators. Lisa Horikawa suspended her work in Japan and joined as the project's 'Director of International Affairs', managing the communication with the support of overseas contacts.³⁷⁷ Shen Xiaomin, a young graduate from Beijing Film Academy, dropped the chance of joining a commercial crew, joined *Long March* and followed the whole project, holding a bulky DV throughout the way.³⁷⁸ Jeff was a Taiwanese student studying at Pratt in the US. He joined a series of three events called 'Long March Propaganda Team', organised by performance artist Xiao Lu and Lu Jie's wife Shen Meng first in New York from June to July 2002. Later he flew to China to join the main curatorial team, working as a photographer from early August. Yang Jie, then working in a TV station, joined the project halfway and became the central coordinator. It is now difficult to trace all volunteers throughout the project and those non-artist participants. In the last several months before the trip, with the increasing scale of the project, the work team of *Long March* expanded considerably.

The project was initially scheduled to start on 1 June 2002, but artists' proposals and the details of sites were still not fully confirmed, so it was put off to 1 July.³⁷⁹ However, by the end of June, preparation was still not fully ready. Qiu Zhijie believed that the preparation can never end and things would work out on the road. He boarded the train from Beijing to Ruijin on 28 June. He said to Lu, who was still hesitant about starting the trip, 'I will go now and you can join on 1 July.'³⁸⁰ Though Lu Jie preferred to prepare and plan things well before the trip, he had no choice but to follow. Lu arrived in Ruijin two days after. The project started and the on-road process turned out to be much more spontaneous than its proposal and even more accelerated than its preparation.

³⁷⁷ '堀川理沙：著者紹介 | 美術館・アート情報 artscape', 美術館・アート情報 *artscape* <https://artscape.jp/dictionary/author/10159842_1827.html> [accessed 1 January 2022].

³⁷⁸ Interview with Shen Xiaomin, 2019. She is the current Deputy Director of Collections Development at the National Gallery of Singapore.

³⁷⁹ '5.11 Xianchang Bangonghui Jilu' [Documentation of 5.11 On-Site Office Meeting].

³⁸⁰ Interview with Lu, December 2019.

Collaboration with the Government

The first site, Ruijin, is a small town in Jiangxi Province in southeastern China. It has a long history of revolution. During the 1920s, the CCP took advantage of the local mountainous landscape and established some military bases including Jinggang Mountain and Ruijin. In 1931, imitating the Soviet government, the Chinese Soviet Republic (CSR) was founded, although it was not internationally acknowledged and the KMT was still the official government in China. Ruijin became the de facto capital of the CSR until 1934 when the Red Army was besieged by the KMT's army and forced to leave. Ruijin has been celebrated as a shrine for the Communist revolution and this escape from Ruijin in 1934 was the beginning of the original Long March. In the initial curatorial proposal (1999), it was Jinggang Mountain (the initial military base cultivated by Mao) that was placed at the first site, but later Ruijin was made the first one, possibly to match the route of the original Long March more explicitly.

In Ruijin, *Long March* collaborated deeply with the local government, especially the local propaganda system. They planned to exhibit artworks by Sui Jianguo (1956–), Zhan Wang (1962–) and Fu Xinmin (1949–), Li Tianbing (1933–) and Li's son Li Jincheng (1963–) in the Yeping Memorial Site. The access to these exhibition spaces would be through the local officers' permission and supervision. Lu and Qiu had previously built connections with them via intermediary people; more detailed negotiation would be done during the implementation in Ruijin.



Fig. 33 At Site 1 Ruijin, Qiu Zhijie (right) talking with the local officer (left). Du Peihua (the woman in a black T-shirt), the director of the analogue documentary sponsored by a TV station, was working with the videographer. Still from the documentary by Long March Project shot by Shen Xiaomin, 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

Through the video camera held by Shen Xiaomin, we can peek into the on-site work of the curators. Right from the start, Shen's camera documented a crisis. An officer from the local propaganda department reserved his agreement to exhibit Sui Jianguo's sculpture *Marx in China* (1998) on a square of lawn enclosed in the former office buildings of the CSR. The work was a full-body statue of Karl Marx in a Mao suit (*zhongshan zhuang*). Made of bronze and painted in white, it was not so tall (about 102 centimetre high); neither would the status easily catch people's attention. The local officer initially agreed to exhibit the work in the evening on 29 June when he met Qiu Zhijie in the hotel; but the next morning, he regretted and withdrew his permission. Sui Jianguo was the most established artist among the participants on this site, but it was his work that met the local officer's reservation.

Marx in China was part of Sui's 'Clothes Vein Study' series in which classic statues in European sculpture history, such as *Discobolus*, were remade and dressed in Mao suits. A

Mao suit was initially a set of experimental clothes designed by politician Sun Yat-sen (1886–1925), the first president of the Republic of China. Recognising that modern citizens in China needed a new style of clothes to demonstrate their brand new identity, Sun explored different kinds of modern suits with inspirations from Japanese student uniforms, Southeast Asian Chinese immigrants' clothes and military uniforms. After Sun's death, the KMT government named one particular style of his outfit after him and promoted it nationwide. Over the following decades, this particular suit became a symbol of modernity, democracy, revolution and progress in China. Nearly all different paramount leaders including Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong wore similar suits in formal state occasions (both the KMT and the CCP acknowledged Sun's contribution to the Chinese revolution). For artist Sui Jianguo and his generation, such a suit was often their formal clothes before the 1980s. These identical suits were usually in a limited variety of colours like grey and blue. Mao suits therefore also obtained the implications of assimilation and mass movement during the eras when ordinary people's everyday life was highly politicised. In the West, the suit was named after Mao. Mao suit could be read as an international symbol of China, suggesting political transmission and retransmission between the West and China.

In his work *Marx in China*, Marx did not wear a Western suit but was dressed in a Mao suit. It incarnated the political agenda raised by Mao in 1938, 'the Sinicisation of Marxism', as well as Deng Xiaoping's slogan for the Economic Reform after the 1970s, 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics'.³⁸¹ If the plan went well and this statue of Marx could be erected on the lawn in front of the buildings of the old Soviet Republic, it would stir up many possible readings — for example, the European original articulator of Marxism meets the Sinicised practice and adoption of Russian influence. To put the statue here would combine these multifarious political references.

Did the officer realise this statue of Karl Marx looked different from the ones usually depicted in a Western suit? The local officer did not say the reason for his hesitation. Qiu used several ways to demonstrate that exhibiting this work was politically safe. The reason he emphasised most was that Sui Jianguo was already the head of the sculpture department in the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), the prestigious and orthodox art academy in China. This suggested that Sui was not an 'independent' and dissident artist. He described Sui as 'the artist with the most righteous root and reddest sprout' (*genzheng miaohong*) —

³⁸¹ Mao Zedong first identified this political agenda in 'On the New Stage', Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949*, (NY: M.E. Sharpe).

this particular expression was widely used in the Cultural Revolution to describe descendants of proletarians, military officers and party members as they were considered to be born with guarantee of political loyalty.³⁸² Qiu also tried to prove the legitimacy of the whole *Long March* project. A professional film crew assigned by the TV station already followed the curatorial team to Ruijin. The director of the documentary Du Peihua presented a letter of introduction to the local officer, proving that they were a crew from the state-own Beijing TV Station and the Tourism Channel. Qiu also ceaselessly made calls with his mobile phone, from the hotel and on site. He called Lu Jie, who was still in the Beijing office, to update him about the situation on the site and in an attempt to source someone who might be able to speak to the head of the Ruijin propaganda department. In the video footage, when Qiu was not on the phone call, he kept talking with the officer and the film crew, and directed the workers to move around the sculptures by artists Zhan Wang and Fu Xinmin, which were already transported respectively from Beijing and Xiamen to Ruijin over long distances. Qiu looked like an interim operational commander on the front line, coping with different urgent threads with a sense of humour. He was always smiling in the midst of these negotiations.

Lu arrived in Ruijin on 1 July. The first *Long March* event on the road was held on 2 July. The curatorial team co-organised a symposium called ‘The Red Earth: Discussion on Revolutionary Paintings’ with the local Artists Association, held in Ruijin Youth Cultural Palace. Accompanying the symposium was an exhibition of ‘oil paintings and prints of historical and revolutionary subject matters’ by the members of the local Arts Association, as well as reproductions of the landscape along the Long March route collected by the two curators. There were also two other exhibitions respectively by the Ruijin Photographers Association and the Ruijin Calligraphers Association. Namely, they were co-organised by *Long March* and these local organisations. The curators addressed the local officers as ‘comrades’ in their notes.

The comrades of the Ruijin Municipal Party Committee of Propaganda and the Cultural Bureau visited the exhibition and participated in Qiu Zhenzhong’s *Signature* project, signing their names enthusiastically with a brush.³⁸³

³⁸² Raw videoclips of Ruijin, documented by Shen Xiaomin, Long March Archive, 2002.

³⁸³ ‘Reports from the Road: Site 1 - Ruijin, Jiangxi Province’, 2002
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20031027050919/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/e-progress1-1.htm>>

In the first 'Reports from the Road', which was written mainly by Qiu Zhijie and published on arts.tom.com along their journey for each site, the curators listed the different official departments and organisations which they had secured support from.

Local organizations, including the Ruijin Municipal Party Committee of Propaganda, the Cultural Associations and Bureaus all showed enthusiastic support for the project. The four Associations of Artists, Calligraphers, Musicians and Dancers under the Cultural Bureau had each proposed a program for the Long March.³⁸⁴

The collaboration between contemporary artists and official bureaus was very rare at that time. On the one hand, avant-garde artists did not like to identify with the authority; on the other hand, the government often identified contemporary exhibitions as a form of dissidence and thus shut down these shows. Because of censorship, the relation between artists and officers was often fraught. In contrast, *Long March* had tried to form an official collaboration with the government, though the other sites did not continue with such a practice. The choice of artists on this site was also relatively mainstream compared with others. Apart from Sui Jianguo, Zhan Wang was also a tutor in CAFA's sculpture department. Another sculptor, Fu Xinmin, previously served as a high-ranking officer in Xiamen Public Security Bureau in Fujian. Li Tianbing was a cameraman who took analogue photographs for residents in the mountainous area in Hua'an, Fujian Province. In 1997, he obtained a Guinness Book of World Record for the most photos taken with natural light.³⁸⁵ His son Li Jincheng, the president of the local county's Photographers Association, was also invited. Neither Fu nor Li Tianbing was an insider of contemporary art and usually they enjoyed reports on the mainstream media.

[accessed 16 December 2020].

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Shen Xiaomin recommended Li Tianbing to *Long March* and Shen made a documentary about Li when working for Xiamen Television Station. Interview with Shen Xiaomin, December 2019.



Fig. 34 ‘The Red Earth: Discussion on Revolutionary Paintings’ between the curators of *Long March* and Artists’ Association of Ruijin in the Ruijin Youth Cultural Palace, on 2 July 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

In the end, Sui Jianguo’s *Marx in China* was not exhibited. Sui did not conduct the planned trip either. But all other artists’ works, which did not include any representation of politics, were exhibited at the Yeping Revolutionary Memorial Site. Zhan Wang’s light and sparkling sculptures *Artificial Rocks* were made of a layer of stainless steel and they were contemporary imitations of ornamental stones (*taihu shi*) appreciated by traditional Chinese literati. Fu Xinmin combined tree-root carving and solid steel in his sculptures. Their installations spread sparsely on the lawn in front of the memorial building of the first Soviet Congress of National Delegates. Li Tianbing and Li Jincheng had a father and son exhibition on 3 July in the former Central Post Office. They and the local association photographers visited each other’s exhibition.

The realisation of exhibitions in Ruijin has demonstrated several propositions of *Long March*. The most obvious one was the collaboration with the local government. The official art system, composed by the propaganda department and association artists, was on one hand an alternative to the contemporary art system, and, on the other, a collaborator that

could provide legitimacy for the project. This collaboration with the Ruijin government could be seen as a strategic move to secure the success of the first site in *Long March*. The curators could possibly take this as a political endorsement, particularly when persuading other local governments to permit events of *Long March* at later sites. Another feature was the de-centring of contemporary art from the metropolis to more peripheral areas. When Qiu explained the intention of this project to local officers, he emphasised the project ‘would like to show works in the town to people in the rural area’.³⁸⁶ In the intersection of different art ecologies, arts from different systems met each other. Sui Jianguo and Zhan Wang were professional artists in the ecology of international contemporary art. They were not in the local ecology of official art associations, which Li Tianbing and Fu Xinmin were more familiar with. The project’s performance in Ruijin resonated well with the curatorial statement of ‘Curators’ Words’.

In ‘Reports from the Road’, the curators proudly counted the realised events on this site: six temporary exhibitions, symposia and colloquia, alongside a public performance and a screening, all of which were held across five days.³⁸⁷ However, the failure of the site was not mentioned. The curators did not mention Sui Jianguo’s name at this site and did not describe Qiu’s negotiation process with the local propaganda officer. When the local officer could not comprehend or support exhibiting the artwork – which was an example of the participants’ ‘incomprehensibility’ that was mentioned in Lu’s curatorial proposal ‘A Detail Curatorial Plan’ (2001), Qiu did not ask about the officer’s understanding of this piece, nor did he attempt to start a conversation about art. Rather, this conversation was very strategic, following the existing safe discourses operating in the association art system. Qiu tried to avoid the rich meaning of *Marx in China*, rather camouflaging the work and the project as identifiers with authority. However, the artwork itself resisted such attempts at masking its true sentiments. The major element, Karl Marx in a Mao suit, penetrated several layers of socio-political discourse, conveying something of its controversy. If Qiu already knew that attempts to detract attention from the controversial aspects of this work were to be in vain, might he have started this conversation differently? But such a discursive strategy proved to be effective in other successful events with the local art bureau and associations in Ruijin.

We might wonder what happens in a situation when curators are forced to speak the

³⁸⁶ Video footage, Long March Archive, 2002.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

same language as represented in *Long March's* 'Curator's Words'. In one colloquium, the chairman of the local Artists Association gave a speech introducing the story of a local mural *The Dawn of the Red Capital* depicting the revolutionary history of Ruijin, Lu and Qiu brought up the classic literature such as Mao Zedong's 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art' (1942) and Pablo Picasso's 'Why I Joined the Communist Party' (1944) as planned. These two texts were already selected into Lu's curatorial proposal (2001) and both emphasised that art and culture should be used for demonstrating political propositions. Through connecting Mao's text to Picasso's text around the same historical period, the curators tried to bridge the gap between today's propaganda and contemporary art, respectively represented by the association artists and themselves. However, the discussions were still wrapped in conventional, celebrative and propaganda rhetoric. The academic discourse was avoided. In other words, though the curators, the representative of contemporary art, met artists from the official system, they avoided exposing differences, which was an important approach to facilitate more self-reflections on art ecologies in both Lu's proposal (2001) and in 'Curators' Words' (2002). Was it because at this stage, it was more important to secure the safety and execution of events in the project? Was it in consideration of the association artists' feeling? We can take another example of the curators' negotiation with the government for inspiration.



Fig. 35 Zhan Wang's sculptures in the Yeping Revolutionary Memorial Site where the First Soviet Congress was held, in July 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

From Provocation to Persuasion

Another negotiation between the curators and an official bureau took place in Xichang. Xichang was the tenth site in *Long March*. The desired institute to collaborate with, Xichang Satellite Launch Center, was by nature a military institute for launching the highest-ranked Long March rockets and satellites into space. Unlike the situation in Ruijin, before arriving at Xichang, the curators did not have any advance communication with the station. Lu tried to find out if there was anyone they could reach at the head of the Center, just like what Qiu did in Ruijin, but attempts to make contact were in vain. On 18 August, on the train from Chongqing to Xichang, Lu met someone working in the Satellite Center, where he heard some information about the art amateurs there.

The artworks they wished to win support for from this institute was *New Plan to Fill the Sky* by sculptor Zhan Wang, whose sculptural work also appeared in Ruijin. Zhan based his proposal on an ancient Chinese fairy tale that the goddess Nüwa burned the stones into lava to cover a hole in the sky. Zhan created a stone in the shape of a meteorite which fell in

China in AD 1512 and had been stored in the Beijing Planetarium since 1992.³⁸⁸ He proposed to the Satellite Center that he would send the stainless steel copy of this meteorite back to outer space via one Long March rocket.³⁸⁹ If the plan could be fulfilled, it would mean sending a copy of the falling stone back to outer space, echoing the folk story of Nüwa. This work could be seen as a variant of Zhan's series *Artificial Rocks* (1995–) exhibited in Ruijin. These artificial rocks were usually quite light. A stainless steel layer was placed around a real stone, the steel was carefully hammered until it closely copied the surface of the real rock. *Artificial Rocks* were hollow and only possessed an impression of the stones not their weight or substance. Zhan developed this series in awareness of the fast urbanisation in China in the 1990s, when high-rise glass buildings proliferated and real stones which used to be ornamentation in cultivated gardens of literati now looked inappropriate in modern cities.³⁹⁰ *Artificial Rocks* imitated the shining surface of the modern buildings but still kept the traditional form of giant stones. They were often exhibited in public spaces, sitting next to skyscrapers, regenerated ancient Chinese buildings, traditional literati gardens or Bauhaus architecture. Their reflective surface witnessed the quickly changing surroundings.

Zhan had a lot of expectations for the new work in *New Plan to Fill the Sky*, and flew himself from Beijing to Xichang. Lu Jie, who did not find anyone to introduce *Long March* to the leaders of the Satellite Center, had to try to convince the artists to go to the Center themselves. There must have been a lot of pressure on Lu in managing artist's expectations under periods of such uncertainty. On 19 August, Lu Jie, Zhan Wang, Zhan's assistant and two cameramen came to the Satellite Center and were stopped at the gate. Lu Jie asked the gate guards to allow them to enter and meet their leaders. The guards only permitted Lu, Zhan Wang and Zhan's assistant. They refused to admit the two cameramen, apparently on the grounds that their shaved heads resembled gangsters. After going inside the institute, Assistant Department Chief Fu came to meet them.³⁹¹ Fu was a member of the propaganda department. Lu explained to him that "They had come to exchange ideas about the

³⁸⁸ Zhan Wang, 'Xin Butian Jihua' [New Plan to Fill the Sky] <<http://www.zhanwangart.com/works/30>> [accessed 14 December 2020].

³⁸⁹ 'Yantu Zhanbao' [Reports from the Road] of Site Xichang, 2002, Long March Foundation, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20030917075450/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/program10-1.htm>> [accessed 14 December 2020].

³⁹⁰ Wu Hung and Zhan Wang, "'Buke Zhixing" de Jinianbei: Wu Hong, Zhanwang Guanyu "Yingxing" de Tanhua' [The Monument of "Agnosticism": Conversation on "Yingxing" between Wu Hung and Zhan Wang], 2014 <<http://www.zhanwangart.com/article/43>> [accessed 12 December 2020].

³⁹¹ In official bureaus in China, people with positions are usually addressed as their surname plus their position title.

interactive relationship between culture and technology with the artists of the station.’³⁹² Zhan presented his portfolio including domestic and international exhibitions and explained his understanding towards the public outlook of art.

After hearing this, Fu asked the Chief of the Propaganda Department, Li, to join the conversation. Lu further interpreted the space flight industry as an exploration of the space flight in China, with potential to be enacted as a peaceful pursuit that could benefit for the whole planet. These ideas resonated with Zhan’s proposal *New Plan to Fill the Sky*. In ‘Reports of the Road’, Lu noted down that Li pointed out that sending a ‘fake meteorite’ to space with the rocket would be too expensive at this stage. Hearing this, Zhan offered that he could donate this artwork to the Satellite Center and the Center could send the work to space in the future, as conditions allowed. Li agreed to ask for permission from the head of the Center. Furthermore, he would also organise a meeting between *Long March* and amateur artists in the Center.

The next day, the *Long March* team, including the camera crew this time, visited the Center again. They met two artists in service of the army, including painter Song Jundou. Song’s ink wash painting depicted traditional landscapes, but in these paintings he presented, he included heavy trucks transporting the Long March rockets on zigzag roads in mountains. During the conversation, the Propaganda Department Chief informed the team that the head of the Center had agreed to accept Zhan’s donation and would set a room in their new exhibition hall for this work. They conducted a brief donation ceremony and Zhan’s work was directly on display together with a model of the Long March rocket. By accident or not, the copy of the rocket and the copy of the fake meteorite were put together in the permanent exhibition.

This success greatly encouraged both artists and the curators. Lu’s passionate persuasion was critical to the success of this negotiation. Zhan’s artwork, in particular, its connection to space, combined his own status as a tutor in CAFA was also significant. In securing this deal, they were able to utilise the Satellite Center, albeit an unconventional choice, as a makeshift gallery space. Throughout this process, it was also clear that the selection of work, artist and the discourse were all tailored toward the mutual goal of securing the Satellite Center. Compared with the content initially designed for this site in Lu’s ‘A Detailed Curatorial Plan’ (2001), Lu did not throw out more difficult questions

³⁹² ‘Site 10: Xichang Long March Satellite Station, Sichuan Province’, *Long March Project* <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/project/dishizhansichuandaliangshanxichangweixingfashezhan/>> [accessed 1 January 2022].

towards the Center's leaders or amateur artists. In reality, their discussion lacked clashes or provocation. In his proposal, Lu initially imagined a massive collaborative exhibition between contemporary art students in Sichuan Academy of Art and amateur artists in the Satellite Center. He intended to demonstrate differences among these artists instead of similarities:

A strong contrast will be created through the juxtaposition of the Chinese 'traditional' style and motifs employed by the art club members, the scientists whose careers are based on the 'universal' language of science and technology, and the art student groups' works that employ the 'universal' language of contemporary art. Accompanying the exhibition will be a forum between the two groups discussing ideology, the market economy and the function of art and technology.³⁹³

At the stage of the 'Total Plan' (2002), the plan for this site stayed largely the same and Lu still hoped to present to these Chinese artists the catalogue *Sensation* (the YBA exhibition) and catalogues from auctions houses like Christie's. These approaches were to stage differences of literal and visual languages between different art ecologies, but in execution, the real situation and mounting pressure greatly influenced their applied approaches. When Zhan Wang and Lu Jie met in Xichang, realising Zhan's proposal and winning the support from the Satellite Center became the utmost priority. As the curators described, at this moment, 'The trust [from the artist] in curating has transformed into the responsibility [of the curators] in execution.'³⁹⁴ The pressure of execution meant that the priority for curatorial work in reality was already to realise artists' works instead of the curator's own intentions.

In the process of converting from Lu's initial curatorial proposal to the real journey, with the participation of artists and collaborators, there was a fundamental change in the role of curators: from imagination to execution. Accordingly, the relation between curators and participants in this project also turned from provocation to mobilisation and persuasion. As Lu reflected, 'persuasion was almost the most important work we were doing', though this large amount of work was not fully represented in the visual documentation.³⁹⁵ Lu's curatorial proposal (2011) was positioned in an ideal vacuum environment. There was no Plan B or risk management if the potential participants refused to collaborate or the project would be censored or cancelled by the Chinese government. But once to realise the project,

³⁹³ Lu Jie, 'Long March — A Walking Visual Exhibition: A Detailed Curatorial Plan', p. 50.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.

the curators were in the position of taking responsibility for all events and participants. With the escalating investment of time, labour, money and reputation of the curators, the outcome of the project became increasingly important. The desired mechanism in Lu's curatorial proposal — to break the convention, admit all differences and transform participants in debate, in incomprehensibility, in surprise — added greater levels of risk. This risk, in turn, directed the curators' to Communist propaganda discourses and approaches, particularly their strategies to collaborate or gain entry into certain spaces — especially when these spaces were state institutions. The curators' appropriation of the Communist discourses echoed the historical Long March in that the Red Army was also in a disadvantaged position and often appealed to local residents for their help and persuaded different political forces to aid them. Like the Red Army, the curators needed to speak the language of the local forces to persuade individuals with resources to identify them as comrades and to join their revolutionary cause.

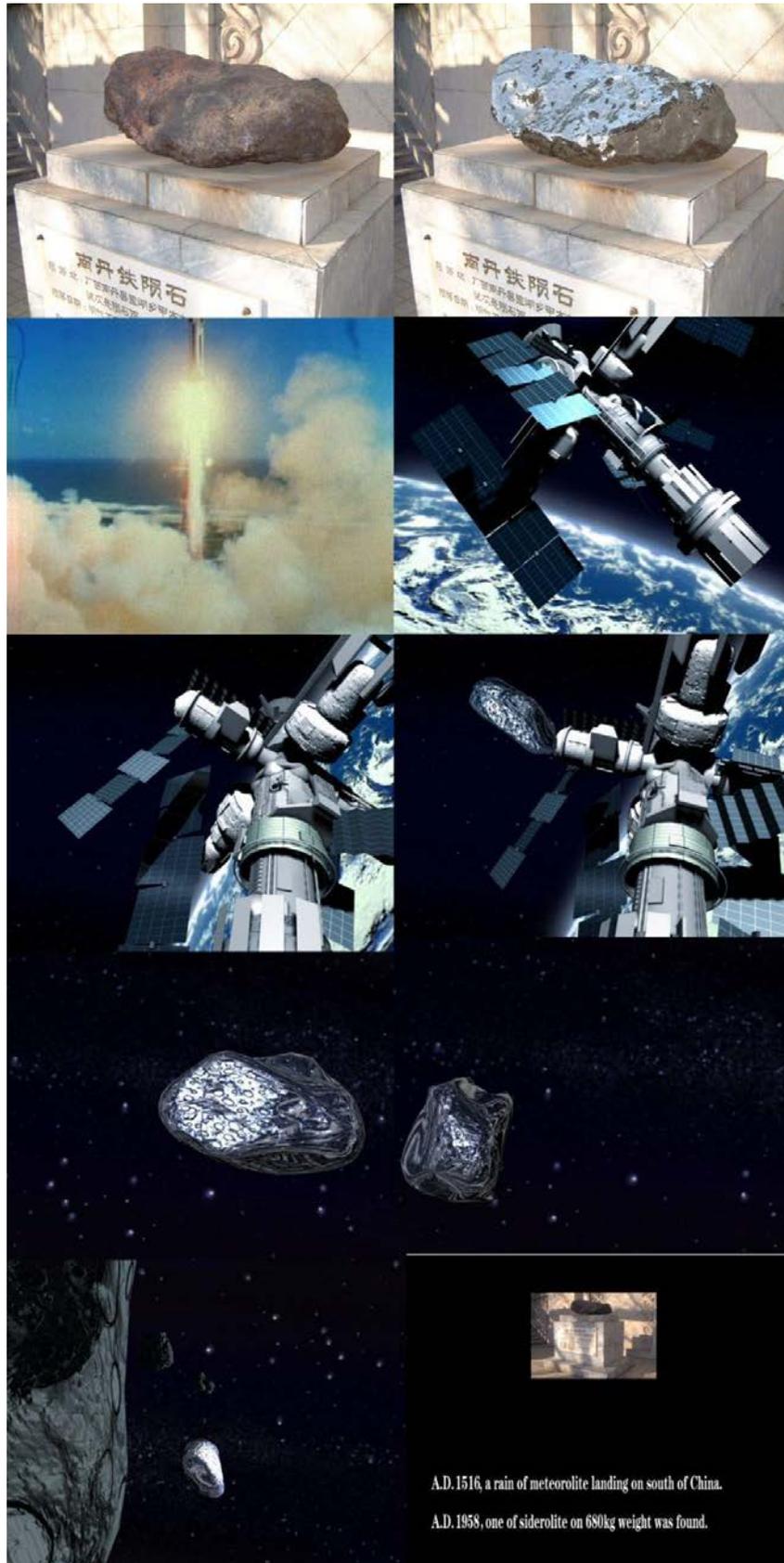


Fig. 36 Zhan Wang's proposal for artwork *New Plan to Cover the Sky*, 2002. Courtesy of Zhan Wang and Long March Project.

