Learning Culture: Cultural Relationship in Masked Lanterns

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LEARNING CULTURE:
CULTURAL RELATIONSHIP IN MASKED LANTERNS

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ABSTRACT ‖ 摘要

Culture shock, or culture conflict, is the unfamiliarity or disorientation an individual experiences after encountering a culture different than their own. To better understand the people around us who share a different culture and the way of life it creates, we need to first respect and understand their culture. In general, Chinese culture stresses that individuals must see themselves as part of a larger group for the benefit of society, while American culture stresses the importance of individualism.

Based on my experiences in graphic design, I decided to further my studies in a studio art context to understand how the cultures of artists affect their artwork. It is important for us to have a basic sense of other cultures to appreciate the value of human development, as well as, appreciating the different forms of beauty that make the world more interesting to explore. This appreciation of beauty and human development is often encountered when experiencing works of art and design.

The issues which arise from cyber bullying reach across the globe, and I have seen them firsthand throughout my life. It is my goal to delve into this issue and compare how individuals from different cultural backgrounds react to this issue. For this project, I surveyed the responses regarding the issue of cyber bullying from Americans, Chinese-American, and Chinese international students, in order to understand how one's culture influences the opinions people form on the issue. I created several art works to share with the viewer my results.

INTRODUCTION ‖ 前言

As modern technology has developed, the world has become more connected and we are able to communicate more than ever before. Not only by means of transportation or communication, but also in cultural exchanges, such as national holidays which are celebrated in more than one country. For example, Christmas is popular for Asian people to celebrate in China and Japan (countries which have a small Christian population), while the Spring Festival (also called Lunar New Year or Chinese New Year) is celebrated by both Asians and Americans in the United States. Culture shock, or culture conflict, can happen when people from different cultural backgrounds misunderstand each other due to unfamiliarity. To understand the differences between cultures which encompass our world, we need to first understand the values different cultures have.

Being a Chinese student in United States has been a very fascinating experience. After getting to know people around me who have misconceptions or little knowledge of Chinese culture, I decided to help others have a better understanding of what Chinese culture is and, hopefully, help them to appreciate the beauty that it, along with many other cultures, have. Every culture has characteristics that are defined by the people who share it, and it is my goal to help others understand the culture in which I spent my childhood which shaped me into the woman I am today.

To achieve this goal a question came to mind: How can I help others understand the culture of modern China, which has been shaped over the span of centuries? As an international student from China, I came to this country as a teenager with little to no knowledge of any culture other than one I experienced during childhood. While the culture of China helped shape

who I am today, my life in the United States has likewise defined who I am today. Having grown up in two very different countries with different cultures, it is my ambition to help others understand what makes each culture so unique and beautiful.

HISTORY ‖ 历史

With much of my life being influenced by my childhood in China, my works are heavily influenced by Chinese culture and art. China claims to be the oldest continuous civilization on earth and credits itself with artistic traditions that stretch without a break from Neolithic times to the present.[1] These traditions and the aesthetic values they embody often reflect a genius for exploiting natural resources for artistic production.[2] Calligraphy, painting, and the crafting of porcelain are among the traditional Chinese arts practiced since ancient times. Scholars and

Figure 1

Figure 2

artists from ancient times to the present have used these techniques to create fabulous works of

China's landscape and mythologies. (Figure 1 and 2) As China developed over time, contacts

with Central Asia were established, and trade along the Silk Road – a network of routes linking

China, India and western Asia – brought exotic products and new ideas which effected Chinese

civilization and ideas across the world.[3] Trade brought new products and exposure to different cultures and ideas, such as Buddhism, to China. This paved the way for the new ideas of craftsmen in art making, such as the cave paintings and sculptures of Buddha or the

Figure 3

bodhisattvas in Dunhuang, Chinese culture absorbed this religion and culture previously unknow

to them, and Buddhism soon became one of the most influential religions in all of China. (Figure

3)

It is from the Warring States and Han periods that we first have direct evidence of two of

China's most revered art forms: calligraphy and painting.[4] These arts share common tools and

materials – brush, ink, silk and paper (the last invented around the second century BC) – and it

is the choice of these tools and the visual effects that they produce that largely determined the

aesthetic of these two art forms.[5]

I decided to use traditional Chinese art techniques in creating contemporary art styles.

