RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Development and Representation of Intertextuality in Contemporary Chinese Visual Art (1979-1989)

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This article aimed to study intertextuality theory, as well as the development and representation of intertextuality in contemporary Chinese visual arts. The time frame under examination spans from 1979 (The Stars Art Exhibition) to 1989 (The First China Avant-Garde Exhibition), with a focus on individual artists, art groups, and art exhibitions. The research primarily concentrates on three objectives: 1) to explore the development of intertextuality in Western academia and its dissemination in China; 2) to trace the development and representation of intertextuality in contemporary Chinese visual arts; and 3) to analyze the unique significance of intertextuality theory in artistic practice. The research methodology is primarily based on intertextuality theory, with a particular focus on the theory's Chinese characteristics. The research results were found as follows: 1) The initial purpose of using intertextual techniques was to compete with the tradition of official art; 2) Through intertextuality, their concepts and works had a profound impact on the creation mode of Chinese contemporary art; 3) Intertextual works are not only the inheritance of traditional culture, but also reflections on contemporary society. To this day, intertextuality theory holds universal critical significance for visual arts, and intertextuality continues to appear in contemporary Chinese art creations, continually altering our visual habits and ways of thinking. It is necessary to clarify the development and representation of intertextuality in contemporary Chinese art and to regrasp the issues that arose from that era within the complex intertextuality network.

INTRODUCTION

"Intertextuality" is a professional term in the field of literature. It was first proposed by the French semiotician Julia Kristeva (1941). Especially, in her book Semeiotikè: recherches pour une sémanalyse (Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, 1969) explains her definition of "intertextuality" in detail. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 29) "Intertextuality" usually refers to the relationship between two or more texts, or the repetition of a part of one text in another text, or the imitation or inclusion of one text in another text. Kristeva believes that every text is a mirror of other texts, every text is the absorption, replacement and digestion of other texts, and they map each other, refer to each other and form an intertextual network. (Kristeva, 1980, pp. 36-38)

Interestingly, in April 1974, a delegation of French writers composed of Kristeva and Roland Barthes (1915-1980) visited Beijing, Shanghai, Luoyang, Xi'an and other places in China. (Kristeva, 2016, pp. 7-9) At that time her ideas and works began to communicate with Chinese academic circles. Scholars represented by Luo Ting, Qin Haiying, Zhu Keyi, etc. began to actively promote the research on

Kristeva semiotics, and her series of concepts such as "intertextuality" and "semi-analysis" began to be frequently used in literature. (Kuang, 2021, 138-146) Works such as criticism or cultural interpretation have profoundly influenced text interpretation and research in Chinese literary circles.

At the same time, the concept of "intertextuality" began to radiate outward from the field of literature, entering fields such as social politics, rights criticism, etc., especially it also entered the field of image production and art field.

Intertextuality and Chinese Contemporary Visual Art

In fact, "intertextuality" is an important means of creation in contemporary Chinese art. Let's pay a little attention to the creation of Northern Art Groups. For example, in 1987, Liu Yan's oil painting The Altar (fig. 1) exhibited in the First Biennale of Jilin University of The Arts can clearly see the origins of Chinese classical philosophy (fig. 2), Western classicism and surrealism (fig. 3). The symbol of Wang Guangyi, who belonged to the same group, created Post-Classic: The Return of Great Compassion and Love (fig. 4) in 1986 with Rembrandt's The Return of the Prodigal Son (fig. 5) form an image "intertextuality". According to Wang Guangyi himself, the schema and emotion of The Return of the Prodigal Son are in line with Nietzsche's "tragedy concept beyond good and evil". (Lv & Yi, 2011, p. 105).