In the exhibition ‘Art Car’, the seventh site held on the train from Kunming to Zunyi, the brand of Long March — its revolutionary calling — played its role. In Lu’s curatorial plan (2001), the passengers on the train would be surprised by a contemporary art exhibition. Lu listed potential approaches to access the space of the train, including contacting the train bureau, buying all the tickets in a carriage, or persuading the head conductor of the train. They went for the last choice. On 6 August, after boarding the train, ‘Commander-in-chief’ Lu found the conductor and started persuading him to allow them to convert the dining carriage — which did not usually undergo conversion — into an exhibition space for *Long March*.

Lu Jie shows him various media coverage the Long March has received while in Kunming. The head conductor is [fascinated] with Lu Jie’s introduction of the Long March project and gives his consent under the condition that they finish installing everything in an hour and that it will be reviewed by him before opening to the public. Thus, the original curatorial plan to show provocative video works by Yang Fudong and Yang Zhenzhong has to be modified. The curatorial team decides to present images of traditional Chinese landscape paintings portraying various sites on the original Long March, together with still shots of Xu Zhen’s video work *Shout*, Song Dong’s work, and the Long March postcards. [...] On this note, the curatorial team quickly begins to sort out the postcards so that some of the more provocative images will not be displayed.³⁹⁶

While in the proposal (2011), Lu wrote down that ‘we have purposely selected provocative works for this leg of the journey’, ‘provocative images’ were avoided by the curators in practice.³⁹⁷ During the set-up, the team successfully taped the prints of artworks like ink wash landscape paintings by Li Chuan, Ren Qian and Li Yong (artists who graduated from Sichuan Academy of Art) and postcards of images of artworks like Zhao Bandi’s *the Panda Bear Series*. The small patches of *Long March* logo, designed by Xu Bing, were also glued to the dining cart. Some artists who boarded the train themselves found their ways to engage with the audience through more provocative performances. Wang Chuyu (1974–) invited passengers in different carriages to pick a paragraph from the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China to read aloud. Another artist, Ma Han (1968–), prepared a moving book cart filled with vintage books such as *Selected Works of*

³⁹⁶ ‘Site 7: On the Train between Kunming and Zunyi’, *Long March Project* <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/project/long-march-a-walking-visual-display/>> [accessed 1 January 2022].

³⁹⁷ Lu Jie, ‘Long March — A Walking Visual Exhibition: A Detailed Curatorial Plan’, p. 31.

Mao Zedong, a travelogue by Edgar Snow and popular novels in the 1970s and 1980s. At first he invited the passengers to borrow the books but, after touring the whole train, he started throwing all leftover books out of the window. Some passengers were excited and joined. The curators wrote that,

The books fly in the air for a transient moment and soon disappear from our sight, leaving the realm of our control completely. It is a stirring commentary on knowledge, endeavour, and the limits of human power.³⁹⁸



Fig. 37 'Art Car' exhibition at Site 7 on the train between Kunming and Zunyi, on 6 August 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

In execution, the project maintained a nuanced engagement with the train passengers. For example, in the 'Total Plan' (2002), the curators wrote about Godard's film *Chinoise*: 'The most important thing is to play the film and finish this task.' How the film-screening would involve and inspire the participants were not discussed.³⁹⁹ At Site Daozhong in

³⁹⁸ 'Reports from the Road – Site 07 on the Train between Kunming and Zunyi' <<http://longmarchproject.com/s7report-train/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

³⁹⁹ Lu and Qiu, 'Total Plan', 2002, p. 2.

Guangxi province, the curators held a screening where they blended art films, video works and popular Hong Kong comedy. The curators not only appropriated Communist discourses, but referenced pop culture in an attempt to widen their audience appeal. Aside from Wei Jun (1962–)’s video *The Fourth Law of the Long March*, and Yang Fudong (1971–)’s art film *Stealing South* and *Hey! The Sky is Bright*, the curators also played pop film *Lu Ding Ji II*. Directed by Wang Jing and starring comedian Stephan Chow, the screening of this Hong Kong martial arts film caused a phenomenon of ‘a thousand empty rooms’ in the tiny village, as everyone came to the square to watch.⁴⁰⁰ Villagers said that it had been many years since a movie crew came to screen a film in their village, and that even then they had not shown movies as good as *Lu Ding Ji II*. Learning from this, Lu temporarily decided that the film star Stephan Chow should supplement the artists chosen for the current *Long March* activities.⁴⁰¹ The interactions with audience in turn changed the curators’ expectation of the curatorial project and the effect of artworks.

Improvisation

Once the local participants were found, the mobilisation and execution of *Long March* became less intimidating. In October 2002, Qiu Zhijie reviewed the effect of his curating:

Before realising this plan, we were very worried and not sure what kind of misunderstanding and difficulty we would meet. [...] After we really started, we found we did very well. Originally we thought we could realise 70% of the assumptions, but now we found we completed 120% in every place.

How should we understand the ‘120%’ here? If 100% was the content of the curatorial plan, ‘120%’ meant that the curators already put the proposal secondary to on-site, participatory dynamics. The curators realised that the process carried its own lessons, particularly when encountering individuals on their journey. For example, the ‘Reports’ noted that at the end of Lu and Zhan’s first visit to the Satellite Center, having persuaded the officers, ‘Lu Jie breathed a sigh in Long March Discourse: even with just this debate and exchange, the Long March had already prevailed at Xichang.’⁴⁰²

The curators started improvising. This was especially clear on occasions when the

⁴⁰⁰ Long March Project, ‘Yantu Zhanbao (7 yue 16 ri)’ [Reports from the Road (July 16)], *Tom.com.cn*, 2002 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20030402232332/http://arts.tom.com/zhanlan/changzheng723/index.php>> [accessed 2 September 2021].

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² Edited from the original English version of the Reports from the Road to suit the original Chinese sentence better.

curators, instead of artists, were the executor of artworks and events. Many invited artists did not travel in person, but allowed the curators to take their works on the road. The curators therefore became the couriers, executors, interpreters and agents of these artworks. The locations, approaches of display and audiences of artworks were up to the curators' discretion and often decided en route.

In *Long March*, many temporary exhibitions were made out of prints and videos. Digital files made it possible for the curators to carry and reproduce artworks on different sites. In Ruijin, the curators decided to exhibit German artist Ingo Günther's prints *Globe* in the Yeping Revolutionary Memorial Site. *Globe* was a series of colourful images of a planet (perhaps the earth). The curators explained their choice of the Ruijin Shazhouba Auditorium, saying that the architecture, the emblem on the building and the history reflected the interconnection between the West, the Soviet Union and China. Günther's works were printed out, but there was no wall to hang the prints, so the curators came up with an alternative solution. They hired some local residents to be the literary 'holders' of the works:

The exhibition was held using a unique method of temporary exhibition. Eighteen villagers from Xiejia Village, Ruijin, held Günther's works up with their hands, lining up in a row, presenting the works to the audience, comprised mainly of tourists visiting the revolutionary memorial sites.⁴⁰³

Chinese artist Song Dong (1966–)'s work was also exhibited in a very localised way. On 15 July, *Long March* minibus was stuck in a local bazaar in Longsheng, Guilin province. The curators decided to throw on an exhibition, echoing the 'street exhibition' mentioned in Lu's curatorial proposal (2001). They set up a stall, exhibiting the work *Shaft-Scenery* (2000) by Song Dong, which was composed of scrolls of long original photographs. A boombox was playing loudly recordings of Long March slogans in different Chinese dialects, which was recorded by artist Wang Jinsong (1963–) in Beijing. Surrounded by the crowd, the curators also distributed postcards of *Long March* to curious people. Compared with 'Art Car', this uncensored and free market made it possible to exhibit some unorthodox works, including a painting of Mao Zedong with a red face.

⁴⁰³ 'Reports from the Road: Site 1 - Ruijin, Jiangxi Province', 2002
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20031027050919/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/e-progress1-1.htm>>
[accessed 16 December 2020].



Fig. 38 The exhibition of Ingo Günther took place at the original site of the former Provisional Sino-Soviet Central Government at Site 1 Ruijin on 3 July 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

At the second site Jinggang Mountain, the curators made a one-day ‘Touring Sculpture Exhibition’. Sui Jianguo’s *Marx in China*, rejected in Ruijin by the government, was exhibited freely in various environments this time. The sculpture was first put next to a house in a village, with political slogans left from the Cultural Revolution era. The curators later took the statue to a river. *Marx in China* was fixed onto a bamboo raft, drifting along the rushing river. Marx was looking ahead with a fixed gaze, with sheer mountains in the background and the boatman holding a long pole. There was no on-site audience for this display apart from the project team. But they documented the visual effect through photography and videos. Another work of Sui, *Jesus in China*, was a small statue of Jesus on a wooden cross, which could be easily grasped by hand. Like *Marx in China*, this statue of Jesus was also dressed in a Mao Suit. As it was so small, when exhibiting this work in the village, the statue was quickly grasped in the hands of local children. After the display of Marx on the river, the curatorial team exhibited the Jesus work in a local Catholic church,

where a local old woman kept praying to *Jesus in China* held by the curators.

When Qiu discussed the curatorial displays of Sui Jianguo's works and the general improvised disposition of artworks, he considered that in *Long March*, 'The curators and the artists were complicit.'⁴⁰⁴ The artists made artworks and the curators realised the unusual exhibitions in non-white-cube environments. Such collaborations allowed the curatorial team to freely make multiple 'visual displays' of the same artworks. It is also worth noting that such improvised displays were often produced as a performance for the camera. The time of 'exhibition' also often depended on the time needed for documentation. For example, in Shen Xiaomin's documentary, in Moxi, Sichuan Province, *Jesus in China* appeared again in a Catholic church, when Qiu was holding the statue while moving along the coloured glass window. Such a display was not intended for on-site audiences but for the camera. What the documentation tried to record was these creative displays in alternative spaces, which could be read as curatorial improvisations in living situations, playing with what was offered on site.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with Qiu Zhijie in 2018.

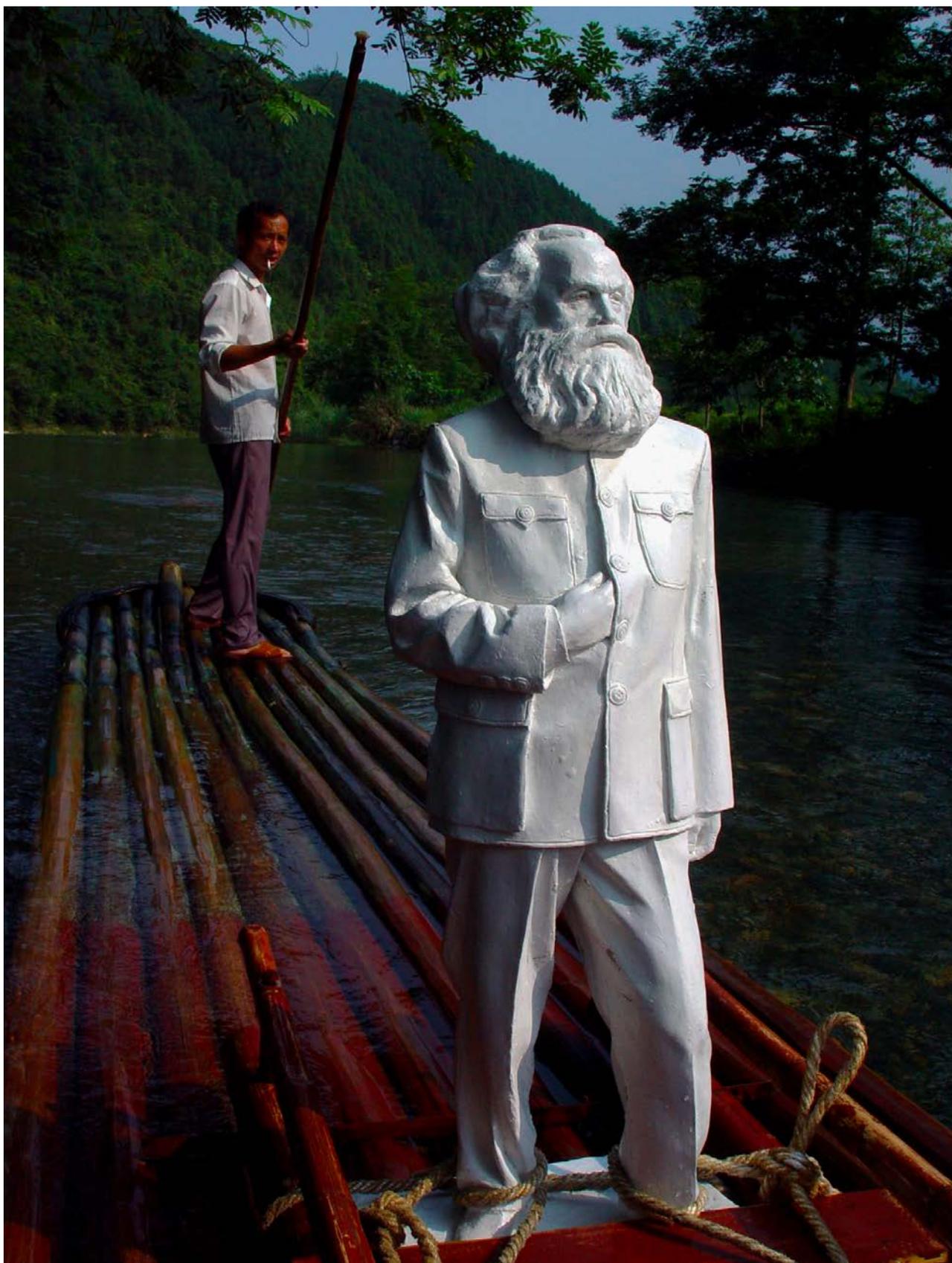


Fig. 39 Sui Jianguo's sculpture *Marx in China* was put on a bamboo raft at Site 2 Jinggang Mountain, on 11 July 2002. Courtesy of Sui Jianguo and Long March Project.

Agent

When artworks were completed on the road, the realisation of artworks and the realisation of curating were simultaneously integrated together. Jiang Jie's work *Sending off the Red Army: In Commemoration of the Mothers on the Long March* was exactly such an example. Jiang was also a sculptor teaching in CAFA. She proposed to make twenty realistic and true size sculptures of new-born babies. Jiang sent one finished sculpture of baby to the curators when they were already on the road. She asked the curators to find a family along their trip to 'adopt' this baby and name it. She would provide expenses if the family took photos with the baby every year on the adoption day — its 'birthday'.

When Jiang just heard about *Long March*, she was not sure how to respond to grand narratives like history or revolution. Then she came up with the question of what women experienced during the war and how they would navigate between gendered and bodily identities such as a human, a woman and a mother. During the historical Long March, when female Red Army soldiers got pregnant and gave birth to babies on the road, they had to give their babies away for adoption to the locals. Jiang Jie then came up with this proposal of sending off new babies. In Kunming, the curators received the first sculpture through a post and found that it was so real and almost scary because the infant's face was full of wrinkles. It was a curling-up baby in sleep and people were unable to identify its gender.

On 26 August, in Moxi, Sichuan Province, the curators encountered Xiao Honggang, an enthusiastic collector of stones and the director of Glacier Museum of Strange Rocks located in his own home.⁴⁰⁵ Xiao showed great passion for *Long March* and his unusual passion for art made the curators identify him as the perfect candidate as an adopter. In the video, Qiu visited Xiao's museum and met his wife and three children, one boy and two girls. Surrounded by cameras and a crowd of Xiao's neighbours, Qiu introduced Jiang Jie's work in relation to the original Long March and presented Xiao with the sculpture baby. Xiao was happy to 'adopt' the baby and a neighbour suggested the name Shuxian, combined by two Chinese characters describing beautiful and gentle females. When filing the adoption form, Xiao Honggang noted down that the baby was named 'Xiao Shuxian (female)' and gave the baby gender. Qiu organised Xiao's whole family to take a photo, with the father holding the baby in arms.⁴⁰⁶

During *Long March*, the artist did not travel by herself and the curators became her

⁴⁰⁵ 'Reports from the Road – Site 11 Moxi, Sichuan Province', *Long March Project* <<http://longmarchproject.com/s11-moxi/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

⁴⁰⁶ Video footage of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, Long March Archive, 2002.

agent. Jiang's work has also become one of the few works in *Long March* that lasted till today: every year, Xiao Honggang still sends a family photo including the baby to the artist.

The project's journey on the road encountered more unexpected situations compared to what was initially set out in the plan. Though the basic structure of the curatorial proposal was still obvious in the journey, the daily happenings and execution largely involved dealing with things that could not be predicted or planned ahead. Logistics like finding hotels and exhibition spaces, transport, connection with locals, health conditions of the staff and production like printing posters became the most urgent issues occupying the team. The contemplation on the revolutionary history, modernisation of China and discussion among participants devised in the curatorial proposal (1999/2001) were in fact not prominent during the journey. Contemplation, self-reflection and discussion demanded much more time. The tight timescale of this project could not . To some extent, the project became more result-oriented and outcome-driven during its realisation. From the time of turning the proposal into reality, the importance of execution and the value of the outcome started outweighing the criticality of the project.



Fig. 40 Xiao Honggang (dressed in a grey shirt) was 'adopting' the sculpture baby made by

artist Jiang Jie as part of the sculpture and performance work *Sending Off the Red Army: To Commemorate the Mothers on the Road of the Long March* at Site 11 Moxi. Courtesy of Jiang Jie and Long March Project.



Fig. 41 The exhibition 'Documentation of Chinese Art in the 1990s' in the village Maoping as part of Site 2 Jinggang Mountain on 9 July 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.



Fig. 42 An old lay seeing Sui Jianguo's sculpture work *Jesus Christ in China* at Site 2 Jianggang Mountain on 11 July 2002. Still from the documentary *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (2002). Courtesy of Long March Project.

Chapter 9 Lugu Lake

A controversy surrounding *Long March* before its journey started was Lu's insistence on inviting the American feminist icon Judy Chicago, instead of funding more Chinese artists' travel and production of works. Chicago met Lu Jie in New York in early 2002, when Lu introduced *Long March* to her. As previously mentioned, Chicago devised a project specifically for Site 6 Lugu Lake in the 'Total Plan'. Embraced by precipitous mountains on a plateau in southwestern China, Lugu Lake has been known as 'the Last Kingdom of Women' since the 1990s. After tourism flourished following the economic reform, Lugu Lake was advertised as a secluded corner left out of modernisation. The local indigenous people Mosuo (a branch of the Na ethnic minority) were also made famous for their non-binding practice in conjugal relationships, i.e. 'walking marriage'. In such customs, men are allowed to affiliate with several different households, and families are centred around women. These practices were initially deemed as primitive by researchers and policy makers in the 1950s. But in the reform-era, Lugu Lake adopted labels like 'matriarchal society' and 'Mosuo culture' to attract curious tourists. During the 1990s, Lugu Lake was widely depicted as an utopia existing in reality, where 'women ruled the world'. The name 'Kingdom of Women' referred to a fictional country that appeared in the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*. The curatorial plan for the site of Lugu Lake was one of the sites that changed dramatically from the initial proposal (2001) but both of its initial and altered plans were most ambitious. Today, Lugu Lake was also the most discussed site in the current research, possibly because of Chicago's participation and also how this site exposed the clashes between curators and artists in *Long March*.

However, Lu and Qiu were nominally not the curators on this site. What was the curatorial process of this site and how did the curators work with Chicago and Chinese artists? Su-ling Welland, who presented a detailed account and analysis of a group of Chinese women artists' experience in Lugu Lake in her book *Experimental Beijing*, was a participant on the site of Lugu Lake herself.⁴⁰⁷ But Welland did not look much into the development of curating or put the site in the context of the realisation of the whole *Long March*. This chapter aims to provide a perspective about the tension between artists and curators involved in this project by analysing at their different approaches to exhibition-

⁴⁰⁷ Sasha Su-ling Welland, 'The Hinterland of Feminist Art', in *Experimental Beijing: Gender and Globalisation in Chinese Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: duke university press, 2018), pp. 135–76.

making.

‘F-male’

In ‘A Detailed Curatorial Plan’ (2001), Lu initially proposed a ‘F-male’ exhibition in Lugu Lake, assembling the local Mosuo women’s living experience, Western Feminist art and some eye-catching phenomena about women in China. Lu weaved two ladies’ lives which were bound to Lugu Lake to lay a ground for discussion. Granny Xiao Shuming (1927–2008) was once celebrated as the ‘the Last Princess’ (echoing Antonioni’s film *The Last Emperor*) for tourism in the 1990s, but she was in fact born ethnically as Han. She was forced to marry a local headman of Lugu Lake before 1949. Another lady Yang Erche Namu (1966–) made herself a contemporary and self-liberated icon in China with her autobiography *Leaving the Kingdom of Daughters* (1997). While presenting these detailed stories, Lu also brought in a macro-level view of feminism in different locales. In the plan, the participants of this site would,

Read excerpts from Julia Kristeva's *About Chinese Women* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* to an all-female audience. Show catalogues of Chinese Feminist Art and Western Feminist Art exhibitions. International and Chinese women artists and theorists will participate in the workshop and exhibition here.⁴⁰⁸

Following this, Chinese and worldwide artists were listed in the alphabetical order of their surnames: Marina Abramovic (1946–), Cai Jin (1965–), Patty Chang (1972–), Judy Chicago, An Van Dienderen (1971–), Tracy Emin (1963–), Guerrilla Girls, Jiang Qing (1914–1991), Lin Tianmiao, Yoko Ono (1961–), Tracy Rose (1974–), Shen Yuan (1959–), Tinh Minh (1952–), Yin Xiuzheng (1963–) and Li Hong (1967–). Among them, along with a line-up of internationally established artists, the name Jiang Qing stood out. She was the last wife of Mao Zedong, an actress in her early life, a politician occupying the front stage during the Cultural Revolution and an amateur photographer. Lu planned to exhibit her photographs. The Communist experience and discourse of women was then inserted into the show. Jiang Qing’s photographs referenced discussion of female partners of leaders during the historical Long March through to the present day.

‘Feminist’ is translated into Chinese as *nüquan* (women’s right) or *nüxing* (female or women) *zhuyi* (-ism), but the term *nüquan yishu* (Feminist art) is rarely used in China. In

⁴⁰⁸ Lu Jie, ‘Long March — A Walking Visual Exhibition: A Detailed Curatorial Plan’, p. 44.

comparison, women's art (*nüxing yishu*) emerged in China in the 1990s and soon became an influential genre, with exhibitions such as 'the World of Female Artists' (Beijing, 1990), 'Natural Feminine Art' (Kunming, 1995), 'Women's Approach to Chinese Contemporary Art' (Beijing, 1995) and 'Century Woman' (Beijing, 1998). In contrast to Feminist art in the West as an act of feminists' self-naming and self-declaration, 'women's art' was largely only related to the gender of the artist in question. It was often the curators who used the term as a clue for group exhibitions or research.⁴⁰⁹ Taking 'women's art' as a field for observation, Jia Fangzhou, the male curator of 'Century Woman', considered 'women's art' as 'the newest topic in contemporary Chinese art' and summarised several attributes of women's art: attention to emotional, personal, everyday life subjects, using textile and embroidery, and lack of interest in 'grand themes' like history and politics or 'men's issues'.⁴¹⁰ Such reading was highly stereotypical that in response many female artists turned away from 'women's art' and, in turn, from Feminism. Xiang Jing commented that, 'Women are often "she/her", never "I/me"'.⁴¹¹ In *Experimental Beijing*, Welland, who formed several partnerships with women artists, poignantly pointed out why *nüxing yishu* made female artists get caught in 'double blinds':

Avant-garde became coded as *liumang* (hooligan) and masculine. Female artists, largely excluded from this realm of activity, found their work contained within a new domesticating and marginalising category of *nüxing yishu* (feminine or women's art). [...] [T]hese women are 'caught up' in a different way from male peers who moved from underground, 'avant-garde' activity to positions of national and international influence. They are caught by a set of interlocking double blinds, generated through cultural encounter over time, regarding female talent and representation.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹ For example, in comprehensive reviews such as catalogue *90s Art China 1990-1999* edited by Lü Peng in 2002 and the catalogue of the first Guangzhou Triennial *Representation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art (1990-2000)*, both include a chapter 'Women's Art'.

⁴¹⁰ Jia Fangzhou, 'Preface', in *Shijie Nüxing (Century Woman)* (Hong Kong: Shijie huaren yishu chubanshe, 1998), pp. 8–9.

