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Bright on the grey sea:

Utilizing the Xiang system to creatively consider the potentials of menglong in film poetry.



This thesis is submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dedication

To my family and my inspiration, the Chinese poet Shangyin Li.



Abstract

This practice-led, artistic thesis develops a corpus of three film poems using the Xiang system (a philosophical and aesthetic system adapted from Chinese poetry) as both the central creative strategy and methodology to heighten poetic thinking within practice. This approach becomes a mediator between film poetry and the researcher as a lyrically reflective practitioner. The project also explores menglong as an artistic and narrative device in communicating emotion, meaning and lyrical nuance. In exploring these phenomena, the thesis draws inspiration from the work of the Tang dynasty poet Shangyin Li. Significantly, it considers the potential application in film poetry of the restraint and delicacy that is indicative of the Xiang system.

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I would like to thank the following collaborators for their deep engagement with my artistic practice, their kindness, talents and cultural insights:

Directors of photography: Du Hao, Mairi Gunn and Alex Plumb.

Performers: Mrs Aixia Shou, Mrs Bai Wei, Bolin Fu, Mr Guomin Cai, Hecui Xie, Jessie Liang, Mr Jiangzhong Ren, Jiangwei Ren, Ting Ting, Mrs Vinka Garelja and Yi Yi.

Composers of music: Shiqin Wang and Christ Lee.

Sound technicians: Xiaobei Ren and Dominic Taylor.

Gaffers: Ziwen Zhu and Rany Ren.

Production designer: Yiqun Chen.

Painter: Liangshan Zhan.

...and the Producer: Mary Gao.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly indicated), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.



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Two poems from Shangyin Li

This thesis is based on two poems by the Tang Dynasty poet Shangyin Li. They are *Le You Yuan* [乐游原] (The Le You Plain) and *Jin Se* [锦瑟] (The Brocade Zither). Although the exact years of their creation cannot be specifically determined, they have been tentatively dated circa. 844-845 and 848 AD respectively.

乐游原 [Le You Yuan]

李商隐

向晚意不适，
驱车登古原。
夕阳无限好，
只是近黄昏。

The Le You Plain

I felt dissatisfied late in the day,
I galloped my coach to the ancient plain.
The evening sun was limitlessly fine,
It was just that it was drawing towards dusk.

Shangyin Li / translated by Stephen Owen (2006)

锦瑟 [Jin Se]

李商隐

锦瑟无端五十弦，
一弦一柱思华年。
庄生晓梦迷蝴蝶，
望帝春心托杜鹃。

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蓝田日暖玉生烟。
此情可待成追忆？
只是当时已惘然。

The Brocade Zither

It just happens that the brocade zither has fifty strings,
Each string, each peg turns thoughts to the flowering years.
Zhuang Zhou's morning dream, lost in a butterfly,
Emperor Wang's spring heart, lodged in a cuckoo.
When the moon grows bright on the grey sea, there are tears in pearl;
When the sun warms indigo fields the jade gives off a mist.
One should wait until these feelings become remembrance,
It's just that at the moment I was already in a daze.

Shangyin Li / translated by Stephen Owen (2006)



Introduction

This thesis stands between worlds. It has its roots in the beauty of the work of a Tang Dynasty poet but its voice speaks into the realm of internationally considered film poetry. Writing this exegesis in English has involved a translative process of not only language but also of specific Chinese ideas. In crafting thought from one culture into the written form of another I have attempted to navigate a complex pathway between maintaining the integrity of words and sometimes complex principles, and accessibility for the reader.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The thesis considers two questions that are explored through the practice of making film poetry. They are:

- How might the Xiang system be applied to the artistic development of film poetry as both a methodology and central creative strategy?
- What is the potential of menglong (enigma/mystery) as an artistic and narrative device within film poetry?

¹This translation is rudimentary. Menglong is discussed more fully in the definition of key terms and in Chapter four.

²Arguably, the *An Lushan Rebellion* was one of the most significant factors in the demise of the Tang dynasty. On December 16th 755, general An Lushan rebelled against the Tang dynasty and declared himself emperor. This Rebellion resulted in a weakening of the centralized bureaucracy of the Tang dynasty, a decline in the economy and heavy losses to the population.

³Dong [董乃斌] (2012) suggests that the poetry of the Late Tang dynasty may be seen as an everlasting monument to the history of Chinese literature for three reasons: First, it was able to reflect reality in a very deep manner. Second, it featured highly developed principles of poetic structure and exhibited a wide range of poetic styles. Third, the period elevated poets from diverse social classes and their work became widely read.

In introducing this exegesis and laying the ground for its reflective journey through the research, this introduction briefly discusses the following topics:

- Shangyin Li's poetry (including a consideration of the two poems from which my work draws its inspiration)
- Key terms used in the study
- The nature of the research practice
- The structure of the exegesis
- The rationale and significance of the research.

SHANGYIN'S POETRY

Shangyin Li the poet

Shangyin Li [李商隐] (circa.812-858) was a Chinese poet of the late Tang Dynasty (755–907) who is noted for a distinctive body of work called *Untitled poems* [无题]. In this collected work Li utilises an approach to writing that opens spaces between what is described and contributions from the readers' imagination (this may be broadly described as the Yi Xiang system). In many of his poems, several levels of Xiang (surface physicality) and Yi Xiang (the fusion of surface physicality and subsurface emotion) fuse to create a sense of menglong (enigma)¹ that produces nuanced interpretation. Shangyin Li's poetry is also noted for its distinctive use of allusion and complex emotion. His poetry lends itself to the delicate and enigmatic stylistic nature of this project because his writing is distinguished by high levels of mystification, ambiguity and indeterminacy. Stephen Owen (2006) notes that, "Shangyin Li has a substantial corpus of poetry that was not meant to be 'understood' in the usual sense [because] it gestures toward concealed meaning while simultaneously keeping the latter hidden" (p. 357).

The Late Tang dynasty

Shangyin Li wrote during the later years of imperial China's Tang dynasty. The Tang dynasty is generally acknowledged as a period of flourishing politics, economy, military, arts and culture. But, at the time when Shangyin Li was living, the power of the dynasty was in decline². Forty-eight years after the poet's death it was overthrown. However, the final years of the Tang dynasty witnessed distinctive developments in poetry³ and narrative literature. Given the gradual weakening of the dynasty it has been argued that work emanating from this time can be distinguished by recurring themes of crisis and remembrance ... and an often melancholic and languid tone (Jiang, 2012).

Shangyin Li's poetry is indicative of this period. On the one hand, his writing reflects the nature of a world in decline. Owen (2006) believes this is revealed as a discernible "general sense of 'lateness'" (p. 485). The poet's writing often alludes to the powerlessness and sadness of an intellectual at the end of a dynasty. On the other hand, his unhappy personal life⁴ is also said to infuse a certain melancholic tone in his poetry.

Le You Yuan and Jin Se

Two of Shangyin Li's poems, *Le You Yuan* and *Jin Se*, form the substrate from which this inquiry emanates.⁵

Le You Yuan

Shangyin Li's poetry often deals with memories and Owen notes that he frequently compares "speculative images of permanence with the fragile and the transient" (Owen, 2006, p. 486). Through these comparisons, the reader gains a sense of the melancholic and the desolate. *Le You Yuan* is a typical example of this strategy.

The first two lines of this poem may allude to the melancholic in time and space.

Late in the day

... may suggest a psychological state of "lateness" rather than a period of physical time. The line is open to interpretation; it might also refer to the end of a dynasty, the closing period of a person's life, an unavoidable destiny or the final stages of a journey.

[The] *ancient plain*

... as the location of the poem may refer to a once prosperous place or to a site of deep physical or cultural history. Xun Jiang [蒋勋] (2012) notes that *Le You Yuan* (the ancient Le You Plain) suggests a delicate and melancholic beauty that emerges from a contrast between a supposed flourishing past and a present in demise.

The last two lines of Li's poem...

The evening sun was limitlessly fine,

It was just that it was drawing towards dusk.

... juxtapose the splendid evening sun and the encroaching dusk, as a way



⁴Arguably The misfortunes of his life may be interpreted from three perspectives: Shangyin Li's official career was largely unsuccessful; his wife died when she was relatively young; and his poems were not recognised as masterpieces during his lifetime.

⁵The original Chinese text and Stephen Owen's English translations of these poems are available on page 18-19.

of reminding us that the resplendent scenery will soon disappear. In other words, at the end of the late evening, darkness will descend. Thus, by considering the longterm quality of time and space in nature, we may also become aware of the brevity of our human lives and the transience of beauty that accompanies them. It is by this comparison that Li establishes the melancholic tone of his poem.

Jin Se

Among Shangyin Li's poetry, *Jin Se* may be seen as one of the most enigmatic (through its employment of menglong). Longxi Zhang [张隆溪] (1992) has described this work as "a puzzling maze of elegant words and phrases, a labyrinth of alluring yet evasive imagery" (pp. 148 – 149). Broadly, there may be two contributing factors to this. First, *Jin Se* may be categorised as *Untitled* poetry⁶. Within the inherent implications of this term, there is considerable space left for the reader to interpret the poem in diverse ways. Second, the poem itself is constructed using the Xiang system with its nonfixing of meaning. The poetic commentator Qichao Liang [梁启超] (1922) notes that even though he is unable to interpret *Jin Se* sentence by sentence, he can feel the beauty of the poem and part of this beauty emanates from its mysterious nature.

Although it is impossible to provide a specific interpretation of *Jin Se*, the opening couplet of the poem ...

*It just happens that the brocade zither has fifty strings,
Each string, each peg, turns thoughts to the flowering years.*

echoes the final couplet ...

*One should wait until these feelings become remembrance,
It's just that at the moment I was already in a daze.*

Together Owen suggests these couplets establish remembrance as the broad theme of the work (Owen, 2006, p. 385).

The middle couplets consist of a series of enigmatic Xiangs.

*Zhuang Zhou's morning dream, lost in a butterfly,
Emperor Wang's spring heart, lodged in a cuckoo.
When the moon grows bright on the grey sea, there are tears in pearl;
When the sun warms indigo fields the jade gives off a mist.*

⁶Jiang (2012) notes that there is a corpus of Shangyin Li's poetry that utilises the first phrase as the title of the poem. Traditionally this form of poetry is sometimes described as 'Untitled'.



Although mysterious, these images may relate to memories evoked by the music. The lines read as illogical contemplations, yet cumulatively they connect through a coherent emotional flow that resources a melancholic attentiveness to a world that is passing away. These Xiangs (physical objects) share a similar, simple, delicate, deep, and evocative nature, and they are connected by the poet's and the reader's subjective interpretation.

The poem's final couplet also contains the idea of uncertainty. This uncertainty may be related to the ambiguity of certain phrases. For example, *dang shi* [当时], which Owen (2006) translates into English as, "at the moment", may in Chinese imply the past, the present or the ephemeral. This ambiguity suggests the mental state of daze, which may be likened to the state of remembrance.

KEY TERMS USED IN THE STUDY

Given that the thesis utilises distinctive Western and Chinese concepts it is useful at the outset to establish brief definitions for three key terms used in the study. These are the Xiang system, *menglong*, poetry, the poetic, lyrical, and film poetry.

The Xiang system

The Xiang system [象系统] is a relatively complex, layered philosophical and aesthetic classification adapted from Chinese poetry. It consists of three traditional concepts: Xiang [象,] Yi Xiang [意象,] and Yi Jing [意境,] They are in a hierarchical order.

The first layer Xiang may be broadly translated into English as physicality (or form). Thus, it describes something concrete like an object or a scene. The second layer Yi Xiang describes the fusion of subjectivity and objectivity. It describes one's emotional response to something physical, like joy or fear. The third layer Yi Jing stimulates a philosophical feeling and comprehension of life, memory and the universe. Yi Jing reaches beyond a specific Xiang (the physical) object, event or scene and our subjective response to it (Yi Xiang).

In order to illustrate these ideas, let us consider a piece of blue velvet. This fabric can be found inside my film poem *Towards the Late Evening 2* (see Figure 4:2). We can use Xiang, Yi Xiang, and Yi Jing as three theoretical lenses to interpret this cloth.

Looking at the blue velvet through the lens of Xiang, we may focus on its physicality, for instance its colour, texture, or the way that light moves on it.

Using the lens of Yi Xiang, we bring our subjective and emotional responses to interpret the materiality of the cloth. Through this lens, our subjective response and interpretation will differ based on past experience. For instance, my grandmother might interpret the cloth as passion, based on her experiences selling blue velvet when she worked for the communist party. Conversely, when I see it from the perspective of a filmmaker, I may link it to the mysterious feeling I recall when watching David Lynch's 1986 American neo-noir mystery film, *Blue Velvet*. Another person might interpret it through their childhood memories of a comfortable velvet covered toy. All of these responses are subjective. As Yi Xiang they are emotional reactions to the Xiang (physicality) experienced through the first lens.

Looking through the third and most abstract lens of Yi Jing, we may consider the piece of fabric as a representation of deeper philosophical understandings and comprehensions of life. This consideration is normally generated from responses at the first two levels. In my grandmother's case, the velvet may link to the communist ideology. In my case, it may relate to the philosophical concept of mystery.

A deeper discussion of these lenses within the Xiang system is provided in Chapter Three.

Menglong

Menglong is difficult to translate exactly. Broadly it means blurred and indistinct or understandable yet indescribable. In a Western context, the concept may be likened to words like enigma, ambiguity, indirectness and mystification. However, in this thesis, I use menglong in the manner of Owen (2006) who aligns the term with the English word "mysterious". In Chinese thinking, menglong creates a strategic gap and an indirect link between the surface and subsurface of a text. A film poet can use it strategically to produce open spaces for negotiated meaning, imagination and interpretation. The term is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

Poetry

In general, poetry is a literary manifestation of a poetic idea. One of the most authoritative Chinese academic literary dictionaries *Ci Hai* [辞海] (2009), observes that poetry follows certain standards of syllabification, tone and rhythm, and it uses condensed language to reflect life, facts, society, the mental world or emotion (Xia, 2009, p. 1691).

The poetic

In Chinese, the term poetic can be translated as *shi yi* [诗意]. According to the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* [现代汉语词典] (2012), poetic refers to

the beauty of Yi Jing which corresponds to what we may feel in poetry (Lv & Ding, 2012, p. 1179). For example, I may feel what is poetic, in a small, green, tender shoot, because I am able to sense the beauty in it and it reminds me of a broad idea of rebirth contained within a small physical object. Thus, the term poetic may be identified outside of a poem and it may describe a state, environment artefact or idea, that is not structured into literary form.

Lyrical

Lyrical (shu qing [抒情]), and narrative are two traditional forms of Chinese poetry. Broadly, when I use the word lyrical in this exegesis, I refer to something subjective, emotional and non-narrative. According to the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, shu qing means expressing one's emotion or emotional thoughts (Lv & Ding, 2012, p. 1211). In lyrical poetry we often encounter a significant proportion of allusive or metaphorical devices.

Film poetry

Film poetry as a media form pays homage to both film and poetry. William Wees (1999) suggests as a subgenre of film, film poetry fuses spoken word poetry, visual images, and sound to create a distinctive presentation and interpretation of meaning. Often film poetry is characterized by a nonlinear style of editing where a flow of images and spoken or written words are used to interpret an existing poem. However, the media form has expanded in recent years so there are now examples emerging where an existing poem is no longer visually or aurally evident in the work. This recent phenomena is indicative of my work where the film poems draw their essence from the poetry of Shangyin Li but they are not a physical illustrations of his text. Instead they reflect on the spirit of his writing to generate discrete artefacts.

THE NATURE OF THE RESEARCH PRACTICE

The three film poems that constitute the central research concerns of this thesis are:

Towards the Late Evening 1 (The online screener is available at: <https://vimeo.com/251746815> and password is hmv8534)

Towards the Later Evening 2 (The online screener is available at: <https://vimeo.com/251747045> and password is hmv8534)

and *The Heart of Spring* (The online screener is available at: <https://vimeo.com/242417969> and password is hmv8534).

All three of these film poems draw their influence from the work of Shangyin Li. *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2* are inspired the poem *Le You Yuan*. *The Heart of Spring* draws its inspiration from the poem *Jin Se*.

Towards the Late Evening 1 and Towards the Late Evening 2

These two short, related film poems are constructed in a lyrical documentary style. In them I compare an elderly New Zealand woman's life with that of my Chinese grandmother. This comparison is achieved through a consideration of small ritual activities accompanied by a voiced over monologue.

The New Zealand woman, Mrs Vinka Garelja, is of Dalmatian descent and her husband George had been dead for two years before I made the work. However, the memory of Sunday afternoon tea rituals with her husband were still palpable memories for her. Afternoon tea was a remembered event that was imbued with melancholic memories of love and the flourishing of earlier days. This state touches the essence of Shangyin Li's poem *Le You Yuan* which considers the relationship between sorrow, a flourishing past and memory at the close of a period of time.

My grandmother, Mrs Aixia Shou, is a Chinese woman who is the same age as Mrs Garelja. She was born into a poor family. The liberation by the Communist Party saved her from poverty and provided her with an opportunity to study and work. In memory of the changes the Party brought to her life, she collected badges of Chairman Mao. This collection demonstrates her gratitude and ideological commitment. For my grandmother, framing Chairman Mao badges was a way of recalling the revolutionary passion of her youth and an idealism that contrasted with her later years. Shangyin Li's *Le You Yuan* considers both the passion (the galloping coach) and the drawing of life into a quiet, gradual close. These two ideas form the primary concepts in the film poem.

These two related films have been officially selected by independent juries for four international festivals:

The 1st Lyrical Visions - Poetry Based Films, Auckland, New Zealand (December 8, 2016)

The 6th CYCLOP International Poetry Film Festival, Kyiv, Ukraine (November 25-26, 2017)

The 2017 Echo Film Festival BRICS, Moscow, Russia (December 14, 2017)



The 6th International Video Poetry Festival Athens, Athens, Greece (January 19, 2018).



Official Selections for *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2* (2016-2018).

The Heart of Spring

This enigmatic film poem considers a woman's return to find her mother who disappeared during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. By following the sound of an erhu (a traditional Chinese instrument) to hidden photographs, the woman is assisted by two elderly people who help her uncover a delicate but difficult truth about her family.

The film poem surfaces from reflections on Li's poem, *Jin Se*. Like his work, *The Heart of Spring* is deeply contemplative and influenced by the Chinese concept of *menglong*. *The Heart of Spring* applies the Xiang system as an approach to both the making process and the narrative content. The final work suggests the reason for the disappearance of the woman's mother and it explores the unresolved nature of remembrance. The work treats poetic narrative, written text, sound and image as integrated devices that combine to suggest meaning simultaneously creating spaces of irresolution.

The Heart of Spring has been officially selected by independent juries for ten international festivals, and it has been nominated for one award:

The 16th Hyperfest - International Student Film Festival, Bucharest, Romania (October 27, 2017)

The 2nd Asian World Film Festival, Los Angeles, USA (in the Signature Film Series - Short Film Days) (October 30, 2017)

The 21st Faludi International Youth Film Festival, Budapest, Hungary (November 18, 2017)

The 14th Scrittura E Immagine International Short Film Festival, Pescara, Italy (November 30, 2017)



The 2nd Lyrical Visions Poetry Film Festival, Lopdell House, Titirangi, Auckland, New Zealand (December 7, 2017)

The 2nd Rushes National Film Festival, Karnataka, India (February 28, 2018)

The 55th The Society for Photographic Education Annual Conference (in the 23rd Annual SPE Women's Film & Video Festival), Philadelphia, USA (March 3, 2018)

The 51st Annual Worldfest-Houston International Film Festival (nominated for a Remi Award), Houston, USA (April 20-29, 2018)

The 2nd International University Cine-Letters Festival of Agadir, Agadir, Morocco (May 10, 2018)

The 2nd Silk Road International Poetry Film Festival 2018, Almaty, Kazakhstan (June 20, 2018)

The 50th New Zealand International Film Festival, Auckland, New Zealand (July 26, 2018).



