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I, Linda Huang , hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History.

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Opening Up to the Universe: Cai Guoqiang's Methodology from 1986 to 1996

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Opening Up to the Universe:
Cai Guoqiang's Methodology from 1986 to 1996

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Abstract

During his residence in Japan from 1986 to 1995, Cai Guoqiang (b. 1957) developed his philosophical thinking on art, life, and the universe and adopted gunpowder explosion as his major art making method. With a focus on his encounter with Japanese Mono-ha artists and the influences of Japan's culture and history on his art, this study explores how Cai challenged the orthodox forms of Asian art by radically exploding gunpowder and how he adopted Daoist view of the universe to cross cultural and disciplinary boundaries. In the first chapter, I investigate the interrelationship between Cai and Mono-ha artists and disclose the common theme of de-materialization underlying their work. I argue that Cai's artistic use of gunpowder explosion liberates his material from its physical confines and initiates conversations with the unknown power of the universe. In the second chapter, I discuss Cai's reflections on Mono-ha arts and examine the embodiment of "the inner universe and external universe" in his explosion events, through which he established a collaborative working relationship with the invisible natural power. In the last chapter, I further discuss the theme of art and war in his work. By analyzing the metaphorical imagery of the mushroom cloud in his explosion events, I uncover his artistic strategy of simulating, intervening, and deciphering human history. Taking a close look at Cai's early gunpowder explosion projects, this study unveils his subversive methods for escaping the conventional art production modes and expanding the temporal-spatial dimensions of his work, which instills new possibilities and infinite freedom in his art.

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Introduction

Overview

Cai Guoqiang (b. 1957) is best known for his use of gunpowder in creating paintings, explosion events, and social projects. His radically new form of gunpowder art challenges existing categories of contemporary art and explodes boundaries between East and West, art and science. From 1986 to 1995, Cai studied and resided in Japan. During his residence there, he worked with the younger generation of Mono-ha artists (Mono-ha literally means "school of things") who had dedicated to exploring the essential spirit of natural materials and their relationship with surroundings since the 1960s. The encounter with Mono-ha spurred Cai to reconsider the spirituality inherent in gunpowder and to subvert the conventional production mode of art creation. This study is devoted to exploring the development of Cai's conceptual approaches during his decade-long residence in Japan. The major focus of this study will be on the influences of Mono-ha arts and Japan's post-war history on Cai's methodology, which led to his artistic use of the destructive power of gunpowder for liberating Asian art from its orthodox forms and expanding the social, historical, and political dimensions of his art.

Biography

Cai was born in 1957 in Quanzhou, China. From 1981 to 1985, he was trained in stage design at the Shanghai Drama Institute, where he began to create large-scale, audience-oriented works of art. In 1986, Cai traveled to Japan and studied at the Institute for Art Research at the University of Tsukuba. During his residence in Japan, Cai worked with many Post-Mono-ha artists who inspired him to explore the properties of gunpowder and directed his practice toward event-based work. At the end of the 1980s, Cai was included in a variety of group and solo exhibitions in the major art museums and galleries in Japan, such as Osaka Contemporary Art

Center, Kigoma Gallery, and Tokyo Gallery. In 1991, the P3 Art and Environment in Tokyo established a working relationship with Cai and provided enthusiastic support for his *Projects for Extraterrestrials*. With growing recognition, Cai's gunpowder art drew attention from Japanese art critics who perceived the radical nature of his art as a new force in Asia that was able to stand out in the international art scene. Cai moved to New York in 1995 and continued to produce gunpowder drawings, explosion projects, and firework events around the world. His remarkable performance has made him one of the most renowned Chinese artists in the global art scene.

Literature Review

The early writings on Cai's art by Japanese curators and art critics in the 1990s reveal the Daoist influence in Cai's art and his interests in exploring the relationship between human, the earth, and the universe. Takashi Serizawa's article "Beyond Flash and Smoke" (1991) for Cai's solo exhibition "Primary Fireball: The Project for Projects" indicates that Cai's gunpowder art goes beyond his Chinese identity and locates his own time and space by exploring the origin of consciousness in the universe. In "New Order out of Chaos" (1994), Yuko Hasegawa discusses three major themes in Cai's early artistic experiment: life, the cosmos, and civilization. Hasegawa illustrates how Daoist spirit in Cai's work leads to notions of wholeness, transformation, and maintaining balance as his key artistic approach. These Japanese art critics' writings correspond with Cai's book *Calendar of Life* (1994), in which Cai states his attempts to "converse with the universe by using the earth as the canvas" and introduces the philosophy of Chinese medicine which is based on the harmony between the external universe and the internal universe in human body.[1]

After Cai's work gained more exposure in the West, many Western scholars approached his art by following three main spheres from which Cai draws: humans, the earth, and the

[1] Cai Guoqiang, *Calendar of Life* (Nagoya: Gallery APA, 1994), 2.

cosmos. Meanwhile, they began to relate Cai's art with Western art, such as Dadaism, the ready-made, and land art. In the monographic study *Cai Guoqiang* (2002), Dana Hansen's survey features Cai's art as "poetic universality" and frames his work through human scale, the earthly realm, and the tendency towards the cosmos.[2] Hansen indicates the parallel notions between Cai and land artists, who used natural phenomenon such as lightning to communicate with unknown forces. In 2007, Cai's retrospective "I Want to Believe" took place at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The exhibition catalogue *Cai Guoqiang: I Want to Believe* provides a comprehensive survey about the influences of Cai's hometown, Chinese revolutionary culture, and his residence in Japan on his work. While this survey reveals the spiritual connections between the Mono-ha artists and Cai's work, there is a lack of in-depth analysis on how the key concepts of Mono-ha contributed to the development of Cai's art-making philosophy. In my study, I will further investigate the interrelationship between Mono-ha and Cai.

Existing scholarship published in English on the Japanese Mono-ha is very limited. One major resource is *Art in Japan Today II, 1970-1983* (1984), in which Toshiaki Minemura contributes a chapter introducing the conceptual approaches of the Mono-ha and its ideological influences on Japanese art community. In the exhibition catalogue *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (1996), Alexandra Munroe provides a historical view of the formation of Mono-ha in the context of the post-war Japanese society. In order to gain insight into Mono-ha's artistic approaches, I will rely on *The Art of Encounter* (2004) written by Lee Ufan, the leading ideologue of Mono-ha.[3] In this book, Lee illustrates his philosophy of art-making: using art as a

[2] Dana Hansen, *Cai Guo-Qiang* (London: Phaidon Press, 2002), 40.

[3] Lee Ufan (b. 1936) is a Korean-born artist and has resided in Japan since the 1956. He is one of the leading Mono-ha artists.

stimulating media to initiate dialogue with the unknown otherness.[4] His notion resonates with Cai's experiment of using gunpowder explosion to create conversations between humans, the earth, and the universe.

Another major source I will use is the interview I conducted with Cai in his New York studio in the summer of 2011. Cai explicated Mono-ha artists' influences on him, such as their consideration of materiality and spirituality and the purified visual format of their work. He explained how his adoption of the universal ethics in Daoist philosophy passes through the confines in Mono-ha artists' work. Moreover, the CD provided by the studio's archive department, with the copies of Cai's conceptual draft, videos, and images of his explosion projects in it, provides important visual resources.

By examining the scholarship on Cai and the leading Mono-ha artist Lee Ufan's work, I find important clues to trace the conceptual connections between Cai and Mono-ha, which have not been fully examined. Based on the perspectives provided by these sources, I will continue to investigate how Cai's encounter with Mono-ha inspired him to open his art up to the infinite universe and how his adoption of Daoist philosophy moves beyond Mono-ha artists' struggle to build up their own identity based on the comparison with the Western art-making mode.

Chapters

In the first chapter, I will situate Cai in the context of Post-Mono-ha arts in the 1980s in order to explore how these artists' interests in matter and energy inspired his adoption of gunpowder explosion for developing a powerful material language. By examining Lee's writings and works, I will discuss the main approaches of his art and will disclose a common theme underlying Cai and Lee's works: liberating materials from objecthood and challenging the

[4] Lee Ufan, *The Art of Encounter* (London: Turner/Lisson Gallery, 2004), 33.

conventional art production mode. In particular, by scrutinizing the embodiment of Mono-ha's conceptual underpinnings within Cai's outdoor explosion events *Projects for Extraterrestrials* (1989-1999), I argue that Cai's artistic use of the destructive force of gunpowder radically extended Mono-ha artists' endeavor to free materials from their physicality. Moreover, Cai expanded Mono-ha's approaches into a broader realm and forged a revolutionary mode of art creation. His explosion events evoke the rebirth of materials and allow him to escape from the traditional mode of production, circulation, and reception of art works.

In the second chapter, I will discuss Cai's reflection on Mono-ha arts, which propelled him to reconsider his identity as an Asian artist and to initiate fundamental changes that break out of the conventional Asian aesthetics. By examining the role of Chinese cultural tradition played in Cai's work, I will elaborate how he adopted Daoist view of the universe to develop the idea of the inner universe and the external universe as the conceptual underpinning of his methodological system. I will further explore the embodiment of *fengshui*, *qi*, and "the oneness of man and the universe" in his work in order to unveil the ways in which he endeavored to transform the traditional Daoist ritual into a collaborative art making mode for connecting with the invisible natural power. By exploring Cai's methods to reconcile the contradictions between destruction and construction, I argue that his artistic use of the destructive power of gunpowder led him to confront the fixity of Asian identity by deliberately reaching out to embrace broad realms of culture, politics, and history.

In the third chapter, I will discuss Cai's artistic strategy of simulating, displacing, and transforming historical events and the underlying theme of art and war in his work. I will use Jean Baudrillard's simulacra theory and Hakim Bey's idea of "Temporary Autonomous Zone" to approach his work *The Century with Mushroom Coulds: Project for the 20th Century* (1996). By

dislocating the mushroom cloud from Japan to the United States, Cai constructed a series of hyper-realities to evoke viewers' reflections on humans' war history. By decoding the symbolic meaning of the mushroom cloud events in different sites, I argue that Cai created a chaotic time-space where imagination, memory, and reality were fused together. Moving beyond the linear narrative of history, Cai perceived the deeper reality hidden under the veil of reality and grasped the spirit of terror in the contemporary era.

Significance

This study explores the interrelationship between the art of Cai and of Japanese Mono-ha artists, which has been rarely examined by scholars. It unveils the crucial role played by Cai's decade-long art practices in Japan in expanding his artistic identity and preparing him to become a global artist. By situating Cai's work in the context of contemporary Japanese art practices and their exploration in matter and materials, this study reconsiders his subversive art-making method, which challenges the confines of studio and the traditional art production mode. Furthermore, bringing together Eastern philosophy, such as Daoism and Zen Buddhism, Jean Baudrillard's simulacra theory, and Hakim Bay's theory of Autonomous Temporary Zone, this study takes a wide breadth of approaches to unfold the cross-boundary nature of Cai's artistic practice. Taking a close look at his early gunpowder explosion projects, this study highlights the contemporary value of Cai's work, the cultural polysemia that is implicit in his art, and the reconciliation of the seemingly paradoxical contradictions between spirituality and materiality, destruction and construction, universality and cultural specificity which he attempts with his works.

Chapter One:
Mono-ha's Influences on Cai Guoqiang:
Seeking Spirituality in Materials and Creating Resonant Space

For me, artwork should make the viewers sense a higher, more distant, and larger world than they can see. It should open up a space and initiate viewers to experience a bigger world beyond their sight.[5]

With a series of gunpowder explosions covering 2,000 meters in 20 seconds, the footfalls of Bigfoot will stomp into the beyond. It will be a moment of a hyper-creature passing through our planet. Is it the Extraterrestrial or ourselves? The moment when the spirit is present, it will leave physical footprints on the border and will vanish beyond time and space.[6]

In 1986, Cai Guoqiang moved to Japan, hoping to gain exposure to contemporary art outside China and to seek greater artistic freedom. At the time Cai arrived in Japan, the Mono-ha movement had developed for two decades and had changed the whole course of Japanese art scene.[7] Their method for fostering a dynamic relationship between materials and surroundings had saturated Japanese artists' practices. In the 1980s, there was an increasing revisionist debate questioning the Asian-centered ideology of Mono-ha arts.[8] It was within this context that Post-Mono-ha artists began to explore new dimensions to enrich the art making approaches of Mono-ha artists. During his residence in Japan, Cai befriended Lee Ufan (b.1936), the leading theorist of Mono-ha, and worked with many Post-Mono-ha artists.[9] The encounter with Mono-ha led to a dramatic progress in his methodology and quickly gained him international fame. As Cai has confirmed in an interview with me, Mono-ha artists' dedication to presenting spirituality in

[5] Ufan Lee, *The Art of Encounter* (London: Turner/Lisson Gallery, 2004), 221.
[6] Guoqiang Cai, "Statement for the Project for Extraterrestrials No.6: Bigfoot's Footprints," in *Primeval Fireball: The Project for Projects*, ed. Takashi Serizawa (Tokyo: P3 Art and Environment, 1991), 23.
[7] "Mono-ha" literally means "school of things." It refers to a group of artists in Japan who were active from the late sixties to early seventies, making art by re-arranging both natural and man-made materials.
[8] Alexandra Munroe and David Joselit, *Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe* (New York, NY: Guggenheim Museum, 2008), 32.
[9] Ibid.

natural materials inspired him to re-contemplate the inherent spirit of his material, gunpowder.[10] However, rather than yielding to Mono-ha's purified, restrained style of expression, Cai adopted gunpowder explosion as his distinct method of art creation, which initiated a "Cai Guoqiang Tornado" in Japan and spurred Asian artists to challenge the traditional material aesthetics.[11]

This chapter begins by introducing the development and main approaches of Mono-ha arts at the end of the 1960s. By examining Lee's writings and works, I discuss his "art of *yohaku,*" in which he presents the original state of materials and reveals an unmade world. The central focus of this chapter is to explore the interrelationship between Cai and Mono-ha arts and to uncover a common theme underlying their works: liberating materials from objecthood and challenging the conventional art production mode. Situating Cai in the context of Post-Mono-ha arts in the 1980s, I explore how these artists' interests in matter and energy inspired his adoption of gunpowder explosion for developing a powerful material language. Moreover, by examining the embodiment of Mono-ha's conceptual underpinnings, such as "the site of emptiness," "a resonant space," and art as "a stimulating medium," within Cai's outdoor explosion events *Projects for Extraterrestrials* (1989-1999), this chapter points to a new understanding of his artistic use of the destructive force of gunpowder, which has radically extended Mono-ha artists' endeavor to free materials from their physicality. Taking a close look at the parallel strategies in Cai and Lee's work, I argue that, together, their art practices continuously propelled "the fall of studio" in Asia. Cai expanded Mono-ha's approaches into a broader realm and forged a revolutionary mode of art creation. His explosion events evoked the rebirth of materials and subverted the traditional mode of production, circulation, and reception of art works. Thus,

[10] Cai Guoqiang, interview by Linda Huang, tape recording at Cai Guoqiang's New York studio (August 2011).
[11] Danqing Chen, "Thatched Boat and Borrowing Arrow," in *Cai Guoqiang: What I Am Thinking About*, edited by Yang Zhao and Li Weijin (Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2012).

placing his medium into what he considers "conversations" between humans and the universe, Cai is able to transcend the boundaries between self and other, East and West and to gain a sense of infinite freedom in art creation.