(Figure 4 and 5) As a beginner in art, I have tried my best to experiment with various styles to

see what best allowed me to express my thoughts and feelings. I experimented with making

abstract painting using traditional Chinese art techniques; using my graphic design skills in

Figure 4

Figure 5

creating computer-based art and in exploring other methods of art with both traditional Chinese

and contemporary art materials.

　　During these experiments, I found myself exploring the connection between cultures

rather than viewing one specifically. It is not difficult to find the connection between cultures,

but why is it important to understand and value the connections they share? As a Chinese student

studying in the United States, I now know and understand the cultures of China and the United

States. The benefit of the dual cultural background helped me create art works which encompass

elements of Chinese and American culture together. It is my wish to have more people in the

United States understand Chinese culture, and likewise create an understanding of American culture to a Chinese audience.

To better understand the concepts behind art works and the value of culture, I needed to understand the power of the objects which applied to works within the cultures of China and America. An important part of this process revolves around the types of materials used in such works. As the world becomes more globalized, many great multi-cultural artists have become more active and prevalent in many countries. Studying these artists and their works can be influential to my own understanding and practice as an artist.

INSPIRATION ‖ 灵感

As a graphic designer, I think differently from other kinds of artists. For me, creating art is no easy task. I was taught to design works for clients, create what they asked for, and appreciate what they admire. When I started to create artworks just for myself, I was lost. It was hard to understand what was important to me as an individual, as I was more focused on creating works I believed others would find important. During the course of my graduate studies, I came to better understand the importance of individualism in expressing what I want others to see when they view my work. In order to create my own meaningful works, I must first understand how other artists use art as a carrier of the ideas which influenced them. My earliest inspirations come from Chinese artists such as Xu Bing and Ai Weiwei. As I reached out farther in the art world, I was able to experience the art and ideas of other artists. This is when I began to understand how to use art as a tool, not only in appreciating its beauty, but the messages it can express to others around the world.

Figure 6

Xu Bing ‖ 徐冰

Growing up in China, I was influenced and educated by Chinese calligraphy and painting. Chinese characters were designed by our ancestors based on the brief shapes of objects, which later developed into symbols and Chinese characters. 汉字 (Chinese characters) are formed by 笔画 (strokes) in different directions. For example 一 (横, horizontal stroke) and 丨 (竖, vertical stroke) are the most common strokes in Chinese characters. These strokes (and other excluded in the example) formed 部首 (radicals) and 偏旁 (side). The combination of these two components becomes one Chinese character.

Xu Bing is known for his reformulation of Chinese characters in his installation book titled, *Book from the Sky* (天书, *Tianshu*, 1988-91). Over a period of four years, Xu Bing invented more than 4,000 nonsensical "characters", which he hand-carved onto printing blocks in the traditional Chinese method of wood-block printmaking.[6] By creating a complete non-language that is unreadable by Chinese and non-Chinese viewers alike, the work can be understood as a philosophical comment on the impenetrable meaning of language and the burden

of the written words in Chinese tradition.[7] His work of *Tianshu* is particularly influential to me

for its discussion of disassembly and reformation in Chinese characters. The idea of this process

influenced my thinking and ideas for my work.

Yee Sookyung　‖　李受径

      Born in 1963 in Korea, Yee Sookyung is one of the most well-known ceramic artists

in the world. Korean ceramic techniques, introduced more than a thousand years ago from

Figure 7

China and then developed further in Korea, are highly regarded all over Asia.[8] Yee's art has the

unshackled freedom of current inventions, devoid of any academic traditionalism, and yet her

work is closely connected to the long standing culture of Korea.[9]

      Yee's *Translated Vase* series amazed and inspired me in understanding porcelain objects.

These works are a collection of broken pieces of porcelain which are then reconnected together

with gold. The meaning of fragmentation and the idea of reconfiguring these broken pieces

inspired me to think about individual relationships and how culture affects the connections

between different people from different cultural backgrounds.

Figure 8

Interpersonal Relationship ‖ 人际关系

    Interpersonal Relationship is a painting of reformed broken porcelain pieces that I created inspired by Yee Sookyung's *Translated Vase* sculptures. The reformation of broken pieces of porcelain was painted on silk, in red, white, gold, yellow, and blue. Among the red pieces, two are decorated with gold Chinese characters and symbols. The remainder are placed among white porcelain pieces along with some yellow pieces. In the bottom left, a piece of white porcelain was decorated with a part of Chinese dragon. I arranged these pieces of porcelain to form a calabash-shaped vase.