Official Selections for *The Heart of Spring* (2017-2018).

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

In closing this introduction it is useful to consider the rationale for, and significance of, the research.

Rationale

To date film poetry has been a largely understood as a Western media form that arguably rose to international prominence out of the Münster-Berlin based Poetry Film Festival “Zebra” in 2002.⁷ Although relationships between film and poetry may be traced back well into last century, most theory and practice related to the field is still largely European in its focus. Given the rich and distinctive nature of Chinese poetry I believe that there is a reason for Chinese artists to engage with the media form as a way of not only surfacing and sharing Chinese ways of conceiving and understanding poetry but also as a way of exposing some of the nuance and delicacy of thinking that underpins the construction of Chinese poetic work.

Significance

The study’s significance may be profiled by three distinct but interrelated features. These are:

- Its contribution to film poetry as an emerging media (from a Chinese perspective)
- Its exercising of the Xiang system as both a methodology and a creative strategy for artistic practice
- Its employment of menglong as an artistic and narrative device applied to film poetry.

Film poetry as a Chinese media form

Chinese poetry has a long and deeply developed history. However, there have been very few film poems emanating from China that have permeated what is currently a largely Western discourse and practice. To date the major festivals relating to film poetry are primarily from the West. These include: The ZEBRA Poetry Film Festival (Berlin), the Weimar Poetry Film Awards (Weimar), the Felix Poetry Festival (Antwerp), the Rabbit-Heart Poetry Film Festival (Worcester), the International Video Poetry Festival (Athens), the Film-poem Festival (Lewes), the Ó Bhéal Poetry Film (Cork), the CYCLOP International Poetry Film Festival (Kyiv), the Festival Silêncio (Lisbon), and the Art Visuals & Poetry Film Festival (Vienna).

However, this situation is changing⁸ as increasing numbers of non-European artists begin to explore the relationship between film and poetry. Given China’s long history of poetry and a unique approach to film, it is timely that research should consider the potential of joining these art forms in an



⁷The festival forms part of the German Literaturwerkstatt which was established in 1991 and the organization became active in disseminating film poetry internationally.

⁸A discussion of Chinese film poetry projects can be found on page 46-47.

exploration that draws upon a distinctively Chinese sensibility and aesthetic.

The Xiang system as both a methodology and a creative strategy for artistic practice

The thesis introduces and applies the Xiang system (including the Xiang, Yi Xiang and Yi Jing) as a Chinese methodology applicable to creative, practice-led research in the field of Art and Design. The Xiang system is exercised as an approach to opening up new ways of sensing, making, reflecting and understanding. Comparing the Xiang system with heuristic inquiry, offers a way of considering transcultural approaches to creative research that support subjectivity, flexibility, reflective questioning and interior (tacit) knowing.

The role of menglong

The third significant feature of this research relates to the role of menglong as an artistic and narrative device of film poetry making. Menglong is one of the highest pursuits of the Xiang system and it is understood as a unique aesthetic and a profound philosophical idea in Chinese poetry. In introducing the menglong essence of Shangyin Li's writing to film poetry, I demonstrate how time, space, narration, sound, colour, editing and text can be opened to uniquely open-ended forms of expression. The protean nature and interfaces of these elements in the context of menglong, I suggest, propose a distinctive, culturally resourced approach to composing film poetry.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE EXEGESIS

This exegesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter Positioning the Researcher adopts a lyrical, personal mode of address. Here I explain my personal background and the life experiences that have brought me to this thesis. The chapter is meaningful, because my research draws significantly on subjective states of emotion, memory and tacit knowing.

The second chapter Positioning the Research is a literature review that considers the historical context of film poetry, contemporary Western film poetry, film poetry from Mainland China and Taiwan, and indicative film poems that contextualize my work. In this review of contextualizing knowledge, I position my research crossculturally within the field of film poetry.

The third chapter considers the Research Design underpinning the inquiry. It consists of five sections: a consideration of the research paradigm, an introduction to the Xiang system, a discussion of methodology, the application of methods, and a critique of the overall research design. The

significant feature of this chapter is that instead of adopting an established Western research framework, I have attempted to develop and apply a research approach that draws on the Chinese Xiang system and Zhe Jiang. However, the research design draws inspiration from both Chinese and Western approaches, and as such, it negotiates the rich potential of crosscultural approaches to methodology and methods.

The fourth chapter offers a Critical Commentary on Practice. In discussing the three film poems I consider specific features of the work, including relationships between menglong and the poetic, the poetics of the everyday, the design and nature of emotion, integration and rhythm, and subtlety and space.

The exegesis concludes with a summary of the main ideas in the thesis and a personal reflection on my practice. I also consider the research's "findings", its contribution to the field, and possible further directions.

The exegesis contains three appendices. The first provides links to the five film poetry experiments that underpinned the development of the submitted work. (These experiments are discussed in Chapter Four). The second contains the Director's notes I provided for collaborators working on the film poem *The Heart of Spring*. The third contains the translative catalogue card used at exhibitions that screened *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2*.





CHAPTER ONE:

Positioning the researcher



As last night twinkle stars, as last night blows the breeze,
West of the painted bower, east of Cassia Hall.
Having no wings, I can't fly to you as I please;
Our hearts at one, your ears can hear my inner call.

From: *To One Unnamed* (circa. 838),
Shangyin Li/ translated by Chongyuan Xu [许渊冲] (2007)

A PAIR OF YELLOW SHOES

Midnight television murmurs
The aroma of grass after rain
In a red velvet scream
My eyes become bright yellow shoes
Walking an enigmatic dream.⁹

As a child in the 1990s, it was very rare to watch international films in the cinema because of the Chinese government's censorship. However, there was a television channel CCTV6 that broadcast one international film daily. The problem was that the screening was scheduled at midnight. Because of my age, I could not fully understand the storylines of these films, but I was deeply attracted to them. I remember being profoundly moved by Filippo Ottoni's (1995) *The Killer Wore Yellow Shoes* (*L'assassino è quello con le scarpe gialle*). There was a scene in this film where a 10-year-old boy witnessed a case of murder, but he only saw the pair of yellow shoes that the killer was wearing. The last scene of the work showed the same pair of shoes under a red curtain without revealing the person.

I didn't know who the killer was. The film spoke in a form of enigma that seemed to me very poetic. I was attracted to its fragmented sequences, beautiful colours, and mysterious figures. The pair of yellow shoes called on my imagination in a way that didactic cinema could not. I found myself attracted to the unknown. Here imagination took me to an indefinable mental space that was active and open to possibility. It was through these covert sojourns into the worlds and devices of international cinema that my childhood appreciation of the obscure and enigmatic began to grow.

A WHITE FOREST

A sunny afternoon
We drink a shiny breeze
Our hair becomes a white forest
Trees grow
Leaves die
And we stand
Without words.¹⁰

⁹Chen, C. (2016). *A Pair of Yellow Shoes*.

¹⁰Chen, C. (2016). *A White Forest*.

There is an old Chinese saying, “Chu chu liu xin jian xue wen” [处处留心见学问]. It means you can always learn something somewhere from daily life if you are attentive. Fifteen years ago, my father and I visited a village where some distant relatives lived. We saw a little girl sitting on a ridge looking into a nearby forest (Figure 1:1). My father befriended her and together we quietly entered the wood. Eventually, the child indicated that we should wait. We stood silently, listening to the sound of the breeze. Then beautifully, under a golden sky, hundreds of white egrets flew towards us through the rays of a sunset. The child explained that this forest was home to the birds in the village.

The experience left a profound impression on me and I was reminded that even small things may have poetic value. Such occurrences expanded upon many similar encounters in my childhood; lying between the fresh grass and the blue sky, while feeling my heartbeat; observing the changes of colour and texture on a leaf until it fell and returned to the roots of a tree ... and waiting for the evening lights to illuminate a city, then observing the interplay between glow and shadow. For me, such fragments of the ordinary contain the essence of poetry and resource my artistic practice.



Figure 1:1. A breeze from the village of Kang Men in Hangzhou, where my father and I saw the white forest. (Photograph taken by the author; 2010).

ECHO

Lying in the mud
Breathing humble brown
She kisses a spark with the deepest sound
A frozen sunset
Blooms into night
Melting lightly
Like a piece of a feather
I see
In her mirror.¹¹

My grandmother

In the 1930s, my grandmother was born into a poor peasant family that did not own land (Figure 1:2). Accordingly, her parents could not support all of their children. There were four girls and two boys. One of the girls died of starvation, one was sent to an orphanage, and one was given away as a child bride. My grandmother was the only girl left in the family, but she had to leave primary school early so she could support her brothers' study. There were very few apprenticeships for women at that time so she served as a maid for a wealthy family. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, gender equality became one of the national policies but it was very difficult for many people to understand and adjust to the ideological transformation. My grandmother proposed herself as the woman representative of the town in which she lived. She promoted the concept of equality, including equal rights for women in both politics and marriage. I recall her saying, "Whatever men can do,



Figure 1:2. My grandmother Mrs Aixia Shou standing in front of her new apartment in Zhu Ji. This apartment was given to her by the government as a reward for fifty years of dedication to its ideals. (Photograph taken by the author; 2010).

¹¹Chen, C. (2016). *Echo*.

women can do, but just in a different way”. The echo of her assertion takes away my fear when I try to work in traditionally “male-dominant” fields, like filmmaking. It also gives me courage to challenge controversial issues in traditional Chinese contexts.

My mother

My mother, Aifen Fan, was born in the 1960s and she was the first university student in her village (Figure 1:3). Accordingly, she secured an opportunity to change her life from selling vegetables in the village market to working in a large city. But for her, study was not a tool for accruing personal benefits. Instead, it was a method for developing independent thinking. After working in meteorology, she studied law and English on her own. From this endeavor she attained a law qualification and worked as a part time English translator. Her passion was to explore diverse possibilities in life. I was very influenced by her strength and insight.



Figure 1:3. The house and garden built by my grandparents (2017).

The Heart of Spring was shot in my mother’s hometown, Ning Hai. The work considers the plight of a mother who keeps the faith with her daughter and pays a terrible price. Mei, (the protagonist) was inspired by the spirit of my mother. The scene in *The Heart of Spring* featuring the doctor was set up in the house where my mother lived during her childhood.

JOURNEY

Life is a net
Dream is a fly
Home is in poetry
I leave to return.¹²

In the early 1990s, it was rare to see Westerners in Hangzhou, the Chinese city where I grew up. However, my mother had a part time job with an American company. As a working mother, sometimes she brought me to the office, as did her American colleagues with their children (Figure 1:4). Although I could not speak English, and the American children could not speak Chinese, by using body language we managed to communicate and play together. Somewhere in this childhood capacity to reach across borders, a small seed was sown in my heart.



Figure 1:4. The author aged 8, playing with the child of American parents at my mother's workplace. (The photograph was taken by my mother in 1997).

After high school, I decided to enrol in a media and communication university.¹³ Normally Chinese students who attain good academic scores do not perceive art school as an option. However, this institution offered a professional grounding in television and film and I had a passion for screen writing. My decision seemed clear.

¹²Chen, C. (2016). *Journey*.

¹³The Zhejiang University of Media and Communication.

I began pursuing international study in 2010 after finishing three years of

professional training in screen writing in Hangzhou. I then moved to Perth in Australia where I studied media production as an exchange student for one semester. Subsequent to this, I attained a Masters degree in Film Studies at the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom. However, when I was studying, it was not easy to find an appropriate methodology for my research because the theoretical paradigms in which I was encouraged to work were largely based on Western philosophies. At this time film theories based on Chinese epistemological frameworks were not well established in the international area.¹⁴As a consequence, after graduating I sought to pursue a more authentic paradigm not only for my practice but also as a stimulus for the thinking that underpins it. Accordingly, I enrolled in a PhD in 2014 with supervisors in New Zealand who were both practitioners who had worked in both China and Western environments. I believed that practice contains knowledge, so pursuing an advanced degree through a rigorously reflective environment where the generation of artistic texts is concurrently explored and contextualized, seemed very natural to me. This may be because I had grown up in a culture that has a long history of connecting art practice and philosophy. From Zi Qing who carved a bell-stand from the philosophical viewpoint of a craftsman,¹⁵to the scholarly practice of Chinese Literati painting that operated as both a moral exemplar and a manifestation of an artist's emotion, philosophy and knowledge, relationships between artistic practice and one's quality as a human being have been deeply understood for a very long time (Figure 1:5).

Thus, this thesis, as both an artistic expression and a scholarly analysis, is not a



Figure 1:5. *Autumn Colours on the Qiao and Hua Mountains Handscroll* [鹊华秋色图], ink and color on paper, 28.4 × 90.2 cm

This painting by Mengfu Zhao [赵孟頫] (1254–1322) is an example of Chinese Literati painting. Zhao Mengfu was a Chinese scholar, painter and calligrapher during the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368). Initially he visited a fellow literatus Zhou Mi at his ancestral hometown. Then he depicted the scenery from memory and sent the painting to Zhou as a gift. In this painting he merged reality and memory with calligraphic strokes, and concurrently transmitted the values of friendship and elegance. (Property of The Yorck Project (2002); the image is copyright free).

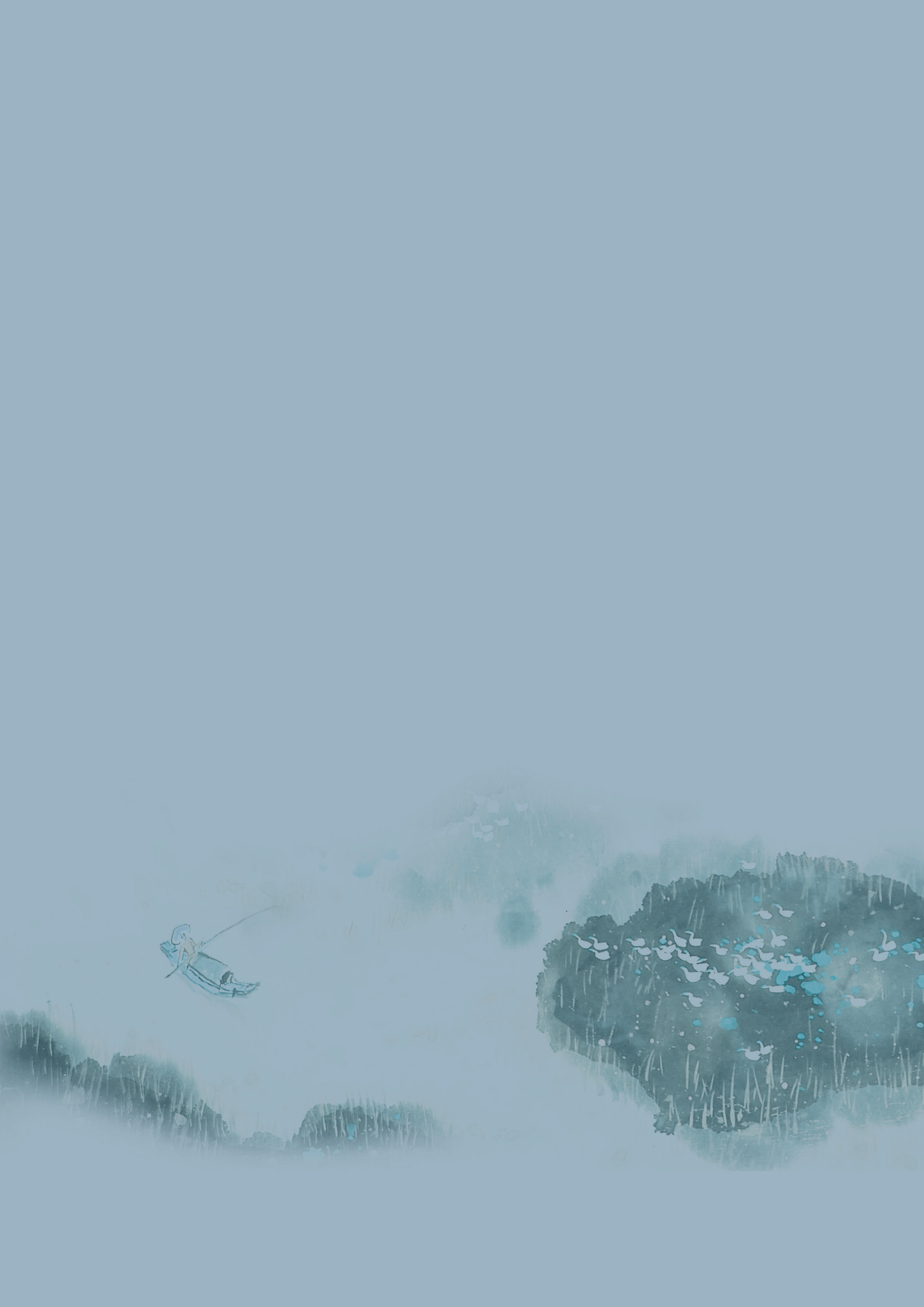
¹⁴In the *2015 Annual Report of Chinese Film Theory and Critique*, Jianqiang Li [李建强] mentions that the proposal of structuring film theories and critiques based on Chinese epistemological frameworks was the highlight of the academic developments in 2015. However only a few researchers have worked in this direction and such theoretical frameworks are still in their early stages of development.

¹⁵Zi Qing lived approximately 2,700 years ago. *Zhuang Zi* (380-287 B.C.) records that in order to forget himself, Zi Qing fasted for seven days before thinking about his art practice. In this time everything that could divert his mind from exclusive devotion to the artwork disappeared. He then went into the forest to look for the perfect form of a tree. Through this search, the shape of the bell-stand arose in his mind. After securing the material required, he did not begin to work until he felt that his spirit matched the quality of the wood.

foreign concept to me. But within it I am positioned between worlds, between Chinese and Western scholarship, between epistemologies that accompany cultural ways of seeing, between the communicative potentials of the explicit and enigmatic, and between analytical considerations and lyrical artwork. In this place I stand as a Chinese woman and an emerging artistic scholar, whose roots run into the past and whose aspirations reach towards a future where the poetic potential of film may be considered as a blending of ways of seeing. I therefore believe that an appreciative common ground might be approached through the explication and contextualization of this thesis study.







CHAPTER TWO: Positioning the research

Breeze-light spreads along the east-west paths,
The lovely ghost has long been sought in vain.
Winged guest of the honey cell, like the sensitive heart,
Alluring leaves, seductive twigs, I know them all.

From *Spring* (circa. 836),
Shangyin Li / translated by Ye (2013)



In this chapter I discuss historical and contemporary discourse surrounding what may be defined as film poetry. A review of the evolution of the media form serves as a useful method for contextualizing my practice.

The chapter considers four discussions:

- The historical context of film poetry
- Contemporary Western film poetry
- Film poetry from Mainland China and Taiwan
- Indicative film poems that contextualize my work.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF FILM POETRY

Relationships between film and poetry can be traced back to early experimental films from the 1920s to the 1960s. Seminal amongst such work was *Manhatta* (1921) by Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler. This work was inspired by Whitman's collection *Leaves of Grass* (1855), and Wees (1999) suggests that it may be considered one of the earliest film poems.¹⁶ Ieropoulos (2009) notes that during this period, "the idea of poetry was seen as a fruitful model for the creative process of the more lyrical side of experimental film practices" (para. 1). Accordingly, early experimental short films containing lines from poems may be seen as the precursors of what we call film poetry today.¹⁷

¹⁶*Manhatta* (1921) may be defined as a film poem, mainly because it was inspired by a pre-existing poem and contains written verses within it.