Mono-ha: The Unmade and Undefined

The Mono-ha movement emerged in the late 1960s. It marked a pivotal shift in Japanese art, which led to a new direction of art creation and awakened Japanese artists' reclamation of their Asian identity.[12] In 1945, after Japan's defeat in World War II, the Japanese government adopted the Western democratic model as a part of its effort to rebuild the country. Along with the embracing of Western culture and ideas, an influx of Western modernist art exerted great influence on the Japanese art community and developed into a dominant presence in Japanese art practices.[13] From the 1960s onward, Japan's passive cooperation with the American military resulted in national wide protests, calling for political autonomy and resisting against Western hegemony. In response to the radical social movement, a group of artists took the initiative to foster alternative art making methods by "positing Asia as the center rather than periphery."[14] In the exhibition catalogue *Japanese Art After* 1945, curator Alexandra Munroe has noted that their art practices "resisted what they considered to be Japan's blind appropriation and advocated a contemporary Asian art that gave form and meaning to their own particular world view."[15]

As opposed to the Western tradition of objectifying materials, Mono-ha artists avoided "the creation of plastic form," but instead stressed on presenting the original status of natural

[12] Minemura Toshiaki, "A Blast of Nationalism in the Seventies," in *Art in Japan Today II, 1970-1983*, ed. Ito Norihiro (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1984), 17.
[13] Alexandra Munroe, *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 257.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

materials. Due to their interests in natural "things," this artistic group is known as Mono-ha, which literally means: school of things.[16] However, in the early 1970s, the name "Mono-ha" was applied to this group as a dismissive label by observers and caused controversial debates among Mono-ha artists.[17] Lee recalled that this name "overly emphasized the thingness/materiality of their work," and this in itself violated their refusal to produce "things."[18] By rearranging unprocessed materials such as rock, wood, soil, iron, and cotton, these artists resisted the flood of manufactured objects brought by mass production. They attempted to redefine what it means to "create" in order to challenge the production mode of art creation.[19] Rather than using materials to realize an idea, they placed natural materials in "temporary combination" with a variety of "space-time environment," such as floors, walls, windows, light, and darkness.[20] Giving up the process of "making," as in craft, and borrowing raw materials directly from nature, Mono-ha artists did not consider works of art as finished products, but instead "focused on the relationship between thing and thing, the multi-dimensionality of surfaces, the process of composition, and the mixed qualities of space."[21] Therefore, the process of reassembling materials and bringing out mutual relationships between materials and their surroundings is what they regarded as creation.

By presenting the "conditional quality" of materials and their relationship with the external environment, Mono-ha artists intended to endow materials with a new sense of spirituality and to reveal a truthful, unmade world.[22] For this purpose, they drew on Zen Buddhist principles, especially the notion of "emptiness," to eliminate the interruptions from the

[16] Minemura, 17.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Lee, 146.
[19] "Pan Li: Conversation with Kishio Suga." www.artda.cn.
[20] Lee, 146.
[21] Lee, 147.
[22] Ibid

man-made world and to release the spirit from materiality.[23] In Zen Buddhism, emptiness refers to "the direct realization of the non-existence of a perceiving subject and perceived objects, said to be the natural state of the mind" and has an equivalent meaning to "the ultimate reality or ultimate truth."[24] It emphasizes the purification of people's minds: if people attempt to create something new, they have to empty their minds first and reach beyond a brain-centered norm of thinking.[25] With this notion in tow, these artists pursued a purified visual form and a simplified composition through which they hoped to reach the essential spirit of materials. As Japanese art critic Minemura Toshiaki stated, by discarding man-made components and structures, Mono-ha artists sought a return to "the origins of existence that might reveal an 'undisguised world' to viewers."[26] By this means, they questioned the man-made reality and attacked "the trickiness and illusory quality of seeing," calling for "the reexamination of the reality that appears in front of our eyes."[27]

As previously noted, Mono-ha, as a loosely defined art movement, became synonymous with an underlying attitude and ideology of art-making in Japan in the 1960s.[28] As it gained popularity in Japan, the Tamabi University in Tokyo became the center of Mono-ha artists' practices. The group, "Lee + Tamabi Connection," played a crucial role in the evolution of Mono-ha. "Lee + Tamabi Connection" included the leading ideologue of Mono-ha, Lee Ufan, and faculty and students in the Art Department of the Tamabi University, including Sekine Nokuo, Kishio Suga, Koshimizu Susumu, Yoshida Katsurō, Narita Katsuhiko, and Honda

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Rosemary Goring and Frank Whaling, *Larousse Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions* (Toronto: Larousse, 1995), 159.
[25] Huaijin Nan, *Basic Buddhism: Exploring Buddhism and Zen* (Newburyport: Weiser Books, 1998), 81.
[26] Toshika, 17.
[27] Lee, 148.
[28] Minemura,17.

Shingo.[29] Sekine, a renowned artist who taught at the Tamabi University, developed an intimate friendship with Lee and guided his students to explore material languages under the spirit of Mono-ha. By rearranging a variety of natural materials, the "Lee + Tamabi Connection" expanded the field of Mono-ha's art practices and propelled its prosperous development.[30] Among these leading Mono-ha artists, Lee is known for articulating the theoretical foundation of Mono-ha in his writings. His art-making philosophy deeply influenced the Japanese art community for over two decades.[31]

Lee, a Korean-born artist, moved to Japan in 1956 and studied philosophy at the Takushoku University in Tokyo.[32] While based in Japan, he frequently traveled around the world, primarily in Europe. His international experiences afforded him a sophisticated understanding of different modes of art-making in Eastern and Western sites. According to Lee, the Western modernist mode of representation was limited in its "ego-centered mentality," which refused to include otherness, but instead emphasized self-consciousness and the controlling power of the artist's mind.[33] In attempt to break out of this conventional mode of representation, Lee was dedicated to creating a new conceptual language that would open materials up to the external world and let them take a leading role in artistic expression.[34] As Munroe commented, "partly a critique of the Western objectification of self and the other, idea and matter, Lee's theory posited an alternative structure for the interdependent relationships between consciousness and existence, things and site."[35]

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Minemura Toshika, "What was 'MONO-HA'?," Exhibition Catalogue of *MONO-HA* (Tokyo: Kamakura Gallery, 1986), www.kamakura-g.com.
[31] Minemura, 18.
[32] Munroe, 258.
[33] Lee, 33.
[34] Lee, 149.
[35] Munroe, 257

Yohaku: The Site of Emptiness

Lee defined his work as "the art of *yohaku*—emptiness."[36] "*Yohaku*" (余白 in Chinese characters) literally means unpainted, blank space. The aesthetics of blank space plays an important role in traditional Chinese painting and was adopted in Japanese painting as well.[37] Deeply influenced by Zen Buddhist philosophy, Chinese old masters used blank space to arouse viewers' empathy with landscape and to catch the spirituality in it. As exemplified in Chinese painter Ma Yuan's painting (c. 1160–6 –1225, Southern Song dynasty) *Fisherman on a Winter River*, 1195 A.D. (fig. 1), Ma depicted a solitary scene of a fisherman crouching on the edge of a small boat and concentrating on fishing. Using reduced ink strokes, he stressed the dynamic interactions between the fisherman, the boat, and the river.[38] Leaving the whole background uncolored and using minimal strokes to represent the drifting river, Ma's artistic use of the blank space evokes viewers to sense the immense river, the whispering wind, and the edgeless sky. This painting embodies the aesthetic underpinnings of traditional Chinese painting: saturating the painted space with blank space to extend the poetic imagery of landscape far beyond what can be seen in the composition.

Borrowing the aesthetics of blank space from Chinese traditional painting, Lee further developed the notion of *yohaku* into "a resonant space" by incorporating music and sound theories. As Lee explained, when using a brush to paint, he attempted to stimulate the energy of

[36] Lee, 10.
[37] Miyeko Murase and Judith G. Smith, *The Arts of Japan: an International Symposium* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 85.
[38] Richard Edwards, *The Heart of Ma Yuan: The Search for a Southern Song Aesthetic* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 34.

the unpainted space, just like using a drumstick to hit a drum.[39] When a drum is hit, the sound wave created by this movement spreads from the internal space of the drum to the external space. As a result, people surrounding the drum will resonate with the sound wave. The whole system of this resonant space including the drum, people, and surrounding space is what he defined as a *yohaku* space.[40] As embodied in his painting *From Line*, 1978 (fig. 2), Lee painted a one-stroke line from the top of the canvas to the bottom. Using this single stroke as a stimulating medium, he energizes the canvas and creates a vibrant space between the painted and unpainted. The vivacious energy carried by the fading ink of this stroke seems to move beyond the boundary of the painting and to extend into a broader imaginative space. By creating an energetic *yohaku* space between the physical presence of a painting and the sensory experience of viewers, Lee challenges the "self-contained, autonomous space" in Western modernist painting, which, according to him, "cut off its connections to the outside world."[41] Thus, in order to break through this limitation, he opens up a *yohaku* space in his painting, inviting viewers' minds to enter the work and connecting the internal and external space of the painting.

Lee's sculptures expand the notion of *yohaku* into what he called "a responsive field."[42] In his sculptures, he attempts to create a "crack" to let the external energy in and to "keep a good circulation of the energy between internal and external world."[43] In this way, he replaces "a fixed thing" with "a changeable event" that can evoke the natural energy of materials and initiate dialogues with the unknown otherness.[44] His sculpture, *Relatum*, 1968 (fig. 3), best embodies this idea. In this work, Lee dropped a round natural stone onto a glass plate lying on an iron plate.

[39] Lee, 10.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Lee, 149.
[43] Lee, 11.
[44] Lee, 170.

At the point of stimulation where the stone hit the glass, the glass plate broke and showed several cracks. These cracks allow the air and energy in the external world to enter the internal of the work, initiating "a strong flow of air where a resonant space emerged."[45] While this is a silent piece, Lee invites viewers to sense the dynamic field of energy initiated by his action of dropping the stone. "When things that come from me and things that come from the outside world meet each other at a certain point, it makes my work ambivalent," he explained.[46] *Relatum* initiates "an event-space" where materials and surroundings, work and viewers' minds encounter and mutually stimulate each other. This moment of encounter evokes the spirituality in materials and therefore transcends the boundaries between "made and unmade, self and other, visible and invisible world."[47]

By adopting the notion of *yohaku* and "the responsive field" as his conceptual approach, Lee intends to present the unmade world that could not be objectified. Drawing viewers' attention to the invisible dynamics outside of the object, Lee sets materials free from human's controlling power. In his 1978 essay "Out of Control," Lee addressed the limitation of Karl Marx's (1818-1883) prevalent theory "historical materialism." He indicated that this theory placed "supreme value on the making of things by human beings based on clear ideas and practices" and implied an elimination of the unmade world.[48] The Western modernist values has established a hierarchy between culture and nature, claiming that culture, which is based on the humans' activity of production, is superior to nature.[49] However, the production mode has exhausted limited resources on the earth and has caused severe natural disasters. To confront this value system, Lee uses his work to call for a reconsideration of the relationships between art,

[45] Lee, 40.
[46] Lee, 31.
[47] Lee, 170.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Lee, 188.

human, and nature and a reexamination on the "totalizing modern value of 'making.'"[50] By evoking spirituality in raw materials, Lee invites viewers to rediscover of the value in the unmade, undefined things and to perceive the original view of the world.