    Interpersonal Relationship was painted with Chinese painting pigments and gold acrylic paint, while using calligraphy brushes on silk. The transparency of the silk and the shadows

painted on the piece create a three-dimensional illusion to the viewer. I designed the overall

look of the painting to be the shape of a calabash fruit. This fruit is also a sign of good luck and

happiness in Chinese culture, and often used to symbolize good relationships among individuals.

While Yee's work, at times, represents the different aspects of Chinese and American

culture, my work outlines the differences and similarities found amongst them when presenting

the work to the viewer. In using material often associated with Chinese art, I not only draw a

comparison between the two cultures, but attempt to create a relatable image which fuses both

cultures so that anyone can understand another's culture and the importance culture has in

today's world.

Ai Weiwei　‖　艾未未

The first time I viewed Ai Weiwei's work was at Art Basel in Miami, 2016. Seeing

his work, *Colored Vases*, I was surprised by how an artist could make such old objects into a

contemporary piece of art just by coloring them. Today, Ai Weiwei is one of the most influential

and renowned Chinese contemporary artists in the world. His vast *oeuvre* embraces performance,

installation and architecture.[10]

Ai Weiwei is influential in one of China's most traditional artistic genres – pottery.[11]

Ai Weiwei has a strong grasp of how to mix cultural references to present harmony or culture

clash. In his *Coca-Cola Vase* (1997), the Coca-Cola logo is painted on a vase from Western Han

Dynasty (206 BC – 24AD).

Growing up with a Chinese background, I want to share my culture with people of other

cultural backgrounds. Influenced by artists such as Ai Weiwei, I am always looking for ways of

Figure 9

converting old Chinese traditions into contemporary artworks while keeping elements of both

in the artwork. Ai Weiwei had a great impact on me in finding ways to combine the ancient and

modern. I greatly admire his experiments in making connections between Chinese and American

cultures, as well as the connection between ancient to modern. By appreciating Ai Weiwei's idea

of ancient vs. modern, I was interested and influenced to create contemporary artwork based on

traditional Chinese painting methods.

CULTURAL VALUE ‖ 文化价值

Culture is the way of life for a particular group of people. It is shown in how they

approach their behavior and habits, customary beliefs, social norms, and their moral and

religious beliefs.[12] It is the culmination of experiences and beliefs our ancestors passed on to their

descendants. In order to commemorate the gifts and memories of our ancestors, people establish

memorials every year and maintain traditions which were passed on to them. This is how a

culture develops, and over time becomes something by which individuals identify themselves. Culture not only makes a group of people unique, it also differentiates them from other groups of people. Culture is a product. It is created by historical events, ideas, social norms, values, is selective, is learned and creates what product we know of as culture.[13]

Alphonse Mucha once said, "The artist must remain faithful to himself and to his national roots." Artists who travel and return to their home countries to create works of art often incorporate their experiences with the cultures they encountered abroad into their work. Thus, even though they might import, appropriate or employ the manners and materials of other cultures, it was presumed that they could only adapt these foreign modalities to the habitus of their "home" culture.[14]

Values are abstract ideas, while norms are definite principles or rules which people are expected to observe.[15] The value of a culture can be found in the norms, which have been passed from one generation to the next. If each culture is distinct in its patterning of values, one might be tempted to identify a set of "core values" for each culture, based on their central importance in each value configuration.[16] The cultural values of a country influence its national psychology and identity. For example, the traditional cultural values that influenced the psyche of the Chinese people are harmony, benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, honesty, loyalty, and filial piety.[17]

CONNOTATION AND METAPHOR ‖
内涵与隐喻

Connotation is a term used to describe the cultural meanings attached to a term—and, by extension, an image, a figure in a text, or even a text.[18] For instance, the term 龙，long (serpent), indicates how the Chinese people refer to themselves as the descendants of the dragon. The national flag of The United States symbolizes to many the "American Dream" or the "Land of The Free." Connotation comes from the Latin connotare, "to mark along with."[19] Connotation deals with the historic, symbolic, and emotional matters suggested by or that "go along with" with the term.[20]

Figure 10

Metaphors are figures of speech that communicate by meaning of analogy, by explaining or interpreting one thing in terms of something else.[21] Similes also communicate by analogy, but in a weaker form such as like or as.[22] The college shirts used in *I confront, I ignore, I forget* represent students. The dress shirts are used to represent the working class, silk fabric represents China and jeans represent America.