¹⁷Because I am aware that the term film poetry was not in use in the 1920s, I am reluctant to call these experimental short films, "film poetry".

¹⁸Included among these we might consider works by Marcel Duchamp, Ian Hugo, Humphrey Jennings, Stan Brakhage, Len Lye, James Whitney and Leslie Daiken.

¹⁹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxTObLCLNPc>

²⁰<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EG2E99Ldm9Y>

However, a diverse range of filmmakers during this time used cinematic approaches as poetic devices.¹⁸ Significant among them were Man Ray and Maya Deren who applied thoughts from poetry writing to the making short films. In Man Ray's two short films *Emak Bakia* (1926) and *L' Etoile De Mer* (1928), a conceptual link may be identified between written poetry and film. Carl Belz (1965) has observed in both films, distinctive "disjointed and illogical sequences" that have resonances with contemporary French verse (p. 128). In Maya Deren's work of the 1940s and 1950s, we encounter efforts to align film and poetry as independent media that work together. Deren argued that poetry might be understood as another dimension of film that might accommodate the appearance of words. She suggested that if words "were brought in on a different level, not issuing from the image which should be complete in itself ... then [it would be] the two things [*word and image*] together that made a poem" (1963, p. 59).

In the 1970s there was a relatively quiet period where little has been theorized about film poetry. In terms of practice there was, however, significant material developed by Margaret Tait, including *Colour Poems* (1974)¹⁹ and *Aerial* (1974)²⁰. Tait (1999) believed that "film is essentially a poetic medium" (p. 5). Most of her film poetry may be described

as “documentary” in style but emanating from a distinctly subjective perspective. However, Tait did not frame her work as documentary. She said:

...in a documentary the real things depicted are liable to lose their reality by being photographed and presented in that "documentary" way, and there's no poetry in that. In poetry, something else happens. Hard to say what it is. Presence, let's say, soul or spirit, an empathy with whatever it is that's dwelt upon, feeling for it -to the point of identification. (Tait, 1999, p. 4)

Tait's work was distinctive because it embraced the lyrical nature of the everyday. She drew forward the nuance of found objects, the expressive power of immediate surroundings and a poetics of ordinary people.²¹ She described her approach as “making use of available actuality” (Tait, 1999, p. 4). It is Tait's concern with the everyday as a form of poetic “available actuality” that intersects with my artistic approach to film poetry.²²

CONTEMPORARY WESTERN FILM POETRY

Since the 1980s, film poetry has been framed as a genre in Western discourse (Konyves, 1982). However, discussions as to what constitutes a “film poem” have been divergent. It is difficult to assert a specific definition because film poetry is a protean genre that can be expressed in many forms. Different practitioners prefer alternative names for film poetry; for example cin(e)-poems (Aguilar, n.d.), videopoetry (Konyves, 2011), cinépoetry (Brown, n.d.), poetry film (Wees, 1999), film-poem (Speranza, 2002) and film poem (Todd, 1997). However, of common agreement among practitioners and theorists is that the genre contains synthesized forms of film and poetry. In Wees' often cited discussion of film poetry, he suggests artists, “have created a synthesis of poetry and film that generates associations, connotations and metaphors neither the verbal nor the visual text would produce on its own” (1999, p. 1). Thus, in a broad sense, the interdependence and hybridity of film and poetry may be seen as a fundamental feature of the genre.

Many theorists (Cook, 2016; Halloran, 2015; Ieropoulos, 2009; Konyves, 2011; Wees, 1984) suggest that creating film poetry is not a process of illustrating a poem, but rather an artistic response to the ethos of a work. This idea correlates with my practice where I draw inspiration from Shangyin Li's poetry²³ and artistically consider the spirit of the original work. As Halloran (2015) notes, “there is common agreement that film poems should creatively exceed standard perceptions of what a poet intended, as well as going beyond a conventionally acceptable range of readings, becoming a new artwork” (p. 86).

²¹See *Colour Poems* (1974) and *Aerial* (1974).

²²This may be most clearly exemplified in my related film poems, *Towards Late Evening 1* and *Towards Late Evening 2*.

²³Although I began my practice by interpreting and illustrating a poem line by line, after numerous experiments, I moved towards trying to express the “ethos” of the work.



Despite certain agreement, divergent conceptualizations of film poetry exist. A significant conflict relates to whether the synthesis of film and poetry should be conveyed by words or film. Both Konyves (2011) and Cook (2016) consider the importance of written or spoken words in film poetry. Konyves believes “text, displayed on-screen or voiced, is an essential element of the videopoem.” Similarly, but focusing more on spoken poetry, Cook (2016) says, “The essence is that if the words must be on screen then perhaps not the entire text but only a carefully chosen extract, alongside the poem being read in full [should appear]” (para. 8).

However, another argument suggests that the production itself gives birth to poetry; in other words, the unfolding visual sequence is “in itself” the poem. Mason and Nuselovici (2012) see film poetry as “a translation from poetry to film by filmmakers” (p. 83). This idea may be traced back to Wees’ (1999) arguments that film poetry should receive recognition in the history of experimental film. More recently, Halloran (2015) has proposed that, “a film poem is a cinematic artwork that takes a written, often canonical, poem as its stimulus” (p. 83). She argues that the key feature of a film poem is “the juxtaposition of visual images and ideas from outside the poem with its lines, leading to activation of new meanings in the poem” (ibid., p. 84).

My film poems *Towards the Late Evening 1 & 2* correlate with this idea. They do not contain written or spoken poetry as explicit elements. However, significant concepts expressed by the images are stimulated by Shangyin Li’s poem *Le You Yuan*. In *The Heart of Spring*, Li’s poem *Untitled (Jin Se)* only appears at the end of the work (on a separate black matte). During the narrative unfolding, it is sound, images and written text that I use as poetic devices. Accordingly, elements of the pre-existing poem are not laid over film but absorbed into and interpreted through it. Li’s poem appears in its original form only as a form of epilogue to the main text. In *The Heart of Spring*, my own written poem appears as text in the work. Text and image work on separate layers such that the poetic combination “expands upon the specific denotations of words and the limited iconic references of images to produce a much broader range of connotations, associations, and metaphors” (Wees, 1984, p. 109).

FILM POETRY FROM MAINLAND CHINA AND TAIWAN

The film poem as a recognized media form has, to date, been largely theorized in a Western context (Ieropoulos, 2009; Kim, 2010; Speranza, 2002; Wees, 1984). However, there are in existence a small number of Chinese film poems produced by independent filmmakers and animators, including *Dreaming of Home and Mother* [旅 恋] (2012)²⁴ and *Ode to*

²⁴<https://vimeo.com/80620897>

Summer [夏] (2008)²⁵. *Dreaming of Home and Mother* was inspired by *A Traveler's Song* [游子吟] which is a classical Chinese poem written by the Tang Dynasty poet Jiao Meng (751-814) [孟郊]. The work portrays the affection the poet has for his hometown and family. Similarly, *Ode to Summer* drew its inspiration from the Tang Dynasty poem *A Pavilion in the Mountain on a Summer Day* [山亭夏日] by Pian Gao (821-887) [高骈]. In this work the animator Yi Xu [许毅] reconstituted the written text as a film poem while preserving the sense of quietness, leisure and comfort in the original work.

After 2014, a small number of film festivals and official art projects in mainland China began to pay attention to film poetry. In 2014, the first official film poetry festival *Shortvisions*, screened with the support of *Interfilm* in Ningbo, China. The same year, CCTV and the China Central Newsreels Corporation selected 108 classical Chinese poems from the Tang Dynasty to be adapted into short films. Although they explored the works through storytelling, the project suggested that increasingly, artists from mainland China were beginning to explore direct relationships between poetry and film. In 2017, The Purple Mountain Theater in Nanjing and the Goethe-Institute China jointly organized *Lyric × Film: In Search of the Aura*. During this three-day event, the organizers of the ZEBRA Poetry Film Festival screened more than 20 selected film poems to the Chinese audience. A number of Chinese feature films relating to poetry, including *Jade Green Station*²⁶(2004) and *Poet on a Business Trip*²⁷(2015), and several short lyrical moving image texts such as *Island of Yesterday*²⁸(2016), were also screened in the programme. However, although works like these constitute an emerging body of film poetry in Mainland China, to date they have not been academically contextualized and theorized as film poetry.

Conversely in Taiwan, film poetry as a genre has been explored since the 1980s. During this decade, crossmedia potentials for poetry were discussed academically among a number of Taiwanese poets, including Yaode Lin [林耀德] who considered film poetry as a new form of modern poetry. In the first Taiwan modern poetry seminar [现代诗学研讨会] in 1984, he discussed how film poems at the event included both visual and audio-visual elements with artists making film poetry, cinematic storyboards and paintings. In 1988 Qing Luo [罗青] published a treatise *Video Poetics* [录影诗学] in which he explored methods for combining film and poetry. He believed there were similar artistic concepts behind film and poetry, although they were conceived of as two different art forms. Other poets and theorists who have considered the concept film poetry include Ling Bai (1986) [白灵] and Shisan Du (1986) [杜十三].²⁹

²⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvdouKLg358>

²⁶<https://vimeo.com/159040062>

²⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l27ddTJev0c>

²⁸<http://vfilm.china.com.cn/pindao/juqing/2017-02-07/48933.html>

²⁹*The Sound and Light of Poetry* [诗的声光] was a new movement of Taiwanese poetry in the 1980s. The movement was established by Qing Luo, Ling Bai, and Shisan Du. From 1986 to 1999, Ling Bai organized a series of exhibitions based on the concept of “the sound and light of poetry”. For these exhibitions, he curated art works that were hybrids of poetry and other art forms, including moving image, painting, drama and installation. (Fu & Bai, 2014).

³⁰These filmmakers are Hong Hong [洪 洪], Misen Wu [吴米森], Lanquan Yan [朱贤哲], Zhexian Zhu [朱贤哲].

³¹These filmmakers are Zhexian Zhu [朱贤哲], Wenzhen Zeng [曾文珍], Junzhi Chen [陈俊志], Misen Wu [吴米森], Jiran Hou [侯季然].

³²The film poetry of Yali Huang is based on poetic and illogical connections between the image and sound, and it focuses on the enigma of ordinary objects. This is perhaps best exemplified in the short film *The Unnamed* [待以名之的事物] (2009). A trailer for this film is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaAHX40SVew>

³³<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAZCCFdvfOg>

³⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZ6v4ve3IGs>

³⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Y5mdN2AkWY&index=13&list=PL2s1bIF7ek7bMhDwRWqJmQRyZcsmL22hC>

³⁶<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GX4ZETCkEKg>

In 2003 and 2007, the Taiwanese public television channel [台湾公共电视] commissioned filmmakers to create film poems for two dedicated film poetry television series. In 2003, four filmmakers were invited to use moving images to create four individual film poems,³⁰ but by 2007, the focus shifted to collaboration. In this later commission, five filmmakers were asked to collaborate with five poets and together they created film poems that revealed the Yi Jing of the written text.³¹

In addition to television programs, and commensurate with the popularization of streaming video sites like Youtube, an increasing number of independently produced Taiwanese film poems have become viewable by online audiences including works by the established filmmaker Yali Huang [黄亚历].³²

Since 2007, the Taipei Poetry Festival has organized an annual film poetry competition that has provided a platform for film poets to exhibit their work. The festival has developed into a cross-disciplinary event featuring film poetry that covers a diverse range of categories. Some of these film poems recreate pre-existing poems and utilize the entire poem. Indicative of this is Qihua Wei's [魏琪桦] *Editing Poet Yu Xia Mixing Me* [剪辑夏宇混合我] (2009).³³ Other works utilize a single concept from a pre-existing poem. *Fragment* [断章] (2008)³⁴ may be seen as an example of this approach. Another form of film poetry utilizes a hybrid between the original poem and film. An example of this is Wanxuan Cai's [蔡宛璇] *I Want to Wake Up Inside the Sea* [我想欲踮海内面醒过来] (2014).³⁵ In this work we hear an original poem about language and lovesickness edited from a conversation between a two-year-old little girl and her mother. We also see the girl learning to swim in the sea. Expanding upon these approaches, there are film poems that integrate performance elements. Indicative of these are the *Tree Talk* [树说] (2017)³⁶ which is a collaboration between Kaiting Qiu [邱楷庭] and Delun Chen [陈德伦].

In general, most of the film poems selected for this festival contain existing poetry that is embedded as either spoken or written text. Interestingly, most of the work depicts daily life or a social phenomenon in a lyrical documentary style. This approach is also evident in my work and may be attributed to the extensive history in Chinese philosophy of understanding the poetic beauty of daily life.

INDICATIVE FILM POEMS THAT CONTEXTUALIZE MY WORK

Although there is an increasing body of film poetry now appearing in festivals and online, a small number of recent film poems serve to

contextualise this thesis project, and a brief consideration of three types of practice demonstrate how concerns within my own work parallel or extend those of other contemporary practitioners.

Film poetry that draws its inspiration from the work of a pre-existing poet

Across diverse forms of film poetry, I am particularly interested in examples where the work is based on a reflection of a pre-existing poem but the original poem does not appear in the film. James Franco's³⁷ *Herbert White* (2010) may be seen as a good example. *Herbert White* is inspired by Frank Bidart's poem of the same name. This poem depicts the inner world of White who is a necrophiliac serial killer. In an interview about his film poem Franco discusses how he structured tension in the work through the consideration of one key line of Bidart's poem:

*"Still, I liked to drive past the woods where she lay,
tell the old lady and the kids I had to take a piss, hop out and do it to
her ...".*

(Bidart, 1990, para. 4)

Franco (2014) developed the dynamics of his character by interpreting a paradox. Essentially on one side, there existed a socially approved family man, and conversely this was a man with a secret that was a social anathema.

Although a very different kind of film poem, my work, *The Heart of Spring*, adopts a similar approach by interpreting a sense of remembrance and melancholy drawn from the closing lines of Shangyin Li's poem *Jinse*.

*"One should wait until these feelings become remembrance,
it's just that at the moment I was already in a daze."*

Although in my work these lines do appear physically in the closing sequence of the work, they are discrete because they do not interplay with the images. Conversely in James' film poem, the line that inspired him has no physical presence at all. James says:

It becomes a visual poem. I don't need to read the poem over it. I have been loyal to a certain aspect of the poem that I want to draw out. Now it lived in a new media. It did not depend on the original media ...³⁸

Although his film poem has its own *spirit*, one can still sense the ethos of the original poet speaking through the double mask that White wears.



³⁷Apart from *Herbert White* (2010), his short films *The Clerk's Tale* and *The Feast of Stephen* are based on the poems by Spencer Reece and Anthony Hecht respectively

³⁸YouTube interview (2014)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31V73WJ9nWo>

³⁹The word documentary has been used to describe "filmmaking practice, a cinematic tradition, and a mode of audience reception" (Nichols, 1997, p. 26). As a media form it is "continually in a state of evolution" (ibid.). I use the term "lyrical documentary style" to describe a particular poetic treatment of nonfiction material that, while "documenting" a perceived reality, moves its stylistic concerns away from the didactic and dramatic towards the contemplative and lyrically attentive.

⁴⁰<https://vimeo.com/195800722>

⁴¹<https://vimeo.com/211630694>

⁴²<https://vimeo.com/192916292>

⁴³<https://vimeo.com/193805952>

⁴⁴Jiran Hou [侯季然] is a filmmaker whose live-action film poems have influenced my practice. In addition to *Poetries from the Bookstores* (2014), his *Shopping Cart Boy* [购物车男孩] (2007) drew its inspiration from an unfinished work by the poet Xiping Sun [孙梓评] and it extended to poet's work by considering the nature of the blue sky. Hou's film poem *Jingqian Shi* [使景迁] won the first prize in the 2008 Taipei Poetry Festival.

This same sense of the presence of an original poem can be identified in my works *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2*. Both film poems touch the essence of Shangyin Li's poem *Le You Yuan* where he contrasts subtle sorrow with the richness of memory. In these films this paradox is applied to a contemporary consideration of older women who now live alone.

Film poetry that treats documentary as poetical

There are many examples of film poetry that engage with what might be understood as a lyrical documentary style.³⁹Significant among them are, *You Don't Know Opera*⁴⁰(2016) directed by Ruben Van Leer, *Chasing the Wind*⁴¹(2017) directed by Andrew Batista, *My son*⁴²(2016) directed by Germain Lalot and *the Wall*⁴³ (2016) directed by Andrew de Zen.

My documentary style film poems *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2* have similarities to Jiran Hou's [侯季然]⁴⁴ short film collection *Poetries from the Bookstores* [书店里的影像诗] (2014). Hou's collection introduces forty independent bookstores in Taiwan and I would propose that several pieces from this collection are in fact film poems. Significant among these are *Tsaochi Bookstore* [草祭二手書店]⁴⁵, *TaKao Books* [三餘書店]⁴⁶, *Time Second-hand Bookstore* [時光二手書店]⁴⁷ and *Jiufen Lebo Second-hand Bookstore* [九份乐伯二手书店]⁴⁸.

In *Tsaochi Bookstore*, Hou combines film and written verses from the poem *the Dome of Afganistan* [阿富汗的天顶] (by the contemporary poet Kuixian Li [李魁贤]). He uses this material to consider the theme of illumination in a lyrical manner. Although the poem appears in Hou's work in a written form, he also utilizes light, shadow and reflection to create an original visual poem (Figure 2:1). In *Time Second-hand Bookstore*, Hou takes a statement made by the owner of the bookstore and then he draws upon it to create a film poem. The sentence,

⁴⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jhbvc1KpzZk>

⁴⁶<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lWO2crtKQpk>

⁴⁷https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoPi3f8dP_U

⁴⁸<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8lw7-b4yo0>



IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS.

Figure 2:1. Frame grab from Hou's *Tsaochi Bookstore* showing the delicate relationality he creates between written text and image (2014).

"The outside is noisy, but the inside is quiet"

... is extrapolated visually and aurally using three hours of time lapse recording of the noisiness outside the bookstore. We do not see the inside of the store or its owner (Figure 2:2). The result is a work that is more poetic than didactic. In it, the ethos of a one line observation is explored as a lyrical interpretation of place.



IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS.

Figure 2:2. Frame grab from Hou's *Time Second-hand Bookstore* (2014).



Towards the Late Evening 1 and *Towards the Late Evening 2* have three similarities with Hou's film poems. First, they capture the *essence*, the objects and the atmosphere of a place using images rather than words. These are used in order to present a relatively small poetic concept or idea. Second, in using a lyrical documentary style, they present ideas from a clearly subjective point of view. Finally, both Hou's and my film poems focus on the poetics of ordinary people's lives. Before filming *Poetries from the Bookstores*, Hou observed and interviewed the owners of the bookstores, then he wove into his work, traces of their lives. In a similar way, I visited Mrs Garelja and my grandmother several times before shooting *Towards the Late Evening 1 & 2*. I came to know the spaces they occupied, their small rituals and the grace with which they conducted them. Like Hou, I was seeking a revivification through film poetry of something that might be easily overlooked ... something intimate, that might be expressed based on a lyrical way of seeing and documenting the relationship between a person and a place. However, my work can be differentiated from Hou's approach, because I intentionally apply the artistic device of menglong to a lyrical documentary style. Normally, documentary is concerned with making something evident or documenting and clarifying a situation, so the concept of menglong may seem like an unusual preoccupation. However, it is used in my film poems to increase delicacy and suggestion in the narratives, such that we meet, but don't entirely "know" the women about whom each work is composed.