⁴¹¹ 'Xiang Jing', *Tate* <<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/tate-research-centre-asia/women-artists-contemporary-china/xiang-jing>> [accessed 26 February 2021]. But on the international stage, Western feminist movement and exhibitions paying attention to female artists indeed have helped female artists be more present, who were often shadowed or overlooked in the global rise of 'Chinese contemporary art'. Artist Yin Xiuzhen once shared an anecdote: during the seminar accompanying 'China!' exhibition hosted by Bonn's Museum of Modern Art in 1996, when people asked why there were no women artists in the show, the curator answered 'because there are not any women artists in China'. This triggered the public anger and Bonn's Frauenmuseum (Women's Museum) started their search for female artists in China and organised the 'Half of the Sky' exhibition two years later and included Yin's work. 'Yin Xiuzhen', *Tate* <<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/tate-research-centre-asia/women-artists-contemporary-china/yin-xiuzhen>> [accessed 26 February 2021].

⁴¹² Welland, pp. 16, 27.

With this background, we can better understand Lu's curatorial plan for Lugu Lake. He intended to question the popular phenomenon of 'women's art'. By furthering this discourse, Lu intended to analyse the entangled relationship between inherited Communist discourse in China and theories of Western Feminism. Juxtaposing heterogeneous participants and cultural facts under an overarching theme was a strategy widely used in *Long March*. In this case, female artists were not mentioned for their particular artworks, or for their potential interests in the project, but more for their various identities, their gender, nationality, culture and their thoughts about feminism. Such curating was theoretically possible, writing, in which all artworks, artefacts, cultural phenomena and artists in different places could be compared with each other to interrogate imposed stereotypes, with the remit of enriching and complicating the shared trajectory of feminism and feminist art. However, when *Long March* hit the road, when participants met each other, they were not merely representative signifiers. Participants joined with their motivations and their own agendas. While the curators could mobilise participants, participants could also become mobilisers and sometimes orient the project in other directions.

Discontent among the Artists

The initial plan for Lugu Lake dramatically changed after Lu and Qiu decided to invite Judy Chicago specifically to this site. In her proposal, Chicago proposed a collaborative project with Chinese women artists, named 'What if Women Ruled the World?', inviting artists to reimagine the world by researching into Lugu Lake. After giving up the right to select twelve proposals out of all submissions, the curators planned to exhibit all proposals in Lugu Lake. Moreover, they stepped back from being the curators of this site. The curators noted down the further development of Chicago's project.

[S]ome artists expressed their discontent that they could only display proposals at Lugu Lake, and their sincere hope that they could actually realize works on-site. Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie decided to forgo their curatorial prerogative and allow all those artists who had submitted proposals and wanted to realise works to do so.⁴¹³

Lu and Qiu also invited Shen Yu, or accepted her proposition, to help assist this site the project, mainly to coordinate with female artists.⁴¹⁴ Shen was an active young researcher,

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Shen Yu later changed her name to Shen Zichen. In 2002, she came to teach in Sichuan Academy of Fine

curator and the director of the self-initiated Women's Art Center. For the coming exhibition, Shen became a speaker for a small group of women artists and expressed their concerns. However, Chicago's direct liaison with *Long March* was still Lu Jie. When Lu was occupied and did not follow closely with this particular commission, Chinese women artists' concerns were not fully addressed to Chicago. When Chicago finally arrived in Beijing in July, after giving a lecture, she was greeted by Chinese artists' anxious questions. Welland, who was conducting her field research in Beijing, recorded Chicago's expression of solidarity with Chinese female artists. Chicago confirmed that she did not come a long way to 'not collaborate' and would stand together with them against the male-dominant structure. Welland noted,

With me as a Chinese-English interpreter, [Chicago] explained to sceptical artists in Beijing that she had also harboured the suspicion that 'this was like just this little women's thing.' But she continued, 'I figured that if we all got together we could make so much trouble that they would wish they had never done this. So you know that's what I was hoping. And for them to boycott it is like the absolute opposite of what should have happened.'⁴¹⁵

Through the bond of gender, Chicago expressed her commitment to the transnational union. In the company of two volunteers Lisa Horikawa and Megan Connolly, Chicago and her husband travelled to Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan, and visited the two group exhibitions organised by *Long March*.⁴¹⁶ Chicago also met six participants of her Lugu Lake project including Fu Liya (1957–), Lei Yan (1957–), Sun Guojun (1959–) and Shen Yu. However, on the pragmatic level, Chicago still relied on her curatorial counterparts, Lu and Qiu, for the practical problems of how and where to exhibit works. Chicago had little more information for the coming days.

By contrast, Lei Yan and Sun Guojun, two local artists, had already travelled to Lugu Lake in early May and conducted the first stage of their work: scattering hemp seed on the bank of Lugu Lake and cornfields.⁴¹⁷ This performative piece echoed Mao's famous dictum — 'The Long March is a manifesto, a propaganda force, a seeding machine.' The two artists regarded hemp seed and marijuana as metaphors for spiritual thoughts, in response to the Long March as a process of ideological dissemination. They wrote in their journal, which

Arts.

⁴¹⁵ Sasha Su-ling Welland, 'The Hinterlands of Feminist', *Experimental Beijing*, p. 143.

⁴¹⁶ Thanks to the close collaboration with Ye Yongqing, the local artist community and the nearly white-cube exhibition spaces, 'Long March' presented an extensive amount of videos and installations by artists based in Shanghai and Beijing and hosted several workshops.

⁴¹⁷ Sasha Su-ling Welland, 'The Hinterlands of Feminist', *Experimental Beijing*.

was also called battle reports, that the seed, like life born from the body of the mother, would ‘enter another person’s spiritual space’ and ‘change the world’. Compared with these two artists, Lu had only travelled to Lugu Lake years ago as a tourist, while Qiu or Chicago had not even been there. The curators were not in touch with Lei or Sun for help on finding practical solutions for exhibitions.

When Chicago was in Kunming, Lu and Qiu were in Lijiang, the fifth site of the project and also on the territory of the Na people. Chicago had met Lu in New York in early 2002, when Lu introduced the project to her. In Lijiang, she eventually met Qiu. Informed by the Chinese artists in Beijing and Kunming, Chicago and Lisa reported the anxieties of artists to the curatorial team. The curators were stunned.

Because apparently, at their meeting with the female artists held the night before Chicago arrived in Kunming, none of these concerns had been mentioned. At this point, everyone reconfirmed the importance of communication while working in a cross-cultural and cross-gender environment.⁴¹⁸

When Chicago asked Lu Jie about the potential locations for the coming exhibition, as the artists in Kunming stated their need for indoor space, Lu said he did not know either and they would find a place when they arrived there. Lu asked for Chicago’s understanding and explained that such an approach was a demonstration of the ‘Long March Methodology’, referring to working with available sources on site. Many of *Long March* exhibitions before Lugu Lake were held outdoors, like the one in a bazaar. It was clear that artists like Sun, Lei and Chicago had very different expectations of making an exhibition from Lu’s. The artists requested in-door spaces and detailed plans while the curators were already used to using alternative spaces and deciding on the day during the journey. This difference of perceptions regarding exhibition-making had not been addressed fully before their meeting. The accumulation of uncertainty, grievance and fear among artists resulted in participating artists’ coming up with their own plans of production.

At the time, the curators did not fully understand the seriousness of the artists’ discontent. When Chicago expressed her worries to the two curators, the two curators said they did not feel the same. They voiced in the third-person in ‘Reports from the Road’ that,

Judy’s rich worldwide experience, especially the experience of interaction with women in different cultures in different ways, made her very nervous

⁴¹⁸ Long March Project, ‘Reports from the Road – Site 5: Lijiang’ (2017 version), <<http://longmarchproject.com/zh/s5-lijiang/>> [accessed 1 September 2018].

about the omnipresent and overly radical confrontation in the early stage of feminism in different place.⁴¹⁹

The quotation demonstrated that the curators ascribed Chicago's worries over the collaboration with Chinese women artists to Chicago's position as a foreigner who was unfamiliar with the local situation and the steadfast approaches of feminists. In fact, it was the curators who overlooked Chinese artists' concerns and underestimated the challenge they would face with the collaboration. They still held much confidence in managing the situation in Lugu Lake.

From 27 to 30 July, 2002, Chicago, Chinese artists, and the curatorial team of *Long March* gathered in Lugu Lake and realised the project. The participating Chinese artists who came to this site as a group and made artworks included Sun Guojuan, Lei Yan, Huang Ru, Pan Xuan, Wu Weihe, Fu Liya, Huang Yin, Su Yabi (1975–), Song Yanping and Zhang Lun.⁴²⁰ There were also accompanying members in this group including Huang Yin, Shen Yu, Sasha Su-ling Welland and photographer James Tweedie.⁴²¹ According to Welland, this group, mainly of members from southwestern China and one from Inner Mongolia, was formed gradually in preparing for the Lugu Lake site by themselves. Outside of this group, there were also artists like Ding Jie (1978–) who wanted to make a social practice in Lugu Lake and was later recognised as a participating artist by *Long March*. Li Shurui, also came to Lugu Lake on her own, while not known by *Long March* or the other Chinese artists.⁴²² Hu Liu (1982–) and He Chi (1978–), the two artists who accompanied the elder Guo Fengyi from Xi'an to Lijiang, also came to observe the scene. Plus the work team of *Long March*, there was a large group that gathered in Lugu Lake.

⁴¹⁹ Long March Project, 'Reports from the Road – Site 5: Lijiang' (2002 version).

⁴²⁰ 'Reports from the Road – Site 06 Lugu Lake, Yunnan-Sichuan Province Border', *Long March Project* <<http://longmarchproject.com/s6report-lugu/>> [accessed 1 March 2021].

⁴²¹ Sasha Su-ling Welland, 'The Hinterlands of Feminist', *Experimental Beijing*, p. 136. There was a group photo.

⁴²² Interview with Ding Jie, 2018–2019. Interview with Li Shurui, September 2019. Interview with Hu Liu, December 2019.



Fig. 43 Artists on the road between their lodgings and Qidi Shanzhuang in July 2020. Photography by James Tweedie. Courtesy of the website ‘Experimental Beijing’ <<http://experimentalbeijing.com/>> [Accessed on 8 January 2021]. Sasha Su-ling Welland has identified the name of these artists: From left to right, first row: Song Yanping, Lei Yan; second row: Su Yabi, Huang Yin, Sasha Welland, Sun Guojuan, Pang Xuan, Huang Ru, Zhang Lun, Fu Liya, Shen Yu, Su Ruya.

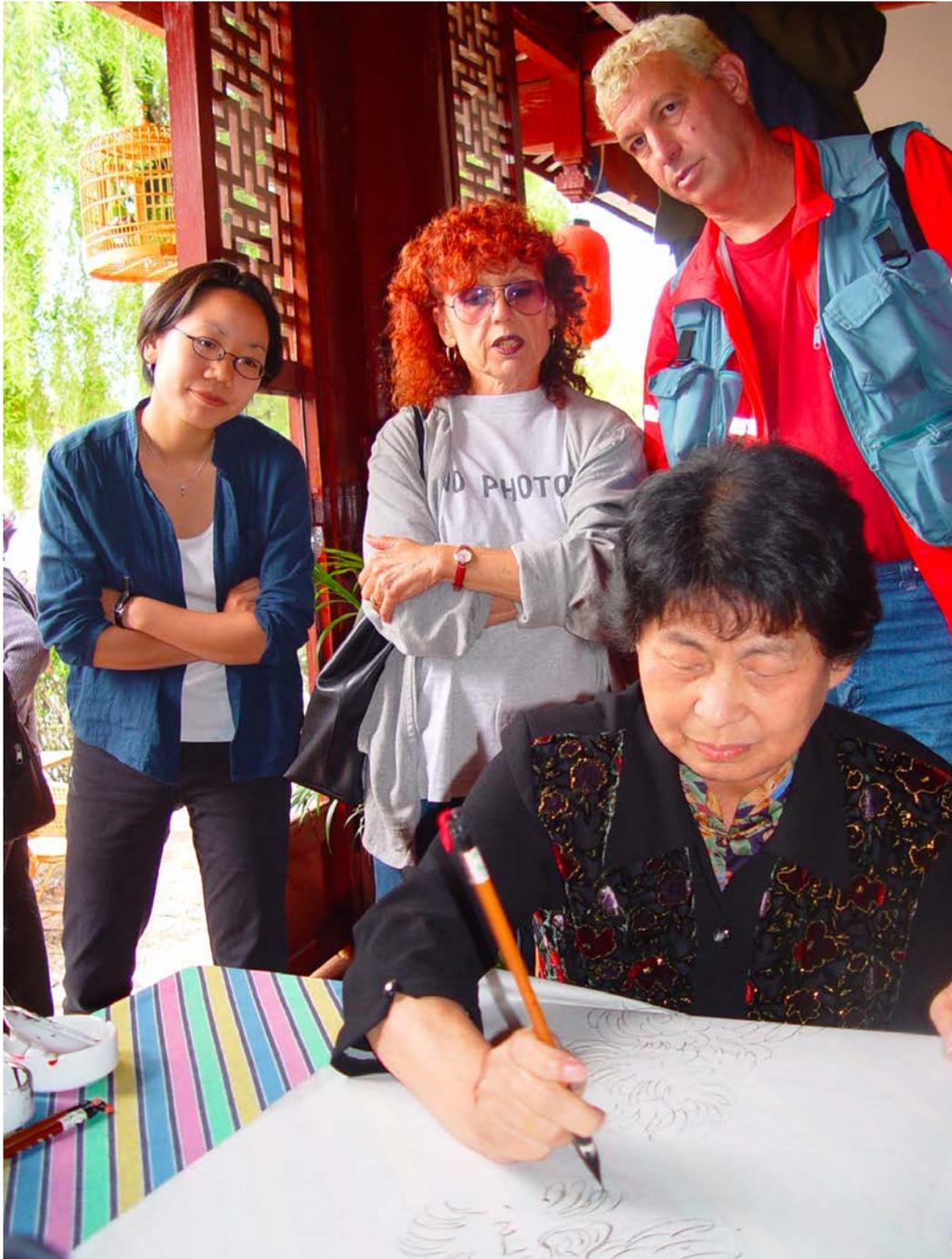


Fig. 44 Judy Chicago and Guo Fengyi met at Guo's exhibition at Site 5 Lijiang, on 26 July 2002. From left to right: Lisa Horikawa, Judy Chicago, Guo Fengyi, Chicago's husband Donald Woodman. Ironically, Chicago was wearing a T-shirt with word 'No Photo'. Courtesy of Long March Project.

When Chicago finally met the group of Chinese artists, they were sitting in a circle in a restaurant in Luoshui, a tourist destination village in Lugu Lake. Lu Jie also attended this meeting, while Qiu Zhijie stayed in Lijiang to complete his artwork. Chicago proposed to artists in the room to build a *Womanhouse* in Lugu Lake with Chinese artists for their

exhibition ‘What If Women Ruled the World?’. *Womanhouse* was a temporary project conducted by Chicago and Miriam Shapiro, a group of students and several local artists in 1972 in Hollywood, as part of the Feminist Art Programme in California Institute of Arts (CalArts).⁴²³ It emphasised group collaboration of manual labour — within three months, about thirty females renovated a dilapidated mansion into ‘an exclusive environment’ for their group exhibition. It was meant to be a space for women to raise self-awareness and ‘restructure their personalities’ by challenging the limits the society put on them.

This time in Lugu Lake, Chicago proposed to build a ‘A House for Chinese Women’: ‘Through this project, they were to demonstrate how women could collaborate and that the world ruled by women is indeed a peaceful and creative one.’⁴²⁴ The idea might have come out from the location that Chicago and Lu Jie had found for the coming exhibition on their way to Lugu Lake: a beautiful holiday inn Qidi Shanzhuang, where they had chosen to stay. Chicago suggested to artists that they could hang and stage their proposals together in the yard of the wooden house. After silence, some artists raised the point that they had already found locations for their works in Luoshui village and they needed to see the inn to make decisions. Lu recalled when he stepped into the restaurant in Luoshui that the atmosphere was already uneasy, and the room was now for a moment full of discussions.⁴²⁵ Chicago had to clarify and stress that this was only a proposal to be discussed further and she invited these artists to meet the next morning to have further discussions.

In Chicago’s open call, the proposal exhibition was imagined to take place by the lake. Chicago required proposals that could survive rain and wind for several days in the open air.⁴²⁶ Now embodied in a relatively isolated house, the exhibition turned to inhabit a more domestic space. While in Lijiang, Lu was alerted by an anonymous call possibly from the national security department, who reminded him to keep *Long March*’s activities low-key. This added to Lu’s consideration of choosing the outlying inn as the exhibition site instead in Luoshui with most visitors. But these concerns were not shared with artists. After the

⁴²³ Temma Balducci, ‘Revisiting “Womanhouse”: Welcome to the (Deconstructed) “Dollhouse”’, *Woman’s Art Journal*, 27.2 (2006), 17–23.

⁴²⁴ Long March Project, ‘Reports from the Road – Site 6’ (2017 version), <<http://longmarchproject.com/zh/s6report-lugu/>> [accessed 17 September 2019]

⁴²⁵ In our interview, Lu considered Qiu was much more cunning than him and knew how to avoid difficult situations. Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019. The situation of this meeting was recorded in the documentary by Shen Xiaomin. Recording were currently held by Long March Project and not published yet.

⁴²⁶ “‘Jiaru Nüren Tongzhi Shijie’ Yishu Fang An Zhengji Hezuozhe” [‘What if Women Ruled the World’ Art Proposal Call for Collaborators], *Arts.tom.com*, 2002 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20020601182933/http://arts.tom.com/Archive/2002/4/28-43247.html>> [accessed 1 March 2021].

meeting with Chicago, most of the artists continued their meeting in their own guesthouse. Welland observed that the ‘Womanhouse’ proposal sparked some artists’ concern that their contribution would all be framed under the name of Chicago and her work — this was their impression of Chicago’s work *The Dinner Party* (1979).⁴²⁷ Some proposed to leave *Long March* and stage their own exhibition.

The next morning, in Qidi Shanzhuang, a majority of artists gathered and passed on a manifesto to Chicago through Lu Jie as Chicago unfortunately fell ill. There were four requests in their manifesto:

1. Chinese women artists wish to replace the concept of ‘Womanhouse’ with the title ‘Dialogue with Lugu Lake’ or ‘Dialogue with Judy Chicago at Lugu Lake’.
2. All participants in the entire Lugu Lake art activity assert the moral and legal rights to works in their own names.
3. Each artist/participant will keep the copyright of her own work.
4. The artists wish to have a clearly defined written agreement. The contents of the agreement will be agreed upon by both sides, with signatures constituting a binding contract.⁴²⁸

Through renaming and clarifying authorship, these artists overturned the framework Chicago had proposed, changing the project led solely by Chicago to a project co-organised by all. Given the tone of the legal, official and distant language, the request for a contract instead of informal understanding, one could also feel the unspoken frustration and anger. Though Lu was not mentioned as the curator, he was also addressed behind Chicago’s name. In the initial ‘Reports from the Road’ (2002), Lu noted down that,

For the second point, Lu was deeply regretful. He did not notice that artists were having such serious crises and distrust. It is obvious that the artists should have the authorship and copyright of their works in any case.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁷ Sasha Su-ling Welland, ‘The Hinterlands of Feminist’, *Experimental Beijing*, p. 152. In fact, Chicago listed all names of participants and contributors in *The Dinner Party*. But artists in China at then might only learn about the work through some introduced content and cannot access more comprehensive information about the work. ‘Acknowledgement Panels (The Dinner Party)’, *Brooklyn Museum* <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/acknowledgement_panels> [accessed 1 January 2022].

⁴²⁸ Sasha Su-ling Welland, ‘The Hinterlands of Feminist’, *Experimental Beijing*, p. 153. The content of the manifesto is slightly different from the records by the Long March Project, but overall they aligned with each other.

⁴²⁹ ‘Yantu Zhanbao (7 Yue 26 Ri–31 Ri)’ [Reports from the Road (26–31 July)], 2003 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20030406214152/http://arts.tom.com/zhuanti/changzheng726/index.php>> [accessed 1 September 2021]. Qiu Zhijie was not present in this occasion and I inferred it was Lu who wrote this report.

Lu came back and conveyed Chicago's agreement to all requests. Lu's notes described that from then on, the atmosphere loosened. He explained that his original plan was to invite 'the creators of feminist art in both the West and China to collaborate' and hoped through revisiting the original idea of Western feminism, Chinese artists could fundamentally question or build something, instead of being consumed as fashionable 'spectacles'.⁴³⁰ But in Welland's observation, the artists were still upset.

Anger mixed with remorse, exhaustion, and cigarette smoke. Lu lectured the artists about his responsibilities as a curator to their foreign guest and thanked them in a strained tone for their efforts. A primary complaint to emerge from the artists' side was that they hadn't had enough time with Chicago to communicate their ideas, let alone come to a consensus about an overall plan.⁴³¹

Shen Xiaomin's video camera also documented Shen Yu's question to Lu. Shen raised the point that she had enlisted many artists for this site of *Long March*, but some artists who had submitted their proposals already changed their mind about participation and decided to quit *Long March*. However, Shen found that these artists' proposals were still exhibited – in the morning, before the arrival of artists, Lu and his wife Shen Meng were already setting up the exhibition of artists' proposals. Hearing Shen Yu's question, Lu Jie acknowledged her contribution to the project but pointed out that these artists should contact the curatorial team directly. Lu also declared to the artists who were present on the site about the relationship between artists and the project:

Artists who have not submitted a proposal, of course, have their own right to do anything. But any responsibility has nothing to do with us. This is the process of following common exhibitions when the invitation was first issued, and we can't break it. So if you do anything that is related to us, whether it is related now, or related to future museum exhibitions, or related to the catalogue, you must submit a proposal to us now. [...] We have set a policy that as long as you do not violate national laws, we are open. Both Judy and I hope to have as many people as possible, so as to break the original choices and boundaries. Opposition is also a contribution to us.⁴³²

Besides, Lu also reminded them that according to most exhibitions, the project had the right to take photos of artists' works and it was the organising committee of the project that would represent the overall process. In tears, Chicago joined the conversation. She

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Sasha Su-ling Welland, 'The Hinterlands of Feminist', *Experimental Beijing*, p.154.

⁴³² Video recordings of the event, Long March Archive.

expressed the hurtful pain she had felt. She emphasised that, ‘I came here to make art. I don’t want to talk forever. We don’t have that much time. I came to make art’.⁴³³



Fig. 45 Lu Jie talking with artists after artists put forward name-changing of the collaborative project with Judy Chicago at Site 6 Lugu Lake on 28 July 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

What was alarming here was that among Chinese artists, curators and Judy Chicago, the understanding towards each other and the understanding about how to make an exhibition was so inadequate at this stage. This lack of communication and understanding was thought to be representative of the power dynamics at play. Welland recorded a revealing conversation between Lei Yan and Sun Guojuan of their feelings towards the event when Lu took the manifesto to Chicago:

As they waited, Lei Yan mused, ‘Even though we are in the Lugu Lake area, we have no discursive power.’ Sun Guojuan responded, ‘Right, we were inserted into someone else’s work. Moreover, before that, we didn’t even discuss this, I mean, nobody told us there would be a Woman house, we didn’t know until yesterday. That’s to say, when we enter into Woman house,

⁴³³ Sasha Su-ling Welland, ‘The Hinterlands of Feminist’, *Experimental Beijing*, p.154.

it's someone else's, we become someone else's work.⁴³⁴

Lu and Qiu's method of improvising with available resources and making exhibitions directly on-site had already been in practice for nearly a month. It had become typical for them that a plan for the next day would only come in shape the day before. That was enabled by the condition that the curators already earned most artists' full permission to present their works according to the curators' decision. In Xichang, Lu was only working with one artist Zhan Wang and they had already known each other for some time. Even under such circumstances, Lu was already bearing much pressure in realising Zhan's proposal. However, this time in Lugu Lake, Lu didn't have those conditions. This group of artists who came in person to Lugu Lake did not share such a consensus with the curators and they felt being disrespected when only being offered such a choice the evening before the exhibition. This lack of communication was seen by the female artists as their lack of 'discursive power'. Such power had been monopolised by the curators.

Lugu Lake was the site with the largest number of artists who came to the site to participate in the project in person. In Lugu Lake, Lu was working with over ten artists and other participants who had no interaction in person before. Besides, Lu was trying to protect the project from censorship this time. He did not openly share the pressure with the artists. From the video, we can find that Lu was trying to maintain a calm and reasonable attitude when he was confronted by the artists. This was also the moment that he was re-asserting his position as the chief curator, central mediator and project manager. His response suggested that he was anxious that he might lose control of the project. Many participants and factors outside of the curatorial plan were all playing their roles at the site. As Welland said, 'The cultural politics that emerged at Lugu Lake refute such a centripetal model.'⁴³⁵ To some extent, at this site, the curators' earlier mobilisation and invitation already morphed into some participants' self-organisation, which was already independent from or even against the overall curatorial project.

A Revealing Scene

After meeting with Chicago, as Lu and the artists agreed on the further plan of the exhibition, the project proceeded. Before and during their conversation, the proposed exhibition was already being installed by the *Long March* team. Previously, Qiu Zhijie had

⁴³⁴ Ibid., p. 153.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p. 150.

suggested Chicago to print her proposals on the prayer flags used by Tibetan Buddhism. Chicago adopted his idea and printed a series of provoking questions on colourful rectangular flags, with English and Chinese on each side of the cloth. Now they were hung up in the corridors in the yard of Qidi Shanzhuang. The questions read as,

1. Would God be Female?
2. Would Men and Women be Equal?
3. Would Sexual Freedom Prevail?
4. Would there be Jealousy?
5. Would there be Equal Parenting?
6. Would Children Go Hungry?
7. Would Old Women be Revered?
8. Would Buildings Resemble Wombs?
9. Would there be Private Property?
10. Would there be War?

While Chicago's proposal took on the form of an installation, the other artists' proposals, including those who did not come to Lugu Lake, were printed and attached to the building's windows facing the yard, and appeared modest by contrast. Artists who were present in Lugu Lake also began installing their own works. On 28 and 29 July, the artists held their exhibitions or conducted their on-site works.

