

Virality

A creative exploration of Affection and Scene

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Attestation of Authorship

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Ivan Yuhuan Liang

October 2011

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Abstract

Affection and Scene [情景交融] is a philosophical concept in Chinese art practice which could be understood as a conceptual thought that transcends an artist's embodiment of their emotions and internal responses to an environment. This project seeks to creatively explore the notion of *Affection and Scene* through contemporary filmmaking. It asks how such an enigmatic concept can be reinterpreted through a Western narrative structure. The short film, *Vitality*, aims to communicate the wisdom of Eastern philosophy in a multi-cultural context, and thus extend its accessibility and possibilities for contemporary application.

Synopsis

After a fatal fall in a jungle, an artist named Donnie finds himself in a hunter's pitfall. With internal injuries and a broken leg, Donnie desperately cries out for help; however, his calls go unanswered. Over the next few days, Donnie struggles to survive with the very few items he has with him. Inspired by nature, Donnie gazes up towards the place from which he has fallen and sees nature brimming with life. Donnie is motivated to express his sentiments through his last painting.

Introduction

Affection and Scene is among the most significant classical philosophical concepts that underlie traditional Chinese art and aesthetic. The concept not only enables artists to manifest their subjective emotions and artistic conceptions through art making, but also creates a communication bridge between the viewer and the artist. The creative process allows the artist to obtain new knowledge and cultivate oneself through the constant engagement with the infinite resources provided by nature.

This research project sets out a cross-cultural foundation to creatively explore the notion of *Affection and Scene* through contemporary filmmaking. It asks how such an enigmatic concept can be reinterpreted through narrative discourse.

This exegesis contextualises and explicates the short film, *Vitality*, in five parts (Figure 1). The discussion starts with the position of the researcher to explain how the initial research question was formed through his subjective experience and insight. The second part contextualises the critical framework of this project. The third part discusses the methodological framework that facilitates the design and practice within this project. The fourth part provides commentary on the short film, *Vitality*. The fifth part concludes and summarises the research project.

This thesis constitutes of 80% as a practice-based work, accompanied by the remaining 20% as an exegesis.



Figure 1. Liang, I. (2011). *Structure diagram of the exegesis*. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

Position of the Researcher

When I was a child, I was fascinated by a classical Chinese fairy tale, *Ma Liang and his Magic Brush* [神筆馬良]. The story is about a boy who is able to turn his drawing to reality through his brush, and thereby gives life to his subject matter. I used to believe that if I practiced as hard as Ma Liang, one day I would be able to gain such a magical power. My belief has since provided me enormous encouragement and energy, which ensures that I practice harder.

While maturity has taught me that the story is merely fictional, and I will never be able to obtain such a supernatural ability regardless of how hard I practice my drawing, when I came across the Chinese philosophical concept of *Affection and Scene*, I understood that with such a concept, it is possible to conceptually facilitate an artwork to acquire a life of its own. I realised that my childhood dream might now be able to come true, and I was motivated to explore this enigmatic concept.

Through the initial investigation of *Affection and Scene*, I encountered tremendous difficulties as I found that in traditional Chinese art practice, artists and philosophers accentuate the intellectual and spiritual qualities, but do not strive to develop systematic structures and approaches with which to pass on this knowledge. This discovery has motivated me to expand the potential of *Affection and Scene* through the Western system of art making. The project is positioned in a cross-cultural context through which the researcher aims to communicate the Eastern philosophical concept across cultures through a Western systematic approach, thus extending its accessibility and the possibilities for contemporary art and design application.

Critical Framework

This chapter contextualises the critical framework of this project and is comprised of four main sections. The first section explicates and conceptualises the philosophical concept of *Affection and Scene*. The second section examines the aesthetic and principles within Chinese painting. The third section discusses both the narrative definition and structure used in the short film, *Vitality*. Finally, the fourth section explains how Eastern and Western ideas connect and form a cross-cultural structure that underpins this research project.

2.1 Affection and Scene

The Philosophical Concept

Affection and Scene is an enigmatic philosophical concept that has been significantly influenced by the Chinese art aesthetic. Its origin might be referred to as the Daoist's idea of the “*Unity of Human and Nature*”:

“Human governed by earth; earth governed by heaven; heaven governed by Dao¹ (the way), Dao ultimately governed by the nature.” (Ames & Hall, 2003, translated, p. 115)

Daoists believe that the human is an essential part of nature and that one should obey the laws of nature to achieve harmony. Ho (2008) suggests that in Daoist's belief, humans are gifted to discover knowledge through the profound and mysterious nature (p. 44). Traditional Chinese artists believe that humans and nature are closely united. One should not attempt to conquer nature through one's talent, but rather to engage with it. They believe that the creation of a masterwork can only be achieved through seeking a harmonious balance between human (the self) and nature.

¹. Wong (1990) suggests, “*the notion of Dao, or the Way, permeated ancient thought and is central to Chinese philosophy, establishing the fundamental notion that nature and humanity are one*” (p. 13).

In Chinese art practice, *Affection and Scene* might be regarded as the aesthetic counterpart of *Human and Nature*. Li (2010) suggested that the correlation between *Affection and Scene* could be understood as the appreciation of oneself and the appreciated nature (p. 13). Nature stimulates an artist's emotions; subsequently, the artist fuses and manifests his subjective emotions and his appreciation of nature through art making (Figure 2). Owen (1996) describes the creative process as the "*Fusion of Affection and Scene*²" (p. 585); or more specifically, as the harmony of subjective emotion and objective nature.

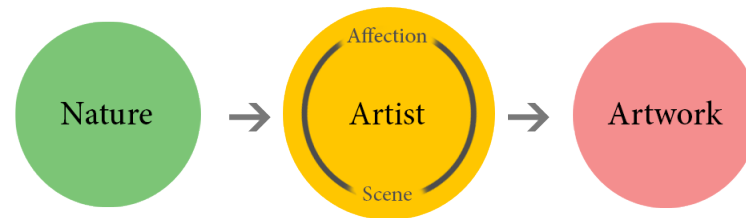


Figure 2. Liang, I. (2011). *The creative process of Affection and Scene*. Auckland, New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

Zheng (2003) cites Fan Xi Wen's Chinese classical literature [*Dui-chuang-ye-yu*] [對床夜語] (1129) and describes that *Affection and Scene* are firmly coupled, and one cannot exist without the other (p. 179). *Affection and Scene* cannot be defined as two separate entities; *Affection* is the emotions of an individual, and *Scene* is the external phenomenon that influences *Affection*. They intermingle with each other to become a complementary counterpart. This counterpart enables *Affection and Scene* to support and empower one another.