From Post-Mono-ha to Cai Guoqiang: Re-making Materials

Lee's artistic practices established a radically new approach to negate the objecthood and to awaken spirituality in materials. His art making method constituted an autonomous consciousness underlying Japanese artists' works in the 1970s.[51] According to Toshiaki, during that period of time, Lee's body of passionate theory was difficult for Japanese critics to swallow, especially those who identified themselves "connected with the Western modernist culture and institutions."[52] Nonetheless, his theory "contained some facts which were difficult to ignore" and challenged the well-established aesthetic value of man-made object. His subversive methods carrying an Asian spiritual identity spurred Japanese artists' enthusiasm to rediscover Asian traditions for contemporary art practices.[53] However, Mono-ha artists' pursuit of a purified visual formats and a metaphysical material language resulted in a lack of influential and individualized artistic expression, which confined their works to academia and eliminated a social dimension. Moreover, since Lee's art theory was based on the comparison between East and West, his concentration on Asian spiritual quality made his work introspective. The comparative focus on East versus West also limited the innovations of the next generation of Japanese artists, including artists born in the 1950s.

[50] Ibid.
[51] Minemura, 17.
[52] Minemura, 18.
[53] Ibid.

While adopting Mono-ha's tradition of instilling new life into materials, this group of artists sought diverse ways of displaying materials and became more socially and culturally engaged with everyday life. Many of them were interested in site transformation and space intervention. They broke out of the static material language of Mono-ha and added new elements of "making" materials in their work.[54] This group was known as "Post-Mono-ha" in the 1980s. Key Post-Mono-ha artists include Kawamata Tadashi, Endo Toshikatsu, and Tatsuo Miyajima.[55] Kawamata (b. 1953) drew attention to the existing meaning of social space and used wooden materials to construct temporary space as a means of intervening in the urban environment (fig. 4). Endō (b. 1950) explored the cosmological relationship between fire and other physical elements such as earth, water, and air, with the belief that "fire does not destroy, but transforms."[56] With these endeavors, Post-Mono-ha artists intentionally escaped the confines of the metaphysical art language of Mono-ha.

When Cai was in China, he had developed an interest in the natural force of gunpowder and had begun to experiment with gunpowder painting. After moving to Japan, Cai worked closely with many Post-Mono-ha artists, especially Kawamata and Endō. These two artists' pioneering experiments in space intervention and their interest in matter and energy prompted Cai to further explore the uncontrollable power of gunpowder explosion.[57] At the time he arrived in Japan, Lee had established himself as a renowned artist in Japan. Cai befriended Lee and gained exposure to a range of Mono-ha arts. As Cai commented, he considered the purified material language of Mono-ha artists as an effective strategy to reveal the essence of materials

[54] Minemura, "What was 'MONO-HA'?."
[55] Ibid.
[56] Munroe and Joselit, 33.
[57] Ibid.

and to let materials speak for themselves.[58] Moreover, their appreciation of natural materials led him to reconsider the relationship between humans and nature.[59] However, according to Cai, the reductive form of Mono-ha's artistic expression is similar to that of Minimal art and Arte Povera in the West.[60] Although their starting points were different, this similarity confined Mono-ha arts to initiate enormous influences in the global art scene. Altogether, the reflection on Mono-ha arts propelled Cai to seek a more powerful material language and to develop a revolutionary way of art making.

During his studies in Japan, Cai found an increased interest in astrophysical theories, such as the Big Bang, black holes, and time tunnels. Since Japan has a long tradition of assimilating Western science and technology, he was able to access these cutting edge cosmologic theories, which he did not have opportunities to learn when he was in China. Meanwhile, he continued to study Daoism and adopted Daoist principles, such as the oneness of humans and the universe, the mutual transformation between *yin* and *yang* (positive and negative energy), and the concept of *qi* (the energy of all beings and the universe), to develop these concepts within his methodology. The investigation of cosmology and Daoism prompted Cai to perceive the converging points of Western science and Eastern philosophy.[61] For example, he found that the principle about the origin of the cosmos shares common points in these two domains, though from different perspectives. The Big Bang theory posits that the universe originated in a massive explosion of energy; it agrees with the Daoist notion of everything

[58] Cai Guoqiang, interview by Linda Huang.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Cai interview.
[61] Jian Huang, "Interview with Cai Guo-Qiang: From Quan Zhou to Venice," China Art Blog, http://www.xdsf.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=1325.

coming from nothing.[62] The cultural encounter between the East and West spurred him to seek a borderless artistic language that could initiate conversations between humans and the universe.

The combination of cosmological theories and Daoist principles led Cai to discover the primary spirit in gunpowder regarding its immediate combustive power and uncontrollable nature. The violent force of gunpowder presents a primitive energy of the universe through which life is generated, such as the Big Bang in the universe and human's fetal movement. As he stated,

> The nature of gunpowder corresponds to the power and spirit that humans have possessed since the beginnings of evolution. These concepts also correspond to characteristics of the universe itself. By producing work inspired by such spiritual correspondence, the meaning of the use of gunpowder went beyond being simply a means of production.[63]

By discovering the "spiritual correspondence" between the nature of gunpowder and the primary spirit of the universe, Cai developed a new mode of art creation: making art as a means to converse with what Daoism considers "the invisible power" in the universe. His innovative use of gunpowder explosion coincides neatly with Lee's conceptual view: art should be "a stimulating media" to initiate conversations with otherness.[64] Yet, by connecting himself with the infinite, unknown universe, Cai is able to perceive the presence of a bigger world beyond human's vision, which led him to transcend the limited human-centered mode of thinking. Moreover, inspired by Daoist notion that *yin* and *yang* can be mutually transformed, for example, he transformed the devastating power of an explosion to serve as a constructive method of sending signals to outer space, and thus of initiating dialogues between the earth and universe. The process of igniting gunpowder, which transforms its physicality from powder to fire and smoke, corresponds with Post-Mono-ha artists' innovation of "making" materials. Therefore, the

[62] Ibid.
[63] Munroe, 31.
[64] Lee, 11.

energy emitted from an explosion reveals the possibility to break out of the introspective artistic language of Mono-ha and to transcend the confines of time and space by reaching out to outer space.

Exploding the Great Wall

From 1989 to 1999, Cai created a series of large-scale explosion projects, the *Projects for Extraterrestrials* and *Projects for Human Beings*. In 1991, the P3 Art and Environment in Tokyo established a working relationship with him and provided enthusiastic support for his *Projects for Extraterrestrials*.[65] During this decade, he developed thirty two proposals for the *Projects for Extraterrestrials* and five for the *Projects for Human Beings*. These projects were conducted in different countries around the world, including China, Japan, German, France, Denmark, and Austria. With the desire to break out of a human-centered thinking mode, he attempted to reveal the ambiguous boundaries between humans (as self) and extraterrestrials (as the other) in these works. As Dana Hansen stated, the key concept of these projects was to create a primal experience of nature; drawing on the explosives force of gunpowder, Cai sought a "cosmic resonance" to "connect the celestial with the terrestrial."[66] Chinese curator Fei Dawei suggested the realization of these projects reflected the desire of the Japanese art community in the 1990s: to expand dialogues between Asian and Western art further beyond the Pacific Rim.[67]

Among these works, the *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters: Projects for Extraterrestrials No.10* (1993) is a compelling example reflecting Cai's ambition to seek a broader realm beyond human's confined perception. While Cai absorbed the conceptual underpinnings of Lee's work, such as creating "a responsive field" and encountering with

[65] Munroe, 289.
[66] Dana Hansen, *Cai Guo-Qiang* (London: Phaidon Press, 2002), 49.
[67] Ibid.

otherness, he extended Lee's *yohaku* space to a broader time-space that engaged humans, the earth, and the universe. The *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China* was conducted in 1993 in Jia Yu Guan, the westernmost edge of the Great Wall. This event took place right after the sunset and lasted for fifteen minutes.[68] Since the Great Wall is the only example of architecture on the earth that can be identified in outer space, Cai designed this explosion event with the hope that it could be observed by extraterrestrials.[69] He and his team of workers laid out the fuses for ten kilometers in the shape of a dragon from the end of the Great Wall into the desert.[70] When he ignited the fuses, the flames and smoke of the explosion appeared as the shape of a "dragon meridian."[71] According to Chinese fengshui theory, the dragon meridian is where the energy gathers in the earth.[72] By creating a "crack" of flame and dust on the earth, this explosion released the *qi* (energy) of the Great Wall to the universe. As a result, the sound, light, and heat of the explosion created a vast resonant space between the earth and universe. Thus, Cai expressed his desire to converse with extraterrestrials in the outer space and to explore the ambiguous boundaries between self and other.

As Cai stated in the conceptual statement of an earlier project, *I Am an Extraterrestrial, Project for Meeting with Tenjin (Heavenly Gods): Project for Extraterrestrials No. 4* (1990),

> In fact, as we explore deeper into the universe, we play the role of the extraterrestrial. For human beings, however, it is more important to find the supernatural from within. Through this existence, we can reach beyond the physical world and connect with the power and spirit of the universe. At the moment of this connection, a human being becomes an extraterrestrial.[73]

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[68] Munroe, 142.
[69] Hansen, 49.
[70] Takashi Serizawa, *Primeval Fireball: The Project for Projects* (Tokyo: P3 Art and Environment, 1991), 9.
[71] Munroe, 144.
[72] Ibid.
[73] "Project Concept," www.caiguoqiang.com.

This statement reflects Cai's attempts to perceive humans' existence from an extraterrestrial point of view. By creating the moment of "encountering otherness," he unveiled the blurred division between humans and extraterrestrials, implying a mutually saturating relationship between self and other. Moving beyond a human-centered perspective, Cai provided a higher position to perceive humans and extraterrestrials as a unity. Moreover, this statement reveals a deeper meaning underlying Cai's work: employing gunpowder explosion as an artistic strategy, Cai does not attempt to produce a fixed object or to materialize an idea, but instead he aspires to "reach beyond the physical world." By initiating an earth-shaking explosion event, Cai liberates his material from the manacle of its physicality. The destruction of its physical being releases the "qi," an invisible energy/spirit, from gunpowder and allows it to reach out to what Daoism considers "the invisible power" of the universe. Therefore, at the instant of explosion, Cai created what he called "a chaotic moment of vagueness" where he was able to perceive a larger realm beyond the physical world and to transcend ambiguous boundaries between materiality and spirituality. In his writings, Lee has questioned the production mode of art making and has conceptually negated the materiality of his work. However, his replacement of the art object with unmade materials inhabits his work from overthrowing the conventional mode of production, circulation, and reception. Stepping further than Lee, Cai's artistic use of gunpowder explosion allows his materials to completely detach from its physicality. The ephemeral, devastating energy released by gunpowder explosion creates a resonant space that fundamentally shatters the constituted circuits of artistic production.

The choice of time and location in Cai's work plays a crucial role in extending the social and political dimensions of his projects. Cai conducted this work in 1993 right after the end of the Cold War. This historical shift led to the collapse of East-West antagonism and pushed

toward a borderless globalized world. The location of this event, Jia Yu Guan, is the west end of the Great Wall and the starting point of the Silk Road, symbolizing the edge between the "East" and "West." Conducted at a watershed moment in history and at the geographical boundary of the East and West, this event reflects Cai's ambition to cross boundaries. At the moment that the fuses burst into fire and smoke, the light, heat, speed and compressive energy of the explosion transformed the time and space of Jia Yu Guan into an original point of the universe where the primary fireball divided chaos and lit the darkness. This explosive moment bridged the ancient and present time, bringing viewers back to the ancient China where the Great Wall was built to defend from invasion. At that time, Chinese soldiers used gunpowder to submit signals informing other soldiers of enemies' activities. By transforming this military strategy into a way of submitting signals to communicate with the unknown universe, Cai seems to reverse the meaning of the Great Wall so that it is no longer a symbol of boundary, but an event of breaking down borders between the East and West, time and space. As Cai's coworker Takashi Serizawa stated, this work is "an expression of our times, an expression of union extended to the universe as a whole."[74]

As the smoke gradually rose up to sky and disappeared in the darkness, the emptiness and tranquility after the explosion brought viewers' minds far beyond the event itself and left a vast space of imagination for them. However, this emptiness is not nothingness, but a refreshment of minds and a state of "letting go." Echoing the aesthetics of blank space in traditional Chinese painting and Lee's *yohaku* space, Cai initiated the moment of "a sudden enlightenment," revealing an unspeakable, ungraspable scene that is beyond the material world and transcends the human ego. Moreover, the speed and energy of the gunpowder explosion led the site to return to

[74] Takashi Serizawa, "Focus: Going Beyond the Wall," in *Cai Guo*-qiang, ed. Dana Henson (London: Phaidon Press, 2002), 110.

the original point of the universe, which contains "the complete possibility and pure potential of the beginning."[75] By unifying his art with the infinite universe, Cai liberates himself from the predetermined categories and opens up unlimited possibilities for expanding his artistic universe. In the late 1980s, Cai quickly gained popularity in Japan. Japanese art critics perceived the radical nature of his art as a new force in Asia that could stand out in the international art scene. They promoted his art as a mode of "Asian heroism" to compete with Western art.[76] This imposition led Cai to question: What does it mean to be an Asian artist? What is the future of Asian art?[77] In the next chapter, I will discuss how Cai responded to Japanese critics' reception of his work by integrating Daoist philosophy into his conceptual approach and opened up broader domains of life, civilization and the universe in his art.