Figure 1: Liu Yan, The Altar, oil on canvas, 1987

Figure 2: Tai Chi Diagram

Figure 3: Salvador Dalí, La persistencia de la memoria,

Figure 4: Wang Guangyi, the Return of Great Compassion and Love, 1986

Figure 5: Rembrandt, the Return of the Prodigal Son, 1669

The same is true when we shift our focus to other groups. This artistic phenomenon does not exist in isolation. For example, the works of Yang Shaobin, Yue Minjun, and Lu Lin from the Old Summer Palace Artist Group. The Drama that Happened on the Tower of X, (1991, fig. 6), and Liberty Leading the People (fig. 7). The "intertextuality" of images seems to have spontaneously appeared in artistic creation after Kristeva's visit to China.

Before Kristeva put forward the concept of "intertextuality", "intertextuality" in visual art was usually called "Quotation" or "Appropriation". (Wan, 2007, p. 42) For example: Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase (1912, Fig. 8) refers to the multiple exposure photographs of Etienne-Jules Marey (Fig. 9), formed the "intertextuality" of painting and photography. (Pu & Yan, 2019, pp. 59-61)

Figure 6: Yue Minjun, the Drama that Happened on the Tower of X,

Figure 7: Yue Minjun, Liberty Leading the People, oil on canvas, 1995, 240 x 370 cm

Figure 9: Etienne-Jules Marey, The Running Lion Tamer, photography, 1886

Figure 8: Duchamp, Nude Descending a Staircase, oil on canvas, 1912.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research object of this dissertation is: 1) to exploring the development of intertextuality in Western academia and its dissemination in China; 2) to tracing the development and representation of intertextuality in contemporary Chinese visual arts; 3) to analyzing the unique significance of intertextuality theory in artistic practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is necessary to clarify the development and representation of intertextuality in contemporary Chinese art and to reexamine the issues that arose from that era within the complex intertextual networks. The following discussion will present the current state of research on this topic, roughly following a chronological order and stages of research progress, with the primary dimensions of consideration being intertextuality theory, the relationship between images and texts, and contemporary Chinese art.。

Research on Intertextuality

In 1966, Kristeva's paper "Word, Dialogue and Novel" was published in Tel Quel (As Is) magazine, in which she used the term "intertextuality" for the first time. (Kristeva, 1967, p.438) The theory began to be widely discussed and used. Kristeva's concept of "intertextuality" was inspired by Russian scholar Bakhtin's discussion on language, especially the Dialogue Theory of novel language, gradually formed the post-structuralist concept of "intertextuality". (Chen, 2003, pp. 75-76)

In 1967, after putting forward "intertextuality", Kristeva explained the concept of intertextuality in the article "Texte Clos". (Kristeva, 1968, pp. 103-125) In 1969, this concept is mentioned again in

Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, which is her new word "intertextualite" made up from several of the most commonly used French affixes and roots. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 15) In 1970, she discussed in detail the content of the concept of "intertextuality" in Le texte du roman. (Kristeva, 1979)

In the 1970s, the rise of structuralism brought further development to the theory of intertextuality. The French theorist Roland Barthes S/Z, he defined the text as "interdisciplinary" and "multi-subject", he believed that any text is a intertext, in which other tex ts exist to varying degrees in this text. (Barthes, 1975) The study of "intertextuality" extends widely and is often abused by critics.

Intertextuality Theory Entered China

Around the 1980s, "intertextuality" was introduced into China as a literary theory, mainly in the fields of literary criticism, cultural analysis, translation studies and semiotics. In China, the term "intertextuality" first appeared in Li Youzheng's translated works in 1980, when it was translated as "inter-textuality"; (Li, 1988) in 1983, Zhang Longxi expounded the theory of intertextuality; (Zhang, 1982) later, scholars such as Zhang Yinde and Qiu Xiaolong translated some theoretical works of "intertextuality" have promoted the influence and dissemination of "intertextuality" theory in China. (Kuang & Peng, 2021,pp. 138-146)