². Owen (1996) suggests that *Affection* (情) could be referred to as the "subjective state' bound to a particular circumstance, or 'feelings' stirred by some particular object or experience." Whereas, *Scene* (景) can be referred to as the "Scene perceived from a particular place at a particular time, thus implicating the 'point of view' of a subject." *Scene* stimulates *Affection*, *Affection* pervades *Scene*. *Affection and Scene* are firmly correlated. Owen summarises the classical conceptual idea as the "*Fusion of Affection and Scene*" (pp. 585 - 586).

Additionally, *Scene* can be interpreted as external and internal. In which one witnesses an *External Scene* (physicality of a natural phenomenon) and through one's *Affection*, develops an *Internal Scene* (mental scene) within oneself. However, the conceptualisation of the *Internal Scene* could be exceedingly different from the *External Scene* as it contains the artist's subjective *Affection*, life experiences, and personal insight. The *External Scene* is only a segment of the whole that serves as a catalyst to stimulate the artist, and thus allows him or her to establish his or her *Internal Scene*.

Although *Affection and Scene* are interrelated, *Affection* assumes a more influential role over *Scene* in that the *Scene* will change according to the *Affection*; and conversely, *Affection* may directly manipulate the *Scene*. The idea might be corresponded to the Buddhist's concept of "*The scene mutates along with the state of mind*" [境隨心轉]: "*To let the circumstances dictate one's state of mind is human; to let the mind dictate the circumstances is sage*³." (Yen, 2006, p. 171).

Buddhists believe that one's state of mind should have the initiative to deal with the influx of nature. While one should gain knowledge through the engagement with nature, one must stay optimistic when difficulties are encountered, and must not be overpowered by the provocation of nature. If one is able to achieve such a mental state, one can be referred to as "*sage*". This state might be regarded as a way to find the harmonious balance between self and nature. The following section discusses a potential way to find such harmony.

³. "*Sage*", in the traditional Chinese context, refers to a profoundly wise being who features wisdom and depth.

The Engagement

According to Liu Xie's classical literature [*Wen-hsin-tiao-lung*] [文心雕龍] (501~502), (Owen, 1996, translated, p. 202):

"When the basic principle of thought is at its most subtle, the spirit wanders with things. The spirit dwells in the breast; intent [Chi] and Chi control the bolts to its gate [to let it out]."

Owen (1996) explicated that when one engages with nature in the "spiritual journey"⁴, one must not lose himself in nature and should not perceive nature as "mere objects". Nonetheless, one should participate with it (p. 203). Wang (2009) clarifies that the spirit inhabits in one's mind, and the key is to be able to control one's spirit by one's "senses"⁵ and vital force. If these facilities function efficiently, everything will emerge in its "true form", whereas, if they fail to operate, one's spirit would be disorientated (p. 162).

The notion of mutual relations of self and nature is significantly influenced by the literature [*Wen-hsin-tiao-lung*]. It provides a valuable method in engaging with nature. An artist's "senses" and vital force enables him or her to participate with nature. Such activity requires an artist's mental and physical engagement. While allowing for free and full immersion into the subject, the artist must take full control of his consciousness. Eventually, one's emotion and artistic conception transforms into realisations, and manifests in the form of artwork.

⁴. "Spiritual journey" may refer to the process of one's physical and mental participation with nature (the *External Scene*).

⁵. "Senses" refer to the human's five ways of perception: hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell.

The Appreciation

The Chinese believe in *Yi-Jing* [意境], that the artwork is able to evoke a viewer's resonance and create a communication bridge between artist and viewer. It is a philosophical concept within Chinese art practices that function to connect the mental locus of the artist and the viewer through the artwork.

Ho (2008) suggested that the goal of traditional artists is to manifest a fusion of *Affection and Scene* through their artwork. While everyone's experience and engagement with the same *Scene* (of nature) could be different, if the artwork is capable of revealing the artist's own interpretation of the *Scene* (*Internal Scene*) fused with his subjective response to nature — and is capable of evoking the viewer's resonance — the artist's work has established a fusion of *Affection and Scene*, or has achieved "a state of *Yi-Jing*" (pp. 54-55). The significance of such a communication mode is that it establishes a conceptual space for the viewer to weave his or her own *Internal Scene*. This *Internal Scene* is unique as it associates with the viewer's own subjective emotions.

Liu and Cleary (2005) suggest that nature forms a collective correlation between artists and viewers (p. 81). The presence of nature motivates both an artist's emotions and his senses. The artist then responds to nature and manifests his subjective emotions through art creation. Subsequently, the artwork incites the viewers' *Affection* and allows them to relate to their own experience of nature. This could be considered as enabling the viewers to respond to both the subjective *Affection* of the artist and the illustrated *Scene* through the artwork (Figure 3).

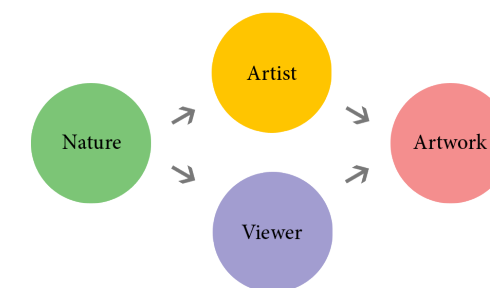


Figure 3. Liang, I. (2011). *The collective correlation between artist and viewer*. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

Summary

With traditional Chinese art practice, *Affection and Scene* enable artists to manifest their artistic conception through art making. Accordingly, *Yi-Jing* bonds the conceptual communication between the artists and the viewers. These two concepts are closely correlated. While the philosophical concept *Yi-Jing* serves as a communication device, *Affection and Scene* is employed as the central underlying concept for exploration within this research project.