Film poetry that renders everyday life poetically

Everyday life appears as a theme or content of many film poems, including Jake Dylka's *Embarrassed* (2016)⁴⁹ and John D. Scott's *In the Waiting Room* (2014).⁵⁰ However, it is the Taiwanese woman poet and filmmaker Mimi Ye's [叶觅觅] film poetry that relates to much of my work. Ye's film poem, *Are There But I Am Not* (2009) [他们在那里而我不在]⁵¹ considered the concepts of time and existence. For this work Ye collected images of ordinary life in her hometown, her grandmother's hometown and her working place in Taiwan (Figure 2:3). She then edited the footage in the USA.

⁴⁹<https://www.shortoftheweek.com/channels/poem-genre/>

⁵⁰<https://www.triquarterly.org/issues/issue-147/waiting-room>

⁵¹<https://vimeo.com/7695648>



Figure 2:3. Frame grab from Ye's *Are There But I Am Not* (2009).

Was Being Moved? (2011) [被移动的吗?]⁵² is a partially animated film poem she created about the mental and physical state of moving and being moved. In this work Ye juxtaposes images of street life in New York city, the cultural rituals of a Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage in Taiwan, a boat crafted by artists in Chicago and a traditional boat made by Taiwanese fishermen. These images talk poetically about her personal experience of moving between Taiwan and America (Figure 2:4).



Figure 2:4. Frame grab from Ye's *Was Being Moved?* (2011).



⁵²<https://vimeo.com/90937184>

In her film poem *Hail the Bodhisattva of Collected Junk* (2015) [南無撿破爛菩薩],⁵³ Ye (2015) introduces a consideration of the Buddhist phrase *Hail the Bodhisattva Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy*. In this work she filmed local junk vendors who collect unwanted household items and she used the material as a metaphor for the idea that the heart of Buddha is in everyday life and merciful people are able to bear and take care of injustice and deficiency (Figure 2:5).



Figure 2:5. Frame grab from Ye's *Hail the Bodhisattva of Collected Junk* (2015).

When working with the poetics of the everyday, Ye shoots a wide variety of material then selects and rearranges in postproduction what she considers poetic. She likens this process to making as weaving. She says:

My poems grow with my films simultaneously. I always write something first before I go out to collect images, but everything is still unclear and improvised when I am shooting. During the editing stage, I like to collage the images. Afterwards, I always write something based on the images and then collage the images more. (Ye, 2014, para. 1)

Ye's work places significant emphasis on valuing the ordinary and overlooked in a lyrical manner. Similarly, I believe that poetry is embedded in small, often mundane things; a facial expression, a fallen flower, the fold of a cloth, the placing of a cup, a well-trodden bridge, or the colour of an old book. Such potentially overlooked aspects of the mundane may be seen as poetic if the artist is prepared to reconsider them. Accordingly, my creative

⁵³<https://vimeo.com/142793891>

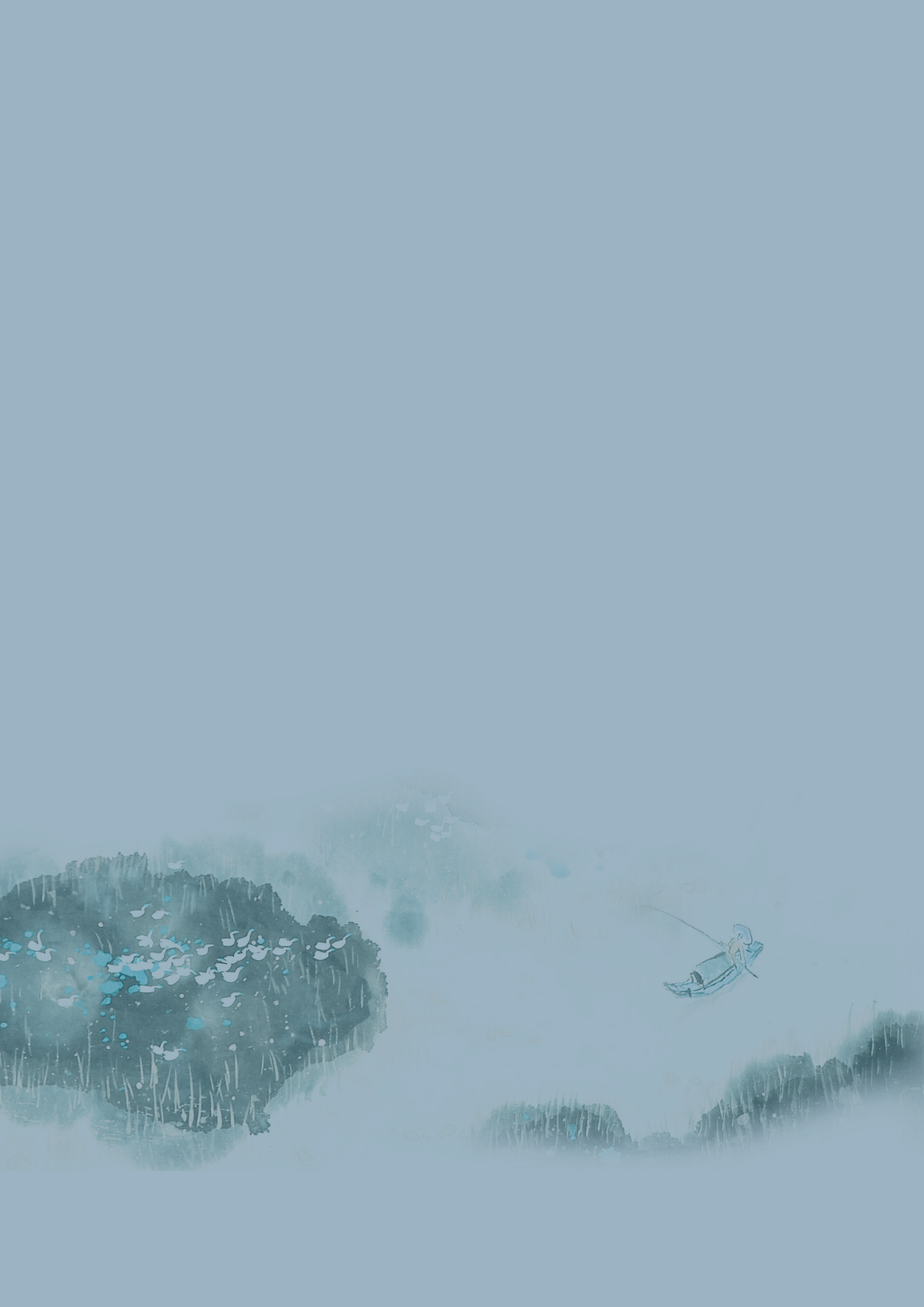
approach has similarities to hers. In my postproduction process, unexpected everyday objects often surface as significant ways of communicating the central idea of a piece. For example, the teacups in *Towards the Late Evening I* were not initially considered as central to the film poem until I began shooting. It was only after I began cutting the footage that I recognized their poetic nature and the delicate rituals of loss and memory embedded within them.

SUMMARY

The aim of this chapter has been to position my work in relation to the variable phenomenon of film poetry. The first section has provided a brief historical overview of Western film poetry and the second has considered theories of film poetry that lead me to position myself as both a poet and a filmmaker working within the hybrid media form. The third part has considered the rise and emerging nature of film poetry in Mainland China and Taiwan. The final section has focused on contemporary film poems that serve to contextualize elements of my work because of the distinctive way in which they deal with pre-existing poetry, documentary elements and the valuing of everyday life. Thus, in this chapter, I demonstrate where my research is positioned and where, conceivably, it might make a contribution to the development of practice and thinking in the field.

Having contextualized my practice, it is now useful to consider the research design underpinning its realization.





CHAPTER THREE: Research design

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You ask when I'll be back – I wish I knew!
Night rain on Ba Mountain overflows the autumn ponds
When will we trim the candle wick under our own west window?
I'll be telling you this story and night rain will be falling.

From *Night Rain, A Letter North* (circa. 848),
Shangyin Li / translated by David Young (1990)

⁵⁴Candy (2006) states, “practice-led research is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice” (para. 1-2). However, I would suggest that the term might be used to describe a more dynamic process where practice actually “leads” thinking. In other words, when the researcher is in the process of making (practice), she is generating both thought and reflection and these agents incrementally move the research forward.

58 ⁵⁵Klein (2010) discusses artistic research as research that is determined by artistic experience. He defines this as the active perception of looking from outside of a frame and simultaneously entering into it (p. 3).

⁵⁶Since the Tang dynasty, Zhe Jiang as a phrase has had three separate layers of meaning: an intelligent chancellor, a skillful craftsman or a talented poet or painter. In order to explore the possibilities of transferring the traditional concept of the craftsman into the modern concept of an architect, in the 1930s the Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture [营造学社] published *The Book of Zhe Jiang* [哲匠录]. I suggest that this exploration may be seen as an early experiment that breaks the conceptual boundaries between intelligent thinking, craftsmanship and artistic practice.

This chapter unpacks a journey of research design and modification. It draws into a working relationship approaches from both Chinese and Western thinking. Given the potential complexity of describing the approach, I have divided the chapter into five sections:

- The project’s research paradigm [Zhe Jiang and practice-led, artistic research]
- A discussion of the Xiang system
- The methodology
- Research methods
- A critique of the research design.

RESEARCH PARADIGM

Paradigmatically, from the Western point of view this project may be described as practice-led,⁵⁴ artistic research.⁵⁵ Carroll (1997) defines a paradigm as “a body of beliefs and values, laws, and practices which govern a community of practitioners” (p. 177). Tolich and Davidson (2011) extend the idea slightly to mean “a particular way of looking at the world” (p. 32). It feels authentic to me to use an artistic paradigm, because I approach this research as an artist with the beliefs, values and practices of an artist. My use of the term practice-led aligns with Gray’s (1996) definition that describes such research as an inquiry that is initiated in practice and carried out through practice. However, I would extend the idea slightly to describe a particular kind of research that uses practice as both its source of inquiry and mode of generating knowledge.

In contemplating the nature of a practice-led, artistic paradigm, it is useful to reflect upon the Chinese concept of Zhe Jiang⁵⁶ [哲匠] which, in the last 15 years, has been used to consider the relationship between thinking and artistic practice by a number of scholars (Jiang Xu, 2017; Shaoxue Hu, 2016; Tongyuan Yu, 2005). Among these scholars, Jiang Xu⁵⁷ has developed the concept of Zhe Jiang into an arts-based research paradigm and my interpretation of Zhe Jiang is significantly shaped by his research. Broadly, in Chinese Zhe [哲] means philosophy and Jiang [匠] means craftsman. Xu (2017) defines Zhe Jiang as “thinking as a philosopher; making as a craftsman” (para. 1).

⁵⁷Jiang Xu [许江] is recognized as a landscape painter, educator and scholar. He currently acts as President, Professor and Doctoral supervisor of the China Academy of Art and Vice Chairman of the China Artists’ Association.



According to Xu's explanation of Zhe Jiang, the relationship between thinking and making may be interpreted as a system of "intergrowth". Xu (2016a) holds the view that a researcher trained to be a master of an art form, thinks, reflects, inquires, questions, criticises and self-expresses in and through the process of making. This making process may help the researcher access Dao [道]. For the artistic researcher, Dao includes the knowledge of a specific art form, the ability to use the hands, the essence of creativity, delicate emotional perception, the illumination of the inner world of oneself and the Yi Jing⁵⁸ [意境] of life (Qian, 2016).

The paradigm of Zhe Jiang bears a relationship to the notion of Western practice-led artistic research. Both paradigms understand a connection between the artist and research by practice, and both place emphasis on processing thinking and the concept of knowing through making. I would posit in this thesis that Zhe Jiang may be considered as a Chinese practice-led artistic paradigm. Therefore, the paradigm of this research project positioned as practice-led artistic, may be approached from both Chinese and Western orientations. Artistic practice is my way of understanding the world from both Western and Chinese cultures.

Traditionally research is understood as a device used to answer a question (Draper, 2004). However, like Western artistic research, in the Zhe Jiang paradigm the researcher creates a field of inquiry to help her or him to think in rich and provocative ways. By concurrently developing thinking and making skills to a high level, the researcher is able to attain both the freedom of artistic expression and the freedom of the spirit (Xu, 2016b, para. 10). This state of freedom is subjective so it does not claim to present an absolute truth.

Differentiating itself from the proposition that "knowledge is embodied in the product of art" (Klein, 2010; Mäkelä, 2007), the paradigm of Zhe Jiang posits an alternative focus that suggests knowledge may be transformed into spirit and characteristics that reside in the researcher. For Xu (2017), Zhe Jiang contains two characteristics of the human being. The first word "Zhe represents thinking: a thinker needs to have a broad [vision and heart]. Secondly, Jiang represents making: a maker needs to be delicate and precise" (para. 1). Thus, under this paradigm, the research process is linkable to the refinement of a person towards two directions. Xu (2016b) suggests that in reaching the essence of Zhe Jiang "tenacity leads to reverence; reverence leads to expertise; expertise leads to vision; and vision leads to Zhe Jiang"⁵⁹ (n.d.). Thus, when engaging with this paradigm one understands the researcher as not only increasing artistic ability but also becoming a better person. According to Xu's (2017) argument, a better person refers

⁵⁸In short, Yi Jing contains the philosophical feeling and comprehension that is generated out of Xiang. I discuss this idea more fully on page 62-63.

⁵⁹Xu (2016b, n.d.) interprets this concept in detail: "In terms of behaviour, a researcher should have the quality of tenacity. In terms of sentiment, a researcher should have a deep reverence for art, nature, society and predecessors. In terms of scholarship, a researcher needs to be an expert in the fields of both academics and ethics, both practice and theory, who knows Chinese, Western, contemporary and classic knowledge very well. In terms of ambition, a researcher should have rich experience and a broad vision."

to a humble, delicate and precise individual who tenaciously pursues the unknown and exists in the world with a flexible and unadorned attitude.

In summary, paradigmatically I approach this research as a practitioner with both explicit principles of the craft of film poetry design and tacit knowledge that is embodied in the research process and the artwork. I am oriented by thinking around Western practice-led, artistic research and Zhe Jiang. As such, this research engages a journey based on anticipation, expertise, reflection and insight, where materials and processes operate as central to a process of discovery, understanding and the pursuit of a more refined artist and scholar.⁶⁰

INTRODUCTION TO THE XIANG SYSTEM

If paradigmatically I am oriented within the tenets of Zhe Jiang, my approach is largely shaped by a Chinese poetic tradition called the Xiang system. The Xiang system is complex and multilayered and somewhat of a challenge to describe when writing in English, so before discussing the methodology and methods that emanate from it, it is useful to consider its structure and nature. To do this I will briefly outline its development as a system and its relationship with three other ideas: Yi Xiang, Yi Jing and the hypothesis of the Xiang system.

The development of Xiang

There are two possible origins of Xiang relating to my research. The first one can be discussed from the perspective of the Chinese character [象] (Xiang). In Chinese, one of Xiang's original meanings is elephant. Hao Zhang [张皓] (1994) refers to the explanation in *Han Feizi* [韩非子] that links this original meaning and philosophical concept together: "People rarely see real elephants and only get their skeletons; therefore, they imagine the real elephants according to the skeletons" (p. 54).

This origin indicates that Xiang may come out of the imagination and be an imitation of objectivity, such as these skeletons, and it fuses with subjectivity, such as a person's imagination of the elephant. It also suggests that Xiang is part of nature.

The second possible origin of Xiang is from two ideas "abstracting Xiang from viewing" [观物取象] and "creating Xiang for expounding meanings" [圣人立象以尽意] (Zhouyi, n.d./2006). This origin suggests that Xiang can be utilized as a symbolic system for expressing concepts. The purpose of creating Xiang is to deliver meaning. It also indicates that Xiang can be a manmade creation based on nature.

⁶⁰This arguably has a relationship to the Greek idea of phronesis which is a type of wisdom relevant to practical things.

Together these two origins suggest that there is an association between Xiang and nature. However, the first of these explanations relates specifically to the mental process of creating or comprehension, while the second raises the possibility that Xiang is able to function as a symbolic mediator for expressing meaning.

The development of Yi Xiang

The term Yi Xiang is normally attributed to Chong Wang [王充] (27 – 97). In *Lun Heng* [论衡] he explains an ancient Chinese custom where a noble family paints the images of bear or deer on cloth as archery targets. The term Yi Xiang refers to these images which represent the ministers who rebel against their monarch or collaborate with the enemy [夫画布为熊麋之象，名布为侯，礼贵意象，示义取名也] (Wang, 86/1974). Yi Xiang here, is used to describe a symbol with specific connotations.

Xie Liu [刘勰] (465 – 520) was the first thinker to transfer Yi Xiang from a general phrase into an aesthetic term in art and literature. In *Wen Xin Diao Long* [文心雕龙], he notes “an insightful craftsman can use tools to work according to the image that has emerged in his mind” [独照之匠，窥意象而运斤] (Liu, 501/2012). This idea indicates that an art work is able to convey feelings and emotions from its creator. Because Yi Xiang is first generated in the artist’s mind then transferred into the art work (or a written text) via materials or language, Yi Xiang has come to refer to both the mental process of making and the mediator for expressing meaning.

In the Tang dynasty, Yi Xiang was employed as a device for analyzing poems in many treatises on poetry theory, including *Shi Ge* [诗格] and *Er Shi Si Shi Pin* [二十四诗品]. Most definitions of Yi Xiang from the Tang dynasty are very close to those posited by Xie Liu who extended the meaning of Yi Xiang to refer to the imaginative experience in artistic creation.

From the Song to the Qing dynasty, many poetry theorists believed that Yi Xiang is formed by the fusion of emotion and scene [情景交融], including Xiwen Fan [范晞文] (n.d.), Yifu Shen [沈义父] (1237 – 1243) and Fuzhi Wang [王夫之] (1619- 1692). A significant amount of research into Yi Xiang during this period focused on the aesthetic principle of indirection, uncertainty and the amorphous state. Both Tingxiang Wang [王廷相] (1474-1544) and Fuzhi Wang believed that the ambiguity of Yi Xiang was capable of providing an infinite imaginative space for a reader. (Ye, 1998)

Today, the term Yi Xiang generally relates to the fusion of emotion and scene, self and universe, which is generated through the process of making



or appreciating artworks (Ye, 1998; Yuan, 1999; Zhu, 2006; Zong, 2005). There are arguably two interpretations of this fusion. The first one is dualism. This refers to a dichotomy between the subject and the object. Dualism forms the central focus of an influential study by Xingpei Yuan (1999) in which the author defined Yi Xiang as the subjective object or subjectivity expressed by the object. The second interpretation is from monism,⁶¹ and may be a more appropriate philosophical foundation to interpret Yi Xiang from, because it can be traced back to the Chinese Taoist idea of the unity of man and nature [天人合一]. Within Chinese monism, nature means the innate state of existence. Pauline Yu's [余宝琳] and Ye Lang's [叶朗] understandings of Yi Xiang appear to be closely linked to monism. Yu (1986) suggests that meanings and connections pre-exist in the world and it is the poet's job to discover these and then present them in the form of Yi Xiang. Ye (2008) believes a real, complete and evocative world (which is a fusion of subjective consciousness and objective reality) can be revealed in the process of creating Yi Xiang. This process stresses the possibility of transcending the self, eternal objects and the duality between the self and eternal objects. Her thinking also raises the concept of regression as a return to nature.

The development of Yi Jing

Unlike Yi Xiang, Yi Jing is a more contemporary concept applied to art and poetry. However, it also draws on a body of classical theory. Yin Jiang [蒋寅] (2007) suggests that the contemporary use of the term differs from its historical context because many modern scholars imbue Yi Jing with personal understandings of art and literature and they draw upon different bodies of classical theory to support their views. Therefore, before discussing the development of the term it is useful to discuss its contemporary understandings.