In 1990s, there was an upsurge in systematically interpreting the theory of "intertextuality" in China. For example: Genette's Nouveau Discours du récit translated and published by Wang Wenrong in 1990, "The Complete Works of Bakhtin" translated and published in 1998; (Wang, 1990) in 2004, Zhang Shouying's History of Western Literary Theory in the Twentieth Century, (Zhang , 2004) and Li Youzheng's works in 2007 Introduction to Theoretical Semiotics. (Li, 2007)

In the 21st century, Scholars have explained and commented on the "intertextuality" theories of Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Genette and others. For example: from 2001 to 2004, scholars such as Luo Ting, Chen Yongguo (Chen, 2006), and Qin Haiying (Qin, 2004) respectively wrote articles to discuss the relationship between the theory of "intertextuality" and postmodern literature and traditional literature.

In addition, the Chinese translations of the theory of "intertextuality" are also progressing in parallel with the research on the topic. In recent years, Kristeva's works have been translated and published successively in China. There are four main translations: 1) Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art; 2) Kristeva's Selected Works; 3) Language, the Unknown World; 4) Subject·Intertext·Psychoanalysis: Kristeva Lectures at Fudan University. (Kristeva, 2016) Among them, Christeva Lectures at Fudan University, which reflects her latest theoretical thoughts and her cross-cultural interaction with Chinese academic circles, has important reference value. Before that, most of Roland Barthes' works have also been published.

Intertextuality Theory and Art Research

In recent years, there has been a growing body of research on the relationship between intertextuality theory and contemporary Chinese art creation. For example: In 2019, Fu Yanjun wrote the article "The Presentation of Intertextuality in Contemporary Painting Creation" (Fu, 2019). Li Shumei's "Research on the Intertextuality of Huang Yongyu's Literature and Painting", the dimension of discussion stayed between Huang Yongyu's painting and literary creation; (Li, 2019) Fu Shihao's dissertation "The Embodiment of Intertextuality in Artistic Creation and the Practice of Cross-textuality as a Painting Creation Method" talked about the creations of two Western artists. (Fu, 2019) In 2021, Shi Hui's "Photographic Works from the Perspective of Intertextuality", discussing photographic works under the theory of intertextuality; (Shi, 2021) and in 2022, Meng Xiaoxu's article "Research on Parody and Intertextuality in the Context of Contemporary Art". (Meng, 2022)

Summary

Intertextuality is an inherent attribute of contemporary Chinese visual arts. The boundaries of artistic thought and concepts have continually expanded since the 1979 "Stars Art Exhibition," extending into fields such as psychology, sociology, political science, and philosophy. This paper aims to return to the creative contexts of those works through the lens of intertextuality theory, avoiding an isolated examination of images or texts, and not merely emphasizing artistic forms and techniques. Instead, it seeks to rethink that era from a broader perspective.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The research conceptual framework based on the theory of intertextuality, together with linguistics, pragmatics and iconography. The aim is to use intertextuality theory to observe contemporary Chinese visual arts, in order to re-evaluate the value of these creations. According to intertextuality theory, the visual materials studied in this paper are regarded as texts, while external factors such as society, history, politics, culture, and literature are considered as "broad texts."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary research methodology of this paper is intertextuality theory. In terms of specific methods, this paper will combine multiple research approaches to thoroughly examine the subject. The main research methods include literature analysis, intertextuality theory, and interviews.

Literature Analysis

Through extensive reading and viewing, the specific contemporary art groups or movements to be discussed will be identified. Textual close reading and image analysis will be employed to explore the reasons these art groups use intertextuality in their creations, with the aim of tracing a general developmental trajectory.

Intertextuality Theory

Intertextuality theory is rooted in the inter-connectedness of intertexts and has wide-ranging applications across various disciplines. In semiotics, it explores the complex networks of symbols involved in communication. In the field of visual arts, artists imbue their creations with depth by referencing and reinterpreting existing visual symbols, thereby establishing a dialogue between works.