2.2 Chinese Painting

Chinese painting is a significant traditional art form in China. It serves as a medium through which the artist can realise nature and manifest their subjective emotion. This section discusses the characteristics of Chinese painting in three parts. Firstly, it introduces several unique philosophical ideas that directly influence Chinese painting. Secondly, it explains the aesthetic in Chinese painting. Thirdly, it contextualises the ideas of *Vitality* and *The Six Principles* within Chinese painting.

The two main Chinese painting styles are *Gong Bi* [工筆] and *Xie Yi* [寫意]. This exegesis specifically concerns the style *Xie Yi* [寫意]⁶ that is directly associated with the concept of *Affection and Scene*.

⁶. *Xie Yi* [寫意] is a Chinese painting style that was established during the Song Dynasty (960-1279); it accentuates the qualities of spontaneity, simplicity, and spirituality.

Nonbeing and Being

The Daoist's idea of “*inter-generation of Nonbeing and Being*” [虛實相生] (Jing, 2001, p. 458) is a significant philosophical idea within Chinese art and aesthetic. *Nonbeing* [虛] or “*emptiness*” could be generally understood as certain conception that associates with human consciousness or awareness; whereas *Being* [實] or “*solidness*” could be interpreted as the concrete form of the subject, or as things that inhabit space and are affected by time. Daoists believe that nature consists of *Nonbeing and Being*, and one generates the other. One's ability to manifest the vitality of nature is enabled by the coherence of *Nonbeing and Being*.

Traditional Chinese artists are not interested in illustrating the outer appearance of subjects, or in representing the reality that is restricted by space and time; rather, they pursue *Truth*⁷ [真] through a connection with nature. Wong (1990) suggests that *Truth* is comprised of *Nonbeing and Being*; one is able to seek *Truth* by fully fusing (fuses) oneself with one's subject matter (p. 20). *Truth* emerges when *Being* (*External Scene*, artwork) and *Nonbeing* (*Internal Scene*, spirit) coexist in art creation.

The Aesthetics

The idea of *Nonbeing and Being* significantly influences the conception and perception of traditional Chinese painters. Yao (2000) suggests that Chinese artists employ water and ink to explore the notion of *Nonbeing and Being* (p. 81). They voyage through dark and light without the constraint of illumination, as nature is comprised of emptiness and solidness rather than light and shadow. One should not be restricted by the constantly changing appearance of the subject matter, but should seek the *Truth* hidden beneath it.

⁷. *Truth* [真] is when vital energy and essence are both abundant [meaning plentiful]. As a general rule, if vital energy is passed only through external pattern and is dropped out of the image, then the image dies (Ho, 2008, translated, p. 59).

This essentially highlights Kwo's (1990) analysis of the characteristic of Chinese painting, which accentuates vitality, movement and spirit, rather than establishes certain representation of the subject matters.

Li (2005) suggests that Chinese painting surmounts the physics of perspective (p. 6). Chinese painters utilise an inconstant perspective that changes frequently across the painting. Yi (2006) refers to the phenomenon as "*scattering perspective*" (p. 234), which means there is no particular or fixed vanishing point within a painting. The "*scattering perspective*" technique is employed to capture multiple scenes of a specific environment, and to seamlessly composite them into a unity (Figure 4) to express the vitality and spiritual wholeness of the landscape. The concept can be referred to Sullivan's (1980) analysis of Chinese aesthetics that "*all landscapes have to be viewed from the angle of totality...see the totality of its unending ranges*" (p.93). Chinese painting is composed in such a way that the viewers are invited to voyage across the scenery and to envision the landscape beyond the framed boundary.

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Figure 4. Fang, W. (2004). *Composition of Chinese Painting: Image of the mind*. Shanxi, China: Shanxi Sheng Yi Shua Chang.

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Figure 5. Liu, S. (2011). *Chinese painting example: Shui Liu Xue Jing* [Painting]. From Bo Bao Yi Shu Wang. Retrieved from <http://news.artxun.com/guohuazhong-1595-7970708.shtml>. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 6. Chen, J. (2011). *Chinese painting example: San Shui* [Painting]. From Chao Shan Feng Qing Wang. Retrieved from <http://ren.csfqw.com/peoplename/ShowAddArticle.aspx?artid=30958>. Reprinted with permission.

Wong (1990) suggests that the fundamental goal of the Chinese artist is to re-establish a *vital breath*⁸ [氣] within their painting. Through evoking a *vital breath*, “the painting is no longer a dead thing, but has acquired a life of its own” (p. 18). Wong’s view originates from the first principle, “*Spirit Resonance*” [氣韻生動], of *The Six Principles*⁹ [國畫六法] established by Xie He [謝赫] (479-502), which are considered as the canon of Chinese painting theory. These principles serve as guidelines for art creation and examination. Ho (2008) considers “*spirit as a universal immanent essence of the artist and his or her work*” (p. 46). Such essence is generated through the observation of nature and fuses with one’s subjective sentiment. In this sense, *Affection and Scene* facilitates the artist to accomplish a *vital breath* in his or her painting.

Yu (2005) suggests that *vital breath* delivers the essential life, spiritual beauty, and internal harmony of the artist to the painting. Subsequently, the viewers are able to sense and respond to these vital features upon viewing the painting (p. 106). An artwork transcends from lifeless to vivacious through achieving a state of vitality within. Ho (2005) suggests that during the process of actualising their creative or conceptual ideas, artists shuttle between “*emptiness and fullness*” [虛實] and it is “*Chi*” [氣] (*vital breath*), the intangible energy that unites their mind with their work. *Chi* is the vitalising force of the “*spirit*” [神] of artists and their artwork (p. 219). The project title, *Vitality*, is informed by the same concept; it implicates the *vital breath* within the artwork that is beyond space and time, and extends to implicate the vital resonance between the viewer and the artist.

⁸. According to Owen(1996), the term *vital breath* [氣] may be referred to as “a force in the body (coursing through the veins) as well as something appearing in the outer world. It has material (or pseudo-material) aspects, but it always carries other implications of “energy,” “vitality,” or “impelling force” (p. 584).