The mixture of these clothes summarizes the majority of 网民, wang min, (netizen: net citizen) and the two cultures, suggesting the differences and similarities between these two cultures and forms the idea of transforming the two cultures into one. With the world being inter-connected in the realms of business and politics, we live in a diverse environment with multi-cultural backgrounds within our populations.

The United States is a great example of cultural diversity, with college campuses being

the most common setting in which someone is able to encounter a multi-cultural atmosphere. With the diversity of cultural backgrounds, culture conflicts can lead to misunderstandings amongst the population. Without understanding each other's cultures, conflicts may arise which may lead to disharmony.

Interpersonal Relationship is a painting of reformed broken pieces of porcelain paint on silk. These fragments contain a valued piece of Chinese culture and the spirit of craftsmanship from thousands of years ago. Porcelain is one of the signature products that come from China and were the ancestors' methods of displaying their accomplishments, by means of communicating with their contemporaries and their successors.[23] The process of creating this piece by using traditional Chinese painting methods suggest the application of Chinese culture, while the finished work is the expression of modern society.

Using the qualities of firmness and fragility, smoothness and sharpness, this piece embodies the characteristics that humans share. Humans may seem strong, but they can be tender inside. They are pleasant to others who appear friendly, but they can also defend themselves from those perceived in a negative light. The healing process from what is broken is the next step in transforming how we understand Chinese and American culture. It is my hope that a dialogue can be formed in how we can better understand each other and how we are shaped by our cultures.

FRAGMENTATION ‖ 碎片

The fragment is the end product of the process of fragmentation.[24] This, in turn, means that the whole from which it derives is a whole that can be broken up: divided into solid,

compact pieces.[25] The form of objects can take different meanings when separated and unified. An example are the fabric pieces in *I confront, I ignore, I forget*, in which the clothing is ripped into pieces and sewn back together in order to represent the mix of cultures in one singular object.

In *Inside Out*, fabric pieces of the same color are sewn back together to form new "clothes" for the lantern. The new clothes made of different pieces of fabric, but of the same color, represents the singularity of one culture. Silk, calligraphy brushes, cotton fabric and the use of computer software are the main sources used to create my works. Each of these objects symbolize an important cultural reference in my works.

Silk was first used and is still produced largely in China. It is not only used for objects of everyday use such as clothing and textiles, but also in creating works of art. Calligraphy brushes are tools often used by Chinese artists, and scholars have used them since ancient times to make art and writings. The brush is a tool still used today by Chinese artists for multiple purposes, and for many is an object that symbolizes Chinese culture.

A fragment is not only a broken part but a surviving part of the original object, "an extant portion of a writing or composition which as a whole is lost."[26] The use of silk and calligraphy brushes represent the survival of Chinese culture in my work.

As the world is more connected and cultures are influenced by others across the world, the lines which make a culture unique may be blurred. The use of Chinese art techniques is important in my work, as it symbolizes the culture I grew up with and the important role it plays in how I define myself. Living in the modern era, I like to experiment with different kinds of materials in creating work, such as computers. With a graphic design background, computer-based art techniques was my choice in creating my work. Computer software is the

most common tool used by video artists and computer illustrators in creating the products they envision.

Living in the modern era, new technologies are introduced constantly in every professional field, and the art world is no exception. However, by adding tools and techniques besides those which are computer-based in my works, I was able to broaden my views on how art can be created while adding more visual pieces which represent my Chinese culture. I learned that contemporary art is not only about the change of styles from the past, but also the importance of the materials used and what they represent to the artist.

COLOR THEORY ‖ 色彩

The use and choice of color in my works is based on Chinese color theory. In Chinese culture, every color symbolizes something. For instance, red is symbolic of the nation. The use of red coloring is prevalent for the Chinese during the Chun Jie (Spring Festival, Chinese New Year in lunar calendar). The use of red during this time of celebration is rooted in Chinese mythology, in which a story is told about a monster named Nian (年, year).

Nian would eat everything such as corn, chicken, and villagers, including children. As Nian would terrorize villages across China, villagers lived in constant fear. During the winter season, people learned that Nian was afraid of color the red and the sound of firecrackers. Upon this discovery villagers decorated their houses in red and lit firecrackers to scare Nian away and protect themselves. To commemorate their victory and survival from this monster, the day was memorialized as the "pass the year"[27]

赤(Red) represent fire and the sun, and is believed to be the color worshipped by the first people.[28] Red is the color that not only represents China historically, but is the color many Chinese use to identify themselves through the passage of time. While red symbolizes fire and the sun to the Chinese, different shades of red also have their own representations and meanings.