[75] Minemura, 10.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

Chapter Two
Crossing Boundaries:
The Inner Universe, External Universe, and The Invisible Artist

At the moment of the explosion, heaven, earth, and humans are all out of themselves, and time-space ceases or returns to its origin.[78]

Humanity existing in the universe and the universality in humans are a single thing. When people feel the truth and recognize it as part of themselves, the universe is reduced to human size and becomes very close, and humans are unified with the edgeless universe.[79]

I am not the real artist. The real artist is "the invisible artist" behind my work.[80]

Reflections on Japanese Art

In the late 1980s, Cai's work received great attention in the Japanese art milieu. Due to the powerful visual and psychological impact of his work, Japanese art critics regarded his work as a mode of "Asian heroism" that was able to contend against Western art.[81] The way in which Japanese critics situated his work led Cai to reflect on his own position as an Asian artist and to reconsider the problems existing in Asian art. He noted that, although Japanese culture thinks from the perspectives of the universe and nature as Chinese culture does, their mode of thinking is quite different from Chinese due to its close ties with the West.[82] Japan's long history of adapting Western political and economic models has resulted in contradictions between modernization and traditional culture. To counterbalance the Westernized value system, Japan gave lots of weight to traditional culture and aesthetics, such as the tea ceremony and flower arrangement, aiming to reinforce the uniqueness of Japanese cultural identity and to differentiate from the West. However, the significant presence of the West in Japan has created a deep-seated set of standards that Japanese artists refer to in their work.

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[78] Cai, Primeval Fireball: The Project for Projects (Tokyo: P3 Art and Environment, 1991).
[79] Ibid.
[80] Cai interview by Huang.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

In his book *Cai Guoqiang* (2001), Chinese art critic Fei Dawei described the dilemma in Japanese art: "while there was a proliferation of promising artists in Japan, Japan seemed perplexed with many obstacles in its efforts to balance national pride and the cult of Western culture."[83] As reflected in Mono-ha arts, although this group of artists initiated a subversive art movement in Japan, their conceptual underpinning was based on the comparison between Western and Eastern art. Directed towards the confines of the brain-centered thinking in Western modernist art, Mono-ha artists drew on the perspectives from Asian traditional philosophy to create a "new site of expression" and to reach out of the shackle of a fixed art object.[84] However, using Western art as an external reference, Mono-ha arts engaged closely with the Western history of art and shared formal similarity with Minimal Art and Italy's Arte Povera's.[85] This similarity prevented Mono-ha artists from initiating groundbreaking influences in the global art scene.

The reflections on Japanese art spurred Cai to raise the questions, such as: Who am I? Who is the East? Who is Asia? Where is the future of contemporary Asian art?[86] Instead of making slight formal and ideological changes, he aspired to bring fundamental changes to Asian art and to liberate it from both the dominant influences of the Western art and the orthodoxy of the traditional Asian art.[87] In order to distance himself from the Western history of art, he intentionally avoided the use of Western art as an external reference and attempted to think from the core of Asian culture. With this notion in tow, Cai returned to Chinese tradition and incorporated the Daoist geomancy *feng shui* and the principles of Chinese medicine in his

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[83] Dawei Fei and Andrei Ujica, *Cai Guoqiang*, translated by Elizabeth Jian-Xing Too, Yu Hsiao-Hwei, and Tess Thomson (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 9.
[84] Lee
[85] Cai interview.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

conceptual language. According to him, *feng shui* and Chinese medicine have a sophisticated methodological system for understanding human's relationship with the universe.[88] These two fields of Chinese cultural legacy embody a Chinese spatio-temporal concept, which emphasized on the unification of humans and the universe as well as the invisible energy "*qi*."[89] Cai continued, all the questions that humans attempt to explore can be traced back to the fundamental inquiries about time and space.[90] Therefore, the principles in *feng shui* and Chinese medicine are able to contribute alternative perspectives to the inquiries about time and space and to open up new realms of life, culture, and history.

In attempt to bring new possibilities to Asian art, Cai rediscovered the contemporary value in Chinese cultural tradition and instilled new vitality in his work. Based on the Daoist notion that humans and the universe constitute a unified ensemble, he developed the idea of "using art to explore the inner universe and external universe."[91] To enrich the connotation of the "inner universe" and "external universe," he incorporated the theories of Western cosmology and the principles of *feng shui* and Chinese medicine into these two conceptions. According to Cai, in his work, the external universe encompasses the astronomical notions, such as extraterrestrial, the origin of the universe, the black hole, and the time tunnel; inner universe is concerned about *qi*, energy, and life from the perspectives of Chinese medicine and *feng shui*.[92] Grafting different temporal-spacial theories in the East and West together, Cai initiated his cross-cultural art practice, in which he transcended the boundaries between art and science and pushed the borders of contemporary art. In the 1980s, Japan paid great attention to the development of

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[88] Fei, 9.
[89] According to Oxford dictionary, *qi* (气 in Chinese) means the circulating life force whose existence and properties are the basis of much Chinese philosophy and medicine.
[90] Cai Interview.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

science and high technology in order to catch up with the Western economies. Corresponding to this social trend, Cai's idea of the inner universe and external universe adapted into Japan's need and enhanced the value of his presence in the Japanese art milieu.[93]

While gaining inspiration from Chinese cultural traditions, Cai hoped to break through the convention of Chinese literati painting, such as the ink painting and calligraphy, which represented the intellectual thoughts and moral quality of the painters. This deep-rooted tradition had dominated Chinese cultural system for thousands of years and had become a heavy burden that hindered Chinese artists to create ground-breaking new forms of work. In order to foster innovation and propel the development of Asian art, Cai strategically used the destructive power of gunpowder to explode the orthodoxy of traditional Chinese art and to create radical new forms of art. As he explained, "when I was still in China, I started to use dynamite to avoid painting like a 'literati' and to oppose my spatio-temporal environment—to destroy it. While you can arrange explosives as you please, you cannot control the explosion itself. This fills you with a great feeling of freedom."[94] During his residence in Japan, Cai gained further exposure to the Western avant-garde art, which instilled a sense of "recklessness" in his art.[95] According to him, he was greatly inspired by Western artists, such as Wassily Kandinsky, Salvador Dali, and Andy Warhol, whose works informed him that "art allows you to do anything and everything."[96] Their sense of "recklessness" reinforced his belief to "pursue the spirit of total freedom."[97] As Fei has commented, "on the one hand, Cai uses the form of Western contemporary art to get away from traditional Chinese art. On the other hand, he uses the spirit of Chinese tradition to free himself

[93] Ibid.
[94] Fei, 132.
[95] Fei, 12.
[96] Primeval Fireball
[97] Cai and Fei, 133.

from the system of Western contemporary art."[98] In light of Fei's insight into Cai's work, this chapter is devoted to exploring the interwoven tensions between traditional and contemporary, destruction and construction in Cai's cross-boundary art practice and the ways in which he reinvented Chinese cultural tradition for liberating Asian art.

The Inner Universe and External Universe

Based on his notions of the inner universe and external universe, Cai created a series of large-scale gunpowder paintings in 1991, serving as the conceptual plans for the *Project for Humankind* and the *Project for Extraterrestrials*. Their common themes involved the inquiry into the origin of the universe, the planets, and time/space as well as the desire to connect with the invisible power in nature. During his study in Japan, Cai developed his skills in formulating gunpowder fuses and controlling explosions, which allowed him to use the gunpowder fuses as his "ink" to "paint." When creating a gunpowder painting, he spread fuses along the images that he drafted on a paper lying on the ground and covered the paper with cardboards and stones to eliminate the flame and smoke generated by the explosion. He preferred to work on the Japanese hemp paper whose texture reacts to the explosion in a sensitive and delicate manner.[99] By igniting the fuses to explode the paper, the explosion left radiant effects on the paper and created radically beautiful and violent images.

Cai's gunpowder painting can be understood as a means of exploding traditional Chinese ink paintings. According to him, painting with gunpowder and exploding the painting led him to reach "a sensation of both liberation and a destructive force" and to challenge the conventional

[98] Fei, 12.
[99] Fei, 11.

Asian aesthetics.[100] This radical nature of his gunpowder painting impressed the Japanese art milieu. In 1991, the P3 Art and Environment at Tokyo organized Cai's solo exhibition, entitled "Primeval Fireball: The Project for Projects," in which seven large folding screens of his gunpowder paintings were showcased in a radial pattern in the gallery space. With the show title "Primeval Fireball," the Curator and Director of *P3* Takashi Serizawa (b. 1951) hoped to promote the understanding of Cai's investigation of the mysteries of human existence by returning to the origin of the universe.[101] As Takashi indicated in the exhibition catalogue,

> Cai has the quality of a shaman, a totally new type of shaman for the planetary age. I don't consider his work in relation to "China", or 'Asia' as his home. His work must be considered in a more universal area that includes the earth, the planets, and the universe.[102]

Inspired by the idea of Da Zi Bao (big character posters), a tool for propaganda during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Cai used these gunpowder paintings as a "propaganda tool" to publicize his idea and to attract potential funding for realizing the explosion events.[103] After the exhibition, these propagandistic conceptual drafts received great attention from a number of art organizations and foundations worldwide. By 2004, many of these conceptual drafts that were conceived to take place on earth had been realized with the support of a variety of organizations.[104]

In 1992, one of these gunpowder paintings *Fetus Movement II: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 9*, (fig. 6-7), was realized at a military base in Hannover Munden, German, commissioned by the Kassel International Art Exhibition "Encountering the Others" (1992), a group exhibition introducing non-western artists' work. As one of the selected "oriental" artists,

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[100] Fei, 11.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Serizawa, P3.
[103] Fei, 131.
[104] Serizawa, P3

Cai employed the form of Chinese *feng shui* rituals to initiate an explosion event and to spur the *qi* (energy) of this German military base. This work shows the ways in which he has transformed Chinese rituals into a radical mode of art-making that liberates Asian art from a preexisting category. Using the gunpowder explosion to simulate the fetal movement of the earth, the universe, and human spirit, Cai attempted to explore their interrelationship and to return to the original time-space of the universe.[105] By creating this explosion event, Cai established a collaborative relationship with the invisible power in the universe, leading to the unification of inner universe and external universe as well as a harmony between art, human, and nature.

To foster a "fetal movement" on the site, Cai conceived the site as a uterus and incorporated the Chinese geomantic technique of *feng shui* to nurture the vitality of the field.[106] Following the *feng shui* principle that "running water does not rot" (the extended meaning is that motivation nurtures vitality), Cai and his team workers used an excavator to dig a canal that constituted the outermost circle of the site and then diverted water from a nearby river into the canal in order to foster the positive *qi* in the field. Inside the circle river, gunpowder fuses were buried underground in the pattern of three concentric circles and eight transverse lines, which looked like the latitude and longitude lines of the earth. This pattern was seized from the Daoist *tai chi ba gua* (Eight Trigrams), a cosmology used as the one of the main *feng shui* tools for exploring the invisible power in nature and the changing energy of all beings.

The central part of the *ba gua* field is *tai chi*, a circle pattern with two semicircle symbols of *yin* and *yang* in it (*yin* as darkness and *yang* as light), which is regarded in Daoism as the

[105] Cai, Fetus Movement Statement.
[106] According to Oxford dictionary, *feng shui* (风水 in Chinese meaning the wind and water) is a system of laws considered to govern spatial arrangement and orientation in relation to the flow of energy (*qi*), and whose favorable or unfavorable effects are taken into account when sitting and designing buildings.

origin of time/space and contains the eternal truth encompassing the presence of all beings and contradictory forces in the universe.[107] Cai sat at the center of this *ba gua* field with the sensors of an electrocardiograph and an electro-encephalogram attached to his body, which measured his heart rate and changes happened to his brain during the explosion.[108] Meanwhile, seven earthquake sensors were planted in ground from the center to the edge of the site and were linked with a seismograph located in an underground room built directly underneath the center where Cai sat. Once the fuses were ignited, a series of explosions rocked the site radiating from the center of the site (the *tai chi*) and towards the lines within the *ba gua*. The loud bangs and the clouds of smoke produced by the explosion immediately transcended the time/space of this site and transformed it into a chaotic birth point of the universe. At this transient and vibrating moment of the "fetal movement," the limited inner universe of man's body was unified with the infinite time and space of the universe. During the five second-long explosion event, all measuring equipments and a diagram secretly tracked the pulse of the artist, the shake of the earth, and recorded the "invisible phenomena of co-vibration between humans and earth."[109]

In his statement for this work, Cai indicated that the purpose of this event is "to unify the fetal movements of the earth and human spirit, and to feel the origin of the fetus movement of the universe which created the universe itself, and all existence within it."[110] By initiating a ritualistic event for returning to the origin of time/space and connecting the inner universe as humans' body with the external universe as the infinite nature, this project reflects what Japanese critic Yuko Hasegawa summarized the three fundamental concepts underlying Cai's work: "*Zheng ti guan* (grasping the whole), *giu ben guan* (going beyond the surface to find the essence

[107] Geling Shang, Liberation as Affirmation: the Religiosity of Zhuangzi and Nietzsche,
[108] Monroe, 139.
[109] Cai, Fetus Movement Statement.
[110] Ibid.

of things), and *diao ping guan* (maintaining balance)."[111] Rather than three independent notions, these three concepts complemented each other as a three-sided pyramid. However, while Hasegawa explained the embodiment of each notion in Cai's work, she did not further discuss their interrelationship and the core idea underpinning these notions. In my understanding, the underlying spirit founded these three notions is the Chinese philosophy of "*tian ren he yi*" (天人合一 in Chinese meaning the unification of man and the universe), which parallels with the unification of the inner universe and external universe that Cai highlights in this work.