⁹. *The Six Principles* [國畫六法] are “*Spirit Resonance*”, “*Bone Method*”, “*Correspondence to the Object*”, “*Suitability to Type*”, “*Division and Planning*”, and “*Transmission by Copying*” (Briessen, 1998, translated, p. 109-133).

Chinese painting undertakes three central roles within this research project. Firstly, it functions as the visual vehicle to convey meaning and operates as a distinctive *iconography*¹⁰ within the short film, *Vitality*. Secondly, it bridges the communication between the viewer, the actor, and myself as the director. And it serves as an expressive and informative device within the short film, which allows viewers to reinterpret and appreciate the vitality within traditional Chinese art and aesthetics.

2.3 Narrative

Flanagan (1992) suggests that we are “*inveterate storytellers*”, and human beings in all cultures share and inhabit the ability to project their own identities through storytelling. Pillion, He, & Connelly (2005) consider narrative as forms of education and entertainment that are shared amongst different cultures; they are substantiated to be capable of educing meaning, circulating knowledge, and inspiring creativity. Altman (2008) suggests that narratives relate to our own experiences, memories, and emotions, and share a sense of humanity with the storyteller (p. 12). In short, narrative allows information to be graciously accessible and appealing. It is a constructive and favourable form of media to convey knowledge within the mass culture.

This project considers that the power of storytelling is able to creatively and properly reinterpret the mysterious conceptual thinking of *Affection and Scene*. This section discusses narrative in two main parts: firstly, it defines film narrative; and secondly, it discusses the narrative structure that concerns the fictional short film, *Vitality*.

¹⁰. By *iconography*, I mean a distinctive device that is often employed to communicate certain descriptions or meanings within a film.

Defining film narrative

Rimmon-Kenan (1983) defines narrative as a “series of events arranged in chronological order” (p. 15). Although the definition might be considered unspecific, it provides an essential principle that forms a story. Chatman (1986) suggests that a narrative comprises of two parts: one is the story (a chain of events), the other is the existents (the characters and setting). He considers a narrative as a form by which certain characters are joined by a series of events that occur within a certain space and time. Chatman’s definition is particularly useful as it specifies the close relationship between space, time, and the character. Furthermore, Bal’s (1997) analysis of narrative film sees events that are linked chronologically according to the characters’ experience and actions. This essentially accentuates the pivotal role of the character, and its involvement with time and space as the narrative unfolds.

Although short film narrative shares similar framework and devices with those of the conventional feature film narrative, the limited duration does impact on the structure and treatment of a short film. Cowgill (2005) considers that in comparison to conventional feature film, short film narrative proceeds in a simpler manner that usually unfolds linearly and rapidly. The simplified story also restricts the number of characters to be involved. Cooper and Dancyger (2009) suggest that short film narrative should be written in a simpler structure. A two- or three-act linear structure¹¹ is commonly used in short films (p. 5). These characteristics are important as they allow one to differentiate short film from the conventional feature film; they also provide reference and structurally related factors that allow short film narrative to be told effectively and clearly within the limited period of time.

¹¹. *Linear narrative* or *linear structure* is a narrative system that portrays events in chronological order within a film.

Narrative Structure

Pramaggiore and Wallis (2005) suggest Aristotle’s *three-act structure*¹² comprised of a beginning, a middle, and an end, called Setup, Conflicts, and Resolutions respectively (Figure 7).

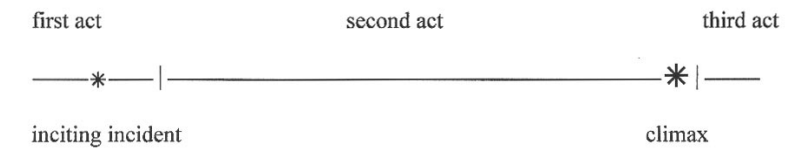


Figure 7. Lavandier, Y. (2005). *Structure diagram of the three-act structure*. From Clown and Enfant. Retrieved from <http://www.clown-enfant.com/leclown/eng/drama/livre.htm#retour>. Reprinted with permission.

Narrative structure is the formation of a story. The classical *three-act structure* has since been adopted by contemporary filmmakers. It has proved effective for common linear narratives. Dancyger and Rush (2002) suggest that one of the major benefits of a *three-act structure* is that it breaks down a story into more manageable units (p. 27). *Three-act structure* allows the artist to systematically arrange complex events, and thus facilitates the audience’s ability to refine and rethink the story precisely and efficiently. Truby (2007) considers that “*three-act structure* is a mechanical device superimposed on the story” (p. 4). It emphasises that narrative structure is only a formula; it should not affect the central meaning of the story. Miller (2008) suggests that according to the nature of certain narratives, the three acts do not always connect in sequential order (p. 115). This indicates that the three acts can be employed flexibly, and appropriate adjustment can be made to suit the specific needs of the story.

¹². The three acts are: the first act (the setup) is the introduction of all the central characters and their own basic situations. The dilemma should also be introduced in an effort to give impetus to the story. The second act (the conflicts or rising action) generally indicates a major incident that the protagonist encounters. The third act (the resolution or climax) is the turning point of the story, where the protagonist is forced to confront the difficulties. Then critical questions are answered and lead to the end.

The short film, *Vitality*, is based on a *three-act structure* to ensure clear and efficient story telling; however, modification has been made to enhance the cohesiveness of the story. Furthermore, the use of film devices such as *flashback* and *bracketing* have significantly influenced the sequence of the timeline; these film devices generate enigma and suspense that enrich the story. The modified structure and the related film devices within *Vitality* are explained in a later portion of this exegesis.

Summary

Short film narrative is chosen as a form of media to communicate the concept of *Affection and Scene*. The nature of narrative enables the storyteller to convey complex meanings through delivering a series of events that are associated with an audience's experience, memories, and emotions, thus stimulating the audience to seek knowledge and messages that underpin the narrative.

2.4 Connecting Eastern and Western ideas

Ho (2008) suggests that traditional Chinese philosophy differs from the Western in that it pays less attention to conveying knowledge systematically and logically (p. 90). Fung (1983) considers that traditional Chinese emphasis is more on “*the moral qualities than the intellectual and material capacities of man*” (p. 2). Chinese artists conduct art practice as a way to contemplate themselves (Clunas, 1997; Kohl, 2007). The openness of the art creation process allows Chinese artists to freely explore their creative conception; however, the absence of a systematic structure of organisation may cause confusing or inappropriate interpretations. Therefore, I propose to restructure the Eastern classical philosophy through a Western systematic approach. This advances a better understanding of the Eastern enigmatic ideas in a global context.