Interview Method

The interview method is a research approach that provides in-depth insights into the perspectives and experiences of artists engaged in intertextual creation. I will establish deep connections with the artists to ensure the collection of comprehensive and insightful information.
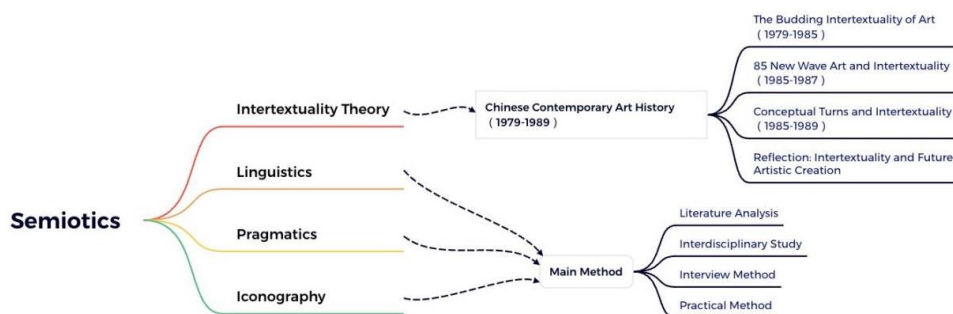
Data Collection Procedures

Figure 10: Conceptual / theoretical Framework

The interviews will use semi-open-ended questions, allowing participants ample space to share their personal views and perspectives related to their creative work. These questions are designed to help uncover the significance of the research.

Question 1.Personal information；Question 2. Understanding of intertextuality；Question 3. Source of inspiration；Question 4.Creative process；Question 5. Selection of intertextual elements；Question 6. Response to traditional culture；Question 7.Creative Challenges；Question 8. Audience feedback；Question 9. References from other art forms.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on the scale of creation, social changes, artistic trends, and levels of recognition, the development of intertextuality in contemporary Chinese art can be divided into three stages. The first stage, from 1979 to 1985 (post-reform and opening up to the 85 new wave), is considered a nascent phase. The second stage, from 1985 to 1987 (early 85 new wave), marks the arrival of China's first nationwide contemporary art movement, the 85 new wave. The third stage, from 1987 to 1989 (transition of the new wave ideas), saw Chinese artists seeking new directions for contemporary art and developing their own theories.

Intertextuality and Early Contemporary Chinese Art (1979-1985)

In 1979, traditional Chinese artists began to try to appropriate Western modern classics, initially in the field of traditional artists. For example, Yuan Yunsheng's large-scale mural work Songkran - A hymn to life (fig. 11) appeared in the public's field of vision as a strong signal. In October of the same year, this work was unveiled at the Capital Airport, which was the first large-scale mural creation since the founding of New China. (Li, 2013, p.14) The human body, which had been considered taboo before, appeared in this large-scale work, which caused a huge response.

The nude elements and structure in this work can be compared to Picasso's Les Demoiselles d'Avignon (1907, fig. 12) and Gauguin's Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going? (1898, fig. 13). It suggests that Yuan Yunsheng may have drawn inspiration from and imitated elements of Cubism and abstraction during his creative process.

Intertextuality and 85 New Wave Art Movement (1985-1987)

In the spring of 1985, among the most influential art groups that emerged during this time were the "Northern Art Group," "Jiangsu Red Brigade," "Red Humor," "Zhejiang Pond Society," "Southwest Art Group," and "Xiamen Dada," among others. (Li, 2020, p.110)

Figure 11: Yuan Yunsheng, Songkran—A hymn to life, 1979

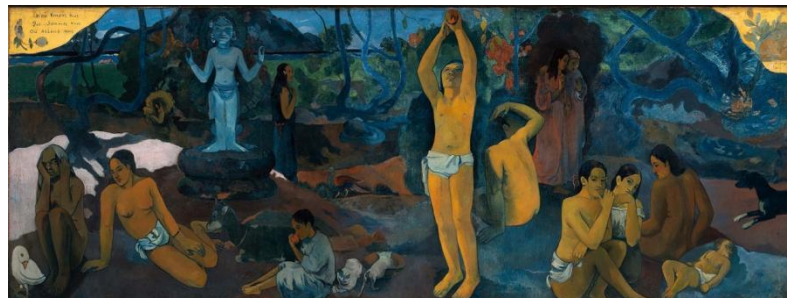
Figure 12: Pablo Picasso,Les Demoiselles