赭色(Ocher red) derives its meaning from the red ground which is found in China. An oxidized iron element gives the ground a red earthly color.[29] Ocher red comes from natural Fe2O3 minerals. Because of its stable character, this color was used in the cave art of the earliest ancient society.[30] It was often used in the wall paintings of royal tombs and the cave painting of Dunhuang.

曙色(Eosin red) is used to describe the color of the sunrise in the morning. It is a red with a yellow or orange-like coloring. 曙(Shu), is the first character used when writing eosin red. It means dawn and is used to describe the colors and energy of the morning sun. Eosin red is also called Oriental Red in modern China.[31] It is the color representing hope and energy, like the hope and energy one feels when viewing the morning sun. Since the Tang Dynasty, eosin red was largely

Figure 11

used to paint splendid female figures.[32] The choice of eosin red by artists was used to represent the hope and energy these female figures embodied.

In the remake of a Dunhuang cave painting, *The Performing Scene to Worship Buddha*, I used a mixture of eosin red to present the lively scene. Red represents China and Chinese culture, a color that symbolizes the place I was born and where I grew up. It is a color which makes a strong visual interaction in my works, and it visually attracts the attention of the viewer. It is aggressive and energetic, so that the viewer understands the message I wish to present. Different shades of red speak to different emotions in my works. The tone and shade of these red colors enable me to express to the viewer how I am feeling and what I am saying.

黄(Yellow) is a another color used to express emotions, and is often used to complement tones of red in my work. In Chinese culture, yellow is used to symbolize something which is new and young. Yellow is a mild color that helps define an object smoothly, especially when used with other colors. When used alongside other colors, yellow can either increase or decrease the level of the emotions I want to portray.

藤黄(Gamboge yellow) is a type of yellow that comes from a pure yellow plant which originated in Southeast Asia during the Tang Dynasty, and eventually found its way to Japan.[33] Gamboge yellow gets its color from the resin of a gorgonian.[34] The lively yellow color of this pigment can tone down the sharp visual appearance of other colors without compromising the quality or message of the work.

金黄色(Gold) is a warm yellow color with metallic gloss. Gold is a sign of wealth, honor, power and religion.[35] In ancient China, the Sun was called 金乌(a golden sun bird), and for early followers of Daoism, it was believed that gold could be used to obtain eternal life.[36]

Gold is also one of the seven precious tenets in Buddhism and means "good color".[37] It is a color that symbolizes royalty and wealth, and was used by Chinese Emperors and their royal families.

I use yellow in my work not only to express the meanings they have in Chinese culture, but to accompany other colors in controlling the degree of emotions I wish to express in my work. In *Interpersonal Relationship*, gold Chinese characters are used to attract the viewers' attention, while also being used to highlight the importance a broken porcelain piece of vase has. As gold was largely used by royalty as a sign of wealth and importance, the use of gold in the broken piece of porcelain is used to represent its value. In order to best communicate my message to the viewer, yellow is an essential color used in my works.

In ancient times, 蓝(Blue) was used not to describe a color but of the plant used to dye fabric called bluegrass.[38] Today it used to describe the color we know it to be. Blue is one of the most common colors used in clothing, and it is a color which represents the ordinary citizen (non-royalty).

花青, also called靛蓝(indigo blue), is a dense blue color often used in Chinese art. Indigo blue is one of the earliest colors used prevalently in China.[39] This blue gets its color from a traditional plant dye and was often used in fabric printing to become the traditional color used for fabric art in China.[40]

Blue represents the general population, the common man and woman. It is a color which speaks to everyone. I use blue so that the art can better interact with the viewer, in a way in which the viewer finds he or she can relate to what they are seeing and feeling. As the viewer sees the work in a color which they believe represents them, they try to relate to what they are seeing in understanding the message I wish to give. The ability to connect or relate to something

invokes powerful emotions within us. The use of blue in my work is to invoke this emotion within the viewer.
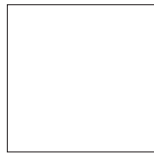
In Chinese, 白 is the character used to represent the color white. The character 白 means "void". *In the Book of Changes*, the white of daylight and black of night are presented as of Yin and Yang. The meanings of the color white can change over time. It can represent the purity of color and it can represent the characteristic of a virtuous person.[41]

White was often seen as a plain color in ancient China. White clothing was often used as inner clothing and was mostly used as a secondary color to complement other colors. The purity of white allows it to be used in many ways as it is a color that works with any other. It is a blank space where anyone can add colors to create something new. The more colors that accompany the white, the more meanings the finished artwork will have due to the representations those colors bring.