"*Tian ren he yi*" represents a Chinese spatio-temporal perspective and is closely related to the ways in which Chinese understand the universe. In Chinese characters, the word "universe" is written as 宇 and 宙 (pronounced as "yu zhou") meaning time and space respectfully. This word implies the Chinese temporal-spacial concepts: time and space together constitutes the universe.[112] According to Chinese scholar Wang Qiheng's (1947) *feng shui* theory, the universe is a spatio-temporal energy field that exerts invisible forces to humans and all beings present in it.[113] He compares the universe and the human body to two magnetic fields; the equilibration between these two fields shapes an auspicious energy field. Therefore, in order to keep a balance between the inner universe in humans' body and the external universe, humans should perceive ourselves as a part of the universe and to maintain a harmonious relationship with it. In light of this theory, the three notions that Hasegawa summed up as the underpinnings of Cai's work can be regarded as three means for achieving the highest moral status of "*tian ren he yi*." During the thousands years of Chinese history, "*tian ren he yi*" had saturated all aspects of Chinese arts and culture and had founded the philosophical base of *feng shui* and Chinese medicine. For example,

[111] Yuko Hasegawa, New Order out of Chaos.
[112] Xunzi.
[113] Qiheng Wang, *Research of Feng Shui Theory* (Tianjing University Press, 1992), 144.

when *feng shui* masters choose a good location for housing, they analyze the surrounding energy fields in order to connect people with the good *qi* and nurture welfare in life. Similarly, in Chinese medicine, it is believed that to preserve long-term health, humans should adapt their dining and daily activities to the seasonal change in nature. Therefore, through the perspectives of *feng shui* and Chinese medicine, both emphasize the presence of *qi* in nature and the interrelationship between man and nature, Cai intended to unite his works of art with the invisible natural power and to borrow power from nature.

Collaborating with "the Invisible Artist"

Besides the cooperation among the team workers, the realization of Cai's explosion events heavily depends on the timing, the humidity level, the wind speed, as well as the invisible energy field surrounded, all of which influence the combustion temperature of the gunpowder fuses. Only when all these elements reach a harmonious state can Cai achieve the success of an explosion event. Therefore, Cai's work follows the Chinese military principle "*tian shi*, *di li*, *ren he*" (the right time, right location, and right people). To him, art creation is like preparing for a war, which neatly tapes with the location of fetus movement, a military base.[114] I will further discuss the relationship between art and war in his work in the third chapter. The need to sustain a balanced relationship between these visible and invisible forces led Cai to develop a new mode of art-making and to collaborate with "the invisible artists," the power from nature, which could help him to win the battle of art.

In *Fetus Movemen II*, Cai adopted the principles of *feng shui* and *tai chi* and simulated an Daoist ritual for evoking the fetal movement of earth and the universe. By this means, he transformed the traditional Chinese ritual into a collaborative mode of art creation, connecting

[114] Cai and Fei, *Cai Guoqiang*, 132.

with the unknown and invisible natural forces. According to him, the inspiration for creating this explosion event originated from the traditional customs in his hometown Quanzhou where the Daoist rituals had saturated in all aspects of daily life.[115] As the local custom of Spring Festival, the villagers would hold a grand celebratory ritual called "*Yin Tian Gong*" meaning welcoming the god of heaven. In this event, villagers set off fireworks and firecrackers to reach out to the power of *Tian Gong* (the god of heaven) who is expected to secure a harvest season and the fertility of the land in the coming year. Such firecracker events are often tied in with life ceremonies, such as wedding, funeral, and baby shower, in Quanzhou. Therefore, these traditions were deeply implanted in Cai's consciousness and became a source of inspiration for developing his artistic methods.

Cai noted that, in the old time, the Daoist ritual worked as a means for people to identify their position in the universe in a humble manner.[116] By sending request to the nature god and seeking for responses from its power, this ritual by nature is an interactive communication with the unknown natural power. In *Fetus Movement II*, Cai adapted this dialogic mode into his explosion event. Using gunpowder explosion for sending "signals" to the universe, he sought to initiate a conversation and to establish a "co-creation" relationship with the mysterious power of nature. As he has indicated in an interview, "I am not the real artist. The real artist is 'the invisible artist' behind my work."[117] With this notion in tow, Cai attempted to create what he called a "perfect system of art-nature-man" in his work.[118] He explained that "man is weak and his life is short, but the time and space surrounding humans is strong and eternal. Therefore, we should borrow the power from nature. When humans, art, and nature are unified, the perfect

[115] Munroe, 22.
[116] Cai interview.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.

system will emerge."[119] Therefore, recognizing the limited power of humans as individual, Cai proposed a new mode of art-making, emphasizing a mutually corresponding relationship between man and nature and a devout manner of borrowing power from nature.

By establishing an alternative view of relationship between artists, nature, and materials, Cai's gunpowder art initiated a conversation between contemporary Chinese art and Japanese art. His explosion events extended post-war Japanese artists' exploration on creative freedom and their experiment with materials, space, and the interrelationship between sprit and matter. Since the 1950s, Japanese artists had begun to explore a new way of interacting with their materials. Rather than emphasizing artists' role as the subjective/active creator, they paid increasing attention to the energy inherent in materials. This shifting trend of de-authorizing artists led them to break with the confines of canvas and studio.

In the 1950s, the Gutai artists stated in their manifesto that artists should play a mediating role to spur the inner life of materials via their physical interactions with materials.[120] Combining with improvised performance and action, they played with a variety of matter, such as water, mud, and fire, in order to evoke "the scream of matter itself."[121] In the 1960s and 1970s, Mono-ha artists continued to develop Gutai group's conceptual approaches, such as discarding the man-made illusive forms and discovering the essential nature of materials. Focusing less on the interaction between body movement and materials, Mono-ha artists explored the relationship between materials and their surroundings. They gave up their authority to "make" an object, but instead created a site for evoking the spirituality and invisible power in materials. In both groups, these artists challenged the traditional art production mode and pushed toward a collaborative relationship with materials. Rather than exerting power over materials,

[119] Primeval Fireball.
[120] Munroe, 258.
[121] Ibid.

they attempted to release art from its confines and to liberate the human spirit through their interaction with matter.[122]

The Gutai group and Mono-ha artists founded radically new methods for fostering a mutually saturated relationship between artists and materials, art and nature. Their art-making approaches provide a new perspective for understanding Cai's material aesthetics and his revolutionary mode of art creation. Comparing works of Gutai and Mono-ha artists, Cai responded by developing their conceptual approaches and took a violent approach to spur the inherent energy in materials. By "destroying" gunpowder fuses, he hoped to initiate an "energy exchange" between visible and invisible forces in the universe, through which he went beyond Mono-ha's "art of encounter" and moved toward the "co-creation" with the natural power. This collaborative relationship between the artist and nature surpasses the hierarchy that humans set up to become superior to nature, liberates both the artist and materials from their physical existence, and therefore injects new vigor into his art.

The New Aesthetics of Poetic Violence

In his work, Cai started with destroying his material and ended with giving new birth to the time/space of a site. By this means, he investigated "both the destructive and the constructive nature of gunpowder" and explored "how destruction can create something new."[123] Cai's understanding of gunpowder's dual nature led to the revolutionary spirit of his work. The destructive power of the gunpowder freed him from the orthodox Chinese art and the confines of traditional material aesthetics. In return, the energy exchange happened during the explosion

[122] Munroe, 258.
[123] Guggenheim Museum, "Cai Guoqiang Gunpowder Drawings," http://artscurriculum.guggenheim.org/lessons/cai_L2.php (accessed May 3, 2010).

emancipate the gunpowder from the artist's manipulation. Moreover, the destructive and constructive aspects of the gunpowder explosion led to the double-meaning of his art. As reflected in *Festus Movement II*, this event can be read as a Daoist Ritual for meeting with the *Tian Gong* and achieving the unification of man, earth and the universe. On the other hand, exploding the site of a military base added another layer of meaning to this event, especially when tracing the history of *ba gua* as a Chinese military strategy for creating an advantageous matrix. With these considerations, Cai made an ambiguous connection between a Daoist ritual and a military maneuver, revealing the contradictions between humans' utopian civilization and the violent war history. Therefore, the duality and contradictions present in his works strengthened the emotional tensions and enhanced the psychological impacts of his art.

The contradictions present in Cai's work externalized his inner conflicts and struggles. Growing up in China, Cai was saturated by the Chinese cultural traditions and inherited the spirit of these traditions. However, having a strong will to rebel the traditional art form and aesthetics, Cai used the destructive power of gunpowder to "explode" the conventions of traditional Chinese art and forged a new aesthetics of "poetic violence." According to Chinese critic Zhang Zhaohui, the gunpowder explosion in Cai's work represents the notion and form of "*qi*," which is a key notion in Chinese traditional arts and culture.[124] In the traditional Chinese ink painting, especially the landscape painting, painters favored to use empty space or light ink to present the energy of the mountains and rivers, which is visualized as the fog surrounded landscape. They used the notion *qi* as a "non-being" for grasping the intangible and mystic essence of nature. The

[124] Zhaohui Zhang, *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: The Art of Xu Bing and Cai Guo-Qiang*.

empty space worked as the "breathing path" in a painting, opening up the painting with the external world and evoking the vitality of the painting.[125]

In *Fetus Movement II*, the diffusion of dust and smoke generated by the gunpowder explosion embodies the similar spiritual quality of the "*qi*" in the traditional Chinese paintings. The gradual disappearance of the smoke in the explosion created a poetic and mysterious atmosphere on the site, which transformed the time-space of the site and reenacted a big bang moment at the original point of the universe where there is no people, no construction, but only chaos and emptiness. At this transient and violent moment, Cai created a poetic beauty and evoked a new birth to both the site and himself. Therefore, the *qi* generated in a gunpowder explosion allowed his work to obtain the poetic spirit of Chinese literati art, but meanwhile liberated his art from the shackles of traditional art forms. Furthermore, connecting his work with the ubiquitous *qi* in the universe, Cai expanded the temporal-spatial dimensions of his work and therefore deconstructed the linear perspective in the conventional Western art.

Cai's artistic strategy of creating new via destruction was also inspired by the Chinese revolutionary culture "No Destruction, No Construction," a popular Maoist slogan during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). As Monroe has noted in the Guggenheim exhibition catalogue *Cai Guoqiang: I Want to Believe*, "Mao's slogan 'No Destruction, No Construction' is central to Cai's practice…For an artist whose main material is gunpowder, Cai must literally destroy in order to create."[126] Growing up during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the revolutionary culture of this movement has been deeply ingrained in Cai's mind. He explained that "the Culture Revolution began as a political movement that was basically an effort to overthrow traditional Chinese culture and heritage, to examine its failings and consider

[125] Qi Shao, *The Reading of Qi in Chinese Landscape Painting* (Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Press, 2006)
[126] Munroe, 22.

alternative directions for the future of Chinese culture."[127] While the Culture Revolution caused a destructive impact on cultural and economic development in China during the 1970s, Cai creatively applied its utopian ideology to his artistic practice and reinforced the revolutionary spirit of his explosion events.

This strategy of "No Destruction, No Construction" is best embodied in his later work "No Destruction, No Construction: Bombing the Taiwan Museum of Art," 1998 (fig. 8). In this work, he "exploded" the Taiwan Museum of Art to evoke the rebirth of it. This event served as a spiritual baptism to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the museum and to instill new vitality in it. By creating a spectacle of an exploding museum, Cai challenged viewers' conventional aesthetic experiences in a museum, dissolving the long-established framework of the museum as a prestigious art institution. By this means, Cai extended the social-cultural dimensions of his work and initiated a subversive "cultural revolution" in the global scene of contemporary art. In the 1990s, Cai's work fit into the urgent desire of Japanese art scene to create "groundbreaking" work for attracting attention of the global art scene. His artistic use of gunpowder explosion created "ruptures" and "chaos" that disturbed the highly institutionalized field of contemporary art and therefore brought new blood for renewing the self-contained, West-dominated history of art.

[127] Munroe and Joselit, 162.