Apart from the previous performative work *Planting Marijuana*, Lei Yan also presented two printed images, *What If the Long March Had Been a Women's Rights Movement?* and *What If They Had Been Women?*. Both images were group photos against a background of grassland with regiments of female soldiers marching to different directions. In the first photo, Lei used photoshop and assembled seven famous female participants of the historical Long March, most of whom were wives of the army leaders. In the second image, in the similar position of the image stands a group of male leaders including Mao Zedong, but their hair were extended to shoulder-length, tied up like a horsetail or braided along their ears. There was also a modern female figure, which could be read as the incarnation of Lei Yan herself, holding binoculars on the bottom-right corner of each image, looking towards the left-central assembly as if she was questioning and looking for an answer. Lei Yan projected Chicago's hypothesis onto a historical fact provoking the imagination of modern China. However, Welland recorded that Lu suggested concealing the second image by turning the picture to face the window because of potential censorship.⁴³⁶ The inherent difficulties in experimenting with the articulation and discussion was further complicated

⁴³⁶ Sasha Su-ling Welland, 'The Hinterlands of Feminist', *Experimental Beijing*, pp. 156-7.

by political constraints. The central question, ‘What if Women Ruled the World?’ could only stay at the rhetorical level.



Fig. 46 A local Mosuo woman looking at Lei Yan’s photographic work *If the Long March Had Been a Women’s Rights Movement?* and *What If They Had Been Women?*, at Site 6 Lugu Lake in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

In a nearby room, Sun Guojuan attached printed images of Lugu Lake and Mosuo people to the wall; on the floor, she scattered cut pieces of printed articles about Mosuo culture. Audiences in the room were required to attach adhesive tape to their shoe soles so that these debris would be brought out when visitors left. The work was named as *Following You*, as if addressing to tourists who came to Lugu Lake and left with fragmented and fabricated stories about Mosuo people. Pang Xuan also responded to Mosuo culture. On a rainy evening, hundreds of red paper boats constituted the local visual symbol of a fertility cult, with each boat hosting a lighted candle. Many works at this site responded directly to

the local social and cultural customs and conditions. Some invited local residents to join the performance.

Qiu Zhijie had come to Lugu Lake and helped record artists' works. Lu was also mediating and arranging the programming. Chicago needed to see each artist's work — though the project was already renamed as 'the Dialogue with Judy Chicago in Lugu Lake', it still carried the mode of pedagogy shown in Chicago's initial open call. The dialogue between Chicago and artists was more like a critique in art colleges in which Chicago gave feedback to each artist on their works. Several artists also invited Chicago to be a part of their works and in these works. For example, artist Fu Liya invited two young men in swimming pants to perform as 'male mermaids' and swim into the lake to fish up floating bottles. The bottles contained written answers to 'What If Women Ruled the World?' collected from the audience in an exhibition in Kunming. Fu arranged Chicago and an old Mosuo lady to sit on the bank of Lugu Lake and read out answers from the bottles. Chicago was staged as a famous American feminist artist; the old lady was performing Chicago's counterpart in Lugu Lake to form a contrast. Juxtaposition like this appeared many times in artists' works in Lugu Lake and Chicago was seen sometimes as representative of the US, the Western feminist, and foreign and modern woman — which was in fact similar to the approach in Lu Jie's initial proposal 'F-male'. Chicago thought that the artists generally needed deeper 'investigation and research', which was still not widely acknowledged as a way of artistic creation in China at that time.⁴³⁷ The process of developing an artwork from 'initial concept' (the term used by Chicago) to the final work, through research and development was rarely taught in Chinese art academies in the early 2000s. Though these Chinese artists were making art with non-traditional media like performances, many of the, were more experimenting with these approaches for the first time. For example, only in this encounter with Chicago did Sun Guojuan come to realise that, 'It turned out art can be done like this... in an open minded way.'⁴³⁸

The problem with this site was the absence of a shared ground among participants, which was due to the lack of communication, discussion and trust. Different factors led to this situation: the intense framework of *Long March*, the limit of curators' time, the undervaluation of mutual understanding in the curatorial work, the artists' lack of

⁴³⁷ 'Yantu Zhanbao (7 Yue 26 Ri– 31 Ri)' [Reports from the Road (26–31 July)], 2003.

⁴³⁸ Luo Fei, Sun Guojuan and Lei Yan, 'Fantang: Sun Guojuan yu Lei Yan' [Interview: Sun Guojuan and Lei Yan], TCG Nordica, 2011<<http://www.tcg nordica.com/2011/interview-sunguojuan-leiyan/>> [accessed 5 March 2021].

experience in making research-based art and working with flexible conditions. While the curators previously assumed that artists could independently produce works or they as curators could just become agents of artists, they were not prepared enough about working closely and directly with a group of artists in person, who did not share the same understanding or expectation of the project. When this lack of mutual understanding escalated, it created an uncomfortable distancing between the two sides.



Fig. 47 Song Yanping's installation *Fire Extinguisher* by the Lugu Lake as part of the collaborative project 'Dialogue with Judy Chicago in Lugu Lake' at Site 6 Lugu Lake, 2002. Courtesy of Song Yanping and Long March Project.



Fig. 48 Huang Ru's work *A Story of His Hometown* which involved film playing in the open air, as part of the collaborative project 'Dialogue with Judy Chicago in Lugu Lake' at Site 6 Lugu Lake, 2002. Courtesy of Huang Ru and Long March Project.

The two curators reserved their influence on the realisation of artworks. Artist Huang Ying's work was about taking photos of the public toilets in Qidi Shanzhuang as a 'social investigation'. She found that doodles in men's toilets were highly sexualised while doodles in women's toilets were mostly about their love life. Qiu gave the advice that Huang could exhibit women's doodles in men's toilets and vice versa; but Huang did not fully follow. Instead, Huang just exposed these private toilet doodles publicly by exhibiting the men's and women's doodles respectively on the outside walls of the toilets through photographs. The curators did not insist their opinions. They noted that, 'For all proposals carried out in Lugu Lake, the curators suspended their own standard for art and curatorial power. They tried not to intervene at all.'⁴³⁹ At the open call stage, they accepted all proposals because

⁴³⁹ 'Yantu Zhanbao (7 Yue 26 Ri-31 Ri)' [Reports from the Road (26-31 July)], 2003.

they thought that from a position of feminism, ‘The awareness of participation and the value of awakening and expression was more important than how good or bad the work was.’⁴⁴⁰ The underlying connotation was that Chinese artists did not make good works. Moreover, as they dropped the ‘curatorial power’ to judge the work, they also stepped back from the role of curator and reserved their opinions towards the artists’ work. It demonstrated that for Lu and Qiu, the quality of the exhibition was still crucial and decisive. When the curators could not select or polish artworks in their exhibition and thus the visual quality of their artworks could not meet their expectation, the curators felt as though they had lost control. A kind of tension emerged, between curating and feminism.

Seeing Mountains, Seeing Water

As Lu and Qiu forwent their curatorial power, there was indeed an artist who took advantage of this change in management. On a cloudy day, 29 July 2002, artist Li Shurui was installing her work *Seeing Mountains, Seeing Water* in Lugu Lake.⁴⁴¹ Surrounded by mountains, the lake was on scenic land belonging to the indigenous Mosuo people. Local villagers helped her implant long bamboo poles into the muddy lakebed, leaving part of the sticks in the air. These bamboo poles were grouped in four, composing the four points of a rectangular shape. Together, they held up twenty transparent gauze nets above the water, which lined up along the shore with wind flowing through. The nets were originally made to encircle beds to protect people from mosquitos. Private and enclosed indoor spaces, formed by these gauze nets, were now opened up in nature. Through the nets drifting in wind, mountains, clouds and waves of water all came into the witnesses’ vision. *Seeing Mountains, Seeing Water* resonated a widespread saying of a Zen master Qingyuan Weixin who was active in the ninth century,

Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters.⁴⁴²

This anecdote is widely known in China and has also travelled transculturally. One could

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ This account was based on the interview with Li Shurui, September 2019.

⁴⁴² Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1951, p. 126

interpret it in relation to the process of understanding the world through different mediums. Even without the knowledge of this reference, one could still feel the lightness in the final stage ‘seeing mountains once again as mountains’, particularly through the sheer bodily experience of seeing the work in the flesh. However, this relief was short-lived. Li was informed by a staff of *Long March* team that Judy Chicago would not comment on her work. Li was advised that, ‘You could take your work as a parallel exhibition.’⁴⁴³ At that time, Judy Chicago was having conversations with each of the female Chinese artists.



Fig. 49 Li Shurui’s on-site installation *Seeing Mountain, Seeing Water* at Site 6 Lugu Lake, 2002. Courtesy of Li Shurui and Long March Project.

Li Shurui came to know about this project through Chicago’s open call on art.tom.com. Born in 1981, she was just in her second year at Sichuan Academy of Art, majoring in painting. Before this work, she had rarely attempted to make researched-based or conceptual art before. However, she had been previously exposed to the magazine *New Wave*, edited by Shi Qing with artworks by artists generally affiliated with ‘Post-Sense

⁴⁴³ Interview with Li Shurui, September 2019.

Sensibility'. Chicago's open call motivated her to try writing conceptual proposals; but she was not interested in feminism or 'women's art'. Similar to the proposition of 'Post-Sense Sensibility', Li intended to avoid direct appropriation of symbols or theories. In Lugu Lake, Li Shurui did not participate much in the negotiation between artists like Sun Guojuan and the curators either. Going to Lugu Lake was more about an attempt in using new approaches to make art. She emailed several proposals to the *Long March* office, but she was never confirmed of her participation. She did not mind so much about the feedback and when she embarked on the trip to Lugu Lake, she was not worrying whether she could collaborate with Chicago either. 'It was just you paid for your own travel to have fun,' after over a decade of years, Li joked about her light-heartedness at that time. Her work *Seeing Mountains, Seeing Water* was not related to her initial proposal. Instead, it was a reaction to the environment of Lugu Lake, and executed on site.

However, that message advising Li to consider her work as a parallel exhibition was hurtful. According to Li, it was only later that her work was added to the website of longmarchfoundation.org. When I interviewed Lu Jie, he had a very different memory about Li's work and her participation at Lugu Lake. He had never seen Li Shurui's proposal. This was possibly because Li Shurui did not specify that her submission was for Chicago's project in her emails. Lu remembered the surprise when he saw Li's work. Lisa Horikawa, who was nervously standing nearby, haltingly said that there was a participant coming directly and they did not know about it either. Lu said, in 2019, he himself was in fact very delighted to see the unexpected participation, because 'It means artists were spontaneously joining the *Long March* and it had developed out of the curatorial framework.'⁴⁴⁴ When I checked the initial website of Long March Foundation, Li Shurui's name was not listed in the 31 Chinese participants of Chicago's project. However, her name had been already added to the general participating artists in *Long March* by August 2002.⁴⁴⁵ Therefore, Li's memory about her experience that she was not invited to join the on-site conversation between Judy Chicago and the artists might be a result of the fact that she was not identified as a participant of Chicago's project, but a participant of *Long March*. By 'parallel project', Lu meant to suggest that Li was not in the project with Chicago, while Li Shurui understood her work was in 'parallel' to *Long March* and felt excluded.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview with Lu Jie in June, 2021.

⁴⁴⁵ 'Artists', *Long March Foundation*, 2002

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20020810131611/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/art.htm>> [accessed 10 September 2021].

Figuring out this misunderstanding between Lu Jie and Li Shurui after almost twenty years led us to wonder how much unnecessary speculations could be spared if such misunderstanding could be resolved on-site in Lugu Lake through direct discussion and clarification — could the artists and the curators understand each other directly instead of through interpretation, stereotyping and misunderstanding?⁴⁴⁶ Though the curators were not the nominal curators in the project ‘What if Women Ruled the World?’ (or ‘Dialogue with Judy Chicago in Lugu Lake’, as the Chinese artists suggested), it was clear that Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie as the curator of the overall *Long March* were still strongly present as felicitators and decision-makers in Lugu Lake. The different opinions on exhibition-making, collaboration on art and the misunderstandings among participants revealed the discrepancies in the project’s curating: while the curators aimed to mobilise more participants and stimulate them to act on their own, they were also, ultimately, afraid of losing control. In their attempt to consciously challenge the mainstream exhibition culture, they were also referring to professional exhibition procedures as acquiescent rules when trying to persuade artists. However, the project’s execution did not allow enough time for such debates to be had. The curatorial procedures, particularly in liaising with both curators and artists, were not well rehearsed. The curators’ appropriation of the Communist mass propaganda and the guerrilla mode of curating had conceptually guided their practice. However, the theoretical underpinnings of *Long March* still fell back on the existing methods as an accepted (and expected) procedure.

While the curators aimed to inspire participants and spark more discussions, for artists, it might seem that the curators were not true to their statements. *Long March* operated as an ongoing experiment, meaning that the curators could not always predict what would happen and these approaches were not well-rehearsed and integrated. The experimental and self-reflexive scope of *Long March* was altogether limited by the curators’

⁴⁴⁶ In 2020, the American feminist icon, Judy Chicago, released a series of large-scale appliqué, handmade banners — *What if Women Ruled the World?* — in collaboration with fashion brand Dior for its haute couture collection. All pieces were hung like flags, stating provoking interrogations. The main rectangular piece frames the hand-written styled ‘What if Women Ruled the World?’ in the centre, with layers of crimson and dark green brocade as frames. The other ten pieces, each also presents contemplating questions in subjunctive mood (such as ‘Would God be Female?’ and ‘Would Men and Women be Equal?’) on canary fabrics, with profile of human bodies or graphs as decoration. Among all media coverings, *What if Women Ruled the World?* was introduced to have been first released in 2020. No source has identified that this series in fact greatly resembles Chicago’s homonymic series she first exhibited in Lugu Lake, China, in the summer of 2002, as part of ‘Long March’. The project is also absent from Chicago’s elaborate chronology of her oeuvre. In 2020, Chicago also re-initiated *What If Women Ruled the World?* in collaboration with a group of craftswomen based in India. ‘Judy Chicago : What If Women Ruled the World?’, *Jeffrey Deitch Online Gallery* <<https://online.deitch.com/exhibitions/judy-chicago-what-if-women-ruled-the-world>> [accessed 19 February 2021].

understanding of curating as a discipline and the curators still aimed to perform as confident and rational decision-makers. Throughout the journey, it seemed that Lu and Qiu never shared their self-doubts. Lu became more self-protective when challenged in Lugu Lake. Though the curators identified the issues in ‘women’s art’ in China and the gaps between feminisms in different areas, the two curators as men could not resolve the paradox between feminist approaches and their rational, self-imposed structures of curating. As a result, they chose to surrender their authority. What the site could be with different curatorial approaches? What can feminist curating be? The feminist aspects in curating should not only be taken as a topic or a standard of selecting artists, otherwise the curating would remain as a top-down means of instruction, directed at the artists. Rather, every stakeholder at all levels of a curatorial project should be able to contribute to the decision making. Though Lu remained calm in front of the artists in Lugu Lake, he also became aware of this. As Lu said, from Lugu Lake, he already felt that there was a sense of distrust towards curators and a detachment from people in the project. This distrust became more and more clear in the following site.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁷ Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.

Chapter 10 Halt

‘Long March Should Stop’

Starting from 28 June, *Long March* executive team usually spent five to six days at a site. In this process, there was almost not a single day for rest. At this speed, it was very likely that the team would arrive at Yan’an in October as planned. However, on the eleventh site, Moxi, on 22 August, Lu Jie suddenly proposed that *Long March* should go on hiatus,

At dinner, Lu Jie introduced an idea that startled everyone: the Long March should stop and rest for three or four weeks. The Long March website, headquartered in Beijing, was already a month behind the actual progress of the March. Busy all day with implementing projects, he and Qiu Zhijie had no time or endurance to write reports each night. In a project like the Long March, realizing projects and publicising projects were equally important. Furthermore, how should they view the preparatory work for the project, or the connection between the curatorial concept and its implementation on site? What was the relationship between planning and implementation? This they must stop and think about.

Everyone had sensed that Lu Jie’s scholarly thinking and on-site implementation were drastically different, and that he had grown more and more silent with each passing day. [...] Qiu Zhijie thought that a week was enough to supplement and edit the website, but even three weeks was not nearly enough to ensure the quality of the works to be realised in the remaining sites. The discussion ended without a conclusion.⁴⁴⁸

‘How should they view the connection between the curatorial concept and its implementation on site? What was the relationship between planning and implementation?’ As the author of ‘the Detailed Curatorial Plan’, Lu’s questions clearly disclosed the disparity between his vision of the journey and its outcome in reality. As he had hinted previously, much of the team’s efforts were put into realising projects. Conversely, Lu believed that publicising projects was just as important. In the plan, Lu imagined that there would be wide engagement and profound participation from artists, intellectuals and the general audience. Their participation would be an important force to transform the project and the social and art scene in China. That was also why Lu not only put much effort in scouting sites and finding artists, but also tried to let the public know the project via accepting public media’s interviews, collaborating with local governments and broadcasting the project’s

⁴⁴⁸ ‘Reports from the Road’ of the Site Dadu River, possibly unpublished, Long March Archive, 2002.

progress on the website. Back in the Beijing office, Lu hired two staff members to build up the website longmarchfoundation.com. This website became the central hub of information about the project.

Instead of publishing the documentation of the project after its completion, *Long March* chose a rather ‘contemporary’ way: similar to today’s social media live updating, Lu intended to keep updating the newest progress by publishing bilingual ‘Reports on the Road’ on its own website as well as on their media collaborator arts.tom.com. ‘Reports on the Road’ was a series of reports of each site in *Long March*. These reports were written mainly by Qiu and sometimes by Lu in a format of working diaries. They noted down personal experience in carrying out the projects and Lu tried to share the on-site experience without any delay with more people. The online website was used not only for publishing news, but also to synchronise the experience. Besides, the readers on arts.tom.com could publish their comments online and raise questions. For *Long March*, the on-site and virtual spaces were expected to feed into each other, even when the project was still being carried out. In the project’s English newsletter published for the international audience, the curators appealed to the readers, ‘Do not miss the opportunity to tune in and pump up your Long Marcher spirit, to join this epochal journey when their footsteps are still fresh on the road. Long Marchers of the World, Unite!’⁴⁴⁹

Such large-scale online publicity was rare at that time for contemporary art activities, which was usually organised and shared within a group of artists. The strategy was also very similar to live broadcast via texts or videos on social media that appeared about ten years after the project. Yet, in 2002, technology, the online ecology and people’s habits were still not ready for the degree of integration that Lu was looking for. There were no smartphones or social media like Instagram or Twitter. The project’s updates could only be published on websites as articles instead of today’s posting short words with images captured by smartphones. Writing, editing and publishing long articles on the website meant much work. Once on the road, the work to update the progress on the website and the work to implement projects on site were competing for priority due to the limit of the core team members’ capacity. Besides, as they were on the road, there were so many accidents out of plan: cars broke down; roads collapsed; booked hotel meeting rooms became unavailable and staff fell ill. The pressure on on-site execution and updating bi-lingual reports

⁴⁴⁹ ‘The Long March Newsletter Vol.2’, 2002

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20030925115022/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/english/e-discourse2002.8.20>> [accessed 16 December 2020].

exhausted their team members. Yang Jie, who joined as a volunteer for on-site production and logistics, noted down the atmosphere of frantic working in *Long March*.

Lu Jie's room [was] basically in working condition 24 hours a day, and there [were] computer cables everywhere on the floor and devices everywhere on the bed. Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie were sorting out materials from the previous period and burned them into more than a dozen discs. [...] Qiu Zhijie was so tired that he slept for more than ten minutes in the gap between making the discs. After a while, we suddenly heard a strange sound, which became louder and louder. Looking back, it turned out to be Qiu Zhijie's snores, almost like a buffalo sound. Lu Jie said [in a] distressed [way] that he had never heard him snoring so loudly after living with him for so long. Qiu Zhijie often exhausted himself so much that he fell asleep with cigarettes at hand. I had a lot of negotiations with the hotels for his burning [of] the sheets.⁴⁵⁰

Not only the two curators were working day and night. It was so typical for Lisa Horikawa to stay late at night till dawn. Despite their ceaseless working, the update of reports still lagged behind the actual journey. On arts.tom.com, the report of the first site, which took place from 28 June to 3 July, was not broadcast until 15 July. In this sense, Lu's attempt at live synchronisation failed.

For Lu, *Long March* got much less attention from the public than what was expected. Initially, the curators kept their itinerary secret in case artists and journalists would follow them too closely — which could be read as the tension between the mystique of contemporary art practices and the need for public familiarity with *Long March*. But it turned out that there was not much attention at all — a different situation compared with Enwezor's trip to China in 2002.⁴⁵¹ Later on, they changed tactics, became more open about their itinerary, in the hope more people could join them voluntarily. Around the same time, two British journalists living in China, Ed Jocelyn and Andrew McEwen, decided to use one year to recreate the historical Long March by walking along the route again themselves.⁴⁵² Before they started, in October 2002, Chinese media had already begun reporting them. Lu said to his colleagues, 'They captured twenty times more attention than us!'⁴⁵³ The attention from the media eventually did not arrive or follow *Long March* through the journey. The

⁴⁵⁰ Yang Jie, 'Quandian Qiu Zhijie' [Comments on Qiu Zhijie], *Long March Foundation*, 2002 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20040925014136/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/huayu/nno8.htm>> [accessed 10 September 2021]. Translations are mine.

⁴⁵¹ Video footage, Long March Archive, 2002.

⁴⁵² Rana Mitter, 'A Story of Heroes', *Financial Times*, 7 April 2006 <<https://www.ft.com/content/c98fa642-c544-11da-b675-0000779e2340>> [accessed 10 September 2021].

⁴⁵³ Video footage, Long March Archive, 2002.

project team put in sustained effort, realised many different ‘visual displays’ and secured some on-site participation, but these displays did not spread beyond its on-site scene. The project was still mainly discussed in the art world in China. Lu later regretted that,

After all, if we wanted to spread this project widely and we wanted a kind of social interaction with it, I feel very sorry that it was so restrained to a circle, which means that it really became a themed exhibition in the end. There was too little discourse in it, and too little dialogue [stimulated].⁴⁵⁴

For Lu, this lack of public attention and discussion was partly due to the significant delay in updating their progress on the website. It was clear that at this stage, what Lu imagined as the publicness of the project became the project being widely discussed as a heated topic across different groups of people. The pursuit for publicness partially transformed into being avid for publicity: via mass media like televisions and newspaper, or via emerging distributing tools like the website. This also explained why *Long March* sometimes performed like a propaganda event and collaborated with official academies and the government. Participation at this stage was more about getting more people to know about the project and get them involved, however, the project did not pursue for soliciting voices from participants already in the project or sustained conversations thought out the journey. The fast pace of the project could not afford it.

Apart from engaging with the public, *Long March* tried to mobilise as many artists as possible, but the engagement with artists did not meet the curators’ expectations either. When calling for work proposals, Lu and Qiu hoped that there could be sculptural and monumental works that could be left on sites.⁴⁵⁵ But few artists had done so, possibly because there was no long-term funding or maintenance support after the project ended. The sculptures of Zhan Wang and Fu Xinmin were only for the temporary exhibition and did not stay in Ruijin. Besides, in contrast to the utopian aims the two curators had originally put forward, and as scholar Wang Hui later reviewed, most contemporary Chinese artists’ works selected very ironic approaches.⁴⁵⁶ For example, in the tenth site Xichang, artist Liu Chengying handmade and flew a white kite with paper, on which the

⁴⁵⁴ “Changzheng — Yige Xingzou Zhong de Shijue Zhanshi” Xianchang Pipan Hui’ [Long March: A Walking Visual Display’ On-Site Critique], 2003.

⁴⁵⁵ Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, ‘Gei Shouyao Wei “Changzheng—Yige Xingzou Zhong de Shijue Zhanshi” Tian de Yishujia de Yifengxin’ [A Lettre for Artists Invited to Submit Proposals for *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*].

⁴⁵⁶ “Changzheng — Yige Xingzou Zhong de Shijue Zhanshi” Xianchang Pipan Hui’ [Long March: A Walking Visual Display’ On-Site Critique], *Long March Foundation*, 2003
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20040701215927/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/huayu/pipanhui.htm>
> [accessed 10 September 2021].

artist inscribed seven red Chinese characters ‘Thought Must Be Liberated’ (*yiding yao jiefang sixiang*).⁴⁵⁷ This sentence was a famous political slogan raised during the economic reform. When appropriated into the context of *Long March*, the connotation of this action was unfixed and it stirred up more second thoughts. The economic reform started an era of the 1990s: money replaced knowledge as the most desirable thing among the public. Here, this slogan referred to not only its original calling to be brave and get rid of conventional ideas but also the greedy and underhanded tactics.

At the same time, the distrust towards the curators and the project was not rare among artists. When Lu discussed the suspicion that women artists held towards the curators and Judy Chicago in Lugu Lake, Lu pointed out that in fact this suspicion did not only exist at this particular site, but at every site. This was proved in my interviews with artists. Though some artists had collaborated with Qiu Zhijie in previous projects, for the curatorial proposition raised in *Long March*, they were sceptical. Most artists participated in *Long March* to realise their own works — so that even if the curatorial project failed, they could still evidence their participation. For example, artist Hu Liu already started her work *Xintianyou* in early August, a long riding and walking journey from Xi’an to the final site, Yan’an, as part of *Long March*. When she heard about *Long March* going into hiatus later that month, she still chose to continue her work until its eventual completion.⁴⁵⁸

In the initial introduction on arts.tom.com, Lu and Qiu listed two main aims of *Long March*. First, to create a new and alternative mode and to change the isolation of contemporary art from the general public; second, to re-approach the communist practices and experiences genuinely, to replace the existing sarcasm or nostalgia towards this particular historical movement. To realise the two aims corresponding to the efforts of engaging the public and mobilising the artists, relation with participants, organising gatherings and felicitating discussions were as crucial as exhibitions, screenings and displays. Although the curators could successfully realise nearly all planned events and artworks in the ‘Total Plan’ (2002), the project had not entirely fulfilled its promise, given the relative absence of profound participation, particularly that which could practically testify to the enduring revolutionary legacy of the historical Long March. How could

⁴⁵⁷ ‘Site 10: Xichang Long March Satellite Station, Sichuan Province’, *Long March Project*, <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/project/dishizhansichuandaliangshanxichangweixingfashezhan/>> [accessed 2 November 2021].