Figure 13: Paul Gauguin, Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?, 1897–1898

Wang Guangyi's works from the 1980s align with the understanding of the intertextual creation model. Around 1987, Wang Guangyi began his "Post Classical" period. Significant works from this period include Post-Classic: The Return of Great Compassion and Love (1986, fig. 4), Post Classical—The Gospel of Matthew, The Death of Marat, and The Trinity. Post-Classic is a "revision" of Rembrandt's The Return of the Prodigal Son (fig. 5).

This approach, characterized by symmetry, balance, stability, tranquility, and abstraction, was intended, in the artist's own words, to express the same aspirations as those of classical artists: "The patterns created through this approach are meant to allow more minds to perceive that in the history of human culture (primarily referring to Western culture), there exists a noble and uplifting force." (Lv & Yi, 2011, p.105)

Like Wang Guangyi, Yue Minjun and Pan Dehai gained significant recognition both domestically and internationally through their works. In particular, Yue Minjun's work has become especially recognizable in the Western world. According to his interview records, he began formally studying painting techniques in 1985. (Jerome & Yue, 2008, pp. 84-85).

Yue Minjun's works after 1985 represent a style exploration rooted in "laughter." However, this formal innovation also draws on classic motifs for experimentation. For instance, the composition of the Drama that Happened on the Tower of X (1991, fig. 6) is clearly inspired by the classic red-themed painting Founding Ceremony of the People's Republic of China (1952, fig. 14), which depicts the founding of the new China. All the male and female figures in the scene are laughing.

Figure 14: Dong Xiwen, Founding Ceremony of the People's Republic

Conceptual Turning and Intertextuality (1987-1989)

When we stand in 1987 and look back at the "intertextuality" in art since 1979, we can truly appreciate its significance and how inseparable it has become from Chinese contemporary art. However, when examining the relationship between intertextuality and Chinese contemporary art after 1987, it is evident that, compared to the earlier period, the expression of intertextuality and the creative ideas have already shifted.At the end of 1987, Wang Guangyi began working on Mao Zedong AO (fig. 15). This piece, along with the later Mao Zedong: P2 (fig. 16) and the triptych Mao Zedong AC (1989, fig. 17), belongs to the same series, with the latter causing a significant stir when exhibited at the 1989 China Modern Art Exhibition. The creation method of this work borrowed from political propaganda posters of the Cultural Revolution (fig. 18) and the consumer advertising posters emerging during the early reform era.
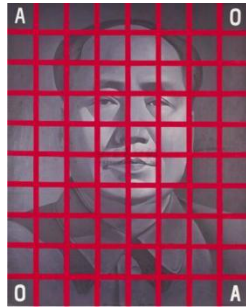
Figure 15: Wang Guangyi, Mao Zedong AO, 1987

Figure 16: Wang Guangyi, Mao Zedong:
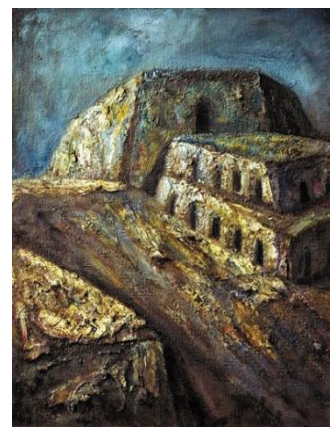
Figure 17: Wang Guangyi, Mao Zedong

Figure 18: Political Propaganda Posters, 1978-

Figure 19: Ding Fang, City,

From 1985 to 1987, Ding Fang created his City (fig. 19) series, which intertextually relates to the Loess Plateau and is also closely tied to his personal experiences. As a native of Shaanxi, Ding Fang's artistic style carries a distinctive northern sense of power. Residing in the historically rich and serene city of Nanjing, he imbues the Danxia landforms of the Loess Plateau with profound cultural emotions. Simultaneously, his work engages in intertextuality with Western Expressionism (fig. 20).