Chapter Three
Simulation, Displacement, and Transformation: Decoding the Mushroom Cloud and Remaking History

A million years is contained in a second, yet we tend to forget the second as soon as it happens.[128]

We were given a kind of Morse code when we were created by the universe. The human spirit was born at the time of the creation of the universe, and actually contains vivid memories of the event. Therefore, at a deeper level, it has the insight into human direction, potential and danger.[129]

Be vertical against or parallel to the virtual, stab through the protection of reality with the sword of virtualness. This time, the once-invincible real is the defeated one.[130]

During the early 1990s, Cai conducted his art projects all around the world. In his career, Japan opened up a window for him to extend his horizon toward the global art milieu and to further his artistic exploration into broader fields including politics, culture, humanity, and history. As mentioned in chapter two, Cai's work was perceived by Japanese art scene as a sort of "Asian heroism" to compete with Western art.[131] However, he considered this reception as a confined Cold War mentality and was not willing to be restricted by such opinions.[132] As the Cold War ended in 1991, the antagonism between East and West collapsed; the political, economic, and cultural opposition between the two was dissolving as well. In his book *Hou Hanru: On the Mid-Ground* (2003), Chinese art critic Hou Hanru (b. 1963) noted that this historical moment led to a new reality of globalization and provided Chinese overseas artists who emerged in the 1980s with new opportunities.[133] Cai, as a perceptive seeker, seized this occasion

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[128] Robert Smithson, "Entropy And The New Monuments," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).
[129] Guoqiang Cai, "P3 Interview with Cai," in *Primeval Fireball*, edited by Rumiko Kanesaka (Tokyo: P3 Art & Environment, 1991).
[130] China Tracy, "RMB City Manifesto," accessed May 28, 2012, http://caofei.com/texts.aspx?id=26&year=2007&aitid=1.
[131] Cai interview by Huang.
[132] Jian Huang, Interview.
[133] Hanru Hou, *Hou Hanru: On the Mid-Ground* (Beijing: Timezone 8, 2003), 75.

to pursuit a broader platform for further developing his work. In 1996, after residing in Japan for ten years, Cai decided to move to the United States in order to gain more artistic freedom and to further expand his art practice. As Chinese art critic Zhang Zhaohui (b.1966) explained in his book *Where Heaven and Earth Meet* (2005), Cai's relocation led to his shifting attention "from celestial to terrestrial concerns" and propelled him further to explore more socially-engaged issues such as the contradictory relationships between art and war, civilization and violence.[134]

The history and culture of Japan evoked Cai's deeper reflection on the meaning of war, violence, and peace. In 1994, he was commissioned by the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art to contribute a work for the exhibition "Creativity in Asian Art Now." For this occasion, he created an explosion event *Earth Has Its Black Hole Too: Project for Extraterrestrials No.* 16, (fig. 9), in the Hiroshima Central Park, memorializing the traumatic event of the atomic bomb being dropped in Hiroshima in 1945.[135] Using fireworks for imitating a reversal mushroom cloud near the atomic bomb dome, Cai drew an analogy between the devastating force of nuclear weapons and the all-devouring black hole, hinting at their power that could potentially destroy the planet. Moreover, by staging this historical event in Hiroshima, a city that was destroyed by the atomic bomb, but has been rebuilt as a peaceful modern city, Cai hoped to unveil the dialectic relationship between destruction and construction, violence and peace.

During his residence in Japan, Cai has developed a strong interest in the metaphorical image of the mushroom cloud. In his interview with critic Octavio Zaya, Cai stated:

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[134] Zhaohui Zhang, *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Xu Bing & Cai Guoqiang* (Beijing: Timezone 8, 2005), 21.
[135] Munroe, 150.

> I think mushroom cloud is the LOGO for the twentieth century. As a symbol of the progress of victory of science, the mushroom clouds, with all their visual impact, have a tremendous material and spiritual influence on human society.[136]

At the time when Cai moved to the United States, numerous protests and discussions had risen concerning the shaping of the post-Cold War world order and international security. Acts such as the Nuclear Disarmament and Arms Control has been launched to eliminate the Arms Race by a range of non-governmental organizations, including Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Greenpeace, and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.[137] However, due to the crucial role played by the nuclear weapon in global politics, there had been a paradox between the reduction of nuclear weapon and the needs for enhancing a nation's deterrence power.[138] Along with the introduction of the "no-first-use" policy, the world superpowers competed with each other by developing their strategic defense system. Therefore, as the world entered the post-atomic age, the continuing existence of nuclear weapon still threatened the peace of the emerging new world order. In response to this situation, many of Cai's works created during this transitional period reflected on the power system of the post-Cold War world and posed questions about the potential threats beneath the protected reality of our society.

After Cai moved to the United States, he continued to explore his lifelong interests in military and politics in his work. In his biography *Cai Guoqiang: What I Am Thinking About* (2012), he indicated: "if I was born in the ancient time, I would possibly be a great general in the army who leads the troops to fight in the battle."[139] To him, making a successful piece of artwork is like fighting for a war, which requires the manipulating of details that point to the

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[136] Zaya, 29.
[137] Mitsuru Kurosawa, *Nuclear Disarmament in the New World Order* (Osaka : Faculty of Law, Osaka University, 1994), 10.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Yang Zhao and Li Weijin, *Cai Guoqiang: What I Am Thinking About* (Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2012).

right time, right place, and right people. Cai's interests in military and political issues has a special presence in his works throughout his career. His major material gunpowder (火药 in Chinese, literally meaning fire medicine), one of the four great inventions of China, has a long history of military use. Originated as a by-product of Chinese alchemy, gunpowder was developed into explosives for against the Mongols in Song Dynasty (as early as 904 A.D.).[140] As the earliest form of firearm, the invention of gunpowder and its spread to the Middle East and Europe motivated the development of diverse forms of bombs and ammunition for warfare through until contemporary times.

The explosive nature and violent history of gunpowder unavoidably instills an underlying theme of war and violence in Cai's art. In his *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10*, the fire and smoke rose from the end of the Great Wall evoked viewers' memory of the beacon fire that was used for defending invasion in the ancient warfare.[141] In the *Fetus Movement II: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 9*, Cai made an ambiguous connection between the primitive spirit of the universe and human's primeval desire for violence. In both works, Cai created an event in which he ritualized violence and simulated scenes of war. In doing so, he rendered a certain code or a kind of unspeakable language to reveal our suspended memories of war and violence that have been obscured by daily life.

Taking advantages of the vibrating power of the gunpowder explosions, Cai's work creates strong physical and psychological effects to awaken the hidden memory of war encoded in our body and mind. He believes that "humans are given a kind of 'Morse code' when we were

[140] Jack Kelly, *Gunpowder: Alchemy, Bombards, and Pyrotechnics: The History of the Explosive that Changed the World* (Jackson, TN: Perseus Books Group: 2005), 3.
[141] In ancient China, dried wolf dung was burned to make beacon fires signaling an invading enemy.

created by the universe."[142] Using Morse code as an analogy, Cai implies that human spirit inherits the consciousness of the universe from the original point of life, the big bang point. The memory of explosion embedded as a code in human evolution and shaped the combative nature of humans. It functions similar as the acid sequence in DNA code that carries the genetic information and determines the traits of life as early as the fetus is formed. As he explained,

> The human spirit was born at the time of the creation of the universe, and actually contains vivid memories of the event. Human's consciousness can recall memories of the past. Therefore, at a deeper level, it has the insight into human direction, potential and danger.[143]

In the contemporary era, the memory of war faded and seemed unrelated to our current life. However, even for those who were born in a peaceful era and had never experienced the war, the bombing noise, the ground-shaking power, and the smoke of gunpowder explosion can bring a strong sensibility of terror, reminding them of war, violence, and the unspeakable fear. Therefore, by creating his explosion projects all around the world, Cai's work in a way reminds us that terror and war has never left far away from humans. It has been transformed into other forms of illusive terror existing in man's imagination, and terror might happen at any time without protection.

Paradoxical "Hyper-reality"

In 1996, Cai created his first body of work in the United States *The Century with Mushroom Clouds: Project for the 20th Century* (fig. 10), during his artist residency at the MoMA P.S.1 international studio program, New York. With the support of the Asian Cultural Council and the Rockefeller Foundation, Cai received the approval from the Department of

[142] "P3 Interview with Cai," Primeval Fireball Catalog. Morse code, a combination of long and short signals of light or sound, is widely used as a secret language for long-distance communication in the warfare.
[143] Ibid.

Natural Resources, the F.B.I., and the Department of Homeland Security to realize this project.[144] In this work, Cai created the events of reenacting "miniature mushroom clouds" in different sites in the United States, including the Nevada Unclear Test Site, which had been used for explosive nuclear-weapons tests between 1951 and 1992, Michael Heizer's (b.1944) earth work *Double Negative*, 1969, in Nevada, and Robert Smithson's (1938-1973) earthwork *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, on the Great Salt Lake in Utah, and various spots in Manhattan.[145]

To create these miniature mushroom clouds, Cai experimented techniques for small-scale explosions by igniting the gunpowder fuses that he bought from the Manhattan Chinatown in a small cardboard tube.[146] As the artist physically moved from Japan to the United States, this relocation spurred him to reconsider Japan's history with respect to its relationship with America. Displacing the mushroom clouds from Japan, the nation that has suffered the trauma of the nuclear attack in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to America where the mushroom cloud originated, Cai attempted to evoke contemplation on humans' war history and the potential dangers of nuclear weapon to humanity in the post-atomic era. In this work, the mushroom cloud becomes a symbol of the terror in imagination. Through the artistic strategy of displacement and juxtaposition, Cai constructed a surreal scene that is full of contradictions and paradoxes, which provoked an unsettling psychological effect and questioned the inextricable relationship between civilization and violence, construction and destruction, reality and illusion. In this chapter, I will explore the symbolic meanings of this mushroom cloud event, aiming to gain a deeper insight into the theme of art and war, event and history in Cai's art.

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[144] Yang and Li, 71.
[145] Munroe, 156.
[146] Chen Danqing, "Thatched Boat and Borrowing Arrow," in *Cai Guoqiang: What I Am Thinking About*, edited by Yang Zhao and Li Weijin (Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2012), 18.

The Mushroom Clouds Project for Cai is a survey on America to investigate the "*qi*" of this country, both geographically and culturally. Cai's choosing of the sites has crucial meaning in extending the cultural and political connotation of the project. The first site he chose, the Nevada Nuclear Test Site, is where the nuclear weapon was invented and experimented. Located in an edgeless desert, this test site played an important role in the nuclear arms race during the Cold War era. According to the historical records, more than 800 underground nuclear testing had been conducted here since the 1950s.[147] At the time, this site even became a tourist attraction, captivating American visitors to come watch the mushroom clouds.[148] Since the end of the Cold War, the test site has stopped explosive testing and started to open for public tours. Therefore, by simulating a mini-mushroom cloud in this abandoned test site, Cai hoped to re-examine the history of the mushroom cloud. As the embodiment of the highest form of science and civilization, Cai's mini-mushroom cloud radically contrasted with the enormous desert in the No Man's Land, which evoked viewers to question the constructive and destructive nature of human's civilization.

Cai's interests in Nevada desert echoes with post-modernist theorist Jean Baudrillard's (b. 1929-2007) writing on "the desert of real" in his book *America* (1988). In this book, he bridged the natural desert with the cultural desert of America in attempt to unfold the underlying reality of this nation. According to him, America is "the desert of the real" and an "ultimate simulacrum" where reality has been replaced by signs and language and the boundaries between reality and illusion have vanished.[149] Based on the model of a simulacrum society, America constructed an "artificial paradise" that is full of paradoxes between individualism and

[147] National Nuclear Security Administration / Nevada Site Office, "Miss Atom Bomb," January 2011, accessed Aug 2012, http://www.nv.doe.gov/library/factsheets.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Baudrillard, 11.

collectivism, freedom and violence, culture and unculture.[150] The utopian civilization of America is represented by the dream factory, the Statue of Liberty, as well as the mushroom clouds. Baudrillard's introduction of the idea of "ultimate simulacrum" relates to the development of his simulacra theory, in which he pointed to a reversal of the relationship between representation and reality where the media are coming to constitute a simulated reality. The ultimate simulacra end up with "hyper-reality," in which the mirrored image unveils the poetic truth.[151]

Baudrillard's conception of simulacra has led us to question the facticity of the constructed reality and sheds light on how we may read Cai's work. In line with Baudrillard's text, Cai's work confused the viewers and left them to wonder: what is reality? What really happened in the desert? By simulating and reenacting an artificial mushroom cloud, Cai created a mirrored image of the nuclear test that happened in the past, questioning the hyper-protected reality and underlying terror that humans might face. In his original concept draft, he envisioned the project to be conducted in various sites of the monumental architectures all over the world, including Louvre Palace, Tiananmen Square, and Taj Mahal.[152] In this way, the artificial mushroom cloud becomes Cai's weapon to stab through the gorgeous façades of these monumental architectures that represent human's advanced civilizations. In the realized project, displacing the mushroom cloud from the Nevada desert to the Manhattan skyline, he simulated an imagined catastrophe in the New York City: a mini-mushroom cloud appeared in the clear sky of Manhattan Island with magnificent skyscrapers and the Statue of Liberty in the background. In this artificial disaster: the mushroom cloud symbolizes the undefeatable power that humans invented to create terror and deterrence, and the Manhattan cityscape emblematizes a utopian

[150] Jane Baudrillard, *America*, translated by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1989), 8.
[151] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
[152] Hanson, 29.

metropolitan where human's desire for material, wealth, and culture has been fully realized. By juxtaposing the mushroom clouds, the skyscraper, and the Statue of Liberty in Manhattan together, Cai created a paradoxical "hyper-reality" implying that "when the civilization developed to certain pitch, it is strong enough to destroy itself."[153] Therefore, the unknown terror created by the mini-mushroom cloud unfolds the hidden truth that human's desire for construction and destruction, utopian and terror are complementary to each other as two sides of power.

An Arbitrary History

In this work, these seemingly safe and unthreatening mini-mushroom clouds yet effortlessly touched viewers' nerves and evoked their fear of terror in their imagination. The disturbing terror spurred by this work is deeply rooted people's memory of the war and their fear for the potential catastrophe. Creating this project in 1995, Cai grasped a threshold moment of that specific era. Rather than solely creating an event at a present moment, Cai transcended the chronologic narrative of history and opened up a hyper-real time-space that bridges the forgotten past and the unpredictable future. For America, 1995 was right after the ending of the Cold War, and the traumatic memory of the World War II gradually began to fade. In this time period, the new generation of American has managed to embrace the images of the mushroom cloud as well as the shock and awe it created without critical reflections on the war history.[154] This generation was satisfied with the hyper-protected reality and can hardly envision the potential threats. However, as the America survived as a superpower dominating the new world order, the emergence of the terrorist attack and the continuing nuclear weapon competition became a new

[153] Hansen, 28
[154] John W. Dower, *The Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor / Hiroshima / 9-11 / Iraq* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 157.

threat to the national security. At this threshold moment, Cai's reenactment of the faked mushroom clouds in Nevada and Manhattan seems to foreshadow some future catastrophe: the devastating explosion that happened in the Nevada desert could potentially happen again anywhere that seems safe and under protection, such as the skyscrapers in Manhattan. Now, after six year of the creation of work, when we re-imagine the mini-mushroom cloud in front of the Twin Towers that had been destroyed by the 9-11 terrorist attack in reality, history in a way verified the vanishing boundary between reality and imagination and demonstrated Cai's insights into the convoluted, cyclical nature of history and the arbitrary intertwining of past and future.