When white is mixed with a different color, it lightens that color. The light color has the power to change the properties which define the color white. Just as white can be changed by being influenced by another color, people can change based upon the influences of others. When they hear something that strikes an emotional chord, they are influenced to change how they think and view things. Sometimes these changes can be negative and take people away from their true self. These negative influences can take us away from what we see ourselves to be and can lead to negative ideas concerning of self-worth and identity. Those influenced by the hurtful words of cyber-bullying are an example of this.

I use the color white as a metaphor for the human mind, and the non-white colors are used to represent the voices of others influencing them. An individual can be influenced by the

words of another, just as the color white can be influenced by other colors. I hope that with the use of white in my work, the viewer can understand the importance of being pure to themselves and to not let negative influences distort how they see themselves.

黑(Black) is believed to be the opposite color of white. Black is a color long adored in China.[42] It originally symbolized the color of leftover materials after an object was burned by fire.[43] Black is also used to describe the degree of shades in light. The ancient Chinese used black to represent the darkness of night and the mysteries of the sky.

墨色(Ink black) is a color which means there is no light reflection or luminosity.[44] 墨, the first character of Ink black in Chinese, also means the ink used in Chinese calligraphy and paintings. Ancient artists believed ink to be color and this belief is symbolized by the characters 墨即是色. Different shades of ink black can be created based upon the amount of water which is added to the ink, and these different shades are used in creating art.[45]

Black is one of the most used colors in Chinese artwork, especially in calligraphy. It can be created with a combination of many colors, but it is also a pure color by itself. It accepts and integrates other colors without losing its own, like how people can be influenced by others without changing who they are as a person. Black can be mixed with any other color and still retain its color. While the shade of its color may change, the color black still retains the characteristics which make it black. I use black in my work to sent a message to the viewer that no matter how we may be influenced by others (colors), we still retain the characteristics which make use unique as an individual.

WORKS ‖ 作品

Most of my recent works are based on the issue of cyber bullying. These works are influenced by my own encounters with this issue, and those around me. I have observed conflicts between Chinese students studying abroad in the United States and students from China who are continuing their studies in their country, through the Chinese website Weibo (also known as Chinese twitter).

One such conflict was based upon the story of a Chinese international student who was kidnapped and ultimately killed by kidnappers in 2015. The misleading title: "Rich Chinese International Student Who Drives a Bentley Got Kidnapped and Killed" led to much discussion among Chinese who study in China and those who study abroad in the United States. The discussion surrounding this story was focused more upon the privileged life of the student murdered and the feeling of entitlement that many Chinese students believed about those who studied abroad in the United States. Rather than feeling sympathetic to a fellow student who was murdered in a foreign country, many students in China started to bully those who studied abroad in the United States and labelled them as spoiled and entitled. The cyber bullying that Chinese students studying abroad faced due to these misconceptions is only a small part of a larger problem, as cyber bullying is a major problem which effects people all across the world.

Cyber bullying is form of bullying using electronic means which attempts to hurt and harm how one sees themselves. A minority of the cyber bullies can wield enough power to skew a people's perception of a story in news or how they see themselves.[46] By relying on the views of another, without trying to view something with their own mind, people can be influenced in how they think. Individuals bully others without first understanding and being aware of the feelings

of the victim. Cyber bullying is a major problem today. It divides common groups of people and hurts how people perceive themselves. It has the power to do great evil, and at times can drive a victim to end his or her own life.