Bohai Chen's [陈伯海], Yin Jiang's and Lang Ye's viewpoints are very close to my interpretation of Yi Jing. They suggest the condition of generating Yi Jing is to transcend Yi Xiang. Chen (2012) believes Yi Jing not only consists of physicality, but also includes a situation, a state of affairs, and principles. Ye (1998) believes that Yi Jing is the philosophical feeling and comprehension of life, history and the universe that reaches beyond a specific limited object, event or scene to attain an unlimited sense of time and space. For Jiang (2002) the essence of Yi Jing is the evocative structure of Yi Xiang and he sees this structure as the poetic text itself. However, I do not believe that Yi Jing is equivalent to the poetic text; I suggest instead that it transcends it. If we consider the deliberations of Bohai Chen, Lang Ye and Yin Jiang; Yi Jing might be therefore broadly defined as the philosophical feeling and comprehension of life that is normally generated from the

⁶¹Monism argues a unity of origin of all things. It therefore denies a distinction or duality in a particular sphere. For instance, it entertains no distinction between subjectivity and objectivity or Zhuang Zi and the butterfly.



evocative structure of Yi Xiang, but transcends this structure.

Awareness of the transcendence in Yi Jing is not recent, having possibly first been described in *Lao Zi* [老子] which was underpinned by the notion of Taoism. Taoist poets and painters have argued that the essence of the universe and life is Tao and one of the purposes of writing poetry and creating artwork is not representation but the expression of Tao. In the Tang dynasty, Chinese Chan [禅] (a body of Buddhist thinking influenced by Taoism) had a significant impact on Chinese poetry and art. Some poets and painters believed they could reach the nature of the universe by sudden enlightenment in daily life, so they sought to express the nature of the universe through the depiction of the “everyday” in their work (Ye, 1999).⁶²

In the Tang dynasty, a poet Yuxi Liu [刘禹锡] (818/2003) argued that “Jing is generated out of Xiang” [境生于象外] (p. 916). In this assertion he suggested that there is a certain type of transcendence underpinning Jing that reaches beyond the temporal and spatial limits of Xiang. In the Song dynasty, in order to critique the poem *On Drinking Wine* [饮酒] by Yuanming Tao [陶渊明] (352-427), Su Shi [苏轼] (n.d./2000) posited the concept of “scene and feeling meeting” [境与意会]. This idea linked the transcendence of Yi Jing to experienced life. By the mid-Qing dynasty the link between Yi Jing and the structure of poetic texts began to take form. Yi Jing was used to describe the general artistic impression or feeling of a complete poem.⁶³

A number of recent studies define Yi Jing as the fusion of emotion and scene. The key problem with this definition is that it is the term *Yi Xiang* that has (since the Song dynasty) been used to define this fusion. Thus, Yi Xiang and Yi Jing have begun to overlap in terms of meaning.⁶⁴

Changlin Wang (cited in Lang Ye, 1985) has proposed that the structure of poetry has three circumstances: Wu Jing [物境] (object circumstance) from the natural physicality of a scene, Qing Jing [情境] (emotion circumstance) from life experience, and Yi Jing [意境] from one’s internal consciousness or awareness. His writing suggests that Yi Jing is in fact the conjunction of Wu Jing and Qing Jing.

Guowei Wang [王国维] (1909/2012) was the first scholar to propose that evidence of Yi Jing in poetry may be a criteria to judging its quality. He argued that sincerity of emotion and scene are the basic elements of Chinese aesthetics. His idea has now become foundational in contemporary interpretation of Yi Jing.

⁶²This idea may have been influenced by the concept that Tao is omnipresent.

⁶³We can see this application in the use of Yi Jing in *Hui Feng Ci Hua* [蕙风词话] from Zhouyi Kuang [况周颐] (1879/2009).

⁶⁴Given the complexity of this debate, in this discussion I will only briefly mention the most influential writing on the concept.

What constitutes the Xiang system?

In my opinion Xiang, Yi Xiang and Yi Jing may be seen as components of a Xiang system. However, their conceptual emphases are different. Xiang is associated with appearance and exists through exterior physicality. Yi Xiang is a fusion of the exterior and interior, objectivity and subjectivity. Yi Jing is associated with the mental state and it reaches into feelings beyond appearance.

In the process of my artistic practice, the Xiang system functions as the mediator between the artwork and the idea or concept underpinning it. There are three possible layers according to the Xiang system.

- The first layer is the appearance of Xiang, which is a pathway that guides the interpretation of Yi Xiang.
- The second layer is Yi Xiang that embraces the mental picturesque scene [画境] which will emerge through creation.
- The third layer is Yi Jing, which stimulates the philosophical feeling and comprehension of life, memory and the universe that goes beyond the specific Xiang, event and scene. Once Yi Jing is achieved, the function of the facilitators Xiang and Yi Xiang is rendered redundant.

In the Xiang system, the relationship between Xiang, Yi Xiang and Yi Jing may be seen as the relationship between materiality and structure. In order to transfer Xiang into Yi Xiang, an artist may need to work from two positions. First, she may need to make efforts to increase the poetic meaning and concept of Xiang through intuition, specific context and the process of making by improving the delicacy of the artistic conception, personal temperament and increasing the artistic experience. Second, the artist needs to utilize the tension between the association and juxtaposition of different Xiangs to express emotions and meanings. In terms of generating Yi Jing out of Yi Xiang, the artist is required to create an evocative Yi Xiang structure and transcend this structure at the same time in order to express her feelings relating to life.

METHODOLOGY

Having now described the derivation and nature of the Xiang system, it is useful to consider how it applies to the research methodology. Gray and Malins (2004, pp. 17-19) suggest that:

The choice of methodology should be a consequence of ontology and epistemology – that is, methodology is evolved in awareness of what the researcher considers ‘knowable’ and in an awareness of

the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and the 'knowable'. And the aim of methodology is to help us understand the process itself.

In this project, the methodology helps me to make appropriate creative decisions, to deal with crosscultural situations and to increase chances of discovery when considering iterations of the inquiry.

Methodological shifts

In the process of developing this project the methodological framework went through a shift. In my early experiments I was largely working with a heuristic inquiry (Figure 3:1). However, in the more recent film poem *The Heart of Spring*, I was increasingly guided by the principles of the Xiang system. Because the heuristic approach has certain similarities to the Xiang system, as my concerns became more focused on the poetics of the ordinary I moved away from its emphasis on internal questioning and gravitated towards a methodological approach more predicated on sensitive observation and the stimulation of feelings and emotions.

Heuristic inquiry is a methodology based on personal involvement, internal experience, questioning, self-dialogue and tacit knowing. It operates without a predetermined formula, because it is extremely flexible and deals with the navigation of the currently unknown (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Ings, 2011; Kleining & Witt, 2000; Smith, 2002).

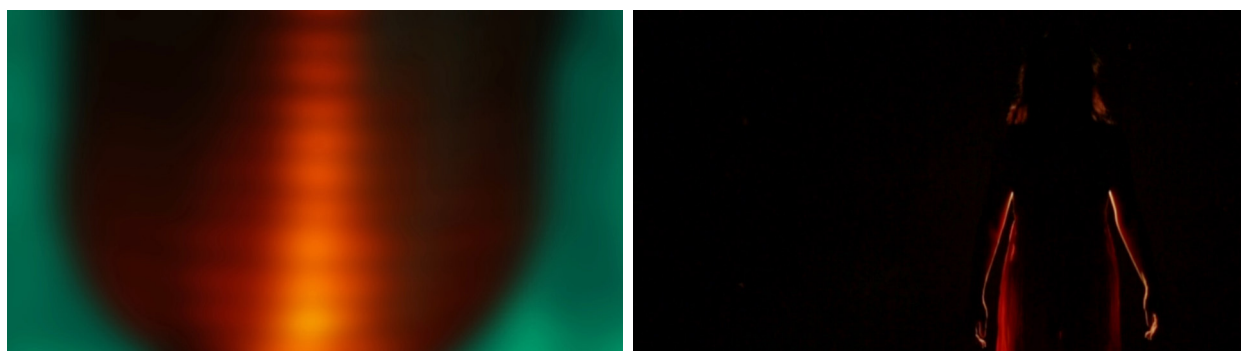


Figure 3:1. Stills from an early film poem, *Butterfly Dreams of Me* (2015). The process of making this early experiment was largely guided by the tenets of a heuristic inquiry. Thus, it was driven by explicit questioning. I asked myself questions like, “How might we consider the space between dream and reality?” (The question itself suggests a state of *menglong*). I was also asking “How might I capture the fusion of subjectivity and objectivity?” (This type of fusion is the essence of *Yi Xiang*). In the process of the heuristic inquiry I was living with, and trying to understand, the research questions and their potentials. The research questions dwelled inside me and I was immersed in a context created by them. Guided by intuition, I utilised methods like poetry writing, the employment of locked off shots and a contemplation on Li Shangyi’s poem *Butterfly Dreams of Me* to explore the potentials of the research questions. This experiment can be accessed at: <https://vimeo.com/251762728> (Password: hmv8534)

⁶⁵In 2011 Xu first proposed Xiang as a methodology. He believes that Xiang can be developed from three features in practice. The first is that Xiang can be comprehended (in the process of contextual review) and generated (through a process of making) a specific art form. The second feature relates to knowledge associated with the art form. (This may be interpreted as reflection through practice). The third feature is concerned with understanding the essence and working system of the Xiang methodology as one builds a bridge between the Xiang of a specific art form and social and cultural issues. If a Xiang system is successfully built, Yi Jing (the ideas behind the art form) should be able to be felt by the viewer.

⁶⁶Mäkelä (2007) believes that “artefacts translate messages between concrete objects and abstract requirements” (p. 3). I would argue that the “artefact” in practice-led research may be seen as a combination of the Xiang system and the specific art form (in my case, the film poem).

Although recently heuristic inquiry has been employed as a methodology in a number of practice-led artistic research PhD projects (Lavranos, 2015; Ventling, 2017), Xiang as an artistic methodology has only just begun to surface in the academy.⁶⁵ This Chinese approach to inquiry functions as a mediator that enables the practitioner to grasp and understand the essence of ideas and convey them in their practice. Thus, the Xiang system provides a link between the artist’s concepts and her art forms.⁶⁶

The Xiang system as a methodology

The Xiang system as a methodology is based on the principle that the researcher should keep her emphasis shifting between Xiang, Yi Xiang and Yi Jing (Figure 3:2). In other words, the movement of thinking should occur between interiority and exteriority (Figure 3:3). Based on the principles of Chinese monism, I believe that the concepts of interiority and exteriority do not constitute a binary. However, within my research proportionally, certain processes occur more in some areas than others. The fundamental driver of the thinking process is often tacit knowing. Therefore, in addition to making the artwork, I concurrently make an effort to improve the delicacy of both my artistic concepts and personal temperament during the study. This is because the self and the work are inextricably linked.

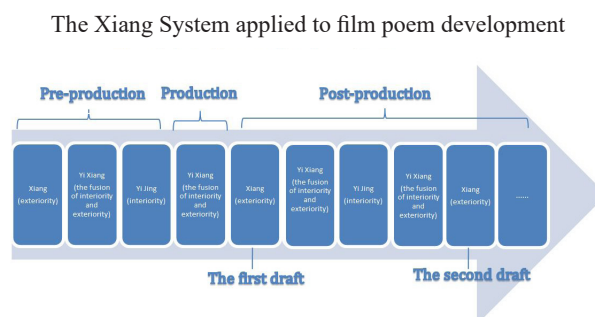


Figure 3:2. The principle and process underpinning the Xiang system as a methodology.

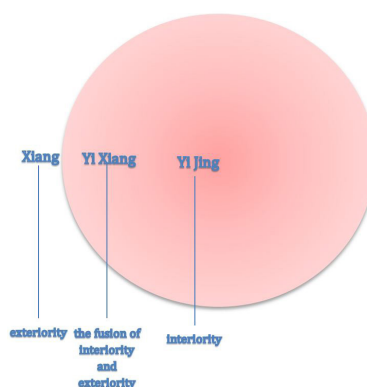


Figure 3:3. The relationship between the Xiang system, exteriority and interiority.



After two years of study, my methodological approach became increasingly focused on the Xiang system. Especially when making the third film poem *The Heart of Spring*, I located creative strategy as a methodological tactic for exploration. Creative strategy permeates all levels of ideation and development in my project. The process of development for this work may be divided into three stages: preproduction, production and postproduction.

In the preproduction stage, fragmented Xiangs (physical things), such as lines from Shangyin Li's poem *Jin Se*, objects, a piece of music or a specific movement experienced in a location, resonated with my research question. Based on my sensitive observations, these Xiangs gathered together according to an inner emotional link and harmonious attraction. Collectively, these Xiangs stimulated my feelings and emotions and they became one or several Yi Xiangs in my mind.⁶⁷ These Yi Xiangs formed a certain structure and evoked the Yi Jing of the work. According to the Yi Jing, I generated new philosophical ideas and reconsidered the Yi Xiangs of the film poem. Certain breakthroughs (or discoveries) were then able to be clustered thematically.

In the production stage, I sought to present Yi Xiangs in the art work. The objects, actors, movements, lighting, shadows and sound that I captured had physicality, but tension emanating from the association and juxtaposition of them stimulated my inner emotions and philosophical ideas. Every consideration was deeply connected and finely considered through a process of immersion within the film shoot.

The postproduction stage was an iterative, reflective process. I edited a first draft immediately after shooting and shared iterations of the film poem with experts⁶⁸ as a way of eliciting external critique. Based on their feedback and what I "sensed" was working, I examined the Yi Xiangs and their structure in each draft. This process afforded me new understandings of the work. According to the revised viewpoints of the Yi Jing of the content, I began to adjust the Yi Xiangs by refining the film poem. This included reshooting and re-editing certain footage. After the refinement I had a new draft produced and a more advanced iterative reflective journey began.

In this new process, I continually reframed the inquiry in order to generate a complete Xiang system. This was a finely tuned process that involved delicate tweaks between relationships, like the movement and texture of a sound in an image or relationships between metaphors. In this phase, aspects of heuristic inquiry surfaced in my approach. I was intuitively questioning drafts of the film poem that, while holding physical form, were still seen as

⁶⁷Sometimes, a single Xiang can evoke my feelings and becomes Yi Xiang by itself.

⁶⁸The use of experts to give feedback on iterations of my practice is discussed on page 80.

hypotheses. From these iterative drafts, new questions were generated and this led to further experimentation.

Features of the methodology

So methodologically, although the research design may be understood as drawing on the Xiang system, it is often resourced by the principles of intuitive questioning inherent in heuristic inquiry. Thus, the methodology combines Western and Chinese approaches that enabled me the flexibility to navigate cultural nuances in an inquiry that creatively explores territory between written and image-based poetic expression. Through the transition from an initial heuristic inquiry to an increasingly Xiang system, four features of the methodology became distinct:

- First, the research navigated an internal pathway of the self (Ings, 2011; Douglass & Moustakas, 1985)
- Second, it drew on tacit knowing (intuition) (Moustakas, 1990; Polanyi, 1967)
- Third, it relied upon iterative reflectivity (Ye, 1996)
- And finally, through the process of researching I incrementally became a “better self” (Xu, 2011).

It is useful for us to consider each of these features.

The internal pathway of the self

Both the Xiang system and heuristic inquiry are predicated on an internal pathway of the self as a means of problem solving. In the Xiang system, Yi Xiang (the mental image) can be seen as a fusion of subjective response and the object. In the process of forming Yi Xiang from Xiang (appearance), my personal feelings, emotions, interpretations and imaginings are deeply involved. This correlates with heuristic inquiry. Smith (2002) describes such an inquiry as being “focused inward on the feeling responses of the researcher to the outward situation” (p. 59). In order to generate Yi Jing (the poetic world), I attempt to transcend Yi Xiang by exploring and expressing my experience, attitude and philosophical thinking of life through my practice. This links to the idea of heuristic inquiry in terms of “investigating self to surrender to the feelings in an experience, which carries the researcher to unknown aspects of self” (ibid.).

Drawing on tacit knowledge and intuition

My film poem making relies heavily on tacit knowing⁶⁹ because I am operating artistically in a state of ineffable knowing. Both the Xiang system and heuristic inquiry contain the idea that what is conceived draws upon what is tacitly known. In my early experiments, I sensed my way

⁶⁹Polanyi (1967) defines tacit knowledge as “the fact that we can know more than we can tell” (p.4). Moustakas (1990) develops Polanyi’s concept of tacit knowledge describing tacit knowing as, “the deep structure that contains the unique perceptions, feelings, intuitions, belief, and judgments housed in the internal frame of reference of a person that governs behaviour and determines how we interpret experience” (p.32).

forward. I developed experiments based on my professional background working in film and television. However, my thinking was also resourced from human experience.⁷⁰ Much of the knowledge that I used was “inside” me (so it was not explicit).

In terms of the Xiang system, Jiang (2002) mentions that poets need to recall their nonexplicit human experience through memory and imagination in order to create Yi Xiang. In the process of creating *The Heart of Spring* (2017), sometimes I sensed the Yi Xiang of natural environments through intuition and sudden enlightenment. In this way I built a connection between Xiang and meaning. I also felt the Yi Jing of a space that might be understood as a complete and infinite world.

Developing iterative reflectivity

In addition to allowing what is tacitly known to surface through my feelings and guide me as I sense my way forward, I also reflect on the journey. Ye (1996) suggests that Yi Xiang is generated by reflection, and it always appears with reflection. When making *The Heart of Spring* (2017), I developed iterations of the work through incremental refinement. Thus, once an initial draft was laid down I worked with subtle shifts of colour, rhythm, sound and accent (within the film poem) to heighten the work’s lyrical voice. Prior to this I located myself in and “felt” my way around the potentials of the town of Ning Hai (which was the location of the work). In this environment I was always attentive to how one idea might relate to and build upon another ... how a shadow might add to the liquidity of water, how the sound of bees might add to the texture of wood or the nature of a dry, book strewn interior. I moved into and through the world of the film in an iterative process of reflective layering. However, I did not only cultivate the appearance of the work, I also refined the Yi Xiang and Yi Jing of the film poem. I took appearance to be more than the work’s visual form, because Yi Xiang can be seen as the subjective response to appearance and Yi Jing can be sensed through Yi Xiang.

I am reminded in this regard of Ye’s assertion that the reflective process involves an iterative relationship between the infinite and limitation and, within it, one is constantly moving towards a distant solution.

Becoming a “better self”

The idea of becoming a “better self” is embodied in certain writing by artistic researchers who are guided by heuristic inquiry. Ings (2011) suggests that self-situated research has “the potential to enable both creative inquiry and the growth of the researcher as a human being” (p. 84). From the perspective of the Xiang system, by being immersed in Yi Xiang, I discover



⁷⁰Douglass and Moustakas (1985, p. 40) describe the heuristic process as “a search for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience.”

and experience the vitality and poetics of the world. Xu (2011) suggests that this experience may bring richness to me as a person. Moreover, in order to present Yi Jing more resonantly in my film poetry, I try to deepen my understandings of life. In order to achieve this, I increase my artistic experience. Thus, beyond the world of the research project, I concurrently work with the growth of other artistic thinkers (by teaching design and theory), I write poetry and I develop processes of critical reflective writing.

METHODS

Gray and Malins (2004) propose that research methods are guided by methodology.⁷¹ In this thesis project I have employed five distinct yet often interrelated methods:

- the use of an immersive archive
- experimentation
- collaboration
- seeking external feedback
- importing contextual knowledge.