Cai's choosing of such a threshold moment for creating this work led him to foresee the threat of future catastrophe and bridge the fragmented memory of the historical events, such as the atomic bomb's explosion in Hiroshima, the nuclear arms race, and the terrorist attack that happened in the "future" 2001. Interestingly, his constructing of a parallel reality in the Nevada and Manhattan corresponds with the narrative of American historian John W. Dower's (b. 1938) book *Cultures of War* (2010). In this book, Dower brought history and contemporary affairs together and took up Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, 9-11, and Iraq war as a series of codes, hoping to unfold the historical chain of these events. Using "Ground Zero" as a thread to link these historical events together, he traced the relativity of seemingly unrelated historical episodes. As he explicated,

> 'Ground Zero' was the code used to identify the hypocenter of the explosion in the desert in Alamogordo, New Mexico, where the United State tested the world's first nuclear weapon on July 16, 1945….Point Zero" and "Zero Area" became common reference in early accounts of the test and subsequent bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and by 1946 "ground zero" had become a familiar term, inseparably linked to the nuclear weaponry only the U.S. possessed at that point in time.[155]

[155] Dower, 157.

After 9-11 terrorist attack in 2001, Ground Zero became exclusively known as site of the destroyed Twin Tower and was isolated from its origin at the dawn of the nuclear age. In the eyes of Dower, "Ground Zero" had been politicized as "the code for America as victim of evil forces…a wall that simultaneously took its name from the past and blocked out all sightlines of from what and where that name came."[156] By tracing the history of Ground Zero, Dower criticized the "shortsighted, dogmatic, delusory, tragic exercise in group thinking."[157]

In my opinion, while Cai agreed with Dower's perspective, he provided an aesthetic distance for the shortsighted humans to reflect on their history. For him, art does not have the capability to judge the rightness or solve the contradictions, but instead provides a perspective and a 'distance' for viewers to perceive the eternal conflicts."[158] Therefore, in this work, Cai encourages a broader reading of the mushroom cloud in both its original context, the Nevada test site where it was invented, and the time-space in imagination where it does not belong to, such as Manhattan and the sites of land art works. His displacement of the mushroom cloud constructed a time-space where "multiple timelines are within one artwork, one space."[159] In this time-space, the chronological history chain vanished, reality and imagination fuse together, and the past memory and the imagined future interface with each other. By constructing such a chaotic hyper-reality, Cai distanced viewers from their own reality so as to foresee the future threats and to discover the hidden reality.

[156] Dower, 161.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Cai Interview.
[159] Huang Jian, Interview.

"Chaos Never Died"

Besides the Nevada test site and Manhattan Island, Cai displaced the mushroom cloud to the sites of the monumental land art *Double Negative* and *Spiral Jetty*, both are located near the Nevada test site. Cai took the opportunity to initiate a dialogue with the land art predecessors. In the 1960s, the land artists in the West, exemplified by Robert Smithson (1938), Michael Heizer (1944), and Walter Da Maria (1935), created large-scale, site-specific works to escape the studio-based art production mode and to challenge the existing art categories. Cai's works are often compared to land art since the ways in which he creates his outdoor explosion, digging holes in the earth and burying the gunpowder fuses, is parallel to the transformation of landscape in land art. However, the starting point of Cai's work set him apart from land artists. In Dana Hansen's survey study on Cai, he described the ways in which Cai's work can be differentiated from the works of land artists. According to him, Cai "focuses more on the Chinese spiritual tradition and intends to link geological and political history; his goal is to reaffirm humanity's primal respect for the earth."[160]

While Cai's works promote the respect for the earth and nature, they also reveal his different understanding of what art is and what art should do. Along with the trend of dissolving the institutional framework around art in the 1960s, contemporary art has been used as a weapon for making institutional critique and initiating social changes. However, for Cai, while land artists had the utopian dream to create a harmonious relationship between art, nature, and human, they exaggerated and overrated the capability of art. As he explained in an interview, "I actually visited Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, and made a 'mushroom cloud' there. At the time Smithson and others were making their large-scale land works, nuclear tests were being

[160] Hansen, 57.

conducted relatively nearly by."[161] Although the land artists transformed landscape and opened up new possibilities to make art and interact with nature, they were not able to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapon and cannot prevent the nuclear test that occurred right beside their sites. By simulating a mushroom cloud on the site of the land art, Cai questioned the power of art as a weapon for changing human society and sustaining peace. As Cai stated, to him, art is like a toy rather than a weapon: "only if art departs from the perspective of fragility can it be justice. The presentation of art can be powerful, but its advocacy cannot be powerful. The morality of art might be powerful, but art itself is actually powerless."[162] As embodied in this piece, by creating a transient, harmless mushroom cloud from a fire cracker, Cai ironically transformed the image of mushroom cloud from a metaphor of a threatening weapon into an frivolous game, which allowed him to negotiate the meaning of art as a constructed illusion.

Unlike the land artists who made great endeavor to reconstruct the natural landscape, Cai's simulating of the mushroom clouds did not leave a spectacular mark on the earth. His liberating of a mushroom cloud is more like an "action of terrorism," which left an unsettling imagination of terror for the viewers. Cai's action corresponds with the aesthetics of "Poetic Terrorism" introduced by the anarchist poet-philosopher Hakim Bey (b. 1945) in his book *Temporary Autonomous Zone* (1991). Bey's definition of PT art well describes the qualities of Cai's work. According to Bey, Poetic Terrorism is "an act in a Theater of Cruelty which has no stage, no rows of seats, no tickets & no walls. The audience reaction or aesthetic-shock produced by Poetic Terrorism ought to be at least as strong as the emotion of terror."[163] Bey's calling for PT art suggests a radically new way of creating an on-site event that leads to an immediate

[161] Zaya,31.
[162] Cai Interview.
[163] Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brookly: Autonomedia, 2003), accessed March 5, 2011, http://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html.

striking impact to evoke viewers' awareness of the hidden truth underneath the constructed reality. This form of art can create a "temporary autonomous zone" outside of the constituted circles of production and distribution and therefore contains the potential to subvert the established power structure.[164] In light of Bey's theory, in the gesture of an alien invader or a terrorist, Cai's act of simulating of a mushroom cloud formed what Bey called the "temporary autonomous zone" where he created an "event" of poetic violence, bringing chaos to disturb the order of reality. Interestingly, both Cai and Bey are fascinated by the concept of chaos. To Bey, chaos contains the all possibilities of changing and the energy to create new lives that can keep the vitality of the world. According to him,

> Chaos comes before all principles of order & entropy, it's neither a god nor a maggot; its idiotic desires encompass & define every possible choreography, all meaningless aethers & phlogistons: its masks are crystallizations of its own facelessness, like clouds. [165]

Since chaos contains the power to change the established order and structures, the aim of PT art is to create chaos to change, either change a person's life or the power structure of the whole society. However, unlike Bey, Cai seems unwilling to make any direct critique and initiate changes through his work. Instead, he is interested in presenting the contradictions and paradoxes of the world and our power system.

Japanese art critic Yuko Hasegawa noted that "Cai has discovered the secret of 'action in non-action,' the fact that refusing to criticize contains the greatest criticism."[166] In his work, Cai created "a system of chaos" that is full of paradoxes, which uncovers the truth of power and the essence of our era.[167] While the mini-mushroom cloud is powerless like a transient vapor in the desert, it unsettled and conquered the vastness of the Nevada desert and the magnificent skyline

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[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Yuko Hasegawa, "New Order out of Chaos," in *Primeval Fireball*, edited by Rumiko Kanesaka (Tokyo: P3 Art & Environment, 1991).
[167] Ibid.

of Manhattan. Successfully transforming the yielding force of the mini-mushroom cloud into a threatening imagination of terror, Cai unfolded the paradoxical truth of power from a Daoist perspective: the most tender and intangible is actually the weakness of a strong and intimidating power. This inextricable dialect of vulnerability and strength neatly mirrored the inequitable power system of today's globalization. After the Cold War, the defeat of communism undermined the equability of the world power structure that was balanced by the antagonism between Soviet Union and the United States. As the Soviet Union disintegrated, this formerly balanced system was collapsed and fell into chaos. The emergence of globalization, or an America dominant world order, therefore expanded to its full potential, but began to destruct itself from internal.

The metaphor that Cai created through his mushroom cloud event echoes Baudrillard's description of the symbolic meaning of terror in his article "The Spirit of Terrorism" (2001), in which he analyzed how the 911 terrorist attack symbolically indicated the collapse of the globalized power system. He rectified a Western conventional thinking that "the progress of good corresponds to the defeat of evil."[168] Conversely, the opposing power of so-called good and evil is inextricable from each other. Although the ending of the Cold War led to the seemingly absolute triumph of liberation, it has created "a response of proportional violence."[169] He continued, "this virtual accomplishment of global power monopoly reaching its quasi perfection would thus be vulnerable to the least spark."[170] The underlying logic of Baudrillard's discussion about the dialectical relationship between good and evil corresponds with the Daoist dialectics, which believes the complementary relationship and the eternal struggles between the

[168] Jean Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," *Le Monde 2* (2001), http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/the-spirit-of-terrorism/.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.

two oppositional forces, such as *ying* and *yang*. His argument on the symbolic meaning of terrorism converged with Cai's perception of the violent nature of our time. However, rather than making direct critique on what is good or evil, Cai applied the ancient Daoist philosophy for understanding the power structure in contemporary age. His creation of the "system of chaos" called for a returning to the "nebulous state of the universe before heaven and earth separated" where the *ying* and *yang* are united, good and evil has not been segregated.[171] Therefore, through the strategy of displacing, simulating, and transforming a mushroom cloud event, Cai unveiled the tensions between power and vulnerability and grasped the spirit of terror in the contemporary times: the symbolic, more-than-real terror in our imagination.

Re-making History

By simulating the tragic events in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and displacing them in different sites in the United States, Cai explored multiple meanings within one historical event. He opened this event up to diverse contemporary issues, such as globalization, terrorism, and tensions in international power struggle. His strategy of simulating and dislocating an historical event interrupted the chronologic history and extended the single version of history into multiple dimensions. As Chinese scholar and critic Wang Hui (b. 1959) has stated in his essay "The Dialectics of Art and the Event" (2008), Cai "strives to create a correspondence between artistic events and historical events."[172] This method of making event to echo with history and to mirror the contemporary time has appeared in many of Cai's works. In his unrealized project *Rebuilding the Berlin Wall: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 7*, 1991 (fig. 11), Cai proposed an

[171] Paul Crowe, "Chaos: A Thematic Continuity between Early Taoism and Taoist Inner Alchemy," in *Purity of Heart and Contemplation: A Monastic Dialogue between Christian and Asian Traditions*, edited by Joseph Wong and Bruno Barnhart (New York, NY: Continuum, 2001).
[172] Hui Wang, "The Dialectics of Art and the Event," in *Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to* Believe, edited by Alexandra Munroe and David Joselit (New York, NY: Guggenheim Museum, 2008), 42.

gunpowder explosion event for building a wall of flames along the memorial site of the Berlin Wall. By proposing this event, Cai called attention to the progress of human history: although the Berlin Wall was physically destroyed in 1990, the invisible "wall" in people's mentality continued its presence in the seemingly liberated and diversified system of globalization. By creating a wall of flame as a temporary monument, he revealed an obscure, invisible storyline under the shadow of the visible history, questioning the spiritual borderlines that humans constructed by themselves and for themselves.

Cai's method of creating artistic events for remaking history embodies the contemporaneity of his work. Using Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's (b. 1942) words, he is the one "who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness."[173] In my understanding, the contemporary value of Cai's art lies in the murky moment after the ephemeral, eye-blinded explosion. While the violent explosion creates a kind of "disjunction and an anachronism" that "shakes the backbone of our era," the murky moment after the explosion leads people to reach the "darkness" of our time where obscurity exist and the light could not reach.[174] Humans are often readily blinded by the light of the glorified history and epic events, which obscured the truth of our time. However, by making events and rethinking history, Cai's work explicitly grasped the essential spirit of our era: an age full of chaos, tensions, and paradoxes. His artistic events, therefore, empowered viewers to perceive the sunken part of our history: the invisible behind the visible, the violence behind the freedom, and the fragility behind the power.

[173] Giorgio Agamben, "What is the Contemporary," in *What is Apparatus*?, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatolla (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2009), 42.
[174] Agamben, 44.