 I want to raise awareness of this issue to the public and I am interested in how people from different cultural backgrounds respond to this issue. What role does culture have in how cyber bullying is perceived or accepted? How do people of different cultural backgrounds react to cyber bullying?
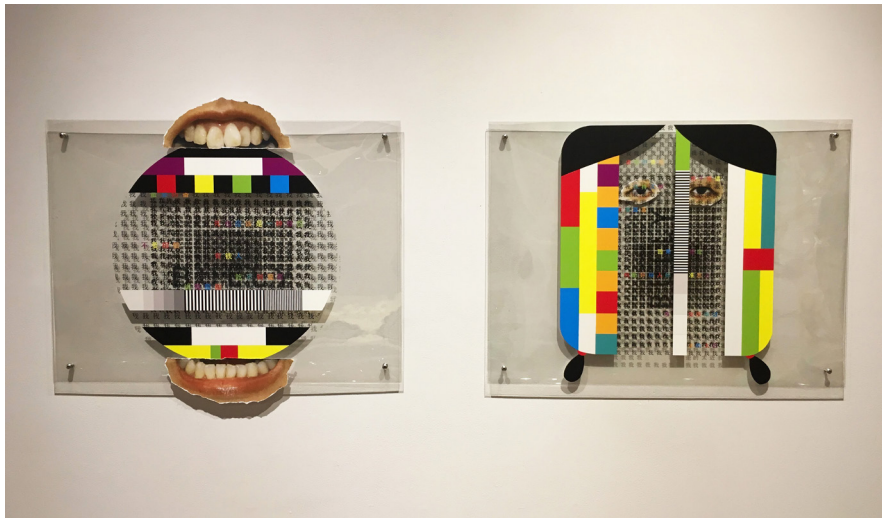
Figure 12

Portrait 1 & 2 ‖ 肖像 1 & 2

 During the spring semester of 2017. I started investigating cyber bullying and how it affected its targets. While the Internet is convenient and, for some, crucial in how we conduct our social lives, it does not come without problems. This semester I created a series of illustrations based upon the news reports of Chinese students who commit suicide while studying abroad.

 I started creating a series of illustrations in response to how these victims of bullying were depicted in the Chinese media and the reactions people had in China regarding these

suicides. *Portrait 1 and 2* are two abstract heads designed on computer printed on Acrylic sheets. I have incorporated the use of layers of Chinese character "我" (which means "I" in English) to represent each of the individuals behind the top sheet as well as to give the audience a message. In between the layers, characters were arranged to form the word "bully". When you view each layer individually, the word "bully" is not visible. It is only by stepping back at a distance and looking straight, that the word "bully" is formed.

I applied graphic design skills and organized geometric colored shapes to form male and female figures. To make a stronger connection to the concept "Behind the Screen", the design of broadcast test screen image was applied to these pieces. The use of primary colors of cyan, magenta, yellow, and black strengthen the visual impact to viewers.

An African American abstract painter named Odili Donald Odita inspired the color arrangement in these pieces. His paintings are known for their colorful shapes that create both

Figure 13

massive chaos and order. The great impact his works brought to the viewers affected me and I have learned that the stronger the visual impact I present, the stronger the message I can pass to the public. Photographs of my eyes and opened mouth were printed and attached to the portraits.

Portrait 1 was presented with the opened mouth torn horizontal from the center and attached vertically on the edge of the figure. This is seen as the figure swollen into the mouth or coming out of the mouth. A printed picture of the eyes was torn into two pieces, each piece depicting an eye, and they were attached behind the top sheet in *Portrait 2*. When viewers look at this piece they make a visual connection with the photo through the colorful shapes which are used. The eyes and mouth express multiple emotions to reach a response from the viewer.

The portrayals of cyber bullying in the Chinese media are not of sympathetic, but rather of confusion and apathy. Too often stories are reported of Chinese students studying abroad committing suicide in response to severe cyber bullying. For many individuals in China, the idea that one could be driven to suicide through online bullying cannot be comprehended, especially if the bullied individual had the finances and upbringing that allowed him or her to study abroad.

In response to these portrayals, I started working on pieces with the theme of "seeing the

Figure 14

world through the screen". To better express my ideas and how I approached my work, I looked at works of Penelope Umbrico, *Signals Still* (Figure 15) and Nam Jun Paik's *Buddha Watching TV* (Figure 16). These artists worked with monitors, and use screens to explore the self-reflections of the human psyche. This material exploration helped me incorporate the issue of online bullying in my pieces.

Figure 15

I confront, I ignore, I forget   ‖   面对, 忽略, 忘记

Based on my previous work, I have developed a new art piece, _I confront, I ignore, I forget_, that contains two parts: a video and a large piece of fabric, both of which speak to the cyber bullying issue. The video is projected on the very top of the fabric pinned up to the wall. Several mouths were shot in the video, speaking English in the beginning, and Chinese in the end. These mouths layered over each other to create a ghost/shadow illusion. Since their mouths are layered on one another, the voices of each speaker are mixed up as well.

Figure 16

Spoken in differing speeds, the audience can hear a line or two while hearing the voices. The acting crew is mainly composed from students at Washington University in St. Louis. Male and female voices are used to tell stories concerning cyber bullying, and the impact it has had on them. The volumes of each voice are also carefully adjusted, so that the audience can hear their lines clearly.