An immersive archive

My immersive archive consists of annotated photographs, sound files, written poems, notes of intuitive feelings and questions. Beyond the physical, the archive also contains memories and impressions of places that cannot be captured in an image, sound or written form. Thus, it may be understood as both a physical and emotional space where I enter into “conversations” with what I have recorded.

An immersive archive provides an environment. In a state of “indwelling” I can exist inside the emerging world of my film poetry and navigate potentials within it. Thus, an immersive archive functions as a system for sensitive observing (Xiang), making Yi Xiang and simulating Yi Jing.

On initial incursions into shooting locations I used photography as a way of “seeing and feeling” the potential of a world. Often, I also recorded fragments of sound from the location. (This is also part of the sensitive observation of the Xiang). I walked through environments, recording as poetic encounters, light and texture, objects and space, sound and voice (Figures 3:4 & 3:5).

After I had “felt” the locations poetically and a few days before I began shooting material, I brought the actors into these worlds. At this time, I documented beyond what was observable. Using photography (Figure. 3:6),

⁷¹Gray and Malins differentiate between these two concepts, describing methods as “specific techniques and tools for exploring, gathering and analysing information” (2004, p. 17).

poems and notes, I recorded feelings, experiences and the spirit of each place. From a Chinese perspective, I was documenting both Yi Xiang and Yi Jing.

As part of my archive, I also wrote poetry to myself. This was a way of understanding the essence of characters or places. The following poem *Spring* was written when I was visiting my mother's ancestral home before shooting *The Heart of Spring*. I wrote about how it *felt* in her garden. The writing became influential when I was editing the film poem because it enabled me to remember the "spirit" and subtle emphasis of the time and the sensual nature of memory.

Spring

I collect the glistening light of waves

White fog and fresh wind

I hear the breath of the sea beyond the mountain

I touch the slight coldness below the leaves

Black rain and warm smoke

I see the shadow of spring waking

Lost in the sound of water and ink,

I breathe the scent of dreams

Remember

Who forgot you on that day.

Don't glance back

When you are looking.

I am old.

While I was poetically *sensing* the nature of my ancestor's world, I also wrote notes to myself. These notes helped me to not only make explicit what I was thinking, but they also operated as texts to which I could return when I needed to remind myself of my initial impressions. Below is an indicative note I made when working with the leading character Mei while I was developing *The Heart of Spring*. The note provided me with a deeper



understanding of the character I was seeking to create:

Through poetic eyes we see a woman trying to find the missing parts of herself. She experiences a poetic and emotional journey ... or she lives in a poetic dream. Staying with her, I can sense nostalgia and warmth in the air.

However, beyond what is able to be recorded physically, there is also information in my archive that exists as memory and this material is often associated with nuanced impressions or emotions. For example, while developing *Towards the Late Evening I*, I went to Mrs Garelja's home before filming. When talking with her and observing her world (including the tone of her voice and the atmosphere in the place), I experienced feelings of loneliness and melancholy. I was not able to capture these feelings in images or words, but I was able to remember them and draw upon them during the production and postproduction phases of my work.

Thus, in summary, the immersive archive is both a physical and emotional space where I enter into "conversations" with what I have recorded.⁷² I ask questions both explicitly and through impression. Through these questions, I try to emotionally understand the world of my film poem and seek a richness of thought. As such, the archive operates as an environment inside which I dwell, breathing and "living with" images.⁷³



⁷²Often when developing exegetical writing I also return to this archive and reflect on how ideas were brought together.

⁷³Keats describes this as dwelling "in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats, 1958, p. 193).

Figure. 3:4. Archived photographs taken during a period of sensitive observing of different Xiangs while making of *The Heart of Spring* (2016). Although I generally enter and "feel" the worlds of my films alone, when I was in New Zealand, prior to visiting this village, I asked the production designer (Yiqun Chen) to take initial photographs so I could reacquaint myself with the space before returning to it.



Figure. 3:5. Archived photographs taken during the preproduction stage of *Towards the Late Evening I* (2015). Before I began shooting this work I visited Mrs Garelja's home many times to collect different Xiangs, I took photographs of her objects and recorded the music she listened to every day.

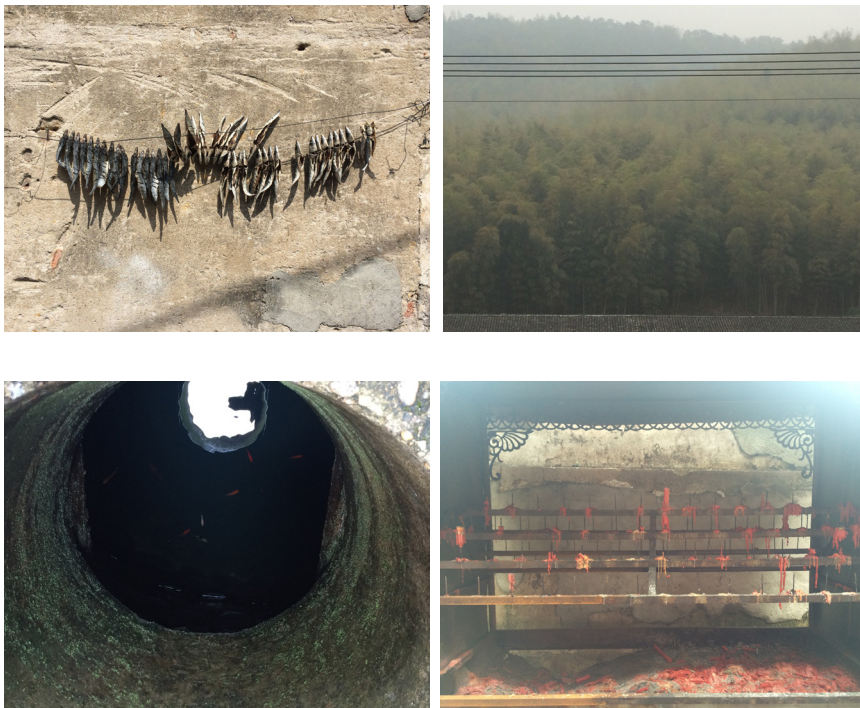


Figure. 3:6. Photographs taken while I was making *The Heart of Spring*. After a phase of sensitive observation, certain Xiangs simulated melancholic and introspective feelings. Using these feelings, I began internal conversations with the shooting location. I used photography to find fusions between my feelings and objects. In this process, photography functioned as a carrier for Yi Xiang and as a catalyst for thought.

Experiments

I employ two distinct forms of experimentation in my work. These may be described as draft responses and relational experimentation.

Draft response experiments

Draft responses are a series of small experiments as poem films, related to ideas surfacing from my aesthetic and philosophical contemplation on Shangyin Li's poetry. These experiments were designed to consider artistic interpretations of specific lines or ideas in the poet's writing and through them I explored the balance between menglong and explicitness. The experiments do not appear as part of the final corpus of submitted work, but they are available in Appendix 1: *Experimental film poems*, because they constitute part of the development of the project. The chronology of their development is outlined in Figure 3:7 and they are discussed briefly in figures 3:8 to 3:12.

A chronological diagram showing all of the experiments and film poems in the PhD thesis.

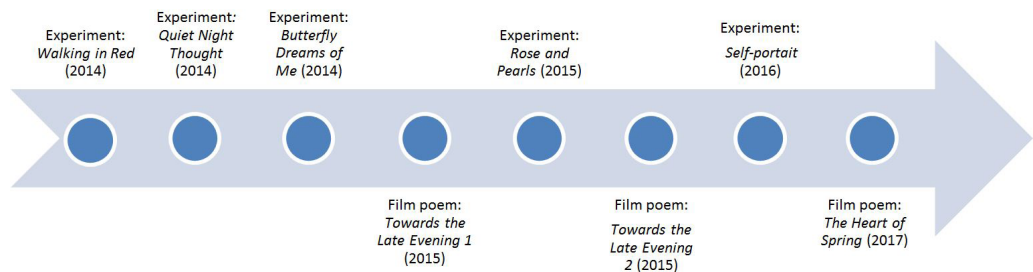


Figure. 3:7. The film poems below the line, *Towards the Late Evening 1&2* and *The Heart of Spring* are those submitted as resolved outcomes of the PhD thesis inquiry. The five “draft response” experiments appear above the line.

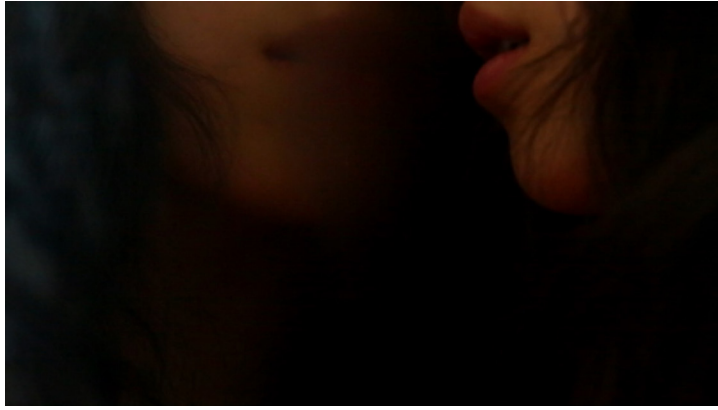


Figure. 3:8. A frame grab from the experiment *Walking in Red* (2014). In this work I was attempting to illustrate Qingzhao Li's [李清照] poem *Forlorn* [声声慢] by constructing a "line-by-line" interpretation, rather than reflecting on the essence of the work. I utilized a series of images to express the meaning and mood of each line. What worked in this experiment was the visual power of the pure image. The sense of rhythm was also strong. However, I did not manage to capture and apply the spirit and the poetic world of the poem. Therefore, *Walking in Red* lacked depth and lent too closely towards the literal. The experiment is accessible at: <https://vimeo.com/251759745> (Password: hmv8534)



Figure. 3:9. A frame grab from the experiment *Quiet Night Thought* [静夜思] (2014). In this work I was reflecting on Bai Li's [李白] poem of the same name. This was the first example of trying to understand the *spirit* of a poem. There was almost no sense of narrative in it. It was a contemplation on the poetic idea of loneliness. I utilized dim moonlight to represent the concept of menglong. However, I felt that this expression of menglong was too literal and weak as an artistic representation. This said, it was at this point that menglong began to emerge as a significant consideration in my project. The experiment is accessible at: <https://vimeo.com/251760746> (Password: hmv8534)



Figure. 3:10. A frame grab from the experiment film poem *Butterfly Dreams of Me* (2014). This film poem drew its consideration from the line “Zhuang Zhou’s morning dream, lost in a butterfly” [庄生晓梦迷蝴蝶] in Shangyin Li’s poem *Jin Se* [锦瑟]. Using this line, I successfully applied menglong as a visual style to the whole film poem. Metaphor, allusion, and a sense of suggestion permeated the work. In the nonsequential narrative, time was not fixed, the identity of the subject was obscured between the butterfly and “me”. It was this experiment that caused me to seriously engage with the concept of menglong evident in Li Shangyin’s poetry. The experiment is accessible at: <https://vimeo.com/251762728> (Password: hmv8534)



Figure. 3:11. A frame grab from *Rose and Pearls* (2015). In this draft response experiment I was exploring a potential balance between menglong and explicitness. I used certain terms and the spirit of Shangyin Li’s poem *Jin Se* [锦瑟] to produce a more narrative script. I also applied techniques like allusion and metaphor evident in Li’s work to the dialogue. The experiment focused on the subtle feelings and changeable emotions of the characters through punning and lyrical dialogue. However, I felt the experiment was not successful because the dialogue was too enigmatic for a general Western audience while, paradoxically, the image was too prosaic. The experiment is accessible at: <https://vimeo.com/251761293> (Password: hmv8534)



Figure. 3:12. A frame grab from *Self-portrait* (2016). In this draft response I was attempting to express the concept of loss that emanated from my overall reflection on Shangyin Li's writings. Visually, I utilized a blurred and indistinct image to show the general aesthetics of menglong. I made the film poem very short (15 seconds). This idea was drawn from both Western and Chinese poetic structures where the essence of an idea may be crystallized in a brief space of time. In developing this experiment, I realized that making a film poem was not about adding elements to a pre-existing poem, but rather drawing an essence out of it. The experiment is accessible at: <https://vimeo.com/251760212> (Password: hmv8534)

Relational experimentation

Relational experimentation occurred during the iterative development of the more advanced film poems. These experiments were primarily concerned with relationships within the film poem.

When developing *Towards the Late Evening 1*, *Towards the Late Evening 2* and *The Heart of Spring* I built an initial substrate, then experimented with editing, grading, sound, music and type to bring each piece into a harmonious resolve. In this process I constantly questioned the work and emerging relationships within it. For example, when I experimented with sound, I asked questions of it, such as “How might the sound of bees enrich the character of a man or the texture of his books?” (Figure 3:13). I experimented with the placement and nuanced meaning of the images. I asked a leaf in a glass of tea about the pace of its rise and the duration of our attention. I questioned the direction of a fish swimming in relation to the direction of the images that preceded or followed it. So, in fine-tuning the poems, I experimented by moving images and sound around, swapping out what didn't appear to be working or altering the duration, colour or tone of diverse elements. By asking structural and aesthetic questions, I orchestrated relationships within the work on multiple layers in order to pursue both emotional and technical harmony.





Figure 3:13. Frame grabs from *The Heart of Spring* relating to the traditional doctor. Here experiments with the dry, audio texture of bees working at a hive were used to complement the texture and colour of the man's books, while contrasting with the slow, contemplative nature of his reclusive world.

Collaboration

I also used collaboration as a method in creating film poetry. From the outset of the thesis I engaged with other filmmakers and artists. One of these collaborations involved working with Mairi Gunn (a professional cinematographer). Although I often shoot my own work (including all of the draft experiments), I admired Mairi's work and I sensed that she could bring to the project a subtlety that I felt when encountering the world of Mrs Garelja.

In *Towards the Late Evening 1*, Mairi was the director of photography (DOP) and her advanced knowledge of lighting and cinematography helped to improve the image quality.⁷⁴ Before making the film poem we discussed how we might work together as artists, so we could develop a unique collaborative approach that would function well when we were on location. In our discussions, I explained that I would be interested in her vision and the way she might frame and light Mrs Garelja's world while shooting. Mairi suggested that I should watch what she was shooting through a small monitor and was clear that she did not want to take over my role as a director.⁷⁵ When we were shooting in the location, we kept a very small crew and took a very limited range of film equipment, so Mrs Garelja was not unsettled in her intimate world. The fact that we were both women arguably made the process easier. In the post-production phase, I showed Mairi drafts of my thinking and had critical discussions with her, because I believed that part of her artistic work was inside the film poem. In a formative discussion with Mairi (as a New Zealand woman) she suggested that it might be innovative to see the private life of a Western woman through a distinctly Chinese lens, and this accounts for the delicate emphases in the final work. Although my initial intention in collaborating related to resolving image and sound quality issues, as our working relationship developed, I came to value Mairi's critique and "Western" readings of iterations of my thinking.⁷⁶

⁷⁴In terms of *Towards Late Evening 2*, I collaborated with Hao Du, a Chinese professional cameraman.

⁷⁵Although this is standard procedure on some professional projects, we adopted a very discursive approach where Mairi was free to experiment or make suggestions and I "fed" into these.

⁷⁶I am reminded in this regard of Gray's (1996) assertion that collaboration "requires an outward looking attitude and an awareness of other research cultures and paradigms" (p. 15).

When developing *The Heart of Spring*, I also worked with a professional cameraman,⁷⁷ sound recorder,⁷⁸ sound technician,⁷⁹ musician⁸⁰ and gaffer⁸¹. Although I returned to China to direct this work, before I arrived I gave the collaborators a synopsis and a general guide that outlined the topics and aesthetic style that we might explore. (See Appendix 2: director's notes provided for collaborators on the film poem *The Heart of Spring*). This guide was not "instructional". It operated as a flexible catalyst for open-ended conversations. Using the document I was able to ask questions that encouraged collaborators to offer their opinions. This is because when I ideate and direct I do not see a "crew" as technicians. I understand each of them as a fellow artist whose unique responses to the central ideas in the work might offer opportunities for enrichment. This is why I always try to work with people who have a high level of sensitive agency. In a collective process I understand that each artist brings a unique level of experience and tacit knowledge to the project.

With the exception of the crew, all of the actors in *The Heart of Spring* were amateurs who lived in the small town of Ning Hai where the film was shot. Through our time rehearsing together I built trust with them and they told me stories about their lives and the location. They also gave me objects from the 1960s that I utilized in the set and costume design. (Figure. 3:14).



Figure. 3:14. These handmade clothes from the 1960s were provided by Mrs Wei who played the old neighbour in *The Heart of Spring*. She told me that both she and her husband lost their teaching jobs during the Chinese cultural revolution, so she had to make clothing and shoes for the family by herself. She kept the garments as a memory of the change in her life and the nature of the old times.

⁷⁷Hao Du

⁷⁸Xiaobei Ren

⁷⁹Dominic Taylor

⁸⁰Shiqing Wang

⁸¹Ziwen Zhu

⁸²I was a translator for Fudong Yang while he was presenting his work in the Auckland Art Gallery in September, 2015. I was able to use this as an opportunity to arrange a meeting with him and talk about my own work *Towards the Late Evening*.

⁸³I was the facilitator of the “Talking to the director Kuo Chen-ti” event in the 2016 Taiwan Film Festival in New Zealand in August, 2016. During this event, I showed Kuo Chen-ti the first cut of my film poem *The Heart of Spring* and received her feedback.

⁸⁴Nguyen Trinh Thi was visiting AUT University and I set up a meeting with her, screened, and sought her feedback on an advanced cut of *The Heart of Spring*.

⁸⁵*Towards the Late Evening 1 & 2* screened in the exhibition *Echo (Hui Xiang)* in the AD16 Art & Design Festival in AUT University between the 12th and 16th of November, 2016, and in the Art Gallery of Sichuan University (Chengdu), between the 3rd and 13th of December, 2016. In Auckland, I was able to initiate individual discussions with people who had seen the work. However, in China I was not able to attend the exhibition and gain direct feedback. Before the exhibition there was an interview with the curator Yanxin Zhong and I was able to elicit some reflection on the work from her.

External feedback

Both Gray (1996) and Ings (2011) stress the importance of having access to external critique and feedback when developing artistic texts as research. Gray (1996) sees critique as “practical support, criticism and encouragement” (p.12) and Ings (2011) argues that “without some form of external feedback, purely self-referenced processes can result in designs that fail to explore a wealth of available options or fall short of their communicative potential” (p.77).

The external feedback I have utilized when developing the thesis has come from four sources:

- professional filmmakers
- audiences at art exhibitions, film screenings and academic symposiums
- focus groups
- a unique supervisory relationship influenced by the concept of Zhejiang [shared philosophical craftsmanship].

Professional filmmakers

As part of the process of seeking external feedback, I have shown versions of my work to established filmmakers for whom I have a high level of respect. These include the Chinese filmmaker Fudong Yang [楊福東],⁸² the Taiwanese director Kuo Chen-ti [郭珍弟]⁸³ and the Vietnamese filmmaker, documentarian and video artist Nguyen Trinh Thi.⁸⁴ In each instance I asked them to reflect on a piece of my work and to offer me their overall impression and critique. I did not use their feedback to change my film poems directly, but I took their advice, questions and comments and dwelled with them. As I continued to refine the work, these reflections became a way of diversifying the variation of perspectives I applied to my thinking (Kleining & Witt, 2000). Because each of these filmmakers is very subtle and experimental in the way they approach their work, discussion and reflection quickly moved beyond the prosaic and technical to concern themselves with issues like “spirit” and meaning. Although throughout the thesis I was concurrently working on commercial film shoots as a codirector or screenwriter, it was this time reflecting with highly artistic thinkers that gave strength to my questioning the artistic potentials of menglong and approaches to conceiving and developing film that sought to cross boundaries between Chinese and Western attitudes.