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with Hu Liu, December 2019.

participation avoid falling into another display of identities and a false gathering? The realisation of the project revealed that *Long March* was still short of effective approaches and had not developed a more layered understanding of participation. Lu's question 'What was the relationship between planning and implementation?' suggested that he already found that the on-site implementation had outweighed the initial concerns in the planning stage. As more participants were invited, they joined with different understandings and expectations of the project. It was clear that Lu Jie was not satisfied with its realisation. But from the reaction of the other team members, this dissatisfaction had been only kept to Lu himself. Qiu Zhijie could understand this, but thought the problem lay largely on the delay of updates on the website; while other team members, including Yang Jie, Lisa Horikawa, Shen Xiaomin and Jeff (the volunteer photographer), did not share the concerns over the lack of profound engagement with the public or artists.

Meeting on 29 August

This conversation lingered around the team from Moxi to the next site, Luding. On the night of 29 August, the curators invited the executive team (Yang Jie, Lisa Horikawa, Shen Xiaomin and Jeff) and artist Shi Qing to their room for a 'democratic discussion'. Lu introduced three options:

- 1) The first option was that the project would stop carrying out new works. Only the curators would travel through each site to Yan'an within a short time, possibly in two weeks. Then the curators would declare the project as completed.
- 2) The second option was that the project would stop carrying out new works. The two curators would choose a different Long March route: usually, when people refer to the Long March route, they meant The First and Second Front Army's route of marching north to Yan'an, because Mao Zedong was in this army. But in fact there was also another troupe, The Fourth Front Army, which chose to march towards the south. During the original Long March, the Fourth Front Army was relatively independent and its leader Zhang Guotao had disputes with Mao Zedong. If the two curators chose this alternative route, it would be a declaration of giving up the 'official' route.
- 3) The third option was to stop immediately and declare the project not completed.

Yang Jie, Shen Xiaomin and Lisa Horikawa voted for the first and the second option.

‘How could you explain to the people who care about the project? How could I answer those people who asked me?’, Yang Jie questioned eagerly. Yang wrote a series of diaries *Niuniu’s Long March* (*niuniu changzheng ji*), published on the website of *Long March*. Her personal and humorous writing won the affection of many readers. As an outsider of contemporary art, Yang was full of curiosities and passion towards the project. Possibly she was the one who was most successfully ‘mobilised’ by the project. She not only had quit her job, but also took *Long March* and the execution of artworks seriously.⁴⁵⁹ She was shocked to hear Lu’s decision to stop.



Fig. 50 The discussion over stopping *Long March* on 29 August 2002. From left to right: Lisa Horikawa, Lu Jie, Yang Jie, Shi Qing and Qiu Zhijie. Shen Xiaomin was behind the video camera, recording the scene. Courtesy of Long March Project.

Shen Xiaomin, the videographer, added that for the completion of the documentary of

⁴⁵⁹ In the previous site, Moxi, she was severely hurt physically: on her way back to Moxi to send printed works, the road collapsed and cars were stopped; but she was so worried about the instalment ongoing in Moxi that she decided to crawl across the landslide area. Unfortunately, a stone slid and hit her leg. Without immediate and proper medical care, this accident left her with a long-lasting injury. Undeterred, she continued to participate in *Long March*.

Long March (the version he documented with a digital video camera), the project should still go to Yan'an. Jeff, the devoted volunteer, agreed. When there was no *force majeure* in the project, it seemed that it was only a question of time to arrive at Yan'an, why not make the effort to complete? On the contrary, Shi Qing, as an insider of the emerging contemporary art circle, understood how *Long March* did not meet the curators' initial aim to revolutionise the local art world. Rather, *Long March* was fast becoming another project with a seemingly radical posture. When sitting on the street in Luding, immersed in the dusk, Qiu Zhijie said to artist Shi Qing in frustration that artists had already known how to 'cater to' *Long March*.⁴⁶⁰ Shi Qing, who followed the team from Moxi to Luding, responded that, 'The *Long March* has become another system, like the museum.' Shi also thought that if the two curators continued to Yan'an or went to another destination and declared that they had successfully completed the project, no artist would want to be associated with them again. If the curators acted on their own, it was irresponsible toward the artists who had prepared for the later sites and who, in good faith, had executed their works. Shi Qing emphasised that *Long March*, as a public project, should be honest about its problems. The curatorial team could start a second round of *Long March* after the first, and that would be much better than pretending it was finished without flaws at the first attempt.

Lu wholeheartedly agreed with Shi Qing. He also thought that to declare the project as 'unfinished' might surprise and disappoint some peers, but later the disappointment would turn into reflection when people saw *Long March* would be re-started in the future. In terms of Shen's video documentation that recorded the process of the curatorial work and execution including this meeting, to stop would not leave the work unfinished, but rather come full circle, from execution to idea and back again – albeit, in a surprising way. Qiu Zhijie already agreed with Lu that they should take the hiatus, but like Yang Jie, he also saw many tricky problems ahead. Yang Jie's questions over how to best explain the sudden halt to their audience were in fact the trickiest part. There were already many people who had heard about the project. Qiu raised the practical question that if the project restarted in one month, three months or next year, would Shen Xiaomin and Lisa Horikawa still be available? How about artists like Hu Liu who already started their works for later sites? Lu Jie responded with optimism that the availability of participants was not a problem. To carry out *Long March* or not was the choice of everyone themselves. For him, he would

⁴⁶⁰ The scenes depicted here were recorded in the video footage captured by Shen Xiaomin and stored in Long March Archive.

commit to *Long March* throughout his lifetime and he would prioritise the restart before anything else. In terms of artists who already started their work for later sites, they would be included in the project's second round.

Shen Xiaomin further brought up the potential dispute with the analogue documentary film crew. **[Redacted Content]** But Lu argued that it was the analogue film crew that first broke the clause because during the journey, the curators found out that the commissioned documentary was in fact not about the curatorial and art project *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* but about 'red memory' of the historical Long March. The film crew were not interested in documenting some artworks of the project when the works were too radical or 'not safe' for the mainstream audience. Lu considered that the TV station's biased selection had significantly reduced the complexities of the curatorial project and misrepresented it.

This documentary to be broadcast on mainstream television stations was a key attraction for many artists. Some artists made their works specifically for this documentary. In the discussion that night, when the core team decided to stop, disputes with the television film crew placed them in jeopardy. **[Redacted Content]**

For the audience in the art world, the two curators prepared another excuse for the purpose of their public statement. They would further explain their 'academic divergences': Lu emphasised the importance of the visual effects of on-site works for camera, with consideration toward their legacy and media profile. By contrast, Qiu Zhijie thought artworks should not be manipulated or changed for the effect of documentation. The two scripts were made for different purposes. On the one hand, the curators needed to avoid legal disputes. On the other hand, the curators needed to come up with an honest and suitably 'academic' reason for artists and intellectuals to win their understandings.

[Redacted Content] The curators would deny any suspicion towards their collaboration, rather proposing questions over the definition of 'completeness' and 'incompleteness' to complicate any and all enquiries around the nature of *Long March's* hiatus. They were aware that there must be rumours in the art world that the project might have stopped because of insufficient funding, internal divergences or some conspiracies. Nonetheless, the curators believed they could eradicate these rumours by collaborating again in the near future.

Clearly, these scripts were rhetoric that mixed truth with invention. Shen Xiaomin's camera was always on and following everyone who was speaking. Lu Jie picked up the camera and focused the lens on Shen when it was Shen's turn to speak. It was an important

moment in this project, given that everyone was aware that their words and actions were being recorded. Was there any element of performance in their words and reactions? While Qiu Zhijie was hesitant at the beginning of the meeting, in the end, he appeared to be determined and confident when Lu said that the project should cease. Was he hiding any reservations because the meeting was recorded and it might be made public one day? When the curators were discussing what was to be said, the participants had already been play-acting.

Eventually, the team members all agreed that the project should stop. On the next day, on 31 August, artist Wang Jianwei arrived to work on his unfinished venture, *Middle Segment*. This work consisted of a ten-mile trek, along which the curators arranged ten local workers to re-enact iconic performances as ‘Homage to Chinese Performance Art’. For example, a local male worker was dressed up half nude with wig and makeups, in imitation of Ma Liuming (1969–)’s androgenous performance. Wang Jianwei’s work lasted the whole day. As the most established participating Chinese artist in the project, Wang agreed with the curators that the project should stop. Officially, Wang’s work also became the last artwork of the whole *Long March* in 2002. In the evening, the curators and staff called artists to cancel their future trips. On the following day, 1 September, *Long March*’s core working team dissolved.

‘No Journey Should Be Planned’

On 11 September, Lu and Qiu issued the English newsletter on the project’s website. In the beginning of this article, the two curators described their decision-making moment,

Standing on Luding Bridge on August 30th, the Long March curatorial team reached a crucial decision: We declared the incomplete Long March project ‘complete’ at that point.⁴⁶¹

This contradiction between the incompleteness of the initially planned twenty-site journey and the curators’ declaration of the project’s completeness was also further explained in this statement:

[I]t was this very self-satisfaction, this confidence about our future, which led us to be cautious and suspicious of ourselves. We recalled the degree of

⁴⁶¹ Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, ‘Open Letter to All Supporters of the Long March Project’, *Long March Foundation*, 2002
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20021225085910/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/english/e-discourse7.htm>> [accessed 26 January 2021].

uncertainty that originally inspired us before hitting the road, and we came to realize that no journey should be planned. Our demands of ourselves and the Long March have been raised to the point where it is simply not enough for us to complete the Long March, especially if we are completing it solely for the sake of its completion.⁴⁶²

Lu and Qiu did not express their dissatisfaction with the quality of artworks, which was the starting point to the grievances Lu had mentioned in his meeting with staff. Instead, the public determined that the project had lost its momentum. As they said, the team successfully completed the curatorial plan of each site. The continuing ‘uncertainty’, the excitement of embarking on the road, had gradually faded. They called their decision to go on hiatus as ‘the desire for a new realisation’, to ‘prevent the Long March metaphor from becoming mired in the trap of superficiality, functionality, and practicality’ and to keep the project’s ‘open-ended nature’.⁴⁶³ The curators emphasised that ‘our decision is based completely on academic, artistic, and theoretical thinking’ — obviously, this discussion around the failure was aimed to clarify potential rumours about the project’s halt.

The curators’ realisation, ‘no journey should be planned’, was contrasted sharply from Lu’s research-based curatorial plan and the important role of the curatorial plan in this project. How should we comprehend this statement? Were they denying Lu’s conceptual preparation and Qiu’s mediation with artists? On the contrary, this said more about the limitations imposed by the curatorial plan in relation to practice. In the case of *Long March*, the plan indicated a conceptual and contemplative narrative, which also gave a structure to the project: twenty sites, in twenty locations, embodying twenty themes. They were equally important and interconnected. Together, they formed *Long March*. However, as Lu said, from the point that the project was opened up and more participants joined, the project already disobeyed the plan and got on its own.

The decision to halt referenced the titular Long March: as an on-going journey which required its participants to adapt to sudden change. When the curators, artists and participants met at each site, the local situation, politics and happenings replaced the imagination in the plan. The slogan ‘No journey should be planned’ could be phrased, ‘no journey should be expected to follow a plan’. The curatorial plan was conceptual and idealistic. As the team tried to recreate this plan, they realised that the real journey had formed its own rhythm, foci and its own questions. What was revealed here was that the

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

real journey was by nature entirely independent from the envisioned plan. They were two distinct things. This also explained why Lu Jie was the only one who raised the point that there was a separation between the former plan and the ongoing journey at that staff meeting. He was the only author of the curatorial proposal.

In the newsletter, Lu and Qiu also pointed out that few projects could afford to stop like *Long March*. They argued that, ‘There exists no mega-exhibition, no giant thematic show, no biennial, no triennial that can adequately represent the project’s original timeframe or geographical structure.’ In the Chinese newsletter published on 20 September, they made it more clear that, ‘[N]ot a single existing themed exhibitions or biennial has the opportunity to suspend itself and declare “complete” before fulfilling the plan; only the span of time and geography of *Long March* allows it to do so.’⁴⁶⁴ The curator therefore transformed this suspension into an opportunity to discuss the pressure to complete proposals in the art world. Their words were right in the sense that the hiatus, indeed, challenged people’s expectations. It was a brave act, considering the project’s scale and influence. On another note, such flexibility around the project timeline had been awarded from the financial contributions made from Lu Jie’s own savings, while the mega-exhibition and biennials that were compared to *Long March* usually had more institutional stakeholders, funding bodies and complex audit trails.

Throughout the English or Chinese newsletter, there was no mention of artists’ names and their works. The declaration mainly spoke from the point of view of the collective, the project. There were artists who were still executing their artworks or had prepared to install works at forthcoming sites. For example, artist Hu Liu was walking with a donkey through the mountainous Loess Plateau; Zhang Hui and Wang Yuyang, had travelled from Beijing to Yan’an for preliminary research. Collaborators and artists were already privately informed about the suspension of the project, but in this public newsletter, it was obvious that the absence of artists, artworks and practical organisational works. To some extent, *Long March*’s decision to go on hiatus exposed the distance of the curators from the rest of the participants, especially the artists. The curators’ passion for engaging more participants in the beginning did not translate into an intimate way of working constructively together. With the curators’ intellectual interpretation of the project’s halt, the newsletter was more

⁴⁶⁴ Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, ‘Jiu Jieshu “changzheng — Yige Xingzou Zhong de Shijuezhanshi” Gei Yishujie Tongzhimen de Yifeng Gongkaxin’ [An Open Letter to Comrades in the Art World about Terminating *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*], 2002
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20040119205311/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/huayu/gongkaxin.htm>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

performative than practical. They in fact replaced their failure in engaging artists and more participants and winning their trust, with a speculative understanding of the potential of the project.

Without a mechanism to form discussions and consensus, the decision-making, here the end of the whole project, did not include all participants. The absence of artists and artworks in this process led to question: who had the right to terminate the project? The curators started the project. However, as artists joined the project voluntarily, did they also have a share in the project's ownership? Would there be a possibility that the curators would drop out and the artists and other participants could continue without them? This option was not on the table.

When the curators declared to stop the project, Hu Liu did not forgo her work *Xintianyou* — she continued her journey to the destination. This blurred the status of the work in relation to the whole *Long March* project: Was the work counted as part of *Long March*? Was Hu Liu an artist of the project? When did the relationship start and when did it stop?

In 2002, most speculations about the project's termination, as Lu wrote in an article, 'were that we came across political problems and had to stop'.⁴⁶⁵ In other words, most people thought the project had been censored by the government. Lu clarified again that the decision to stop was an 'academic' (*xueshu*) decision, made without external pressure. This tendency was in line with the discussion proposed in the Zunyi 'International Symposium — Curating and the Chinese Context'. Zunyi was the eighth site of *Long March*. From 7 to 12 August, about thirty local and international renowned curators and museum directors attended this symposium. The theme and agenda Lu wrote for the symposium revealed his expectation to bring out the intellectual concerns and thoughts of *Long March*. In the agenda, 'power' was a key word. It referred to real power struggles as well as the metaphorical ones: on the one hand, Lu denoted the authorities with resources for art, like the Chinese government and Western cultural institutes. He also included the different roles and responsibilities of curators, gallerists, sponsors and media in the making of the art scene. At the same time, 'power' was also a metaphor referring to various factors and trends shaping the contemporary 'visual culture' in China such as the taste of the general public.

⁴⁶⁵ Lu Jie, 'guanyu beidong de "wancheng" yu zhudong de "wei wancheng"' [About the Passive 'Complete' and the Active 'Incomplete'], *ARTCO Monthly [Diancang Jinyishu]*, 112.11 (2002), 50–53.

These different powers, in Lu's opinion, would lead to a new situation of art. As he said, 'In the special power structure, Chinese art should not only form breakthroughs in methods and outcomes of making art but also form a unique exhibition culture.'⁴⁶⁶ But the Chinese attendants of the symposium did not cover the full range of the agenda and responded mainly from the perspectives of contemporary Chinese art's confrontation and compliance with the official system. Lu ascribed such a narrow direction to the 'identity crisis' that one attendant Charles Merewether brought up. Charles Merewether was the Collections Curator at Getty Research Institute at the time. Merewether sensed that there was always some tension when people talked about the avant-garde art in China and in the West, about Chinese artists in mainland China or overseas, or about avant-garde art and the official art system. Similarly, Per Bjarne Boym, once director of the Contemporary Art Museum in Oslo argued that there couldn't be 'a Chinese context' but plural 'Chinese contexts'. Merewether pointed out that 'all these questions lead to a simple question: who does Chinese avant-garde art belong to?'



Fig. 51 Zunyi International Curating Symposium that took place in a classroom of a training

⁴⁶⁶ Lu Jie, '2002 Zunyi Guoji Xueshu Yantaohui — Zhongguo Yujing Yu Zhanlan Cehua' [Agenda for 2002 Zunyi International Scholarly Symposium — Chinese Context and Curating], *Long March Foundation*, 2002 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20041211043252/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/OSite8-1.htm>> [accessed 5 October 2021].

institute of teaching English, at Site 8 Zunyi, 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

This question of ownership penetrated dialogue on contemporary Chinese art. The discussion of the ‘Chinese context’ in 2002 was taking place at a moment when Chinese avant-garde art was being institutionalised: the government began acknowledging contemporary art. Established art academies like Chinese Academy of Art began setting up programmes in the name of ‘new media art’ or ‘experimental art’.⁴⁶⁷ Accordingly, the connotation of ‘contemporary Chinese art’ or ‘Chinese avant-garde art’ was changing quickly. Among practitioners previously identified with these trends, some tried to guard its status of independence from the government and some tried to find new positions in the emerging landscape. Did contemporary art in China belong to the Western institutions or the rebellious Chinese artists in the 1990s? Could new players claim their right to this still young brand? Lu and Qiu’s concerns in *Long March* also responded to this moment. They sensed that the Western institutions would be replaced by more local ‘powers’ as the deciding factor for contemporary Chinese art. Thus, they anticipated that a new art ecology would emerge in China. They hoped to renovate practitioners’ new perceptions towards the intellectual heritage of Communist China and the approaches of making art. In other words, instead of discussing topics on practical power relations — to determine the allies and enemies, *Long March* proposed to thoroughly recreate the field of contemporary Chinese art. Lu regretted that most discussions involved in this symposium still concentrated on the relation between contemporary Chinese art and the current canon. Therefore, it was not by coincidence that Lu discussed this symposium in the article explaining the project’s hiatus. Participants responded to *Long March* in the context of contemporary politics. Meanwhile, Lu’s expectation and new agenda were expressed but not met.

In the following year of 2003, Lu’s attitude about the project’s halt became more modest. An editor in the journal *Dushu* (which means ‘reading books’) organised a discussion among intellectuals and thinkers on *Long March*. The discussion was later transcribed and published under the name ‘On-site Criticism’. This text, instead of the newsletters informing the project’s hiatus, has been kept on the website of Long March Project across the years. In hindsight, they could be viewed as a more thoughtful reflection

⁴⁶⁷ Zhang Peili, ‘Cengjing de Xin Meiti Xi’ [The Past of New Media Department], *Art Shard*, 2019
<http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzUxODI4NTg3OA==&mid=2247496900&idx=1&sn=2459500ddc77a13e8e408df545c17b90&chksm=f9898b9dcefe028b6dfod3adafc91e030ac74e8716bfbo89db290f54aeb76158eb90cba9829c#rd> [accessed 6 October 2021].

on Lu's decision to eventually stop. In this discussion, Lu commented that he and Qiu's expectations and methods did not meet the harsh reality of the Chinese art world. Their curatorial practices were ultimately restrained by existing working methods, particularly those that people in the Chinese art circle were accustomed to.

[O]verall I felt that the reasons behind our early end included both the obstacles we encountered on the road, as well as certain misunderstandings that dated back to our preparation and manifested themselves in our realization. That is to say, the artists and the curatorial team both had misunderstandings, including my own misunderstanding and misperceptions of the working environment in the art community in China. Another problem was that before departure, we failed to establish a strong common foundation in the public realm, so that in the end the entire project was skewed toward the existing elitist art circle. When we picked our team members, most of the newcomers were very idealistic, saying that they wanted to use this opportunity as a self-ablution, to come work and sweat again. But when it came to actually working, we couldn't help but bring along our old working styles, which is to say, to bring in the old habits of the art circle. We ignored questions like how to turn the project into a 'sower of seeds' by working with media and society at large. ⁴⁶⁸

Zhang Guangtian (1966–), a theatre director, thought that the project lacked a clear target audience to engage with. He used the example that during the historical Long March, 'Mao Zedong took revolutionary and radical plays to Zunyi and put them on', but the local farmers and intellectuals felt distant and strange to these uprisings. After so many years, when farmers saw contemporary art performances, they might feel the same strangeness and ambivalence. Wang Hui then pointed out that this invalidity of communication was also why Mao Zedong started the reform movement in Yan'an in 1942: to call artists and intellectuals to make artworks for proletarian farmers and workers, rather than for capitalists. Chinese Communist leaders localised Marxist theories and found the local support of farmers instead of factory workers; Lu also needed to transform his curating in order to communicate with the Chinese art world and the local audience. Zhang's commentary pointed out that Lu's localisation of 'creative curating' in China was still on the conceptual level. Lu had tried to re-activate the memory of the Long March and appropriate the Communist propaganda approach, but the contemporary artists did not share the same

⁴⁶⁸ Lu Jie and others, 'On-Site Criticism: Long March—A Walking Visual Display' (presented at the On-site Criticism: Long March—A Walking Visual Display, Café, Sanlian Bookstore, Beijing, 2003) <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/discourse/changzheng-yigexingzouzhongdeshijuezhanshixianchangpipanhui/>> [accessed 28 August 2015].

interest and motivation. Topics like the mainstream exhibition culture, the West and the distance between contemporary art and its local audience were stated in ‘Curators’ Words’, but they were not widely discussed among artists and participants to form a common ground. Instead, it was still the historical Long March that was placed at a central position – often, this was not the artists’ concern.

In this discussion, ‘utopia’ became a key word connecting and differentiating the historical Long March and the new *Long March* art project. Wang Hui argued that ‘the principles to construct a utopia are completely different from the utopia’.⁴⁶⁹ He thought that the historical Long March slowly found its particular method in difficult conditions under the influence of foreign ideas, and based on this practice, the CCP produced a vision of utopia based on their experience. By contrast, in Lu Jie’s *Long March*, there was strong motivation but they did not have the practical ability to construct the utopia they had conceived of. Artist Zhu Jinshi (1954–) and Wang Hui grasped some similarity between the historical Long March and the curatorial *Long March*: they both self-deconstructed partly because ‘utopias seem always to produce power relationships from within.’⁴⁷⁰ Lu’s curatorial plan could be seen as a blueprint of the activities in the utopia, but the groundwork and methods to build that utopia was not mature. Lu did not expect ‘power relationships’ in the project to become a key issue to deal with. Once on the road, the artists’ suspects, the curators’ will to lead, the opportunists’ participation and the local governments’ support or opposition all became the most realistic and urgent issues, which bypassed the utopia described at the start.

In the Zunyi International Curatorial Symposium, artist Wang Chuyu conducted the work *Democratic Long March*. In his proposal, Wang pointed out that Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie had not been democratically elected as curators of *Long March*, and requested that they be voted upon on-site. To this purpose, Wang Chuyu printed a series of ballots and wrote a strict set of election rules. In this election, there were no particular candidates, or rather, everyone present was a potential candidate. The first round would choose five of those present to make speeches, and the second round would choose two winners from those five.⁴⁷¹ The design of no listed candidates meant that anyone who was in the project could be nominated as a candidate and become the selected curator. Wang’s request for democratic

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ ‘Reports from the Road - Site 8: Zunyi, Guizhou Province’, *LONG MARCH PROJECT*, 2002 <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/project/dibazhanguizhouzunyi/>> [accessed 8 October 2021].

procedures of selecting the curators was covered in a manner of humour. Still, it stirred up the entangled tension and collaboration between artists and curators into a carefully conducted election.

This democratic selection also echoed the struggle for political and military power in Zunyi during the historical Long March, all of which led to Mao's rise to power. In *Democratic Long March*, most voters were curators and museum directors coming to the symposium and Lu, Qiu and three other attendants of the project were selected as candidates: Wu Meichun, Ye Yongqing and Johnson Chang. Unfortunately, none of the candidates took their candidacy speeches seriously. No matter whether they intended to reject or attract ballots, they attributed their reasons to the objective conditions such as their financial resources, physical strength or camera equipment (one ballot for Johnson Chang stated the choice was made because the candidate was wealthy). With these casual and funny words, the farcical election still revealed a hidden truth: curating in China was still considered as the curators' own initiative and the curator was the unquestionable protagonist. Although *Long March* emphasised a mode of working together collectively, curating was still understood essentially as the occupation of the curator, its value judged according to each individual's ability without considering their willing, experience and ability to form friends and collaborations with others. In the final round, it was still Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie who won the mock election. Nonetheless, Wang's work led us to ponder what direction the project would turn to if other participants were selected as the curators or how other curators would organise Lu's curatorial plan.



Fig. 52 The curatorial team travelling on the road in *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, 2002. Courtesy of Long March Project.

[1. Ruijin](#)[2. Jinggangshan](#)[3. Guangxi](#)[4. Kunming](#)[5. Lijiang](#)[6. Lugu Lake](#)[7. On the Train](#)[8. Zunyi](#)[9. Maotai](#)[10. Xichang](#)[11. Moxi](#)[12. Luding Bridge](#)[13. 25000 Cultural Transmission Center](#)[14. Dawei](#)[15. Zuoqueji Fortress](#)[16. Grasslands](#)[17. Huining](#)[18. Nanniwan](#)[19. Mizi](#)[20. Yan'an](#)[21. Yan'an](#)[Works that are realized throughout the course of the Long March](#)[International Stops on the Route of Long March](#)

Open Letter to All Supporters of the Long March Project:

Standing on Luding Bridge on August 30th, the Long March curatorial team reached a crucial decision: We declared the incomplete Long March project "incomplete" at that point.