Certain concepts may be creatively reinterpreted through connecting Eastern and Western ideas. Sullivan (1989) refers to this as “*the fusion of Eastern spirituality and Western science*” (p. 282). Such fusion enables one to effectively explore certain ideas through association with the appropriate cross-cultural counterpart. Thus, this project will enable knowledge to become more accessible, and generate new meanings through connecting Eastern spiritual concepts and Western logical and systematic approaches. This is my belief, and serves as the underpinning concept for the design of the short film, *Vitality*.

This research project explores the notion of *Affection and Scene* through contemporary filmmaking. It asks how such an enigmatic concept can be reinterpreted through narrative discourse. This project draws on distinctive ways of ‘*speaking and telling*’ Chinese philosophical concepts creatively through the use of image and sound. The resulting film speaks across cultures in a manner that may suggest familiarity and fascination with the Chinese enigmatic thinking process. In the film, *Vitality*, we see a fusion of Eastern and Western ideas. I adopted a traditional Western *three-act structure* using filmmaking techniques such as *bracketing*, *enigma*, and *flashback*, to tell a story that is embedded with the spirituality of Chinese philosophical concepts. Thus, the film resonates with both Western and Eastern ways of interpreting. This approach has enabled me to occupy a position as a filmmaker who stands between two cultures.

Methodological Framework

The project formulates design approaches that apply Chinese philosophical thinking and manifests through Western research methods. The hybrid design structure has formed a rich and comprehensive platform for this research project to explore the notion of *Affection and Scene* and to acquire potential new knowledge.

This chapter consists of two main parts: the first considers the method of *Affection and Scene*; the second discusses the design approaches relating to the making of the short film, *Vitality*.

Design structure

The concept of *Affection and Scene* might also be considered as an intellectual design approach that is broadly adopted by traditional Chinese artists. Therefore, It is formulated as a methodological foundation for the design structure in this project.

Ho (2008) suggests “*The Chinese associate humans with nature and emphasise the internalisation of natural phenomena to locate harmonious fusion between the external scene (Jing) [景] and the internal emotion (Qing) [情]*” (p. 100). Informed by this, the process of art making requires my subjective response to the stimuli of the “*External Scene*” (of nature). Incited by nature, the internalisation of the *External Scene* and my internal emotion fuse and unfold through the action of art making. Such action requires me, as an art practitioner, to mentally and physically involve in the reflective activity of art creation. (Figure 8).

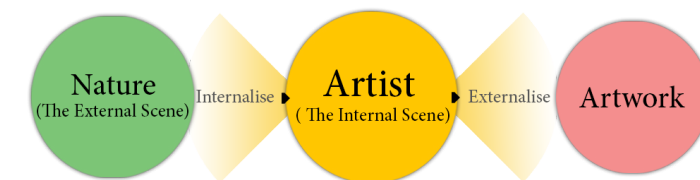


Figure 8. Liang, I. (2011). *The creative process of art making*. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

The classical approaches of “*Internalising the External Scene*” and “*Externalising the Internal Scene*” are the fundamental methods to carry out my conceptual thinking and appreciation within this project. My creative practices have been drifting between these processes. The following sections discuss these approaches.

Internalising the External Scene

Enveloped in nature, artists are allowed to enrich their creativity through exploring the myriad and profound resources of nature. In the Daoist’s idea¹³ of Human and Nature, nature provides infinite resources for inspiration and motivation. The research process requires me to constantly unfurl myself (my thoughts) when encountering the stimuli of nature. Unfurling myself to the *External Scene* (of nature) can be considered as an action that facilitates my conceptual and perceptual engagement with the research questions. In time, the internalised thoughts are sedimented to become a conceptual repository to inform art practice. Such an internalising process does not anchor to a fixed locus; it tends to be more emotional and less rational.

My participation with the *External Scene* consisted of two main parts. Firstly, the initial engagement with nature occurs in real time through observation and from multiple viewpoints that are commonly adopted by traditional artists. Such an observation process enables me to mentally and physically connect with nature and allows me to be stimulated by its provocation.

¹³. In Chapter 25 of Dao De Jing, There was some process that formed spontaneously [in chaos], Emerging before the heavens and the earth. Silent and empty, Standing alone as all that is, it does not suffer alteration. It can be thought of as the mother of the heavens and the earth... Human beings emulate the earth, The earth emulates the heavens, The heavens emulate way-making, And way-making emulates what is spontaneously so (ziran) [Nature]. 物混成，先天地生。寂兮！寥兮！獨立而不改，周行而不殆，可以為天下母，吾不知其名，字之曰道，強為之名曰大。大曰逝，逝曰遠，遠曰反。故道大，天大，地大，王亦大。域中有四大，而王居其一焉。人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。(Ames & Hall 2003, translated, p. 115).

Secondly, time-lapse photography and audio recording are employed for supplementary analysis and documentation. This will reinforce a more rational reflection and resolution towards art making. Compared to conventional video recording, time-lapse photography captures and plays back still pictures in a significantly lower frequency. This unique feature enables me to observe the subtle moments of nature which are difficult to comprehend with the naked eye. It eventually intensifies the stimulation of my emotions and appreciation.

Concurrently, a sound recorder is used extensively in the process of observation because I consider that the sound of nature is equally important to the visual aspect of it. Through revisiting the sound of the external scene (such as sound of water running and sounds of birds singing), my sensitivities toward the observation process are significantly enriched. In short, these design methods work as complementary counterparts to facilitate the internalisation process that is both emotional and rational.

The participation with nature allows me to be inspired and motivated by my encounter with the *External Scene*. Eventually, conceptual ideas emerge when the internalised *Scene* is fused with my internal sentiments. Such fusion advances me to develop a unique *Internal Scene* with my own interpretation and reflection of nature.