Audience response

A second method of seeking external advice involved engagements with audiences who saw iterations of my film poems at art exhibitions,⁸⁵ national

and international film screenings⁸⁶ and academic symposiums.⁸⁷ During these events, I had the opportunity to introduce the film poems and outline key ideas behind them. Because the screenings were of variable quality (because of diverse projection and sound facilities), I was able to understand the nature of a filmic text that must navigate diverse technical infrastructures at different events (including variable lighting and environmental noise). However, perhaps more importantly, these screenings and explanations caused me to focus and clarify my thinking and enabled me to gain useful feedback from audiences who had not seen earlier iterations of the work. Audience critiques, often provided after the event, resourced my thinking in terms of how I might navigate the potentials of menglong across international “readings” of my work.

Focus groups

Strategically formulated focus groups were used as a way of seeking feedback on specific issues within the work. For example, before the final refinement of *The Heart of Spring*, I organized a small screening for a group who might conceivably be representative of an eventual audience. The sample was made up of two Chinese and four Westerners who had not seen my film poems before. However, all participants were sophisticated readers of film because they were either filmmakers, theorists or practising visual artists. There were two phases to the focus group analysis.

In the first phase, I screened the work without an introduction. Prepared questions were posed by a facilitator so I was able to simply observe and record responses. By not introducing the work I could ensure that participants were naïve viewers and by using preset questions I was able to focus feedback on specific issues that were concerning me at the time. These included the potential need for, or nature of, subtitles and the nature of communicated narrative meaning when audiences came from Chinese and nonChinese backgrounds.

In the second phase of feedback the group was asked to write comments that they thought might help to improve this work. This process enabled me to access individual reflection beyond the agency of target questions. At this time I was still in the postproduction process, so because the work was only an iteration of the final film poem I was able to reflect on the feedback when changing the pace and readability of the type, refining the delicacy of the sound, negotiating between the Chinese and Western readers, and fine-tuning balances between poetics and narrative clarity.

Zhe Jiang as a supervisory construct

Although supervision is not normally discussed as part of a thesis’ research

⁸⁶*Towards the Late Evening 1 & 2* were selected for festivals like *Lyrical Visions - An Evening of Poetry Based Films* (Auckland, New Zealand on the 8th of December, 2016). In this festival an opportunity was provided to introduce the films, address questions and also gain feedback from the audience. This direct contact with an audience was methodologically more useful to me than international screenings of the film poems in international festivals that I was unable to attend.

⁸⁷My films were screened at consecutive university conferences in 2016 and 2017. *Towards Late Evening 1 & 2* and an accompanying exegetical paper were selected for the AUT Postgraduate Symposium in 2016. At this event I was able to outline emerging considerations of film poetry in relation to my work and elicit questions and feedback from a large, multicultural audience of “first viewers”. In 2017 *The Heart of Spring* was selected for the second university conference. Here I was able to discuss the methodological framework of my exegesis. After the presentation, I received critiques of the heuristic aspects of my methodology and my work. This helped me to understand the crosscultural potentials and challenges of my approach in terms of meaning, emphasis and allusion.

⁸⁸This approach may be partly explained by the fact that I wish to eventually become a supervisor of artistic practice research, especially where there are crosscultural boundaries navigated. Concurrent to the development of the thesis, I have worked as a tutor of theory in a digital design degree and I have become increasingly interested in the nature and potentials of culturally nuanced pedagogy.

⁸⁹The supervision was extended to philosophical, personal and cultural discussion, his personal film making processes and deeply reflective discussions on pedagogy.

⁹⁰To preserve the integrity of the supervision and the need for my unique voice to refine without compromise, we did not work at any time on a collaborative project (although our films sometimes screened in the same festivals).

design, in this PhD I sought to develop the concept of Zhejiang (philosophical craftsmanship) into a contemporary form of supervisory relationship.⁸⁸ My primary supervisor Professor Welby Ings is a professional filmmaker and both within and outside of the normal supervision process,⁸⁹ I was able to discuss with him aspects of my practice on a very deep level. Essentially, in the preproduction and postproduction phases I approached him as both as a critic and as another craftsman. Thus, our discussions were not only concerned with the technical issues, but also with philosophical and conceptual thinking behind our approaches. Within this relationship I was not positioned as an acolyte or apprentice. It was understood and agreed from the outset that, although we were both concerned with the potentials of lyricism in film, his emphasis on social justice and my concerns with the nuances of a Chinese poetic voice differed. The nature of Zhejiang meant that when we discussed iterations of my thinking, conversation was normally driven off certain shared understandings of the craft of filmmaking. Normally critique took the form of questioning and if advice was offered it was always tentative. Because I knew his work, I was able to measure the value of any feedback against an understanding of how such values were evidenced in his practice and cultural perspective.⁹⁰

After discussions with him, I would consider what was said but I would make artistic decisions by myself. For me, the most important process after receiving external feedback is its internalization. In other words, I feel connections with certain feedback, so I draw it into myself. Its validity rests with the harmonious or productive way that it connects not only with the emerging film poem but also with the thoughts and feelings that are agents in its development.

Imported contextual knowledge

In general, philosophical and theoretical concepts and existing filmic works helped me in four ways. These were gaining inspiration, positioning and contextualizing my inquiry, stimulating aesthetic approaches that I might not normally consider and clarifying my thinking.

The written literature I have considered in this thesis study has primarily focused on the aesthetics of Shangyin Li's poetry and practices and theories of film poetry from both Chinese and Western perspectives. I also read extensive material relating to the Xiang system and menglong. These readings folded directly into decision making in both the methodological approach and aesthetic nature of my work. In a practice-led artistic project such as this thesis I find it helpful to remember the etymology of the word theory. It comes from the Greek *theōria* meaning "contemplation and speculation" (Davidson, Seaton, & Simpson, 1986, p. 1032). Thus, theory

may be understood as a way of “seeing and thinking about”. It offers an expansion to how one might perceive the complexity of what one creates as artistic inquiry. Using theory one “looks at and into” what one creates. In a practice-led inquiry, theory becomes a method that is called to the inquiry as much as something that prefigures it.

Thus, when making or writing, when personal knowledge was insufficient for understanding, I read essays and books or critically viewed film texts relating to questions I was asking. Because, during the early making stage, many of my thoughts were tacit, writing or film approaches provided explicit thinking that resourced my creative processing of ideas.

CRITIQUE OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis has developed a unique methodological framework that draws on the potentials and similarities between certain Chinese and Western approaches to creative ideation and artistic realization. However, such an approach does not propose an absolute solution to navigating research design. It contains inherent strengths and challenges, so it is perhaps useful in closing this chapter to briefly reflect on the nature of these.

Advantages

Broadly, the research design underpinning this thesis had three advantages.

First, its two methodologies drawn from Chinese and Western cultures were used to test the research process from different epistemological perspectives. In the development of my work the methodologies generally complemented and stimulated each other,⁹¹ so I was able to reflect on potential pathways and readings from a rich variety of standpoints.

The second advantage of the research design relates to the need to progress the research through a process of questioning. Both heuristic inquiry and the Xiang system as methodologies employ insightful reflection as a means of driving an inquiry forward. In the project questions surfaced *through* practice, and as I experimented, reflected and critiqued, the research allowed me to think between, into and across what I was making.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, my practice is about film poetry and, being poetic in nature, applying the Xiang system was appropriate because the concept itself is from Chinese poetry theory. Thus, not only was the content and subject of the inquiry poetic but so was the ethos of the methodology. Thus, the inquiry was designed to develop poetically. As both a scholar and an artist I was able to think in metaphor, rhythm and

⁹¹Because the research refers to both Eastern and Western philosophies it poses challenges inherent in crosscultural and crosslanguage study. However, my supervisors were from different cultural backgrounds and I read in both Chinese and English. I also conducted my research in both China and New Zealand. These features of the study design enabled me to productively explore tensions and opportunities in the crosscultural nature of the research.



nuanced imagery. Although the thesis engages with critique and analysis, its greatest emphasis has been on creative discovery through enigmatic, lyrical and allusional approaches to creating and communicating meaning. The distinctive methodological fusion supported such an approach.

Challenges

However, the synergistic methodology also posed distinct challenges. The first was that both approaches, because they are question-led, could be very time consuming and resource heavy. They forsook linear, cyclic or logical processes so I was essentially on a journey into potential, without a road map. Therefore, it took time to find the research focus and my artistic voice. In addition, using film as practice was expensive, with costs including travel, building props, hiring crew and casting actors. In addressing this challenge, I needed to constantly know the question that I was asking, and I had to develop effective time management strategies and an effective production schedule. Accordingly, I tended to shoot in intimate spaces, use minimal elements and work with a small crew. In addition, I tried to ensure that any experiments I eventually took to film were as productive to the inquiry as possible.

Secondly, while the strength of applying the Xiang system to moving image lay in a cultural outreach from Chinese philosophical understandings, the transition across art forms, especially from Chinese literature to filmic research, was challenging. Because the existing discourse of the Xiang system and menglong has not been systematically applied and theorized into the field of film poetry, the application of crossing vastly different media forms itself was difficult because I did not have forerunners to whom I could refer when trying to understand what I was discovering.⁹²

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As a Chinese born and educated woman who has also studied in Western universities, both my tacit and explicit knowing have been shaped by different cultures. Accordingly, I constantly questioned my work through both Chinese and Western lenses. I sought external feedback from experts in both cultures and this was drawn back into a self who existed between and inside differently constructed cultural worlds. What I found was that not all ideas translate into likeness so I could not approach the inquiry trying to locate “epistemological equivalence”. As a consequence, I had to think as *both* a Chinese and a Western artist, negotiating problems in a flexible but attentive manner; critiquing from the inside and refining my theoretical thinking in concord with a practice that essentially became the “thought leader” and question raiser.

⁹²Practice operated in the thesis as the site of research, discovery and synergy. Thus, I was not illustrating theory but instead, I was using culturally located ways of knowing to enrich my creative process. In addition, I considered knowledge related to both poetry and film and this was drawn back into my practice.

Rather than adopting and applying an established methodology, I have journeyed into the heart of my research questions to consider their needs. The crosscultural research design I have developed has not been used before, but I hope in exploring it as a response to a practice-led inquiry, I might not have only opened my thesis to higher chances of discovery, but also contributed something useful to ongoing deliberations about the nature of methodology in Art and Design research.

Having now discussed the research design underpinning the project, it is useful to turn directly to the substance of the research. The following chapter will therefore offer a critical commentary on the work.





CHAPTER FOUR:

Critical commentary on practice

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For ever hard to meet, and as hard to part
Each flower spoiled in the failing East wind
Spring's silkworms wind till death their heart's threads
The wick of the candle turns to ash before its tears dry

From *Untitled Poem* (circa. 827),
Shangyin Li / translated by A.C. Graham (2008)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a critical commentary on the film poems:

- Towards Late Evening 1
- Towards Late Evening 2
- *and The Heart of Spring.*

Within it I discuss significant structural and aesthetic features of the work with specific reference to four ideas:

- The poetics of the everyday
- Emotion
- Integration and rhythm
- Space.

This chapter will explain how I create film poetry that speaks authentically from my heart but communicates across cultures. I see myself as an author who is always adjusting and strengthening her own voice through the process of making. I consider Chinese poetic principles as beacons that guide my artistic voice when constructing work. Therefore, my practice is rooted in Chinese poetry and culture. However, when I “craft” my film poems, I also consider Western film poetry techniques, such as specific approaches to sound design and editing. In general, this approach to design and realisation may explain why my work is able to speak in both Eastern and Western worlds without losing the spirit of its origin.

In writing a first-person commentary in this chapter I make a number of assertions about my work that I understand are subjective and therefore contestable. However, in adopting this approach, I am seeking to make explicit both technical and subjective decision making and the underlying principles that have guided my thinking.

However, before considering the work itself, it is useful to reflect on the notion of *menglong* because this phenomenon permeates my film poems as an artistic and narrative device and is central to understanding structural and stylistic approaches to the work.

MENGLONG AND THE POETIC

An introduction

In Chinese, the term *menglong* originally described dim moonlight and its literal meaning is blurred and indistinct. There are diverse interpretations



of menglong in English including enigma, ambiguity and indirectness. Menglong resonates with all three of these words. However, it comes closest to Owen's (1992) definition of "mystification".

Owen (1992) suggests that "mystification conceals the putative proposition and compels the reader to construct the 'message' out of the fragmentary words" (p. 301). He believes mystification can be used to describe both the poetic values of *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry*⁹³ and menglong.

I suggest that the concept of Han Xu (reserve or accumulation within) [含蓄] also relates to menglong. Owen defines Han Xu as "a reserve of unexpressed significance or emotion that lies implicit behind or beneath words and unfolds after the words of the text are over" (ibid. p. 326). He believes that in Chinese poetry, a strategic difference between surface and subsurface is central to Han Xu. He says, "The surface text is evidence of subsurface, but it is not a sign of the subsurface. The words are signs, but the category of Han Xu operates on a different level, not getting 'locked' in the words" (ibid., p. 328). However, Han Xu functions differently from Western semiotics. In Han Xu, a signified connotation may not have a direct association with the sign. Yuan (1999) suggests that Li's poetry often provides readers with a variety of interpretations. The multiple interpretations may be caused by the indirect link between the subsurface and beneath the surface,⁹⁴ and the reader may receive the aesthetic pleasure of menglong through processes of guessing, imagining or sensing.

The features of menglong permeate most Late Tang dynasty poetry so they were in existence before Shangyin Li's poems were written. This said, James Liu [刘若愚] (1969) describes Li Shangyin as "one of the most ambiguous, if not the most ambiguous, of Chinese poets" (p. 27), and Owen (2006) notes that "much of his poetry is difficult, and some of it is impenetrably obscure" (p. 338).

Jiaying Ye [叶嘉莹] (2010) suggests that reading Li's poetry is like catching a fish in water. We can feel the body of the fish slipping through our fingers, but we cannot catch it. However, we receive a kind of realistic, intimate feeling. Ye (2005) argues that the significance of Li's poems lies not in their content but in the underlying concept and techniques he used to write them. The implied original meaning is nebulous and we can only speculate upon its significance. Ye (2005), in referring to the concept of "creative betrayal"⁹⁵ and the Chinese concept "Xing Fa Gan Dong" [兴发感动]⁹⁶ says, "when I write a poem, I do not refer to Li's original meaning of his poem, but what it touches and motivates in me" (p. 24).

⁹³*The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry* was written in Late Tang dynasty (circa. 837 – 908) by Kong Tu Si [司空图]. It offers an authoritative classical consideration of the aesthetic construction of Chinese poetry.

⁹⁴The relationship between the surface and the subsurface is an important idea in the Xiang system. I use these terms as translations [表面] and [内在] from Chinese. The relationship between them is also the theoretical foundation of understanding menglong.

⁹⁵The term "creative betrayal" comes from Franco Moretti's *La Reception Literaire*. When we interpret a work, although our creation of meaning is based on the work, we may betray its original intention.

⁹⁶Xing Fa Gan Dong [兴发感动] means that the reader's heart is inspired and affected by the essence of the poem. The inspiration and affections may differ from the content of the original poem.

Menglong in my work

My practice is similarly motivated. I do not seek to translate what Li Shangyin has written but to use his menglong to inspire and sustain the composition of film poems as contemporary artworks. In so doing Li's poetry forms a site of reflection and departure.

In my film poems, the aesthetic features of menglong may be described as ambiguous Xiang, indefinite and uncertain in content (constructed by the Xiang system) and complex and changeable in terms of emotional meaning. In addition, menglong draws to the surface of my film poems "an understandable yet indescribable connotative beauty" (Xia⁹⁷, 2009, p. 1290), and opens space for diverse interpretation. Since menglong is a significant feature of Li's poetry and reflecting on his work is the foundation of my research, I try to develop an artistic method of appreciating the ethos of mystery, enigma, ambiguity and indirectness evident in his writing.

THE POETICS OF THE EVERYDAY

Although menglong permeates my work, it operates inside an appreciation of the poetics of the ordinary. Ames and Hall (2003) suggest that Chinese philosophy is embedded in everyday life. In my work I appreciate the lyrical nature of the everyday. I do this by paying homage to worlds that I find (rather than constructing artificial environments for my films). This is because I perceive the poetic in ordinary objects, in unaffected environments and people. Before filming, I normally visit locations and decide what objects and existing sites I might include in a film. In line with this approach, I do not cast professional actors, instead I find people who have grown up or currently live in the worlds I film. This is because by adopting this approach, I am assured of a certain harmony of experience and aesthetics because physical elements in my film poems coexisted before I orchestrated them into artistic compositions.

Yi Xiang and the everyday object

An immersive world

Through the lens of Yi Xiang, in my film poetry everyday objects may be considered as a dynamic fusion of subjectivity and objectivity. Yi Xiang contains the imaginative, empirical and sentimental link between me as an artist and the physicality of everyday objects. In a process of fusion, my body, heart and the objective material world become one entity. An example of this may be illustrated by a consideration of the tablecloths that appear in *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2*. While filming these works, I immersed myself inside the worlds of the respective women.

⁹⁷*Ci Hai* (edited by Zhengnong Xia [夏征农]) is one of the most authoritative lexicons in Chinese. The original publishing of *Ci Hai* was planned for 1915, but the first edition wasn't published until 1936. Here I am citing the 7th edition published in 2009.

From the outside, I could see the exterior physicality of the tablecloth; its materiality, colour, texture and weight. But by immersing myself “inside” the cloth, I imagined that my body became the cloth. Here I felt care in the unfolding of the fabric, memory and love in its movement, the grace of time in the way it displayed and gave beauty to objects positioned upon it. From this immersion my heart was able to sense the respectfulness and delicacy of both Mrs Garelja and my grandmother and the emotional worlds they inhabited (Figures 4:1 & 4:2). This phenomenon may be understood when we consider Xu’s (2012) assertion that “the fusion of subjectivity and objectivity through Yi Xiang provides a bodily transition of life and experience” (p. 29).



Figure 4:1. Mrs Garelja lays out her carefully folded, delicately embroidered tablecloth. Frame grab from *Towards the Late Evening 1* (2016).



Figure 4:2. My grandmother unfolds her blue velvet tablecloth. Frame grab from *Towards the Late Evening 2* (2016).



These film poems have the potential to lead an audience to the same immersive world and the state of fusion that I experienced, because the everyday objects, nature and people function as an affective external physicality that provides an access to Yi Xiang. This idea relates to the theory of Xing [兴] in Chinese classical poetry. Chenghan Liu [刘成汉] defines Xing as a fusion of subjective sensations and the poetic objectivity. He has suggested Xing is “a thing that fuses with the inner emotions which were evoked by it” (Liu, 2011, p. 14).

Yi Xiang and menglong

In my film poems, most Yi Xiangs are in the form of menglong, so they are ambiguous or mysterious. This ambiguity occurs as a consequence of an integration of the readers’ diverse experience of life and the poet’s rich and layered feelings.

In *The Heart of Spring*, the utilization of the glass ball is inspired by the enigmatic mention of “misty jade” in Li’s poem *Jinse* (Figure 4:3). The line reads:

When the sun warms Indigo Fields the jade gives off a mist

Both the glass ball and the misty jade are figurative and allusive and this paradox enables suggestions without fixed Yi Xiang behind them. The glass ball may allude to Mei’s childhood, her grandmother’s daily life, the idea of dislocation, the mysterious atmosphere or her fragile mental state.⁹⁸



Figure 4:3. A glass ball in Mei’s grandmother’s apartment. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

⁹⁸This links to Yu’s (1990) idea that Li’s poems generate multiple meanings and can be read on literal, allegorical and symbolic levels.