This is a serious and sincere decision, based on our examination and rethinking on what we had done to that point. Though confronted by numerous challenges, we had triumphantly pressed on, making it to the twelfth of twenty planned sites. And even today, we strongly believe that if we had continued the march, we could have maintained the quality which we had sought up to that point. But it was this very self-satisfaction, this confidence about our future, which led us to be cautious and suspicious of ourselves. We recalled the degree of uncertainty that originally inspired us before hitting the road, and we came to realize that no journey should be planned. Our demands of ourselves and the Long March have been raised to the point where it is simply not enough for us to complete the Long March, especially if we are completing it solely for the sake of its completion. With all our desire for "failure", we have to prevent the Long March metaphor from becoming mired in the trap of superficiality, functionality, and practicality. Precisely by postulating the project's "incompletion" as "completion," we remain faithful to the very open-ended nature which has been its hallmark from day one.

How do we complete the Long March? Is there a completion to the Long March? Is it necessary to complete the Long March? There exists no mega-exhibition, no giant thematic show, no biennial, no triennial that can adequately represent the project's original timeframe or geographical structure. But in our Long March, and in the hyper-textual relations it has drawn between self and society, time and space, concept and ideology, we are given this option. We consider the current decision a new realization, new examination, a new contextualization of the Long March.

We emphasize that our decision is based completely on academic, artistic, and theoretical thinking. We are currently working on improving our website and also organizing all the documentation from site 1 to 12. Meanwhile, we ask you to be with us through our website (www.longmarchfoundation.org) and together engage in the process of dialogue that this change in the course of direction brings to us.

You will be receiving our first and second newsletter following this letter, in case you did not receive them due to technical difficulties we faced on the road. We appreciate your patience with us.

Thank you for your continuous support on the Long March.

Sincerely yours,

Lu Jie, Curator-in-Chief

Qiu Zhijie, Co-Curator

Fig. 53 'Open Letter to All Supporters of the Long March Project' published on Longmarchfoundation.Org, 2002, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20021225085910/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/english/e-discourse7.htm>> [Accessed through Wayback Machine, Internet Archive on 17 October, 2020]. Courtesy of Long March Project and Internet Archive.

Conclusion: From Curating to *Cedong*

Between Two Exhibitions: Oslo and Lyon

The abrupt halt of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* aroused much debate and criticism in the Chinese art world. After returning to Beijing, Lu started sorting out the report and photographs for each site and updated them on the project's dedicated website, longmarchfoundation.org.⁴⁷² The two curators also received several positive reviews acknowledging the success of *Long March*. The newly founded academic journal *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, initiated by Zheng Shengtian and Ken Lum in Canada, dedicated a whole issue in November 2002 to the project. In 2003, Lu Jie gave six public lectures in different institutes around the world — Apex Art in New York, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan, as well as Asian Studies Annual Conference in the United States and Tsinghua University in Beijing. The venues for these lectures ranged from contemporary art institutions to official academic environments.

During this time Lu Jie rented a former cafeteria in the 798 Art Zone and renovated it to host 25000 Li Cultural Transmission Center, which opened to the public in February 2003. The construction of an art space in Beijing seemed to go against the fluid mode of *Long March* and its proposition to offer an alternative approach to the existing art world. Lu clarified that '25,000 Cultural Transmission Center is not a gallery but a center, a base, a working station which looks to [...] connect the art world with Chinese society, and to connect China with the world.'⁴⁷³ The centre's space in the 798 Art Zone, which was called Long March Space, was also claimed to be the thirteenth site of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*, following Site 12 Luding Bridge.⁴⁷⁴ In May 2003, the centre put on the first exhibition 'Black Tattoo' by Shi Qing. Lu Jie and the new assistant curator, Philip Tinari, started organising more exhibitions. Moreover, Xiao Xiong was invited to join the centre as a project manager, to oversee exhibitions and projects.

⁴⁷² 'Long March: A Walking Visual Display', *Long March Foundation*, 2002
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20020927145505/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/>> [accessed 21 February 2021].

⁴⁷³ 'Long March Ranks Occupy New Headquarters: The 25,000 Cultural Transmission Center Opens in Beijing', *Long March Foundation*, 2003
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20041220223231/http://longmarchfoundation.org/english/e-discourse27.htm>> [accessed 7 October 2021].

⁴⁷⁴ 'Homepage', *Long March Foundation*, 2006
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20060517002901/http://www.longmarchspace.com/english/homepage-foundation.htm>> [accessed 27 December 2021].

While the core curatorial team never returned to this project, the international tour of exhibitions they had initially planned together was not in vain. In April 2004, Long March Project was invited to participate in the exhibition 'Shanghai Assemblage 2000-2004: Light as Fuck!' in National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo.⁴⁷⁵ This exhibition in Norway was curated by two attendants of the Zunyi International Curating Symposium: Per Bjarne Boym, the director of the museum, and Gu Zhenqing, who had started working independently as a curator in and out of China for several years. For the first international exhibition of *Long March*, Lu selected eight relatively well-known artists' single pieces.⁴⁷⁶ For the purposes of display, each work was presented as an independent work rather than as a series of works from the larger project. Besides, these works were not necessarily carried out on the road. For example, Wang Jinsong's *New Long March Slogan* was retouched from the original version presented in 2002. *Long March* as a curatorial project was only present in the foreword, as a shared context of these artworks. The working process was presented through occasional reference to photographs, representing the different iterations of the artworks exhibited.

⁴⁷⁵ 'Shanghai Assemblage 2000-2004: Light as Fuck!', *Long March Project* <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/exhibition/shanghai-assemblage-2000-2004/>> [accessed 27 January 2022].

⁴⁷⁶ These eight artists were Wang Jinsong, Qiu Zhijie, Chyanga (Qin Ga), Zhou Xiaohu, Shi Yong, Jiang Jie, Sui Jianguo and Xiao Xiong.



Fig. 54 Xiao Xiong's performance and participatory work *Entry and Out* was shown in exhibition 'Shanghai Assemblage 2000-2004: Light as Fuck!' in the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo, 2004. Courtesy of Xiao Xiong and Long March Project.



Fig. 55 Jiang Jie's sculpture and performance work *Sending Off the Red Army: To Commemorate the Mothers on the Road of the Long March* was shown in exhibition 'Shanghai Assemblage 2000-2004: Light as Fuck!' in the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo, 2004. Courtesy of Jiang Jie and Long March Project.

In contrast, 'The Monk and The Demon: Chinese Contemporary art' ('Le moine et le démon: Art contemporain chinois') exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Lyon, France in 2004 combined artworks and documentation of the road trip undertaken by *Long March*.⁴⁷⁷ The exhibition was curated by critic Fei Dawei, who had returned to China from France and had assumed the position of Head Curator of The Ullens Foundation in Beijing (which later became The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art). For this exhibition, Fei invited Lu Jie and *Long March* was given a whole floor in the museum. Lu Jie created an immersive display, utilising photographs, sculptures, videos, a cassette player, several television monitors and objects from the road, which spread across the museum's 600-m² third floor. 5000 photographs covered the nearly 5000-m² wall space. Artworks were

⁴⁷⁷ The exhibition was jointly organised by the Contemporary Art Museum of Lyon, the Guangdong Museum of Art and the Guy and Guys and Myriam Ullens Foundation and ran from June 8 to August 15, 2004.

crowded in conjunction with each other with thirty or so containers used to ship the artworks and materials from China to France. In the corner, a desk was set up with a computer connected to the internet, directing the audience to the website of Long March Foundation, an online archive of Long March Project.⁴⁷⁸

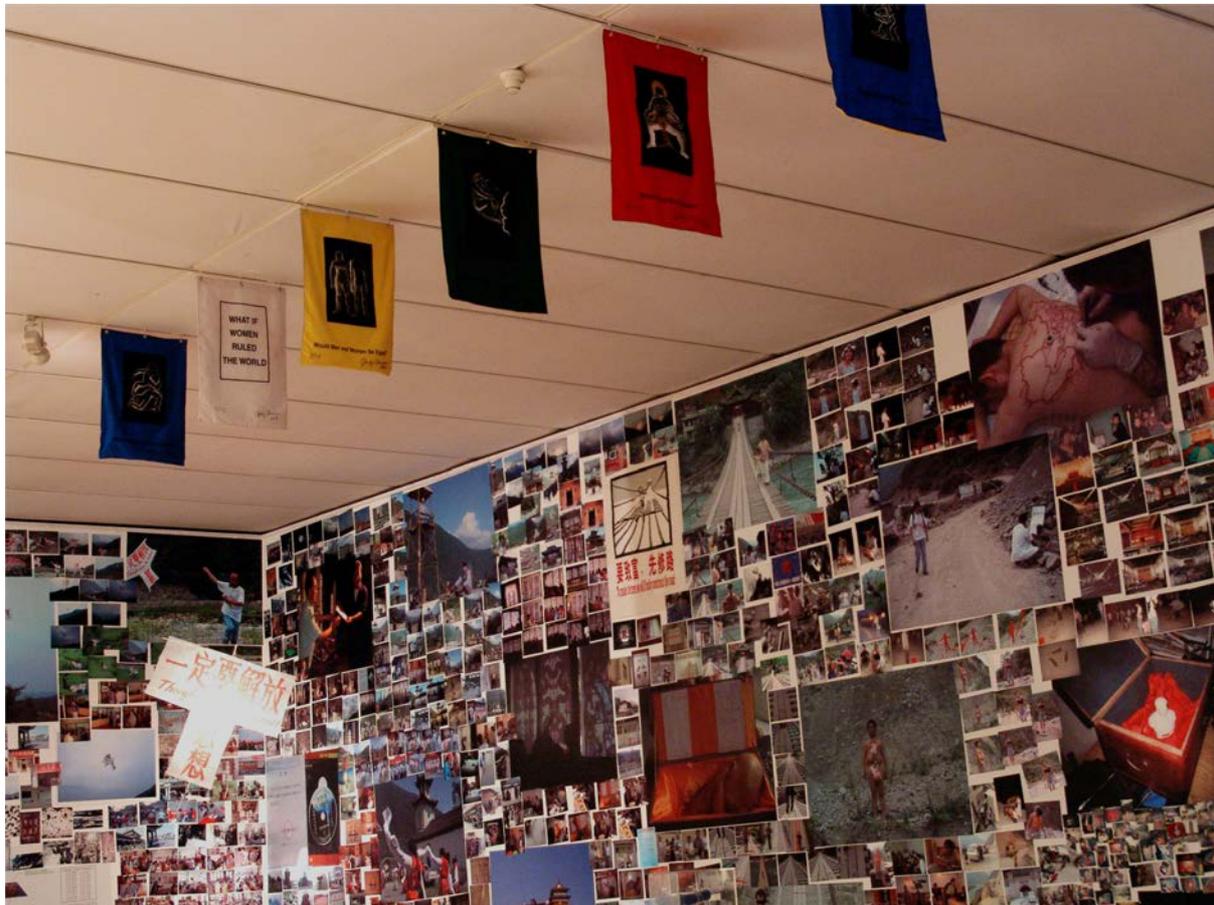


Fig. 56 Exhibition view of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* in exhibition “Le moine et le demon – an exhibition on Contemporary Chinese Art” in the Museum of Contemporary Art Lyon, France, 2004. Courtesy of Long March Project.

⁴⁷⁸ “The Long March Participates in “Le Moine et Le Demon - Contemporary Chinese Art” Exhibition Held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lyon.’, *Long March Foundation*, 2004
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20040813145533/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/images/lyon/index-e.htm>> [accessed 23 October 2021].



Fig. 57 Exhibition view of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* in exhibition ‘Le moine et le démon – an exhibition on Contemporary Chinese Art’ in Museum of Contemporary Art Lyon, France, 2004. Courtesy of Long March Project.

The exhibition in Oslo was clean, minimalist and restrained: the works remained autonomous, and the gallery maintained a streamlined modern exhibition look. In sharp contrast to the exhibition in Oslo, the display in Lyon was unbounded, chaotic and overwhelming, with materials pouring towards the audience. The artworks for the Oslo exhibition could be seen as a response to Lu Jie’s reservations about the quality of the artworks that appeared during the process of *Long March* – in our first interview in 2018, Lu remained reticent about the project: ‘What was the best work in *Long March* from your perspective?’

Due to the open format of *Long March*, there were many artists who hadn’t yet matured in their approach to their artistic practice. As a curator, Lu was faced with the question of whether to temporarily cease reflecting on the nature of artistic production, and instead turn his attention to assuring the quality of the artworks produced. When these artworks moved from the streets and villages in China into museums and galleries in the West, the

expectations placed upon these artworks also changed. The eight artworks in the exhibition in Oslo incorporated a standard ‘museum quality’ in terms of their aesthetics and display. By contrast, in the exhibition in Lyon — with artworks immersed in the numerous photographs, videos and objects collected from the project’s journey — critical evaluation of artworks was suspended and gave way to the perception of the whole project as a continuous ‘work-in-progress’. The accompanying press release highlighted the collective, malleable and intertwined nature of these artistic practice — brought about through the process of curating and making artworks.⁴⁷⁹

The different approaches of display in the two exhibitions in Oslo and Lyon reveal that Lu Jie was operating across multiple dichotomies: concerns over whether to foreground the individual or the collective, the artwork or Long March Project, the outcome or the process? Could these elements be differentiated? As 25000 Cultural Transmission Center’s work memo for the Lyon exhibition showed, the staff were aware that there was an inherent difficulty in presenting artworks in the aftermath of the journey.⁴⁸⁰ Moreover, they felt that since these works were rooted in the context of the historical Long March and contemporary Chinese society, a Western audience might not be able to interpret their manifest cultural significance. If they chose to explain the meaning of these works more thoroughly, the visual qualities of this exhibition would be overwhelmed by walls of text. This was perhaps why, according to Fei, Lu initially considered presenting these artworks in a conventional way — by separating the whole space into several rooms with movable walls, similar to the display in Oslo. However, in Lu’s meeting with Fei and Thierry Raspail (the director of Lyon Contemporary Art Museum at the time), Fei and Raspail considered that ‘It is [...] unnecessary to foreground artworks, that’s against *Long March*.’⁴⁸¹ What the two outsider curators found fascinating about *Long March* was the project’s ‘raw state’ — a by-product of travelling intensely on the road. Fei suggested that a clean and conventional display would not deliver the exhilarating atmosphere and bodily experience of the curators’ and artists’ travelling.⁴⁸² His advice was that Lu should display all varieties of materials all over the vast exhibition space, leaving only several narrow paths for the audience to walk through — thus giving an impression of the immense number of material accumulated while on the road.

The curatorial approach adopted in the Lyon Exhibition opened up an undefined space,

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Long March Archive, ‘Li’ang Zhanlan Jihua’ [Proposal of Lyon Exhibition], 2004, unpublished in-house work document.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Interview with Fei Dawei, December 2019.

allowing the particular process and collaborative mode of making art to fully unfold. The gallery became an experimental field, which welcomed new approaches and attitudes to articulating artistic processes. Like ‘Cities on the Move’ (1997–1999) curated by Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist, miscellaneous everyday objects and visual materials were brought into the gallery and intermingled with artworks in videos, photographs and installations which reflected upon social conditions.⁴⁸³ The chaotic and immersive exhibition scene signalled the working process at play, which punctuated the rhythms between artists’ studios and the social environment, as well as between the practice of art and that of curating. At the same time, the curatorial approach exemplified by the Lyon exhibition also meant that the conventional distribution of authorship was challenged. Lu Jie was also aware of this. He smartly reframed the implicit tension between artists and curators in relation to the tensions between the individual and the collective in Communist discourse. Long March Project’s press release of the Lyon exhibition included a discussion about *Long March* as a collective:

Of special interest was that several artists on display at the ‘le moine et le démon’ exhibition also had their works on display in the Long March exhibition at the same time, only with a different display style. One can say that the Long March collectively displayed the power of the individual, or one can say that it was the power of the individual that displayed the power of the collective.⁴⁸⁴

The Lyon exhibition chose to display the whole process of rendering these artworks, in the name of a curatorial project. The Oslo show, unlike the Lyon exhibition filled with objects and documentation of the curatorial process, manifested the mainstream perception of the so-called ‘Art’ and exhibition practice. The curating in Oslo still followed the canon of Western art history, in that the exhibition was centred around individual artists and autonomous artworks. Therefore, the display of *Long March* adopted the classic Western display of art in salons and galleries by only presenting artworks, not the processes or collaborative network at play in rendering them.

Lu continued to grapple with dichotomies between individual and collective discourse,

⁴⁸³ *Cities on the Move: Chaos and Global Change: East Asian Art, Architecture and Film Now* (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 1999).

⁴⁸⁴ ‘The Long March Participates in “Le Moine et Le Démon - Contemporary Chinese Art” Exhibition Held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lyon.’, *Long March Foundation*, 2004 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20040813145533/http://www.longmarchfoundation.org/images/lyon/index-e.htm>> [accessed 23 October 2021].

with relationships between curators and artists in *Long March* taking on an increasingly hybrid status. In 2008, Lu put forward the term ‘curatist’, denoting the dissolving boundary between the two roles. In the article ‘The Paradox of the Curatist: The Long March as Author’ (2008), Lu considered that the special structure of *Long March* led to a special relation between curators and artists.

[C]urators are not curators, nor are they artists. Nor are artists curators. Rather, it is the exhibition that is the artist. All the participants reassume the status of cultural workers.⁴⁸⁵

Given that ‘it is the exhibition that is the artist’, the occupational differences between artists and curators were suspended. Lu erased the difference between roles and made all participants assume the status of these so-called ‘cultural workers’. In so doing, he argued that the project of *Long March* was not to simply present finished artworks; rather, artists and curators were working collaboratively to make works on site. Naming the whole project as the artist, instead of acknowledging individuals who identified themselves as artists in *Long March* as artists, can be considered as a challenge to the ‘artist-exhibition’ format: where usually only artists and artworks are selected for exhibition. It also responded to a long-lasting conundrum about curating retrospectively: is it still possible to retain the status of an active curator or a curatorial project, especially when that curatorial project continues on a rolling basis? This can also be viewed as dissolving a typical tension in curating, i.e. how curating (things that are not art) should be displayed when what the display system centres around art? Lu identified an element in *Long March* to be the ‘artist’ rather than bypassing the identity; the curatorial work is rendered part of ‘artwork’ and a living body, refuting ideas of stasis or completion.

However, Zoe Butt, the director of Long March Project and International Programs of Long March Space from 2007 to 2009, commented that ‘many [artists] felt threatened by the open conceptual structure of “A Walking Visual Display” in that numerous works were collectively authored.’⁴⁸⁶ Butt’s words suggested that while the old system was being challenged and the resulting experimentation was key to this, a new ethics should be established to uphold collective authorship. Few artworks created in *Long March* have been exhibited independently without being linked to its curatorial approaches. In contrast with

⁴⁸⁵ Lu Jie, ‘The Paradox of the Curatist: The Long March as Author’, *MJ - Manifesta Journal: Journal of Contemporary Curatorship*, 5, 2008, 204–10 (p. 209).

⁴⁸⁶ Zoe Butt, ‘Marching Out of Step’, 2009
<<http://longmarchproject.com/en/discourse/eryuanlundemiheyishidejuexing/>> [accessed 3 December 2021].

the curators' active promotion of *Long March* and Lu's manoeuvres around the world, the contributing artists were relatively quiet. In October 2002, on arts.tom.com, a young student in the CAA said their journalist friend had visited Long March Project, but never felt as though they were an 'insider'. In closing, they remarked: 'why, after stagnation for nearly a month and a half, all the participating artists of the Long March are still unknown or still showing the nobility of being off-site?'⁴⁸⁷ They further considered that 'no one has genuinely and objectively changed themselves' in this project, which meant that artists were still artists, curators were still curators and participants still performed according to their existing (and expected) roles.

This observation echoed the executive curator Qiu Zhijie's perception of the interrelationship between artists and curators in the project as 'complicit' in upholding traditional methodologies, as aforementioned in our interview. The passiveness of artists and their lack of purpose within the wider project thus prompts a further question: how can curators work constructively with artists, the public and wider stakeholders to encourage people to step out of traditional roles? Furthermore, the overarching question 'who does Chinese avant-garde art belong to?' raised in the international curating symposium in Zunyi, is echoed in doubts over the effectiveness of *Long March's* own practices: who does *Long March* belong to?

Long March as Free-thinking Practice

In 2003, Qiu Zhijie joined the faculty in CAA and set up his Total Art (*zongti yishu*) Studio. He has not spoken much about *Long March* over the years. Lisa Horikawa returned to Japan and continued working in an institutional context.⁴⁸⁸ In fact, most artists haven't openly commented on *Long March*, Long March Project or their experience. It seemed that it was the 25000 Cultural Transmission Center that continued acting as custodian in preserving *Long March's* legacy. Their website acted like an index and once upon a time, there was a column called 'Long March Artists', listing names of those who participated in *Long March*. But what did it mean to be a 'Long March Artist'? Was it just an acknowledgement of the encounter in the past? Or did it mean something like being

⁴⁸⁷ 'Guanyu Changzheng de Taolun' [Discussions about 'Long March'], *Arts.Tom.Com*, 2002 <https://web.archive.org/web/20040428095244/http://bbs4.tom.com/read.php?forumid=224&postid=7472&page_back=39&mod=modify> [accessed 8 October 2021].

⁴⁸⁸ She is now the Deputy Director of Collections Development at National Gallery Singapore. 'Collecting Momentum: The Past, Present and Future of the National Collection of National Gallery Singapore. An Interview with Lisa Horikawa.', *Singapore Art & Gallery Guide*, 2018 <<https://sagg.info/interview-with-lisa-horikawa/>> [accessed 27 December 2021].

represented by a gallery? As one of the ‘Long March Artists’ said, some institutes and galleries still asked them, ‘Were you still in collaboration with *Long March*? How should we collaborate with you?’⁴⁸⁹ These doubts from the outside were combined with some artists’ relatively independent production of their works in *Long March* and 25000 Cultural Transmission Center’s collaboration with artists.

When Chyanga was devising his work for *Long March*, he was clearly conscious that he did not want his work to be ‘an illustration of the curatorial content’.⁴⁹⁰ Chyanga was subverting power dynamics between artist and curator by centring his own body as an indicator of provenance. Instead of *being documented*, he chose *to document* the curatorial team of *Long March*. During *Long March*’s journey on the road, Chyanga was based in Beijing. He asked a tattoo artist to draw a map of China in 1936 on his back; as the curatorial team moved to each site, the tattoo artist added the name of the new site and extended the trajectory. When *Long March* halted midway, Chyanga was waiting for Lu Jie to start again — the route on his back had not yet reached Yan’an. This work was called *The Miniature Long March* and featured a tattooed route map of *Long March* on his back. It has been often selected as the cover image of the project. Initially, Lu Jie was considering returning to the journey in the winter of 2002 or in the next year (He even invited artists to join the second part of *Long March* on the Venice Biennale in 2003).⁴⁹¹ However, the project remained on hiatus. Undeterred, Chyanga decided to complete this work by himself.⁴⁹² While the previous journey was conducted by the curators, this time he ventured out alone. Chyanga organised his own team of one tattooist, two videographers and one photographer — together, they travelled from Dadu River to Yan’an.⁴⁹³ In 2002, Chyanga paid for all the expenses himself. In 2005, the Center agreed to sponsor half of the production fee, held an exhibition of *The Miniature Long March* and represented this series of work for three years globally.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁹ Conversation with an artist in the ‘Long March Artists’. The name is kept closed for protection.

⁴⁹⁰ Interview with Chyanga, December 2020.

⁴⁹¹ ‘Changzheng Duiwu Zai Weinisi Shuangnian Zan Xuanze Canjia Xia Ban Bu Changzheng de Guoji Yishujia’ [The Long March Team Choose International Artists Participating in the Second Part of ‘Long March’ in Venice Biennale], *Long March Space*, 2003
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20060517021549/http://www.longmarchspace.com/jiangzuo/czxw/czxw01.htm>> [accessed 27 December 2021].

⁴⁹² Interview with Lu Jie, 2019. Lu Jie said they tried to invite international artists at the Venice Biennale 2003.

⁴⁹³ Chyanga, *Weixing Changzheng [Miniature Long March]* (Beijing: 25000 Cultural Transmission Center, 2005).

⁴⁹⁴ Interview with Chyanga, 2020-2021.



Fig. 58 Chyanga (Qin Ga), *The Miniature Long March – Site 12 Luding Bridge*, performance and photography, 2002. Courtesy of Chyanga.

The relation between Chyanga and *Long March*/ the Center involved collaboration on multiple levels: from concept, production, exhibition to sales. However, throughout the process, Chyanga also retained his artistic independence. There was not any clear and long-term commitment towards each other in this collaboration — rather, the work reflected the changing conditions in this collaboration. For example, the curatorial project did not need to reach Yan'an for Chyanga's work in 2002. Nonetheless, Chyanga embraced the uncertainties and risks when he decided to document and respond to the curatorial project in his way. In 2005, when Chyanga decided to complete the tattooed route himself — forgoing 25000 Cultural Transmission Center's support, the dynamic between the artist and the curatorial project was crucial to the value of this work.

This changeable nature of this relationship was upheld in the Center's approach. In the year 2005, *25000 Cultural Transmission Center* changed its name to *Long March Space*, which was already in use in the Center's press release from 2003 — 'Long March Space' used to only denote the building and is now used as the title.⁴⁹⁵ At this time, the market of contemporary Chinese art started taking off and many galleries opened in the 798 Art Zone.⁴⁹⁶ One of the Center's and, ultimately, Long March Space's functions had been to market artworks to collectors.⁴⁹⁷ While the Center/Long March Space had the attributes of a commercial gallery, Lu did not position it within the Western coordinates of the art world: that is to say, he avoided defining whether 25000 Cultural Transmission Center was a non-profit institute or as a gallery. In an article 'Long March Capital — Visual Economy', Lu defined the Center as a site of social production of visual culture, 'with displays in space, independent projects, consultations, services, productions during residency, publications, conferences, workshops, cyberspaces, etc.'⁴⁹⁸ Long March Project and Long March Space were two aspects of the same curatorial practice. This hybridity was essential for creativity. With exhibitions and curatorial projects all over the world, Lu continually asserted that '*Long March* is always on the road'.