Figure 9. Liang, I. (2011). A still scene from time-lapse video No.16 [Photograph]. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

Externalising the Internal Scene

The process of internalisation allows me to establish my own *Internal Scene* which reflects the harmonious balance between my subjective *Affection* and the objective *External Scene*. However, the *Internal Scene* is private, intricate, and intangible; thus, these stored conceptual ideas are to be expressed through art making, transforming intangible to tangible, perceptible, and revisitable by myself as the researcher. The process of art making can be regarded as externalisation of the *Internal Scene*.

Photography has been a major medium to manifest the process of externalisation. It is a rational process of manifestation that allows me to capture the transient moments that inspired and motivated me during my participation with nature. My initial approach is illustrated in one of my practices “*The Cascade Mirror*” (Figure 10). The picture was taken in front of a cascade mirror installation in a hotel lobby. I was captivated by the installation and stood in front of the mirror and saw my reflection being distorted and washed by the rushing water. My identity became blurred and fragile, I felt a sense of being liberated and unconstrained. Witnessing this new form of self, moving in corresponding unison with my actions, was like seeing myself moving in another dimension.

To the hotel, the cascade mirror installation (Figure 11) was simply a decoration; but, to me, it was a unique and inspirational experience. My emotions and senses were being influenced by the presence of the cascade mirror. Through it, I saw another “self” and came to understand how the environment (*External Scene*) influences my emotions and senses. The photograph was taken as my subjective emotion fused with my interpretation of the environment. It freezes the moment as the resonance occurs. The photograph may be regarded as the work of my externalisation.

McCullin (2005), an internationally renowned war photojournalist who later focused on landscape photography once said that “*Photography for me is not looking, it’s feeling. If you can’t feel what you’re looking at, then you’re never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures.*” Such thinking is reflected in his later landscape photos that carried forward his *Affection* from his former journalistic experience in war.



Figure 10. Liang, I. (2011). *The Cascade Mirror* [Photograph]. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.



Figure 11. Liang, I. (2011). *The cascade mirror installation in Marriott Hotel, Sydney* [Photograph]. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

Inspired by this, I associate my past experience during the process of photo taking. The concept can be explained through the “daydream” experiment (Figure 12), when I participated in the portrait photo session in May 2011, the set motivated me to recall scenes that I have visited and pictures that I have precious taken. I was inspired to relate to my own past experience while engaging with the *External Scene*. The imaging technique used for the final image can be referred to as the Western method of photomontage, yet it bears the vitality of Chinese aesthetic.

The method is inspired by Cheng’s (1986) idea that the meanings of individual images are transcended when combined as a whole (p. 47). The creative approach allows me to articulate the newly taken photograph (Figure 13) that expresses my interpretation of subject matter, as well as visuals (Figure 14) that are associated with my past experiences, memories, and emotions. The process of image re-making enables me to contemplate and reconstruct my *Internal Scene* in a rational way. The resultant image emerged as my subjective sentiment fused with my artistic conception toward nature.

The methods of externalisation have been a practical approach throughout the research project. The process of externalisation allows me to manifest my sentiment and my *Internal Scene* through the action of art making. The rational approach of image making transforms the intangible conceptions into tangible materials. These materials eventually become inspirational resources for later art practice.

Narrative Development

The methods of internalisation and externalisation also inform the development of the story and, as such, the story carries data from my personal experiences and conceptual thoughts of nature. During the story developing process, I also shared stories with my friends, families, and colleagues. Consequently, questions and opinions have been raised through conversations. By responding to their inquiries, I constantly studied and reflected on the problems to refine the story. Schön (1983) described the process as “Talk Back”.



Figure 12. Liang, I. (2011). *Daydream* [Photograph]. Auckland, New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.



Figure 13. Liang, I. (2011). *A photograph from the portrait section* [Photograph]. Auckland, New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.



Figure 14. Liang, I. (2008). *Black unicorn in the field* [Photograph]. Auckland, New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

He said, “*the situation talks back, the practitioner listens, and as he appreciates what he hears, he reframes the situation once again*” (p. 131). Such a process allows me to test and solve problems that affect the effectiveness of the story telling, and thus facilitates the narrative development.

My early consideration for the narrative was a story about a frustrated artist being trapped in an enclosed space; he was not able to find a way out, and eventually created a painting to express his sentiment to his family. When I told the story to other storytellers, there were queries as to whether the artist was depicting the concept of *Affection and Scene*. Through the discussions, I discovered that the initial story was insufficient to communicate the philosophical concept, as the setting of the narrative restricted the engagement between the artist and nature. Consequently, I had to constantly review my practice, and research data in order make effective adjustments to the narrative. By responding to the queries and suggestions, I would constantly refer back to methods of externalisation; thus, the narrative was developed in a flexible and dynamic manner.

I have employed Aristotle’s *three-act structure* to consolidate the developed story. It allowed me to arrange every act and event systematically. Once the plot points were organized, storyboarding was used to initially translate the story into images. This pre-production process was vital as it allowed me to visualise the sequencing of the overall story. Problems and difficulties were relatively easy to identify and solve at that early stage. Furthermore, storyboarding enabled me to pre-determine the camera positions, location settings and framing, and expedited the process of film production.

Film Production

In the filming process, one of the challenges was the changing outdoor environment which greatly affected the performance of both the actor and the director. The situation described by Schön (1983) that “*the practice situation often changes rapidly and many change out from under the experiment*” (p. 23). Although the story of the short film, *Vitality*, is situated in an outdoor environment (a hunter’s pitfall in the jungle), as the

director, it was my responsibility to ensure the best possible condition to maximise the potential of the outcome. Therefore, I decided to build the entire set indoors and to model the designed environment. As a consequence, I had full control over temperature, humidity, and lighting. Furthermore, I was able to build props and settings that would have been difficult to manage in an outdoor environment.

By building the hunter’s pitfall indoors, I had the opportunity to get a hands-on feel for the protagonist. The level of involvement in the story can be considered as first person. In this way, by treating the hunter’s pitfall as an immersive space for the development of the story, I was able to refine the plot and fine-tune the details. In this stage, I dwelt upon being the protagonist, and by assuming the role of the protagonist, I was able to rationally direct my actor to externalise my *Internal Scene*. For example, I could demonstrate which way to turn his head, whether he should be sitting or slouching, and how to interact with the props appropriately.