Survey Link:
English version: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7T6XM8J
Chinese version: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7NWPYPM

The video was made using a script based on a survey I posted online about the experiences people had with cyber-bullying. The survey was written and responded to in two languages: Chinese Mandarin and English, and the script was created using a question and

Figure 17

answer format. The script was recorded with a camera where only the mouth of the speaker is seen. The large fabric background was made of used clothing (mostly tee shirts) that were torn into pieces, reconfigured and sewn together with silk threads. The clothing used included college t-shirts, dress shirts, jeans, and embroiled silk. I used these materials to represent different aspects of Chinese and American culture.

Inside Out ‖ 由内而外

This piece was developed from *I confront, I ignore, I forget*. Using the same kind of fabric pieces, these clothes were carefully measured to form a "skin" of multiple Chinese lanterns. The fabric pieces were sewed together to cover the exterior and yet show the structure of the lanterns. Silk threads sewn into these pieces shows the connections of the clothes. The metaphor of the connection is to refer to the time needed in learning a culture and how they are incorporated into one's understanding.

The lanterns covered by these "skins" resemble people wearing clothes. These "skins" represent the people who can better interact with others of the same culture. The exterior skins for the lanterns represent masks that everyone around accepts and sees.

While the exterior skins of the lanterns may cover them, underneath the skin, they have a different appearance. For example, a Chinese student studying in the United States may wear an American cultural mask to better fit in and integrate with others. While the student has accepted American culture, there are aspects of his Chinese culture that are still within.

These masked lanterns are a metaphor of Chinese international students studying abroad. They study in the United States, and integrate aspects of American culture into their own. As they have integrated both Chinese and American culture,

Figure 18

they form a new cultural identity based upon their experiences.

The covered lanterns are suspended from the celling like clouds representing the thoughts and words of these international students. Their voices come from everywhere, speaking of both Chinese and American culture. A video projected on the floor right underneath the lanterns on an area covered with folded white clothes. White is a single color which can mix with others in creating a lighter tone. It can represent the purity or multiplicity of colors, depending on how the viewer see the work.

This video was also developed from the previous work *I confront, I ignore, I forget*. Viewing Tony Oursler's work, *Obscura*, which consists of projections of eyes onto spheres of varying dimensions, I had multiple ideas about how to position my video and projector. Instead

Figure 19

of separating all the mouths in my video like Oursler, I decided to keep them layered.

The more concentrated the video, the better the viewer can understand the piece as a whole (with the suspended lanterns and the projected video). I want strong connection between the two parts of this piece so that an illusion can be created through the video that the words/thoughts are coming from the lanterns. By having the video projected from the bottom of the lanterns to the white shirts on the floor, I believe the viewer can better understand the piece in its entirety.

The purpose of this piece is to model the differences between Chinese and American culture, and how people can make connections between them. To connect two things, a "bridge" is needed. The silk threads are the bridges that connect my pieces of fabric together, and the light from the video connects the suspended lanterns to the floor. As an international student who spent my childhood in China and most of my adult life in the United States, I hope I can help Chinese and American people better understand, appreciate, and makes connections with each other's culture.

CONCLUSION ‖ 总结

The world is connected through the Internet; people see each other through monitors. Behind the screen everyone appears to be the same, but in reality, they are different and unique in their own way. Having a different cultural background can lead one to see an issue differently. One's experiences help shape how they perceive themselves, and it is difficult to understand another when we have not lived through the same experiences. I hope to create a dialogue as to how we can better understand and each other combat this problem.

Having grown up in the cultures of China and America, I am always trying to make a connection between them. As art is one of the universal languages we all speak, I do believe there are people out there who have trouble translating contemporary art into how they understand the world around them.

I hope to create works of art that contain a view point that we can learn from to better understand each other and our cultures, which have shaped who we are today. The material in my work have different meanings in differing cultures. One's culture is often shaped by the place in which we grew up, and the experiences we have outside of it. Culture is an integral part of an individual's identity, and to better understand each other, we must first understand the culture which shaped us. It is my hope that through creating works that speak to this issue, we can better understand and appreciate the cultures which make us who we are.

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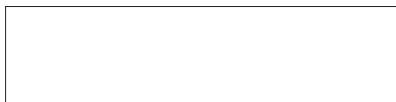C: 0 M:15 Y:92 K:10

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