Lu was aware that these activities, if to be viewed from the typical definitions in the art world, would be inappropriate to be performed by the same entity. However, Lu regarded the Center as an innovative practice to engage with 'an enmeshed art structure' embedded

⁴⁹⁵ 'Newsletters and Announcements', *Long March Space*, 2006
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20060517000045/http://www.longmarchspace.com/english/discourse/newsletter.htm>> [accessed 27 December 2021].

⁴⁹⁶ Ye Ying, 'Hunsheng Zhuangtai' [Mixed State], in *Yaobian 798 [Fambe 798]*.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Lu Jie, 'Long March Capital- Visual Economy', *Long March Project*, 2003
<<http://longmarchproject.com/en/discourse/changzhengziben-shijuejingji/>> [accessed 30 November 2021].

in the whole society, rather than existing exclusively within the art world. The theoretical articulation of 'Long March Capital' was later put into simpler words. Lu explained in 2006 that 25000 Cultural Transmission Center worked across three worlds: 'black' (*heidao*), 'white' (*baidao*) and 'red' (*hongdao*). 'The black' in Chinese usually means the underworld and here Lu referred to the world of contemporary art still under censorship; 'the white' means the legal and respected world and Lu used it to denote the international institutes and foreigners (*laowai*); 'the red', the colour of the communist party, denoted the authoritative state-own art academies and museums.⁴⁹⁹ In China, where there is scarce public funding for self-initiated art projects; the Center's manoeuvres in and out of these black, red, white worlds helped to financially sustain the continual development of the project. In so doing, Lu also identified the creative value of a renewed curatorial practice. As the introduction to Long March Space indicated:

The space functions as a 'curatorial laboratory' dedicated to the fundamental questions of the relationship between curating, display and artistic creation, between practice and discourse, between objects and text, and between audience and artists.⁵⁰⁰

At the same time, Long March Project was still reserved as the umbrella for several curatorial movements. From 2003 to 2004, Lu organised a series of exhibitions under the title 'The Power of the Public Realm'. This exhibition presented artists like Li Tianbing and Guo Fengyi, who were contributors to *Long March*, and contemporary artists like Liang Shuo (1976–) whose practice investigated folk art and social engagement. From 2004, Lu initiated a large-scale project 'The Great Survey of Papercutting in Yanchuan County' (abbreviated as 'Yanchuan Paper-cutting'). Long March Project closely collaborated with the local government and public education system in Yan'an; at the same time, it was an affiliate contributor to the 2004 Shanghai Biennale.⁵⁰¹ These projects responded to the facets of folk art and alternative artists practices in *Long March* in 2002. In May 2006, after nearly four years, Long March Project resumed the stopped *Long March* and held a three-

⁴⁹⁹ Ye Ying, 'Hunsheng Zhuangtai' [Mixed State], in *Yaobian 798 [Fambe 798]* (Beijing: Nestar Press, 2010), pp. 70–72.

⁵⁰⁰ 'Homepage', *Long March Foundation*, 2006 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20060517002901/http://www.longmarchspace.com/english/homepage-foundation.htm>> [accessed 27 December 2021].

⁵⁰¹ In promotional material for 'Yanchuan Paper-cutting', Lu Jie put forward that 'paper-cutting is also part of contemporary art'.⁵⁰¹ The collected objects in 'Yanchuan Paper-cutting', including questionnaires and the paper-cutting works, were exhibited in Shanghai Biennale, Bienal de São and contemporary art institutions in Vancouver and San Francisco. 'Yanchuan Survey: Preparation, Research, Mobilization, Organization', *Long March Project*, 2004 <<http://longmarchproject.com/en/project/puchadashijiqianqizhunbei/>> [accessed 23 October 2021].

day forum (*zuotan hui*) on contemporary art education in Yan'an — the last site in the initial curatorial plan.

This large-scale forum realised the initial proposal of artist Cai Guoqiang for *Long March* and marked the end of the previous project.⁵⁰² Moreover, the forum was an ode to the education experiment promoted by Mao among writers and artists in Yan'an during the 1940s. In 2006, many participating contemporary artists and scholars in *Long March* had held important positions in art colleges in China. Lu was also a visiting tutor in the curating department in CAA. Moreover, the forum asked, what are the new methods and mechanisms to organise art education for the greater good, especially taking advantage of the revolutionary art heritage rooted in Yan'an?⁵⁰³

Like *Long March*, Yan'an Forum on art education reflected upon the fissure and collision in contemporary art: the international and the local, the rural and the urban. Partly this reflected the time: the 2000s witnessed heated engagement between contemporary Chinese art and the international art market, and these questions were still so pertinent to the practitioners.⁵⁰⁴ In 2008, Long March Project initiated another project, 'Ho Chi Minh Trail', in which a group of Chinese artists and critics were invited to visit Vietnam to reapproach communist and revolutionary memory from the perspective of a transnational case study. Some insiders in the art world considered that this visit to Vietnam was timely, offering a period of critical reflection after the expected crash in sales of Chinese art on the international market.⁵⁰⁵

These projects, along with 25000 Cultural Transmission Center, were initially all seen as continuation of the first *Long March* in 2002. In fact, the Chinese art world rarely distinguish between these projects: often referring to the combined legacy of both as simply, *Long March*. However, when employees who work for both Long March Project/Space are networking within the art field, they often employ different identities to save unnecessary trouble. The decision to hand over the business card of Long March Project, or that of Long

⁵⁰² Cai Guoqiang and others, *Yan'an Yishu Jiaoyu Zuotan Hui [Yan'an Forum on Art Education]* (Long March Project, 2006).

⁵⁰³ Qiu Zhijie shared how he introduced 'social investigation methods' including field studies, on-site interviews and paradigm-making into his teaching in the Total Art Studio in CAA.⁵⁰³ This teaching has been clearly influenced by the curating in *Long March*.

⁵⁰⁴ The Chinese art totalled less than one percent of the global art market in 2000 and in 2010, China jumped to the first place ahead of the UK and the US. Artprice, *Art Market Trends 2010, 2010*, <https://imgpublic.artprice.com/pdf/trends2010_en.pdf> [Accessed 16 November 2021].

⁵⁰⁵ This project did not produce any artworks — rather, reflected changes in their critical thinking parallel to contemporary socio-political developments.

March Space, depended entirely on the identity of the person they are meeting. In Philip Tinari's words, Long March demonstrated 'a smart strategy of calculated defiance to the Western system paired with (perhaps feigned) fealty to that system's hierarchies and operational modality'.⁵⁰⁶

Tinari questioned how the controlled incongruence was only a gesture of challenge and a posture for brand-making, like Sasha Su-ling Welland's consideration that *Long March* was aware of the necessity to 'garner international attention'.⁵⁰⁷ However, this body of research considers that these marketing approaches were essential to the curating of *Long March*. In mirroring these approaches, Lu targeted not only the Chinese artist community and the local resources but also the international art system. From the very start, Lu was consciously engaging with the 'difficulty in reconciling a specific Chinese approach to contemporary art with international expectations and interference'. *Long March* was, for him, 'about providing a position for being international'.⁵⁰⁸ In so doing, Lu contemplated strategies for generating media exposure, a strong creative network and potential financial reward.

We can reflect on this from another perspective — by drawing onto the gradual disappearance of this 'calculated defiance' in Long March Space, particularly as the gallery commercialised after 2008. The multifaced nature of the Center during the 2000s posed difficulties for other galleries and institutions to make sense of its overall mission. As the revenue generated by contemporary Chinese art declined after the closing of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, this entity then started participating in art fairs and representing artists on the market with the name Long March Space, resembling a commercial gallery.⁵⁰⁹ In the following decade, Long March Space has become one of the biggest commercial galleries in mainland China.⁵¹⁰ It integrated more deeply into the already defined art world,

⁵⁰⁶ Philip Tinari, 'A Brief History of Space', *LEAP*, 2010 <<http://www.leapleapleap.com/2010/12/a-brief-history-of-space/>> [accessed 9 December 2020].

⁵⁰⁷ Sasha Su-ling Welland, 'The Hinterland of Feminist Art', in *Experimental Beijing: Gender and Globalisation in Chinese Contemporary Art*.

⁵⁰⁸ Andrew Maerke, 'The Long March Project: Backward Progress'.

⁵⁰⁹ In 2009, Long March Space participated in the Statements area of Art Basel, the leading commercial art fair, for the first time. Long March Space presented works by Xu Zhen and Guo Fengyi. In 2011, it was accepted into the main area Galleries. For most new galleries, attending Art Basel is an opportunity to further establish and promote their brand to an international audience — however, for Long March Space, this action was more likely to demonstrate that the Space was now operating as a commercial gallery. Interview with Leung Chunglan, December 2019.

⁵¹⁰ When the new website of Long March Space was relaunched again in 2017, the 'collaborating artists' only included about a dozen artists whose works were commercially represented by the gallery. Most of these artists were from the same generation as Lu — having emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, like Wang Jianwei, Xu Zhen, Wu Shanzhuan and Zhu Yu (1970–).

especially the art market. Some of the former parts of 25000 Cultural Transmission Center were transferred to Long March Project, which, opposed to the current commercial nature of Long March Space, became more purely as the umbrella for artistic, curatorial, and non-profit projects. In contrast with the rapid updates of Long March Space, from 2009 to 2017, Long March Project only initiated one new project, the Rhizome Forum (2010-2011), and was largely in a dormant state. It was not by accident that the dormancy of Long March Project was accompanied by the commercialisation of Long March Space. As mentioned earlier, *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* later embodied in the consolidation and organisation of Long March Project/Space. This curatorial practice has brought together different systems, thus overcoming boundaries to build a professional profile. After 2008, this boundary-defying mode of curating gradually gave way to the boundary-making commercialisation of Long March Space — wherein Long March Space was recognised as a commercial gallery and Long March Project, a curatorial institute.

During these years, Lu Jie was always in the team of Long March Project/Space as the founder. But in September, 2021, Lu Jie left the team and joined his former alma mater Zhejiang Academy of Art, now the China Academy of Art (CAA), as the full-time director of the Institute of Contemporary Art & Social Thoughts (ICAST). He currently heads the curating department. This move echoed to the continuous experimentation in art education in Long March Project throughout the years, as well as Lu's effort to set up the short-term 'Seminar for Curators' programme in the academy in 2001. In 2003, Research Center of Display Culture was set up in CAA and Lu has been a guest supervisor for graduates. So, from his point of view, his efforts to radicalise forms of curatorial education have persisted.⁵¹¹ While his multiple roles sometimes conflict with each other, they are fully integrated into his curatorial practice — a lens through which he observes the distinctive value of curating as a practice that allows this aggregation of different roles, and latterly, the simultaneous engagement in different fields.

In November 2021, after two years of not going back to mainland China, I interviewed Lu Jie again in Hangzhou. Speaking of my research on *Long March*, he expressed concerns that some contemporary scholars' analyses of *Long March* were strongly biased — especially the research on Lugu Lake. In his opinion, the clash on Lugu Lake was a very common phenomenon in curating and happened in every site in *Long March*. I raised the

⁵¹¹ Lu Jie also supervised a course Professional Development under MA Program Curatorial Practice in California College of the Arts (CCA) in 2005.

point that most researchers were limited by the current available materials and hopefully, more discussions can attract more first-hand materials and lead to clearer and more rewarding understandings of the project. Hearing this, Lu then suggested that I see more on-site recordings in Long March Archive. This echoed our conversation in 2019, when he told me he was so unsatisfied with ‘Reports from the Road’ that he had been thinking ‘to rewrite the reports almost every week all these years’.⁵¹² He was worried that the documentation hosted by *Long March* (such as ‘Reports from the Road’ and ‘Niuniu’s Long March’), deliver on only a particular aspect of Long March, instead of its full impact. Prospective researchers would be limited by the insufficient perspectives offered up by these materials. However, scholarly attention has pushed the Long March Archive to expand its online presence. The history and significance of *Long March* are still unfolding through up-and-coming debates, archival materials, and interviews, as this thesis has shown.

Long March did not meet the curator’s initial aim of establishing a new, long-term mode of creating and displaying art in China. However, it has influenced a wide range of contemporary stakeholders concerned with art’s place within society at large by encouraging greater experimentation in their own practice. As Gao Shiming (the current head of CAA) reflected, how curators talked about and framed the project, enabling them to expand their approach to contemporary Chinese Artists as a whole:

Long March in 2002 brought out many problems, even for participating artists, there were many discourses and many words which they had never heard about. But this does not mean they did not take place or exist among people, but just people hadn’t heard about them. Like Postcolonialism, in the beginning people all considered it had not much relation with us, but it was substantial.⁵¹³

Among the discourses and concepts mentioned by the curators in *Long March*, were postcolonialism, visual culture, anthropology, ethnography, ecology. Perhaps the most important word was ‘curating’. Through *Long March*, Lu introduced the discourse of curating to China, which, importantly, was often described as ‘self-organisation’ in China at that time. Artist Shi Qing reflected that he still held much respect towards the project:

It was such a good opportunity to explore questions like what we called as artists’ ‘self-organising’, a mode different from museums and commercial galleries, as well as artists’ attitudes towards politics and histories. If it could

⁵¹² Interview with Lu Jie, December 2019.

⁵¹³ Gao Shiming, *Xingdong de Shu: Guanyu Cezhan Xiezu [Book of Action: About Curatorial Writing]* (Beijing: Jincheng Press), p. 382.

be discussed profoundly, it might be a contribution to Chinese contemporary art.⁵¹⁴

Organised by independent curators with participants' support, *Long March* was indeed realised through self-organisation. However, the terminology of 'self-organisation' cannot fully grasp the distinctiveness of this practice: especially given the strong curatorial framework and the temporary clashes and encounters *Long March* had created in the field of contemporary art in China and beyond.

Since then, Shi Qing has carried the term 'self-organisation' into his practice:

Art is by essence a mechanism of action, a practice differentiating from contemplation. Contemporary art in our understanding today, is a mechanism calling for action every moment. It has to be self-organised, fast and flexible. It should not be limited to the self-supervision among artists and should stimulate other's participation. [...] This in return reminds 'self-organisation', first of all, [to be cautious] about assumptions and plans. An effective way is to reduce its attempt to build an institute to producing events, which means, to actively downgrade 'art' to general social events. Through juxtaposition and intermingling, one can regain an equal view instead of reproducing alternative system or forming a situation of two systems confronting each other.⁵¹⁵

What Shi Qing suggested here was 'self-organisation' is a verb and an action, rather than merely a plan. This echoed much to what theorist Irit Rogoff has phrased as 'urgency' – 'the possibility of producing an understanding of what the crucial issues are, so that they may become driving forces.'⁵¹⁶ To some extent, some participating artists pitied the fact that *Long March* did not successfully produce the solutions the curators had identified in their curatorial statement. Shi Qing's definition grasped the potential of *Long March* and offered a critique of the later institutionalisation of Long March Project and the commercialisation of Long March Space. Shi Qing's later artistic practice also engaged much in the society and aimed to point out the overlooked issues in social transformation. By collectively acting upon the critical issues embedded within their reality, the differences between artists and non-artists, curators and artists, were also dissolved.

Some art practitioners, who have been inspired by Lu Jie, picked up curating. He

⁵¹⁴ Interview with Shi Qing, July 2019.

⁵¹⁵ Shi Qing, 'Ziwo Zuzhi Shi Yizhong Zai Shengchan Jizhi' [Self-Organisation Is a Mechanism of Reproduction], in *ON/OFF Collective Practice in China* (Beijing: Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, 2013), pp. 329–33. Translations are mine.

⁵¹⁶ Irit Rogoff, 'Turning', *E-Flux*, 2008 <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68470/turning/>> [accessed 26 April 2019].

Wenzhao is one of them. He, who joined 25000 Cultural Transmission Center for a short time in 2005 as Director of Publication, set up the programme 'Transit Project' in his hometown Ci'man in Lijiang, Yunnan Province from 2011. This traditional village, in the suburb of Lijiang, was going through rapid urbanisation. Wanting to draw attention to the changing environment, He identified the village as a site and a situation for observation, action, and reflection. In 2011, He invited artists from Beijing, Shanghai and other urban areas to stay in Ci'man for no longer than two weeks and produce an artwork. This short deadline was set in order to intensify the differences between Ci'man and the environment artist had travelled from, thus magnifying the artists' bodily experience:

We want to rebuild the relation between practice and theory and reopen my bodily feelings. [...] We can no longer trace the origin again and again, but to ground ourselves deeper and deeper, to generate more things belonging to ourselves, our bodies and our inner experience. We shouldn't discern more about [a particular] word and yield more power to accumulated dying theories.⁵¹⁷

In He Wenzhao's opinion, a considerable drawback of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (2002) was that it was mainly directed to form a display towards the outsiders, directed at secondary audiences, international museums and intellectuals.⁵¹⁸ While *Long March* did not purposely commit to a particular place for long, 'Transit Project' was held in He's hometown and in the everyday lives of local residents who He had known in his lifetime. As a result, 'Transit Project' found its legitimacy in bearing witness to the effects of formidable urbanisation on this traditional village.

However, we could also find the similarities between *Long March* and 'Transit Project' in their choice of self-positioning in public spaces, their emphasis on bodily presence, the intensity of making works, the aims to provoke and transform artists and the desire for a new mode of art. I later realised that 'Transit Project' shares many similarities with *Long March*: primarily, in their inviting other artist, writers and researchers to the scene and allow various expectations for the project, secondly in their shared aim to transform people's perception in these intensified concrete social environments. In line with Communist movement 'going to the countryside' during the Cultural Revolution, both 'Transit' and *Long March* can be reinterpreted as leaving behind the white-cube galleries and artist studios and working in social situations. For curators like He Wenzhao, *Long*

⁵¹⁷ Interview with He Wenzhao, July 2016.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

March has become an iconic example to draw out lived experience, and lessons learned from it. However, He was alert that *Long March* did not faithfully translate the Communist heritage into deeds and often stayed at the level of discourse and display. This also influenced the curating of ‘Transit’: over the years, the project has kept low-key, small in scale and relatively slow in pace.

In my observations, the history of self-organisation by Chinese artists and curatorial practices like *Long March* in the past are still largely absent in today’s discussion in the art world. Over the years, *Long March* has effectively lost its currency. Lu Jie once expressed concern that now few young people know or could relate to the project and Long March Project.⁵¹⁹ This historical amnesia can be attributed to an art world prone to a highly selective memory. While Star Group and the ’85 New Art Wave were celebrated at important anniversaries as landmark movements in contemporary Chinese art, many more valuable experiments including *Long March* fail to be included in narratives concerning contemporary Chinese Art. Art historian Peggy Wang observed that young Chinese artists often ‘avoid’ politics in their works and tend to ‘box up’ the history and issue of identities, to ‘draw a historical division between political art and unpolitical art’.⁵²⁰ As a result, the direct and insistent engagement with political narratives in Long March Project hardly resonated with the younger generation. In Hangzhou, amidst rumours that Lu might finally close Long March Space after taking the teaching position in CAA, he asked me: ‘Do you think *Long March* should continue? In what way?’

Cedong: to Instigate and Self-Instigate

As the first PhD research on *Long March* with a focus on a single case in the history of contemporary curating in China, this thesis has aimed to fill a discernible absence of a detailed narrative and analysis of a number of large-scale curatorial projects within China. As mentioned in the introduction, curating as a discourse was still not widely accepted in China until the early 2000s. In the past twenty years, the proliferation of exhibitions, museums and curators has become a crucial phenomenon: the increase of museums and galleries in China has been at a frenetic pace. Moreover, the government has officially set the national target to become a ‘museum power’ in the world and build ten to fifteen ‘world-

⁵¹⁹ Interview with Lu Jie, July 2021.

⁵²⁰ Peggy Wang, *The Future History of Contemporary Chinese Art* (University of Minnesota Press, 2021), p. 201.

class museums' by 2035.⁵²¹ At the same time, curating (*cezhan*) has become more popular than ever in China. A considerable number of Chinese students go abroad to Europe and North America to study curating and museum studies.⁵²² The official art association in China has also put forward to establish 'Chinese curatorial studies' (*zhongguo cezhan xue*) in 2018.⁵²³ By contrast, substantial research on curating in China has yet come into being — the discourse on curating is still largely imported from the West.

The most common translation for 'curating' in Chinese is *cezhan*, a neology coined through combining *cehua* (devising/planning) and *zhanlan* (exhibitions). This term was invented when translating the term 'curator'. A widely spread saying is that 'curator' was first translated by Taiwanese curator Lu Rongzhi into *cezhanren* in the 1980s when she was working in Taipei Fine Arts Museum and helping to bring in a contemporary art exhibition curated by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.⁵²⁴ The word *cezhanren* means people (*ren*) who devise (*cehua*) exhibitions (*zhanlan*). In fact, the translation and introduction of 'curator' was more complicated than that. In public museums in China, in 1986, museology researcher Zhen Shuonan translated curator as 'research staff' (*yanjiu guanyuan*); in the following years, there are also other translations such as 'head of operation' (*yewu zhuguan*) or 'director' (*guanzhang*).⁵²⁵ In the contemporary art field, Lu Rongzhi's translation *cezhanren* has been widely accepted and has since become popular. However, many researchers and practitioners in traditional museums reject to use the term *cezhanren* because most museums in China do not have the same system with Western museums and

⁵²¹ 'China Says It Will Be a "Museum Power" by 2035', *The Economist*, 10 June 2021 <<https://www.economist.com/china/2021/06/10/china-says-it-will-be-a-museum-power-by-2035>> [accessed 13 January 2022].

⁵²² According to the data from Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), China has been the leading source of international students in higher education in the UK. 'Where Do HE Students Come from? | HESA', HESA, 2022 <<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from>> [accessed 21 February 2022].

⁵²³ 'Tantao "zhongguo Cezhanxue Tixi" de Jiangou, Shoujie "Cezhan Zai Zhongguo" Luntan Zai Jingdezhen Qimu' [Discussing the Construction of "the System of Chinese Curation", the First "Curation in China" Symposium Opened in Jingdezhen], *Artron.Net*, 2018 <<https://m-news.artron.net/news/20181219/n1263024.html>> [accessed 22 July 2021]. This symposium was organised by the official institute China Artists Association.

⁵²⁴ 'Zhongmei Cezhanren Fangtanlu Zhi Lurongzhi: Cezhanren Yici Zuizao de Zhongwen Fanyizhe' [Interview with Lu Rongzhi: The Earliest Translator of the Word 'Curator'], *Academy of Literary and Art*, 2015 <http://www.alac.org.cn/content/details_53_36095.html> [accessed 26 July 2021]. See also Liang Zhiqin, 'Wang Huangsheng: The Biggest Problem of Our Curators is the Lack of Principles.', *New Express*, 12 October 2014.

⁵²⁵ Li Huijun, 'Guanyu Jiang "curator" Tongyi Fanyi Wei "Cezhanren" de Jianyi' [Proposal for Translating 'Curator' into 'Ce Zhan Ren'], *Chinese Museum*, 4, 2018 <<http://61.175.198.136:8083/rwt/288/http/GEZC6MJZFZZUPLSSG63B/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?recid=&FileName=GBWG201804010&DbName=CJFDLAST2019&DbCode=CJFQ&uid=WEhuVoNJcGVBNEIENDdJQVZsOGdrWC9tTTZoV1NpeG1NTUNHYXFpQopxeks5L0o1>> [accessed 26 July 2021]. Translated by me.

there is no such role. On the other hand, from the 1980s to today, *cezhanren* has been associated with independent curators of Chinese avant-garde art and more recently with commercial curators making mega exhibitions for social media — which suggests that *cezhanren* usually work by integrating resources, but lack critical thinking.⁵²⁶ This stigmatisation of *cezhanren* has made some curators choose alternative words to describe themselves, such as *cehuaren* (deviser) or simply *cehua* (devise/plan).

There are also some practitioners, usually who are conscious of their working methods, who have used the word *cedong*, a term that already exists in Chinese but originally means ‘to incite people to take actions’. For example, in 2014, the introduction of ‘Aesthetic Jam’, a satellite project of the 2014 Taipei Biennale, introduced itself as follows: ‘Aesthetic Jam was *cedong*-ed by curator Henk Slager and Hongjohn Lin’.⁵²⁷ In 2021, curator/filmmaker Chen Baiqi introduced himself as *cedongzhe* (an instigator/mobiliser). He chose *cedong* instead of *cezhan* because he felt he has rarely *made* exhibitions; but at the same time, he identified with the English term ‘curating’, because it denotes a much wider field than exhibition-making.⁵²⁸ In March 2021, the bilingual journal *Curatography* published its third issue *Curating Performativity*; the title’s Chinese translation used *cedong* in the position of ‘curating’. Here, the choice of such a word was perhaps as a result of the suggestion of movement in *cedong*: *dong* also means moving and liveliness.⁵²⁹ It is therefore worth noting that one of the editors of *Curatography* is also Hongjohn Lin, the curator who appeared in the first example of ‘Aesthetic Jam’. These choice examples, illustrated here, show that practitioners used *cedong* for various reasons — that its definition, much like the occupation to which it refers, is ever-changing.

In *Long March*, Lu called himself *cezhanren*, but he also emphasised that he was not a professional curator but an amateur.⁵³⁰ The curating in *Long March* mainly involved navigation, mediation, persuasion, collaboration and most importantly, mobilisation (*dongyuan*). As Lu said, ‘mobilisation’ was a heavily used verb; more often used in the communist context in encouraging collective participation. It was participants and their

⁵²⁶ Yin Kai, ‘Ruhe Lijie “Curator”’: Yige You Fanyi Yinfa de Xueshu Sikao’ [How to Comprehend “Curator”: An Academic Thought Aroused by Translation], *Chinese Museum*, 2, 2019, 51–57.

⁵²⁷ Aesthetic Jam’, *Aesthetic Jam* <<http://aestheticjam.wixsite.com/satellite-project>> [accessed 24 September 2016]

⁵²⁸ Interview with Chen Baiqi, July 2021.