Figure 15. Liang, I. (2011). *Images of the working environment*. [Photograph]. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

In order to simulate the hunter's pitfall environment realistically, I conducted numerous experiments to test the outcome. Eventually, I found that the most substantial way to model the hunter's pitfall environment was to obtain materials straight from the jungle. For instance, I paved a few layers of soil onto the concrete floor in order to imitate the ground of the hunter's pitfall (Figure 16). I also mixed soil with water, and then painted the mixture onto the wall to create the unique texture and uneven surface of the pitfall (Figure 17, Figure 18). I obtained branches and plants from the jungle and rearranged them on the set (Figure 19).



Figure 16. Liang, I. (2011). *The making of the hunter's pitfall*. [Photograph]. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.



Figure 17. Liang, I. (2011). *Mixing soil with water*. [Photograph]. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.



Figure 18. Liang, I. (2011). *Painting the wall with the mixture*. [Photograph]. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.



Figure 19. Liang, I. (2011). *Arranging the plants*. [Photograph]. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.



Figure 20. Liang, I. (2011). *The hunter's pitfall*. [Photograph].
Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

Finding suitable props was a major difficulty for this project. I wanted to use animal's rib bones as a symbol of death; however, I was not able to find them in the shops. Eventually, I made them myself; by trimming, cooking, and stitching them (Figure 21) together, I was able to create the effect that I wanted. And the process was memorable.



Figure 21. Liang, I. (2011). *The making of the animal's rib*. [Photograph].
Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

Since, within the story, the protagonist is designated as a Westerner who is also a great Chinese painter, the actor must manifest his familiarity with utilities such as the classic Chinese gadgets like the *Four treasures of the study* [文房四寶]¹⁴. To achieve this effect, I arranged several short meetings with the actor before the actual filming began. We discussed the philosophical thinking of *Affection and Scene*, and I provided him with extensive tutorials on how to interact with the Chinese gadgets.



Figure 22. Liang, I. (2011). *Discussion with the actor*. [Photograph]. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

¹⁴. The term *Four treasures of the study* [文房四寶] refers to traditional stationery of ink, brush, paper and ink stone used in Chinese calligraphic traditions.

Sound

Vitality can be considered as a non-spoken film, which means the story is not driven by the actor's monolog or dialog. The short film heavily relied on image and sound to narrate the events. Sound and music are paramount elements within *Vitality*.

Holman (2002), Buhler, Neumeyer, and Deemer (2009) suggest that music offers film and television additional information, and enhances the impact of the mood and aesthetic of the narration. Dakic (2009) suggests that “*sound plays a grammatical role in the process of filmmaking. It also provides a form of continuity or connective tissue for films*” (p.2). The flow of *Vitality* heavily relies on the rhythm and arrangement of the chosen music soundtracks. Consequently, I decided to play these soundtracks in the background while I was filming the corresponding scenes. Such an approach allowed both the actor and the director to interact with the soundtracks, and thus enabled us to intuitively respond to the emotion and rhythm it produced. The approach operated as a sentimental incentive which stimulated us to physically and mentally participate in the film making process. It also benefited the postproduction of *Vitality*, as it enhanced the continuity of the short film.

Participation in the film production

My knowledge of photography and graphic design greatly facilitated the planning and filming process. My professional background allowed me to solve technical and theoretical difficulties and to appreciate film making from a different perspective.

The budget of the production was used mostly to hire a professional actor, build the set, and create the props. There was practically no funding to hire other backstage professionals to assist my production. I was offered generous support from one

of my peers to support the backstage work. Due to the limited budget, I had to deal with every role involved in film production, from storyboarding, directing, lighting, and camera operating, to set building, props making, editing, and other small details. The process was extremely energy- and time-consuming, but the advantage was that I was able to control and monitor every detail effectively and consistently.

The initial outcomes of the first several attempts were not satisfactory. The limited working space inside the hunter's pitfall often causes problems. For examples, the cameras were extremely difficult to be stabilised at certain angles. Light effects on the subjects or objects often create unintended shadows due to the restricted environment. It was virtually impossible to avoid unwanted echo effect during audio reception. These led to a point when I had to demolish and rebuild the entire set. Knowing these challenges, the situation improved as I constantly made necessary adjustments. The process was informed by the approach of "trial and error". It is effective for obtaining knowledge and problem solving throughout my practice.



Figure 23. Liang, I. (2011). *Behind the scene of Vitality*. [Photograph]. Auckland. New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

Within the short film, the Chinese painting is employed to conceptualise the internal scene of the troubled artist. The internalisation process is presented through a series of animated scenes. Informed by the principle of "scattering perspective", these animated scenes were composed as a whole to construct the creative painting. Through series of experiments, I was able to explore "scattering perspective" in an animated manner.

Summary

This research project concerns design approaches and methods that are informed by Chinese classical philosophical ideas and executed by applying Western research methods. Internalisation and externalisation are the core conceptual approaches. They allowed me to seek harmonious balance between the self and nature, and also enabled me to gain knowledge through the profoundness of nature. Methodologies that referred to the Western research context such as Schön's (1983) "talk back", "trial and error", and others, were utilised to facilitate the project to obtain knowledge and solve problems systematically and efficiently. These methodologies not only formed a comprehensive foundation for my research practices, but also reflect the influences of certain moral and intellectual qualities of the different cultures.

Commentary on Vitality

This chapter provides commentary on the short film, *Vitality*. It analyses the structural frameworks and conceptualises ideas that are embedded in the short film. Additionally, a comprehensive documentation that discusses the design considerations and production of *Vitality* is included with the final short film to complete the exegesis.

Fusion within Fusion

The short film employs a specific strategy to choose a Westerner who is familiar with Eastern philosophical thinking to play the character. This cross-cultural synergy is considered as a contemporary creative approach within *Vitality*. There are a few feature films that have adopted a similar approach and which have been widely accepted in a global context. Feature films like *Batman Begins* (Thomas et al., 2005), *Kill Bill volume 1* (Bender & Tarantino, 2003), *The Art of War* (Clemont & Duguay, 2000) and others. However, the Eastern idea is applied in these films to generate novel interests and meanings to enrich the narrative as a commercial marketing incentive.