Conclusion

During his residence in Japan from 1986 to 1995, Cai developed his independent methodology of art making. His encounter with Japanese Mono-ha artists propelled him to reconsider the relationship between materiality and spirituality and to transform gunpowder explosion into a ritual for initiating conversations with the universe. By radically exploding the gunpowder, his alternative art creation mode challenges the conventional object-based art production mode. The reception of his work in Japan spurred Cai to develop a revolutionary mode of art creation, which instills new possibilities and freedom in contemporary Asian art. Adopting Daoist view on nature and the universe as the foundation of his art-making philosophy, Cai regards his art as a vehicle for communicating and connecting with the invisible natural power. Incorporating the Daoist dialectic into his work, he attempts a subversive new aesthetics that unifies violent and poetic, destruction and construction, art and war. Through his decade-long art practices in Japan, Cai opens up his art to the immensurable universe and moves beyond the limited mentality of humans. Moreover, Japan's culture and history evoked his reflection on contemporary issues, such as nuclear war and terrorism. His artistic strategy of simulating and displacing the conceptual scenes of historical events questions the official history and creates an aesthetic distance from which to perceive the contradictions and power struggles in the contemporary world. By this means, he stretches the cultural and geographical boundaries and pushes toward a continuous expansion of his artistic universe.

In the 1990s, Cai started to create gunpowder paintings, explosion events, and installations all around the world. In his range of installation works, Cai frequently plays with the concept of what he called the "cultural readymade." By dislocating, simulating, and transforming historical events and cultural metaphors, he instills the spatial and temporal dimensions in these works, exploring the cultural polysemia within different sites and historical

contexts. In his controversial work *Venice Rent Collection Courtyard*, 1999, Cai relocated a Chinese socialist realist group sculpture *Rent Collection Courtyard* (1965), which had been widely reproduced as political propaganda during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, to the venue of the 48th Venice Biennale. Rather than simply reproducing the original work, he invited nine guest artisan sculptors who were engaged in the creation of the original work to re-create the sculptures on-site and therefore initiated an event of watching artists making sculpture. Being distracted from its original social context, this group sculpture, a work that is full of sympathy toward peasants and deep hatred for the exploiting class, lost its socialist realist aura, but instead turned into an entertaining event for the Western viewers. Ironically transforming the meaning of this piece, Cai alluded to the frenetic desire of contemporary artists to participate in biennales and exhibitions and evoked artists, curators, and viewers to re-consider their roles in today's art scene.

In his essay "Image Explosion: Global Readymades," American scholar David Joselit has commented that Cai's *Venice Rent Collection Courtyard* is "a diasporic revision of the readymade."[175] As the inventor of the readymade, Marcel Duchamp used manufactured objects to question the definition of art and the role of institutional contexts in determining the meaning of art. In *Venice Rent Collection Courtyard*, Cai used this group sculpture as his cultural readymade to negotiate the tension between local and global. As Joselit pointed out, "the question begged by the courtyard is not what counts as art, but what counts as 'Chinese.'"[176] He counted Cai's courtyard as an example that represents the variety and complexity of readymades in an increasingly globalized world. In my understanding, while Joselit's comment seems to contradict Cai's endeavor to escape a fixed Chinese identity and to break through the existing

[175] David Joselit, "Image Explosion: Global Readymades," in *Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe*, edited by Alexandra Munroe and David Joselit, 53. New York, NY: Guggenheim Museum, 2008.
[176] Ibid.

category of Chinese art, Cai is able to reconcile the paradox between the universality and cultural specificity. Instead of casting away his Chinese cultural roots, he plays with his Chinese identity and uses it to produce different readings and meanings of his work and to question the meaning of being a "Chinese." As a Chinese artist working outside China, Cai's in-between position allows him to extend the meaning of reproducing a classic socialist realistic sculpture, through which he negotiated a cultural space that was full of tensions: the tensions between different meanings of propaganda, utopian, and post-modern embodied in a single work. By situating a cultural symbol into a different time-space, he spurred it to interact with the new context, which led to the ambiguity, multiplicity, and shift of its meaning. Thus, Cai inquires into the increasing cultural complexities in the context of globalization and provides possibilities for negotiating the ethnic role played by an international artist in cross-cultural art practices.

In the recent years, Cai has become more engaged in creating the firework ceremonies for a range of important historical events in China, including the firework for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (2002), Shanghai, and the *Footprints of History* at the opening of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. His involvement in these events allows him to embed his artistic event into the history and therefore to overlap and interweave with the history. However, as Wang stated, "Cai's art is not subordinated to history, but rather that he uses artistic method to reveal the not-easily perceived relations behind event, to transform the significance of the occurrence."[177] Positing a historical moment in human's millions of years history, Cai inserts his interpretations and imagination of history into these events and therefore expands their historical meaning. In the Beijing Olympic opening, Cai used firework to create 29 huge footprints stepping across the axis of Beijing in the sky, imitating an invisible giant of history walking across the monumental architectures in the city. By creating this stirring, epic ceremonial event,

[177] Wang, 43.

he condensed the thousands years history of the city in this one-minute firework event, implying the momentary nature of human history in compare to the history of the universe. At the moment when the big footprints stomping through the city, he invited viewers all around the globe and even the extraterrestrials from the outer space to converse with the invisible spirit of history and to contemplate on the physical and spiritual evolution of humans. Following these footprints, Cai opened up a time tunnel in the sky, leading viewers to escape the shackle of gravity, to freely walk through variable time-spaces in history, and to go back and forth between the visible and invisible world.

Images

Fig. 1 Ma Yuan, *Fisherman on a Winter River*, 1195 AD, ink painting, 26.8x50.3 cm
National Museum, Tokyo

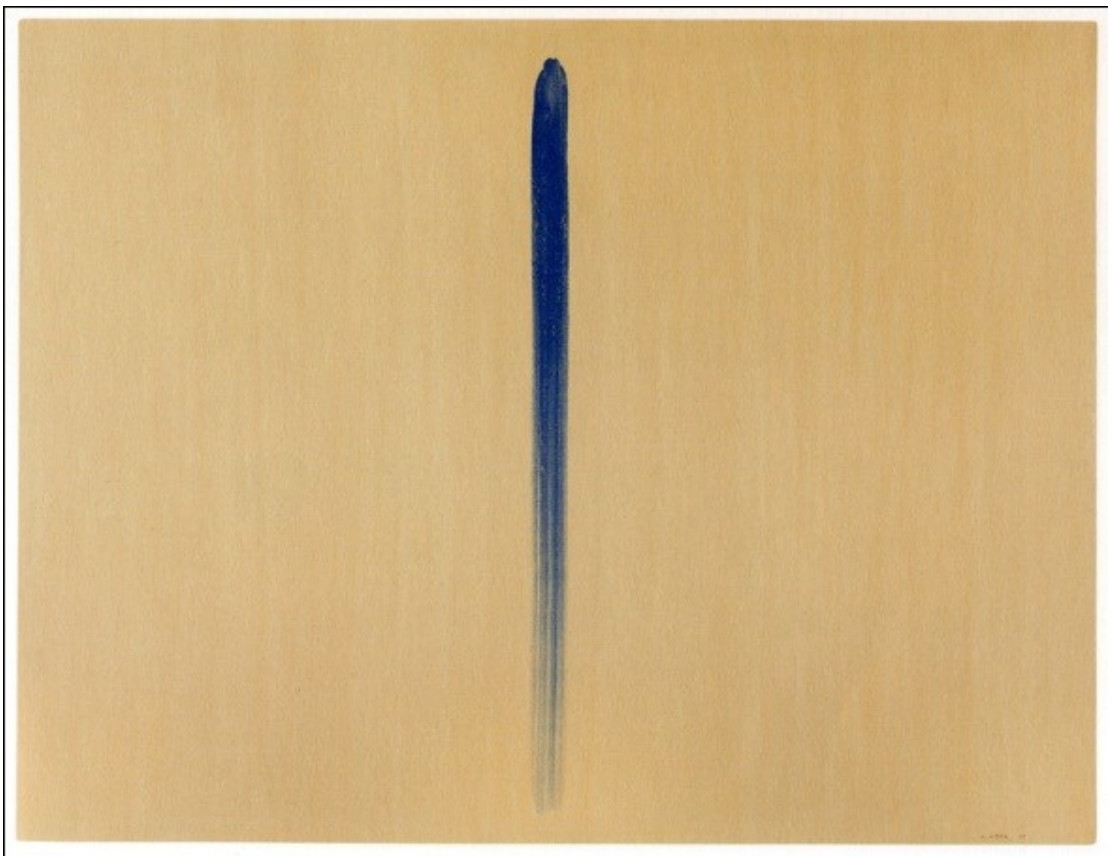

Fig. 2 Lee Ufan, *From Line*, 1978, glue, stone pigment on canvas, 182 x 227 cm

Fig. 3 Lee Ufan, *Relatum*, 1968/2010, iron plate 180 x 200 x 1.5 cm, glass plate 180 x 200 x 1.5 cm, natural stone 40 x 33 x 37 cm

Fig. 4 Tadashi Kawamata, *Construction Site Project*, Venice Biennial, 1982

Fig. 5 Cai Guoqiang, *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters: Projects for Extraterrestrials No.10*, 1993, Gobi desert, west of the Great Wall, Jiayuguan, China

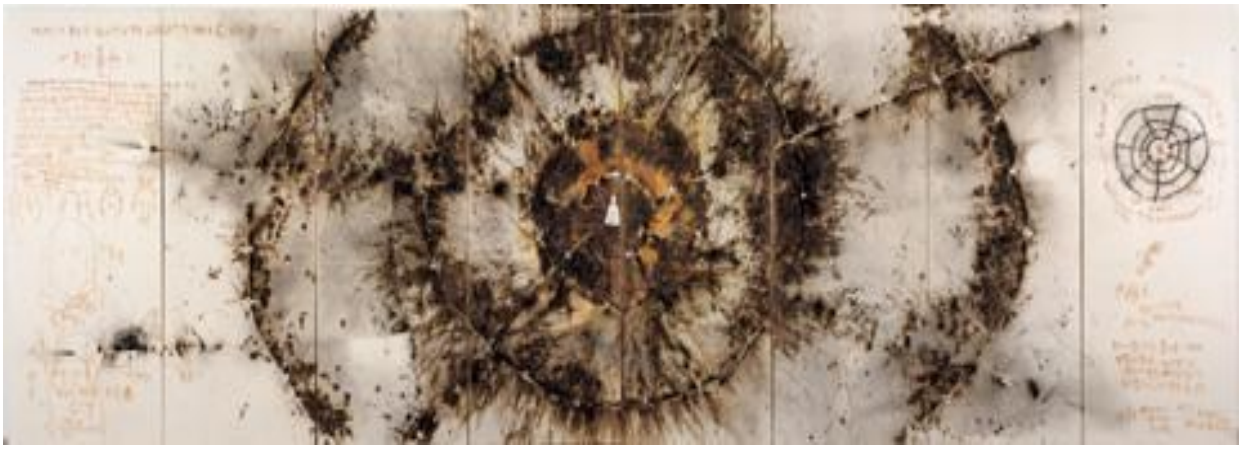

Fig. 6 Cai Guoqiang, *Fetus Movement II: Project for Extraterrestrials No.9*, 1991, Gunpowder painting on Japanese paper

Fig. 7 Cai Guoqiang, *Fetus Movement II: Project for Extraterrestrials No.9*, 1992, Hannover Munden, German

Fig. 8 Cai Guoqiang, *No Destruction, No Construction: Bombing the Taiwan Museum of* Art, 1998, Taipei

Fig. 9 Cai Guoqiang, *Earth Has Its Black Hole Too: Project for Extraterrestrials No.* 16, commissioned by Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art for Exhibition "Creativity in Asian Art Now1994," Hiroshima

Fig. 10 Cai Guoqiang, *The Century with Mushroom Clouds: Project for the 20th Century*, 1996, Nuclear Test Site, Nevada; at Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969-70), Mormon Mesa, Overton, Nevada; at Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) Salt Lake, Utah; and at various sites looking toward Manhattan, New York

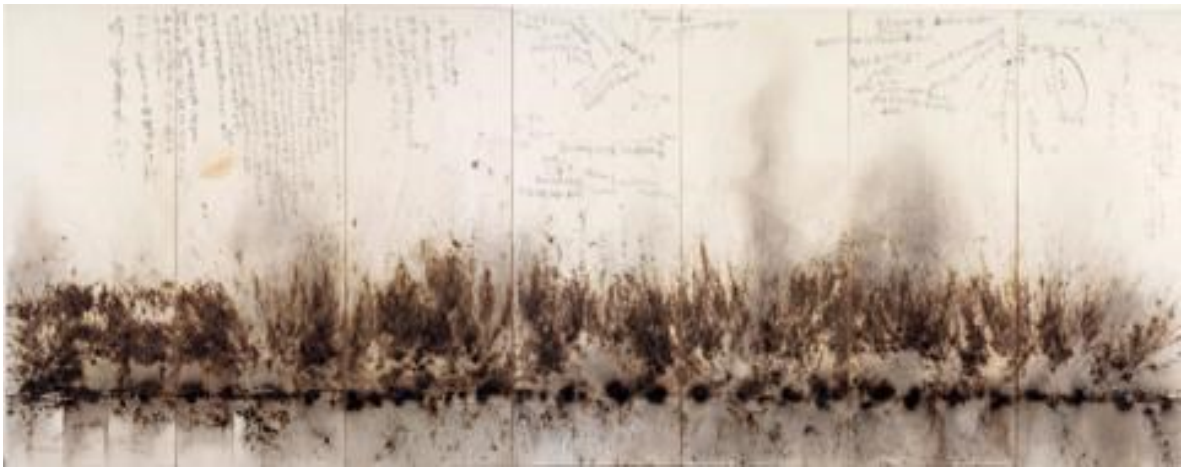

Fig. 11 Cai Guoqiang, *Rebuilding the Berlin Wall: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 7*, 1996, Gunpowder and ink on paper, mounted on wood as seven-panel folding screen, 200 x 595 cm

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