⁵²⁹ I-Wen Chang, ‘Cedong Biaoyanxing’ [Curating Performativity], *Curatography*, 2020 <<https://curatography.org/zh/策動表演性/>> [accessed 7 December 2021].

⁵³⁰ Wenzhao He and Jie Lu, ‘Open Open Open, Talk Talk Talk (Do Art in Lu Jie’s Way, Talk with Lu Jie, Against Lu Jie, Together with Lu Jie). Lu Jie, ‘Weishenme Yao Changzheng?’ [Why Do We Long March?].

thoughts, conversations and actions, in place of objects, that became most visible and took on the greatest significance. Besides, the project was constantly moving and adapting according to its changing circumstances. Therefore, the inadequateness of ‘curating’ (*cezhan*), combined with the project’s emphasis on mobilisation, movement and instigation, led me to argue that *cedong* is a more suitable term than *cezhan* to denote and understand the curating in *Long March*.

By using *cedong* in place of *cezhan*, I hope to demonstrate the curating in *Long March* as a shift from the object-based curating to curating for instigation, demonstrated by the physical move from museum spaces to social realities. *Cedong* initially is a term in political context. Here I borrow it for the curatorial context. Nonetheless, I still hope to keep its connection with the revolutionary tradition – especially with regards to mobilisation, instigation and its aim to fundamentally revolutionise the existing system. *Dong*, which means movement, refers to the always changing and moving state of *Long March* on the road as well as its appropriation of political movements. *Ce* can stand for curating; self-organising; the act of making things happen. *Cedong* therefore can stand for the point-of-encounter between curatorial practices in the West and in China; how to make and display art, given contemporary concerns over the changing relationship between art and the society.

In *Long March*, this encounter was enabled by Lu’s transnational experience in both China and the West. The distinctive mode of *cedong* has also arisen from the absence of art infrastructure in China which called for invention for new tools and new approaches. Irit Rogoff, when writing about the expanding field of curating in 2014, considered that curating could instil a site of knowledge to ‘rehearse of its crises’. Not unlike Lu, Rogoff pointed that the non-West areas could be the places offering new possibilities to the world because of the absence of infrastructure:

Thinking about the links between collectivity and infrastructure, the obvious necessities of mobilizing as many resources and expertises as possible at a given moment in order to not only respond to the urgencies of the moment, but also in the need to invent the means, protocols and platforms which will make that engagement manifest among strata of stakeholders – then the decentering of the West is not only the redress of power within a post-slavery, postcolonial, post- communist world but also the opportunity in the absence of infrastructure to rethink the relations between resources and

manifestations.⁵³¹

Drawing onto *Long March* to review the discourse about curating and the curatorial, I find that *cedong* denotes a more fluid state of curating — betraying less concern (or more caution) about institutions and their long-term infrastructure. *Cedong* relies more on each respective individual involved in a process and their interconnection. The absence of infrastructure should not lead to copy an advanced infrastructure from the outside, but an experiment to question and discuss what is in need. In *cedong*, any existing infrastructure can be appropriated because it is the interconnection among people that matters — friendship, an individual’s network on social media, information passed through leaflets on the road, online open calls, conversations on public transport. The individuals are encouraged to be conscious of the surroundings and be their own agents to create new connections. This sentiment is echoed in Shi Qing’s definition of ‘self-organisation’ as a liberating move out from the zone of ‘art’, to the much larger field of society. The invention of forms, means, protocols arise out of action and practice, instead of heading towards another infrastructure. While there is already much discussion about ‘the curatorial’ as opposed to/expanded institutional curating, as a Chinese term, once uttered, *cedong* always carries the sense of mobilisation and instigation from its original context of political movements.⁵³²

In 2011, just two years before Sun Dongdong and Bao Dong shared their observation about ‘self-organisation’ (as mentioned in Introduction), Liu Ding, Carol Yinghua Lu and Su Wei presented the research project ‘Little Movements’, assembling practices alternative to the mainstream ecology and with particular methodologies to build their own networks or spaces. Inside mainland China, the project included ‘Zhuhai Conference’ organised by two artists Wang Guangyi and Shu Qun in 1986 to connect radical artists around China; grassroot literary magazine *They* (1984–94) self-published by a group of enthusiastic literature lovers outside of the academic publishing system; Zhang Peili’s teaching in New Media Art, China Academy of Art (2002–2010?) that pushed reforms in art education in the academy and nurtured a generation of young artists... Some of these practices, like collectives of artists, were in common with what Sun Dongdong and Bao Dong focused in *ON/OFF: the Self-Organization of Contemporary Art in China, 2001–2012*, but Liu, Lu and Su emphasized connectivity as well as independent criticality. As Liu and Lu said, ‘The

⁵³¹ Irit Rogoff, ‘The Expanding Field’, *Yishu: Journal Of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 13.2 (2014), 12–19.

⁵³² For example, Jean-Paul Martinon, ‘Theses in the Philosophy of Curating’, in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 25–34.

word “little” in the title is not meant as the opposite of “large”, but rather as an adjective for an introspective and contemplative way of working.’⁵³³ This introspective, contemplative characteristics made these practices, though certainly transforming the ecologies they situated in, more rooted in themselves instead of curing social problems. The subtitle of the research project referred to these examples as ‘self-practice’: indeed, they were practice to make the space, form affinities and build communities for an expanded self. Not all practitioners identified themselves as curators or saw their practice as curating.

My understanding of *Cedong* allies with these ‘self-practices’ in ‘Little Movements’, the broad sense of ‘self-organisation’. But *Cedong* also includes those self-initiated ephemeral art projects, especially the curatorial projects inviting more participants to work with a place/topic in diverse ways, which contains plurality within the ‘self’. They might be not as politically radical as those ‘Art Activism’ endeavours termed by Meiqin Wang, or directly dealing with social problems or starting a revolution in the typical sense. However, *cedong*’s emphasis on creating new interrelations among people, extending to non-human beings and more invisible things like friendship and infrastructure, provide a more elastic way to understand and describe practices like organising, mediating, communicating...

As Lu left Beijing to Hangzhou in 2021, Long March Space started terminating their contracts of representation with artists on the market. Before that, in 2019, Long March Space already declared that they would no longer participate in art fairs. Rather, they were in search for ‘innovative commercial modes’.⁵³⁴ From late 2021, the physical gallery of Long March Space started to act as the gallery of Long March Project. These changes to the curatorial incarnations of *Long March* indicate the tenacity of the curatorial team to keep repositioning and change oneself to create new modes — these are also what *cedong* demanded.

I am possibly the first curatorial historian to highlight the importance of the term *cedong*, but definitely not the first curatorial practitioner. Curator and publisher Chen Yun once explicitly defined curating as *cedong*. In an interview in 2016, curator Chen Yun said that,

The most important thing in curating [*cezhan*], for me, is to incite [*cedong*] and instigate [*cefan*]... And these works should be targeted at the practitioners themselves. [...] A curator is better the supporter and opponent

⁵³³ ‘What Little Movements Is Not’, in *Little Movements: Self-Practice in Contemporary Art*, ed. by Liu Ding, Carol Yinghua Lu, and Su Wei (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2011), pp. 8–9. In the English leaflet attached to the Chinese version, the article runs from p. 13 to p. 15.

⁵³⁴ Long March Space, ‘A New Era, A New Direction, New Programmes’, newsletter, 1 August 2019.

of their collaborating artists (or non-artists). Don't jump to make an exhibition in a white cube too easily — something that is costly, exhausting, stimulating for a short time and soon to be doubted. If art is not a collective social action, then we really don't need curators; artists can solve everything by themselves.⁵³⁵

Chen's curatorial practice is called 'Dinghaiqiao Mutual Aid Society', and has run from 2014. Her curatorial proposal won the first Emerging Curators Prize hosted by Power Station of Art.⁵³⁶ Only making a modest exhibition with the smallest budget, Chen secured the rest of funding to rent a three-storey private house in Dinghaiqiao, a 'leftover' area constructed by generations of workers and discriminated against by other "proper" Shanghai communities'.⁵³⁷ She invited artists and non-artists to work in this area, based on 'observation, interviews, archive studies and visual/linguistic representations'. She clarified particularly that,

Dinghai Qiao does not work as a community art project aiming for a social change. Instead, it expects a self-reflection-based practice [...] The purpose is to rethink the responsibility of an art practice to a very recent but disclosed history that is haunting the present, and open up the passage and methods of realizing this responsibility. Art here is more a position than a method through which our engagement with Dinghai Qiao can be called a practice.⁵³⁸

Chen's alertness to the exhibition format and her dedication to social action made her choose the term *cedong* and *cefan*, to incite and instigate. But as she reminded, the target of the instigation is not the audience, but the initiators themselves. Chen considered everyone could be the practitioner. Chen Yun's practice and words, along with the previous research on 'self-organisation' and 'Little Movements', have inspired and encouraged me to take *cedong* further from the example provided by *Long March*; to imagine *cedong* not only as mobilisation and instigation, but also a constant reflection towards art practitioners themselves — echoing Irit Rogoff's identification of 'urgency' as an opportunity for self-

⁵³⁵ 'PSA Shoujie "Qingnian Cezhanren Jihua" — Dnghaiqiao: Dui Lishi de Yishu Shijian' [The 1st PSA Emerging Curators Program Invitation Lettre | Dinghai Qiao: Art Practice into History], *Dinghaiqiao Huzhushe* <<http://dinghaiqiao.org/archives/45>> [accessed 23 September 2016]. Translations are mine.

⁵³⁶ Power Station of Art is the first state-run museum dedicated to contemporary art in mainland China' and based in Shanghai.

⁵³⁷ 'PSA "Qing Ce Zhan" Yaoqinghan | Dnghaiqiao: Dui Lishi de Yishu Shijian 10 Yue 28 Ri Kaimu' [PSA The First PSA Emerging Curators Program Invitation Lettre | Dinghai Qiao: Art Practice into History Opens on 28 October], *Dinghaiqiao*, 2014 <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA5NDAwMjc4NA==&mid=200474941&idx=1&sn=b82deb7bb16b36ff56d721296d1ba1a6&chksm=1e52ea3229256324bf80f6aab9ec8e80e81b7c522cda56c4b3d11307f15dafdd242f7b8b4c35#rd> [accessed 6 December 2021].

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

education.⁵³⁹ Here, *cedong* refers to a relation within the curatorial work which is different from the typical curator/artists/audience. It is a collective action but it essentially starts from self-instigation — that which is shared by Chen Yun, Lu Jie, He Wenzhao and Shi Qing's works to different degrees. The self-awareness, self-critique and self-instigation in practice can be traced to the 'reform through labour' (*laodong gaizao*) and 'going to the countryside' (*xiaxiang*) rhetorics performed throughout Socialist China, thus promoted to transform intellectuals by repositioning them from academies to the social reality of the ordinary pedestrian.

As a word rooted in Chinese cultural politics, *cedong* situates itself in a social, historical, and political space which is extended through its appropriation of galleries, museums and exhibition halls. The case of Dinghai Qiao, which has been active till today and has included many practitioners, suggests to me that *cedong* might appear to be slow, hidden and trivial during the process, but the changes it prompts are fundamental. Through the lens of *cedong*, we can review *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* in different premises other than 'contemporary Chinese art' (which has apparently lost its significance among the younger generation) or 'participatory art', to see how the *Long March's* response to timely concerns have influenced our reckoning of contemporary art in the present day. The story of *Long March* from twenty years ago encouraged practitioners today to act towards what is needed and at hand, to invent, connect, experiment. *Cedong*, then, draws onto resources, traditions and inspirations from different areas, cultures and fields.

This thesis argues that *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* should be understood as a specific contribution to contemporary Chinese curating. *Cedong* can be a substantial reference for curatorial and artistic practices around the world. *Cedong* has come out of the distinct context of contemporary art in China. However, this does not mean that it was born in a space untouched by globalisation. On the contrary, responding to the conundrum of contemporary Chinese art as an international phenomenon — enabled by Lu Jie's transnational experience and his understanding of the revolutionary tradition in China, as well as curating in the West — has to reckon with globalisation as a mediating factor in the transition between nationalities, place and intercultural understanding. The significance of *cedong* should also not be limited to China; rather, its appropriation of political movements, the decentring of objects, and the self-instigation engaged by artist-practitioners can be of inspiration to many more seeking ways and reasons of working

⁵³⁹ Irit Rogoff, 'Turning'

together. The profound entanglement between art and politics in modern and contemporary China is not a burden to avoid, but a trove of heritage primed for re-invention. By facing our most pressing challenges head-on, we still have the choice to act, to curate, to *cedong*.



Fig. 59 The map by Long March Project illustrating the trajectory of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*. Courtesy of Long March Project.

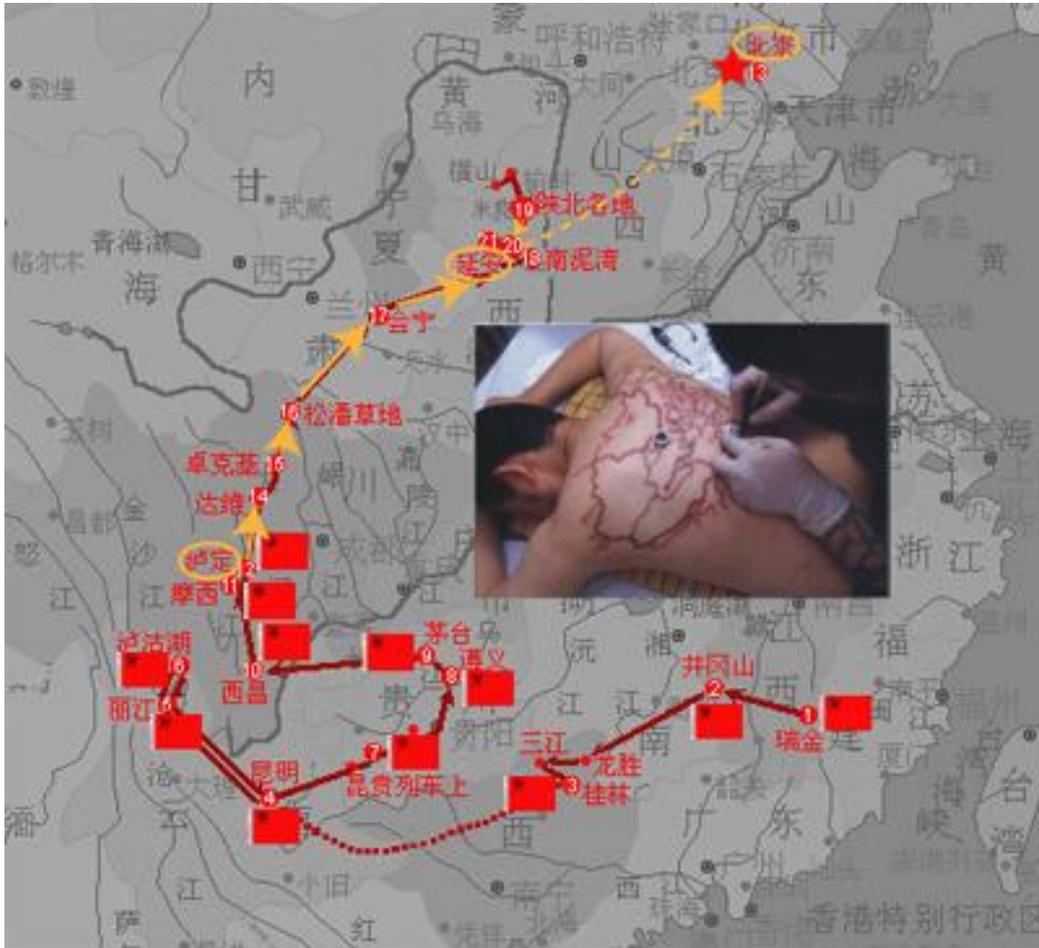


Fig. 60 A photograph of Chyanga receiving his tattoo for *The Miniature Long March* (2002–2005) was overlaid over the map of *Long March: A Walking Visual Display*. This image was put on the website of Long March Space in 2005. Courtesy of Chyanga and Long March Project.

Appendix

Appendix One: Glossary of Terms

These terms were selected for their relevance to this thesis. As this thesis negotiates terms in both English and Chinese, highlighted below are some definitions to clarify their meaning and their relationship to *Long March*:

1. *Cedong*: A verb in Chinese, which means instigate or incite something like a mutiny or a revolution — which is often the aim of mass propaganda. I borrow this term from the political context to denote the mode of curating in the mentioned cases which involved participation and reflection upon the current system and practitioners themselves.
2. Chinese Communist Party: abbreviated as the CCP, officially the Communist Party of China, it is the founding and sole ruling party of the People's Republic of China (PRC). It was founded in 1921 with the help of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist International.
3. Kuomintang: abbreviated as the KMT, was founded by Sun Yat-sen in 1919 and later led by Chiang Kai-shek. The KMT was the sole ruling party of the Republic of China (ROC) (which retreated to Taiwan in 1949 after the KMT's being defeated in the civil war with the CCP).
4. Long March: A military long-distance trek by the Red Army (the CCP's military force) from 1934 to 1935 because of the besiege by the KMT in Jiangxi Province. The Red Army marched from Ruijin, Jiangxi Province towards the West and then to the North and eventually arrived at Yan'an in Shaanxi Province.
5. The People's Republic of China: abbreviated as the PRC, founded by the CCP in 1949.

6. Mao Zedong (1893–1976): Mao was an early member of the CCP and became the head of the CCP during China’s historic Long March. Mao developed a following for his views on politics, military and art, collectively known as Maoism. In 1942, in Yan’an, where the Long March ended, he gave the ‘Talks on Literature and Art in Yan’an’ and put forward that art and literature should be for the broad masses of the people and serve politics.
7. China Academy of Art (CAA): Located in Hangzhou, this academy is one of the most prestigious art universities in China. Its history dates back to the National Academy of Art, founded in 1928 and it went through several reorganisations in the century. In 1958 it was named as Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts and in 1993 changed to its current name. It is the alma mater of Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie.
8. Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA): Located in Beijing, this academy is one of the most prestigious art universities in China. Its history dates back to the National Art School in Beijing founded in 1918 in Beijing. In 1950, it was officially named as Central Academy of Fine Arts.
9. MA in Creative Curating Programme in Goldsmiths, University of London: Founded by Anna Harding in 1995, it is now called MFA Curating.
10. Cultural Revolution: Formally known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, it was a socio-political movement in China launched by Mao and ran from 1966 to 1976. The Cultural Revolution was marked by the fetish of Mao and caused much political turmoil. The education system was also largely suspended and propaganda art became the dominant form of art as campaigning tools and mass communication.
11. Reform and Opening Up (*gaige kaifang*): The series of policies that formed the economic reform of the PRC after 1978, which has not only turned China from state-owned plan economy to ‘Socialist market economy’, but also made the closed China open for foreign visitors, goods and capital. It was critical for the emergence of contemporary Chinese art after the 1980s.

Appendix Two: Lu Jie Timeline

- 1964 Born in Putian, Fujian Province in China
- 1978–1981 Attended School of Art and Crafts of Fujian Province (*fujian gongyi meishu xuexiao*) in Xiamen, Fujian Province and majored in craft painting.
- 1981–1984 Worked as a junior worker in propaganda in the Workers' Club in Putian.
- 1984–1988 Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in portraits of ink wash painting in Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (*zhejiang meishu xueyuan*) in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province in China.
- 1988–1992 Editor in Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House (*shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe*).
- 1992 Short stay in Leicester, U.K.
- 1992–1996 Assisted starting Schoeni Art Gallery in Hong Kong, travelling between Hong Kong and Beijing and promoted artworks by Chinese contemporary artists.
1996–1998 'Confessional journey' to Southeast Asia and South America; lived in New York.
- 1996–1998 'Confessional journey' to Southeast Asia and South America; lived in New York.
- 1998–1999 Master of Arts degree in 'Creative Curating' programming in Goldsmiths College, London; wrote the curatorial proposal 'Long March: A Walking Exhibition'.
- 1999–2001 Researching and developing the curatorial proposal, widely meeting curators and artists, travelling back to China several times to contact artists in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou and present the curatorial proposal, in preparation for the realisation of the journey.
- 2002 Founded 25000 Cultural Transmission Center in Beijing and co-curated with Qiu Zhijie *Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (the project of the former curatorial proposal), which developed into the long-term Long March Project including a series of curatorial and cultural projects in China and abroad.
- 2003 Set up the physical gallery of 25000 Cultural Transmission Center in 798 Art Zone in Beijing; initially, the Center was recognised as the thirteenth site of

Long March: A Walking Visual Display and later collaborated with artists in the name of 'Long March Space'; after 2008, it became one of the biggest commercial galleries in mainland China.

- 2003– Curated and guided the development of Long March Project and Long March Space as the founder; on the Advisory Board of *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese art*; Visiting tutor in the Institute of Contemporary Art & Social Thoughts (ICAST) in China Academy of Art.
- 2021 Became the director of the Institute of Contemporary Art & Social Thoughts (ICAST) in China Academy of Art and headed the curating department.

Appendix Three: List of interviews

All of these interviews were recorded when the interviewee allowed. The recordings were then transcribed as accurately as possible, and these texts were shared with the interviewee for fact-checking. As most of these interviews were in Chinese and some interviewees preferred to keep the content closed until in the future, the transcriptions were not translated into English at the current stage.

1. Lu Jie 卢杰 (main curator of *Long March* and founder of 25000 Cultural Transmission Center and Long March Project/Space): 1 August 2018, in the office of Long March Space, Beijing, accompanied by Shen Jun and Zian Chen; December 2019, Time Zone 8, 798 Art Zone, Beijing; 8 July 2021, online, over Wechat call; 28 October 2021, Hangzhou.
2. Qiu Zhijie 邱志杰 (executive curator of *Long March*, current head of Department of Experimental Art in CAFA): 8 October 2018, Dining Hall of W Hotel, London.
3. Wang Jianwei 汪建伟 (artist and participant of *Long March* and once represented by Long March Space): 9 August 2019, in Wang Jianwei's studio in Beijing, accompanied by Zian Chen.
4. Ding Jie 丁洁 (artist and participant of *Long March*): From November 2018 to March 2019, over online cooperating document.
5. Shi Qing 石青 (artist and participant of *Long March*): 5 July 2019, a restaurant in Shanghai, accompanied by Liu Jieyi.

6. Li Shurui 李姝睿 (artist and participant of *Long March*): 16 September 2019, online over Wechat video call.
7. Wang Yuyang 王郁洋 (artist and his participation in *Long March* was not realised due to the project's halt): 4 October 2019, during dinner in London.
8. Hu Liu 胡柳 (artist and participant of *Long March*): 15 December 2019, at Hu Liu's Home, Beijing.
9. Xiao Xiong 肖雄 (artist and participant of *Long March*, artistic director of 25000 Cultural Transmission Center from 2003 to 2008): 28 December 2019, Xiao's studio in Shanghai.
10. Chyanga 琴嘎 (artist and participant of *Long March*): 2020-2021, online and Beijing.
11. Shen Xiaomin 沈晓闽 (videographer of *Long March*): 22 December 2019, Online Wechat video call.
12. Philip Tinari 田霏宇 (reporter of *Long March*, assistant curator of 25000 Cultural Transmission Center from 2002 to 2003, co-curator of 'Art and China After 1989: Theater of the World' in Guggenheim Museum, 2017): 16 December 2019, UCCA, Beijing.
13. Zhang Hui 张慧 (artist represented by Long March Space and his participation in *Long March* was not realised due to the project's halt): 30 December 2019, Zhang's studio in 318 Art District, Beijing.
14. Fei Dawei 费大为 (curator of 'The Monk and The Demon: Chinese Contemporary art' ['Le moine et le démon : Art contemporain chinois'], 2004): 18 December 2019, at Fei's home in Beijing.
15. Zheng Shengtian 郑胜天 (tutor in CAA during Lu's bachelor, trustee of Long March Foundation, participant of *Long March*): May 2021, Online over Zoom.
16. Felicity Allen (curator and Lu's tutor in Goldsmiths): 2018, Allen's home in London.
17. Grant Watson (curator and Lu's classmate in Goldsmiths): 10 December 2019, London
18. Anna Harding (curator, founder and tutor of Creative Curating Programme in Goldsmiths): May 2021, online over Zoom
19. Shen Jun 沈军 (researcher of Long March Project from 2017 to 2020): Summer 2017, December 2019, 2020 and 2021.
20. Zian Chen 陈玺安 (researcher of Long March Project from 2017 to 2020): online

Wechat call, 14 March 2019 and 30 July 2020.

21. Theresa Chung Lan Leung 梁中蓝 (director of International Programs in Long March Space from 2010 to 2018 and director of Long March Project from 2017): 13 December 2019, Time Zone 8, 798 Art Zone, Beijing.
22. He Wenzhao 和文朝 (staff of 25000 Cultural Transmission Center in 2006, curator of 'Transit' Project): 27 September 2016, Lijiang.
23. Yan Bing 严冰 (staff of Long March Space from 2005 to 2006): 6 September 2017, Lijiang.
24. Song Yi 宋轶 (staff of Long March Project from 2008 to 2012): 5 July 2018, Online over Wechat call.
25. Huang Qiang 黄强/黄格勉 (staff of Long March Project): December 2019, Beijing.

Appendix Four: Bibliography

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- A. Interviews undertaken as part of this thesis (See Appendix Three)
- B. Primary sources held by Long March Project
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2.1.3 Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie, 'Zongti Fanan' / ['Total Plan' 总体方案], 2002

2.2 'Yantu Zhanbao' / 'Reports from the Road' [沿途战报] (Three versions)

2.2.1 The first version was published in Chinese on Arts.tom.com during *Long March* in July and August 2002. This version stopped recording activities from 1 August at Site 5, Lijiang.

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2.2.2 The second version of ‘Reports from Road’ was written in both Chinese and English. (Some English copies were possibly translated or directly written by Philip Tinari). This version included all twelve sites and was published on the website of Long March Foundation (2005) and Long March Space (2008), which could be accessed from the website addressed listed in I-B-1.

2.2.3 The third version was also in both Chinese and English and an edited version by Long March Project published in 2017. It can be accessed through the current website of Long March Project, which could be accessed from the website addresses listed in I-B-1.

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