Within *Vitality*, I posit the underpinning concept of the short film as “*Fusion within Fusion*”. The short film is designed through a fusion of an Eastern philosophical idea and a Western methodical narrative structure. By employing a Western actor to experience and interact with the Eastern philosophical idea, it furthers the significance of the fusion. I believe that certain cultural boundaries are transcended through “*Fusion within Fusion*”. It allows the audiences of any cultural background to respond to and immerse themselves in the narrative discourse.

The structure

To transform intangible *Affection and Scene* into tangible Western rational narrative structure, the classical *three-act structure* was employed to facilitate the transformation.

Vitality is comprised of three central conceptual approaches within *Affection and Scene*, which are *Engaging with the External Scene*, *Internalizing the External Scene* and *Externalizing the Internal Scene*. These creative processes are designed to be dispersed rationally into the *three-act structure* (Figure 24).

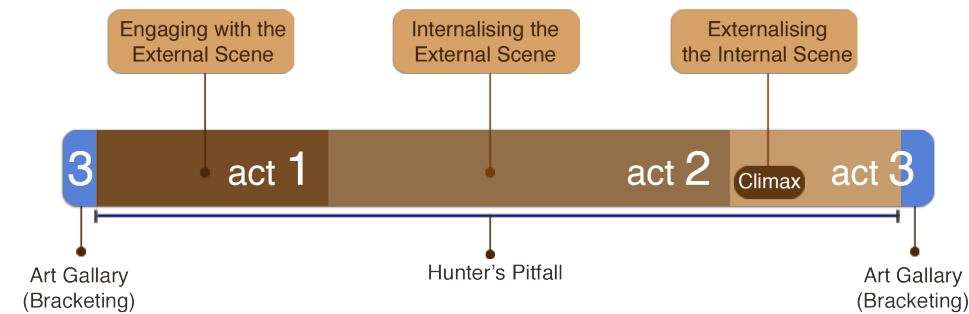


Figure 24. Liang, I. (2011). *The narrative structure of Vitality*. Auckland, New Zealand: Private collection of Ivan Liang.

The opening scene of the short film discloses a painting in an art gallery scene. As the painting is unveiled, without seeing the content of the painting, the audiences are directed to the hunter's pitfall where Donnie is trapped. The sudden change of space and time from the opening scene functions as a transitional device that generates *enigma*¹⁵. It provides an intriguing introduction to the short film. Furthermore, this opening scene corresponds to the closing scene and forms a *bracketing*¹⁶ to *Vitality* to provide a clearly defined introduction and conclusion that enhances the cohesiveness of the short film.

The first act of *Vitality* introduces Donnie's engagement with nature. Donnie awakes from a comma and finds himself in a pitfall. The extreme environment is considered as a creative setup within *Vitality*, as it contrasts with traditional Chinese art practices where artworks are often conducted in a peaceful and unrestrained environment. The extreme environment and the caused tragic events are designed as emotional triggers to stimulate both the actor and the audience.

In the second act, Donnie encounters physical and mental difficulties. Upon realising the hopelessness of his situation, he intends to express his inner sentiment by creating his last painting. In the moment, the extreme environment transforms conceptually and serves as the *External Scene* (of nature) that stimulates Donnie (the artist) for his artistic creation. As the story unfolds, Donnie establishes his *Internal Scene* through internalising the *External Scene*.

In the third act, Donnie externalises his *Internal Scene* through his last painting. The externalization process (the painting process) reveals Donnie's *Internal Scene*. Such an *Internal Scene* emerges as Donnie's subjective *Affection* [情] is fused with the objective *External Scene* [景]. Meanwhile, his conceptualisation of *Being* [實] and *Nonbeing* [虛] also emerges. As these conceptual ideas are fused and manifested through his painting, Donnie's *Truth* [真] is actualised, and the story reaches the climax of *Vitality*, where Donnie has acquired *vital breath* [氣] within his artwork.

Vitality reveals the enigmatic internalisation and externalisation processes in a manner that is open for visualisation. This provides a conceptual space for the audiences to relate to their subjective emotion and thus weave their own *Internal Scene*. Such openness establishes a conceptual dialogue between the audiences and me, as the director, through the painting as stimulus.

¹⁵. *Enigma* is a film treatment that is often employed to generate mysteries and suspense. It usually emerge illogically within the narrative discourse, such as incomprehensible incidences or situations.

¹⁶. *Bracketing* is a film device that is often utilised in the opening and closing of a film. It usually offers a sense of continuity through repetition, and as a way to stimulate the viewer's interest in unresolved moments of the film.

Summary

Informed by the philosophical concept of *Affection and Scene*, the short film *Vitality* has obtained a *vital breath* [氣] which is considered most significant within the classical Chinese art and aesthetic. Through *vital breath*, it has acquired a life of its own and provokes a conceptual dialogue with the audience.

Conclusion

The project aimed to explore the Chinese notion of *Affection and Scene* through contemporary filmmaking. It examined how such an enigmatic concept can be reinterpreted through Western narrative discourse. The extensive contextualisation of critical and methodological frameworks have formed a rich philosophical foundation for this project to expand the potential of knowledge discovery. Through it, the project is able to reflect certain moral and intellectual qualities of the cultures, and to reveal certain distinctive aesthetic and conceptual methods within the classical Chinese art and aesthetic.

Through the integration of Eastern philosophical concept and Western systematic approach, the project has established a cross-cultural framework “*Fusion within Fusion*” to creatively communicate the wisdom of Eastern philosophy in a multi-cultural context; it thus extends its accessibility and possibilities for contemporary application in a global context.

The painting within the short film serves as reflective and communicative device that offers potential for the establishment of *vital breath* [氣] within one’s artwork. Through it, the reinterpreted philosophical concept of *Affection and Scene* provide a conceptual method to inform the creative manifestation of sentiment in contemporary art practice.

In conclusion, the resultant short film, *Vitality*, is a vessel that contains Chinese philosophical concept within the Western narrative structure. It is fused with *vital breath* (Vitality) and emotional stimuli that provide a conceptual space for audiences to seek the notion of *Affection and Scene*, and thus expands and enriches the contemporary context of artistic creations.

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