Similar to Ding Fang, another artist is Shang Yang. His Yellow River Boatman (fig. 21) carries a profound cultural weight, allowing viewers to quickly feel the powerful flow of the Yellow River (fig. 22). Clearly, both Ding Fang and Shang Yang have skillfully replaced Western concepts lacking local relevance with indigenous ethnic imagery that provides strong visual impact and memorable elements for Chinese viewers. This approach transforms their work into a powerful representation of the soul rather than merely abstract concepts.

CONCLUSION

Respond to Question 1: What is the development and representation of intertextuality in the creation of Chinese contemporary visual art?

The first stage (1979~1985): In the early 1980s, China's modern and contemporary art movement had just sprouted. It was based on imitation of Western art culture, which was also the main criterion for artistic change. At this time, the artist began to experiment with "intertextual" expression techniques, such as appropriating patterns or colors from Western classic works.

The second stage (1985~1987): In 1985, the "85 New Wave" art movement began to emerge in various parts of China. The imitation and appropriation of Western modern art became a norm, and the entire Western modern art became an intertext in the early stage of the "85 New Wave". After the "85 New Wave", Chinese modern and contemporary art began to enter its initial stage of true significance.

The third stage (1987~1989): The period from 1987 to 1989 is generally regarded as a period of transition in artistic concepts. Artists began to gradually liberate themselves from the shackles of collective mythology and turned to profound reflection on reality.

Respond to Question 2: How do specific ideas, forms of expression, and concepts affect painting and visual art?

The first stage (1979~1985): The "scar art" spreading in China at this time not only successfully reproduced the real circumstances and inner feelings of the lives of the Red Guards and educated youths through intertextuality with the pain of the Cultural Revolution, but also went beyond a simple depiction of the facts themselves, entering into the overall psychological structure of an era.

The second stage (1985~1987): After 1985, Chinese contemporary artists accelerated their acceptance and learning of Western artistic styles, and intertextual techniques such as appropriation, imitation and conversion became common expression techniques in the Chinese art world.

The third stage (1987~1989): In 1987, artistic concepts mainly shifted to three directions: 1. cleaning up humanistic enthusiasm; 2. purifying artistic language; 3. calling for the great soul of the times. The representation of intertextuality in works of art turns alongside these conceptual turns.

Respond to Question 3: Why have the unique connotations and the "intertextuality" of images been developed in China?

In 1979, "intertextuality" as an implicit visual art expression technique, which has gradually become universal with the development of Chinese contemporary art. The most important one was the visit to China of a delegation of French writers composed of Kristeva and Roland Barthes in 1974. They visited China in Beijing, Shanghai, Luoyang, Xi'an and other places.

By 1985, when new wave art emerged in China, "intertextuality" was already prevalent in creation. Moreover, in many cases, the intertextuality of other texts or images (extensive text) itself expresses the attitude and stance of contemporary artists.

The period from 1987 to 1989 was a period of conceptual transformation. The artist dug deeply into the historical and cultural heritage, revealed the contradictions and limitations, and constructed a more realistic and complex historical picture.Intertextuality will remain one of the key words of Chinese contemporary art, providing artists with a broader creative space and promoting the continuous innovation and development of Chinese contemporary art.

SUGGESTIONS

In an Era of Image Explosion, how do we face art creation?

1) Approaching our images with intertextual thinking and be cautiously aware of its intertextuality. 2) Every artist should build their own image database. 3) This database should differentiate one artist's creations from others.

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