In my film poems I do not depict explicit worlds. Instead, I create a contemplative atmosphere that suggests to an audience that they might encounter value in Yi Xiang. They might temporarily dwell inside it and let their thinking experience the way that feelings and life emerge through it. Accordingly, in the worlds of my film poems viewers are positioned to interpret subjectively what they encounter.

Everyday objects

I see everyday objects and actions as inherently poetic. For me the way the light brushes the corner of a street, the movement of fish in a tray of water, the unfolding of a cloth or the appearance of a green shoot on an old vine all “speak” with a kind of lyricism. Such appreciation emanates from a way of seeing the world that values both what is artistically rendered and what is unaffected.

The repository of memory

In these three film poems, everyday objects are often suggested repositories of memory. In this regard, they may be understood as belonging to what Shiming Gao [高士明] (2007) defines as “the ruin of time”. Gao (2007) uses this term to refer to “certain things that indicate time and the marks of existence” (p. 34). These objects indicate the profoundness of the ordinary.

Thus, it might be argued that personal, cultural and collective memories are embodied in many objects in my film poetry.⁹⁹ According to Owen (1986), the value of the past and the link to it may be found in certain ancient objects. This suggests that memory may exist inside physical form for a moment. In *Towards the Late Evening 1*, the tea cups evoke Mrs Garelja’s memory of the company of her late husband and the warmth of past affection (Figure 4:4). In *Towards the Late Evening 2*, memory resides in the badges of Mao which contain my grandmother’s revolutionary passion and idealism (Figure 4:5). In *The Heart of Spring*, many of the objects including the handmade shoes, old photographs and keys allude to Mei’s memories of childhood. These objects do not only embody her personal memory, but may also resonate with the memories of people born during the 1960s and the 1970s in China.



⁹⁹These often allude to the political or societal background of the film poem. Thus, everyday objects sometimes operate as references to larger ideas.



Figure 4:4. Fine china teacups on an embroidered table cloth. Frame grab from *Towards the Late Evening 1* (2016).

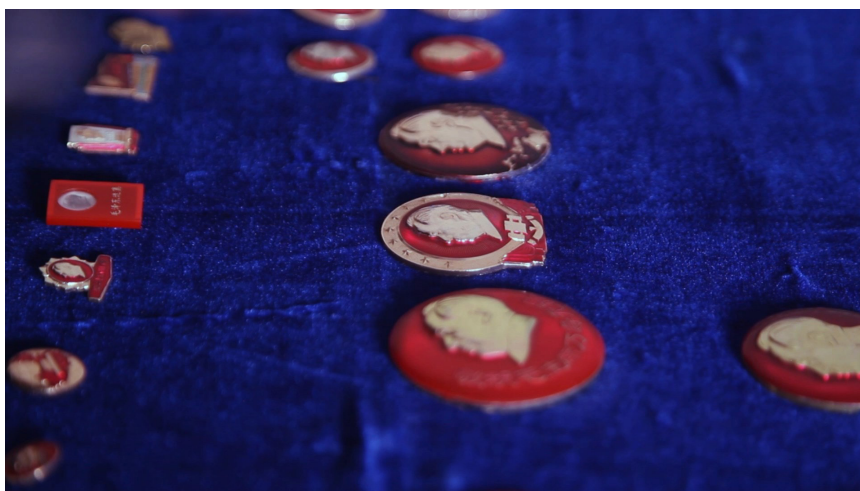


Figure 4:5. My grandmother's collection of Mao Ze Dong badges laid out on velvet cloth. Frame grab from *Towards the Late Evening 2* (2016).

Allusions to past relationships

In addition to memory, certain objects in my work operate as allusions to past relationships between people in families and neighbourhoods.¹⁰⁰

In certain instances these allusions also consider relationships between political ideals and notions of allegiance or defiance.¹⁰¹ An example of this is recognizable in *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2* because we may read the film poems as two sides of the same idea; one side is based on the intimate memory of a person and the other is based on an intimate memory of a connection to a political ideal.

¹⁰⁰This is particularly evident in *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *The Heart of Spring*.

¹⁰¹This is evident in *Towards the Late Evening 2* and *The Heart of Spring*.

In *The Heart of Spring*, the erhu may embody the love between a mother and her daughter. The delicate way that Mei touches and holds the musical instrument may be reminiscent of a mother's affection (Figure 4:6). Narratively, the musical realm of erhu is the place where Mei's mother was able to escape to during the Chinese Cultural Revolution and her defiant playing of the instrument to her daughter, even when in hiding, reveals something of her determined attitude (Figure 4:7).



Figure 4:6. Mei tenderly holds the erhu. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).



Figure 4:7. The visualized historical space where through the erhu, the memory of a mother plays to the emerging recollection of a daughter. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).



The indication of existing lives and experience

Most of the objects that appear in my work were loaned to me by the people who performed in the film poem. In *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2*, the two elderly women provided the tea set and the badge collection respectively. These were familiar objects through which they related memories.

Similarly, in *The Heart of Spring*, the interior objects in the doctor's room and the grandmother's flat were provided respectively by Mr Cai (who plays the role of the doctor) and Mrs Wei (who plays the role of the old neighbour) (Figures 4:8 & 4:9). Thus, in *The Heart of Spring* everyday objects are indicative of the existing lives and experiences of the actors. As such there is a visual harmony between the doctor and his world. We see similar textures and colours and a sense of devoted, considered scholarship that connects the man with the environment he inhabits. In adopting this approach, I am able to establish delicate relationships between semi-fictional characters and actors because the actors' real lives spill into the film's world.¹⁰²



Figure 4:8. The actress Mrs Wei's hat. In the film poem, this object was something left in the room by Mei's grandmother. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

¹⁰²By extension, movement is also more authentic because the actors are familiar with the objects that they handle.



Figure 4:9. Mr Cai owned the basket of food that in *The Heart of Spring* the doctor offers to Mei as a light refreshment. Mr Cai is by profession a traditional doctor. It is normal practice for him to offer such food at the beginning of a consultation. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

The natural world

The Heart of Forest and Spring

My film poetry occurs in ordinary worlds without contrived natural scenery. However, I perceive these worlds with *The Heart of Forest and Spring* [林泉之心]. This is a concept developed by the Song Dynasty painter and scholar Xi Guo [郭熙] (1000-1090). Drawing on Daoism, Guo believed that a closeness and love towards nature is part of being effectively human and being able to perceive natural beauty requires a nonsecular, spiritual, calm heart (Chen, 2008).

In addition to land and plants, I understand that wind, light, water and shadow are all aspects of nature. In my work, I only make small adjustments to them in order to preserve what is visceral. We can see this idea clearly illustrated in *The Heart of Spring*.¹⁰³

Blossoming and decay

In my film poetry life is an interplay between blossoming and decay. Thus, in *The Heart of Spring* nature is experienced as a consideration of time. For instance, in the early spring I filmed the last scene in a broken shed where tender shoots were appearing out of old foliage and spring blossom was appearing on fruit trees. In contrast, we also experience through the film poem, the summer dryness of ancient bamboo. This counterpointing suggests a cycle of life, death and rebirth¹⁰⁴. The trajectory through death to life maps on to the film's narrative where a young woman seeks meaning



¹⁰³This is because in contrast *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2* are largely interior works.

¹⁰⁴This may be tangentially aligned with what Ting Qiu [丘廷] (2011) considers nature as a sculpture that constructs its own space and uses this space to extend time.

from knowledge of the past and, at the end of this journey, she achieves new knowledge.

Affection for nature

The concept of affection for nature [情景交融] is the essence of Yi Xiang (Fan, 2006; Ye, 1998; Jiang, 2002). In *The Heart of Spring*, I attempt to develop Yi Xiang by establishing a link between the external scenes of nature and my internal sensations. This idea corresponds to Gawei Wang's (1909/2012) belief that the language of natural scenes is the language of sensation [一切景语皆情语]. In my work, the link between nature and sensation may be broadly categorized into two ways. The first is based on the Chinese metaphoric conventions that have been built on observations and appreciations of nature over multiple generations. For example, let us consider the Xiang of a fallen flower in *The Heart of Spring* (Figure 4:10). There are several traditional meanings of this metaphor including the end of a woman's youth, a waste of time, the fleeting nature of beauty or a sense of sorrow and pity. All of these conventional meanings contribute to build the Yi Xiang of Mei's mother in the work.



Figure 4:10. A fallen camellia flower floating in a bowl of water. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

In addition to cultural metaphor, in my work nature is also sometimes used to increase the identity of a person. For example, in *The Heart of Spring*, the doctor's personality and feelings are represented by dry, ochre leaves (Figure 4:11). We see these leaves as fragile, poised in the last stage of life, yet they contain a delicate beauty. They are suspended for a moment, brittle and paper-like before they will fall. This is a parallel to the elderly doctor's nature so the colouring and fragility of the leaves is extended into the interior of his world. Similarly, the old neighbour working in the town sells shoes. She may be seen as the eternal, living heart of the village. She is surrounded by nature as a phenomenon of the everyday. We walk with her through a well-trodden grove of bamboo, along a pathway flanked with foliage where women have walked for centuries. The doorway through which she takes us into the grandmother's world is now surrounded with bamboo strips that we understand have been stored and are now drying in preparation for weaving. She is both of this time and also in a timeless world of women's work.



Figure 4:11. The last, brittle leaves of the season. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

People

People from the world

The people appearing in my work are not professional actors. They are individuals who have lived or grown up in the world that I film. During shooting, I merge fictional characters that have been shaped broadly in the preproduction stage with features of these participants' lives and behaviours to create higher levels of authenticity. Thus, the warmth in their hearts and the respect for their natural rituals surface naturally through the work. For example, in *The Heart of Spring* when the performers were walking on the stairs, the old neighbour and Mei knew to walk slowly and carefully, because they had stepped on similar stairs many times before. My directing technique was to simply have the actors respond naturally to a situation. Given the incline of stairs in these old houses, Mei, who belonged to a younger generation, knew intuitively to help Mrs Wei. By utilizing the life experience of the performers I was also able to pay homage to small, subtle traditions. For instance, Mrs Wei knew how to make the shoes we see in the film. She also knew how to display such merchandise in traditional baskets in the market place (Figure 4:12). Similarly, the local barber was familiar with the traditional method of cutting hair (Figure 4:13)¹⁰⁵ and the shrine that the doctor prays at is similar to a personal devotional space that he has used for many years. His ritual is authentic.



Figure 4:12. Mrs Wei's display of merchandise in a traditional wicker basket. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

¹⁰⁵In my film poetry, these small, traditional, seemingly unexceptional actions are elevated to the poetic.



Figure 4:13. Mr. Ren (who had been a village barber) cutting hair with his traditional hand clippers. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

By extension, the performers in my work have the same *texture* as their worlds. The worn surface of their skin, the material fatigue of their clothing¹⁰⁶ and their unique postures (figure 4:14) all result from living and working in the worlds in which they are filmed. This means that I can use the texture of a hand, a distinctive silhouette or a familiar glance to communicate concepts like age, delicacy, feeling or the intimacy of touch.



Figure 4:14. Mrs Wei's hunched silhouette as she walks through a grove of bamboo. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

¹⁰⁶Prior to filming, a performer and I will look through their personal wardrobe and select something they might wear on an ordinary day. Generally these clothes have signs of age but they are also valued by the actor. They are familiar. Normally such clothes also have a colour scheme that matches the environment in which they will be filmed.



Familiarity

When directing actors, I try to create a familiar environment. I will run several rehearsals in a location so they are conversant with each other and the space in which we will be working. I have found that this approach enables them to become more at ease with their embodiment in a character. As an extension of this, interior locations are normally either the places where they live or spaces with which they are familiar. For example, the way that Mrs Wei sits down on a chair in the corner of the room in *The Heart of Spring* appears very natural to me (Figure 4:15), because the layout of her house is very similar to this room. The textures, objects, fabrics and furniture are familiar to her.



Figure 4:15. Mrs Wei seated in the half light of the grandmother's house. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

When I am filming, I generally ask people to do ordinary things and this helps them to avoid “acting”. For instance, when filming the first three shots in the doctor’s house, I asked Mr Cai to do what he would normally do when treating a patient. As a consequence, he poured a cup of tea and offered Mei a basket of traditional snacks (peanuts and sunflower seeds) (Figure 4:16). The gesture was understated and natural but within it I attempted to highlight the poetics of movement, the subtle rituals of his professionalism and the delicate tentativeness and modesty of his nature.



Figure 4:16. Mr Cai pours a cup of green tea and offers a basket of traditional peanuts and sunflower seeds. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

¹⁰⁷This subjective, emotional resonance designed to speak for something much wider than the immediate subject under consideration, is evident in my own work. Most of my film poems (with the exclusion of certain experiments), deal with emotions of ordinary people and my feelings towards them but, these suggest (even across language barriers and cultural differences), a sense of something universal. So, emotions like pride, affection, loss, constrained grief and care, are evident in *Towards the Late Evening 1*, *Towards the Late Evening 2*, and *The Heart of Spring*. I suggest that my film poems, even when they are encountered in a foreign language, may still be considered emotionally communicative texts. Their selection in a variety of international poetry film festivals, without requests for translating subtitles may be used to support this proposition.

Summary

In my work I do not conceive people as dramatic characters but instead I try to elevate relatively everyday lives to the realm of the poetic. The poetic is manifest in subtle nuances that I discover in ordinary beauty. Through the mediator of Yi Xiang, I perceive within objects and environments; memory, emotions, relationships, political and cultural backgrounds and the fused lives of my fictional characters (and real people). The poetics of the everyday therefore exist inside the link between ordinary material physicality and ideas that sit behind it. I suggest that by understanding something very small and ordinary, we may in fact understand a much more nuanced poetic condition.

EMOTION

The second broad area for consideration in my work relates to emotion. For me, memory is as much factual as it is felt, and although what is considered emotional may be nebulous it is nonetheless resonant.

Menglong in Shangyin Li's construction of the emotional

Nonfixed emotion

In my work, emotions have a sense of menglong and this can also be said of Shangyin Li's poetry (including *Le You Yuan* and *Jinse*). Most of Li's untitled poems address us indirectly by focusing on internal emotions. Meng Wang [王蒙], Peiheng Zhang [章培恒] and Yuming Luo [骆玉明] all suggest that it is impossible to locate specific content in Li's *Jinse*. Similarly, Wang (1990) argues that it is inadequate to study *Jinse* for the poet's intention in writing, because at the core of this poem are the emotions, including pain from the death of his wife, the bitterness of leading a wandering life and other unknown personal conflicts. Zhang and Luo (1997) suggest that because the emotions in Shangyin Li's poems come from the poet's spirit and heart, it may have been challenging for him to separate discrete emotions clearly.

Subjective and universal emotion

Naibin Dong and Xingpei Yuan [袁行霈] also argue that Li's poetry emphasises subjective emotions and these, they suggest, contribute to the nature of menglong in his work. Dong (1992) asserts that Li's poetry expresses not only the state of his life but also personal, flowing emotions that can only be communicated through menglong. Xuekai Liu [刘学锴] (1993) extends this idea, suggesting Li's poetry expresses the universal emotions of life deep in connotation and extensive in denotation (including ideas like loneliness, confusion and being lost). Significantly, Liu suggests that emotions in Li's poetry are not only personal but can also apply to universal situations.¹⁰⁷

To achieve this, Zhang and Luo (1997) suggest that Li employs complex, fluctuant emotions from diverse angles in his writing. Zongqiang Luo [罗宗强] (2003) develops this idea by suggesting that the expression of emotions in Shangyin Li's poetry is achieved through a process of layering, delicacy and circuitousness,¹⁰⁸ and this approach produces a tone of "hidden sorrow" [幽约] and "bitterness with beauty" [凄艳].

Experience and emotion

The menglong of Li's poetry partly emerges from a fusion of the poet's experiences and his emotions emanating from these experiences.¹⁰⁹ Both Aijun Sun [孙艾君] (2011) and Bohai Chen (1985) suggest that in his work, diverse content may coexist in a single poem. (For example, the coexistence of a love affair, a difficult official career and a sense of destiny). Liu (1979) argues that it is the poet's tacit knowledge and wide experience that make him "comprehend by analog" [触类旁通]. For example, when he was writing a love poem, he might unconsciously indicate his attitudes towards political issues impacting upon him through the Yi Xiang.

The relationship between emotion and narrative structure

Horizontal storylines and parallel emotional lines

Towards the Late Evening 1, *Towards the Late Evening 2* and *The Heart of Spring* all employ a simple, horizontal story line, but beneath this runs a poetic and emotional line. Narratively, the poems trace a restrained, chronological progression through a series of events. The general tone is quietly elegant and there are no impassioned, dramatic revelations. Beneath this narrative progression, a parallel emotional strand also transitions and these two lines are perceived together, creating a restrained fictional surface and an emotionally resonant subsurface.

If we consider the narrative structure as a Yi Xiang system, the narrative line may be understood as the Xiang (what is physical). This is simple and accessible. Conversely, the parallel subsurface (emotional) line may represent Yi (the meaning behind the Xiang). This line is deep, nuanced and evocative. So, in *The Heart of Spring* we encounter the narrative line as linear and concise. It traces a woman's return to find her mother who disappeared during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The parallel emotional line beneath the plot begins with Mei's feeling of nostalgia and unknowingness; it transitions through the warmth and care that she receives from the traditional world of her mother and grandmother's neighbours and culminates with a quiet, emotionally subtle anagnorisis.

¹⁰⁸This "nondirect" expression of emotion is evident in *The Heart of Spring*. The doctor's complex state of grief and responsibility is suggested through an environment of quietness and reserve. His emotional state is never made explicit but we sense a deep undercurrent that is expressed in layered, repeated and delicate Yi Xiangs rather than through direct language or action.

¹⁰⁹I would note however, that menglong in my film poems is also shaped by my contemporary context. Because I am an artist who lives and works between diverse cultures, often there are elements in my film poems that may have clear and resonant meaning to one cultural group, but to another, the same elements may appear enigmatic. For example, the afternoon tea ritual in *Towards the Late Evening 1* may be considered as menglong to a Chinese audience because afternoon tea is not a traditional ritual in China, while the pride and ritual associated with the Chairman Mao badges in *Towards the Late Evening 2* may seem enigmatic to a Western audience that does not understand the impact of Mao's elevation of agency among Chinese women. Many of these women transitioned from relatively powerless, gendered roles in their communities to positions where they exercised considerable local power and were appreciated as agents of change.

Fragments

The narrative structures of all three film poems move quietly through fragments of ordinary people's lives. These fragments represent the mental states and inner worlds of the individuals and incrementally they establish the mood and emotional flow of the work. For example, in *Towards the Late Evening 2*, we see (and hear about in the Chinese language) fragments of my grandmother's childhood (Figure 4:17). We sense the fragment of her commitment to the Communist Party (Figure 4:18) and we hear the fragment of her dream about her deceased mother in her monologue.¹¹⁰ Most of these fragments are recalled from memory and are subtle, subjective and nonsequential. The fragments are linked by my grandmother's emotions (through the parallel emotional line) which may be described as both passionate and restrained.



Figure 4:17. Entry to the house where my grandmother lived as a child. In the film poem my grandmother transitions through three houses. We enter through the courtyard of her childhood home, we see her examining the badges in the house where she lived as a married woman, and we leave her seated beneath the badges in the house she now occupies. Frame grab from *Towards the Late Evening 2* (2016).

¹¹⁰To access this information, one needs to understand her Chinese monologue. If this is not aurally accessible her reflections can be read on the catalogue card accompanying the work. Her monologue translates as:

I got my own house when I was 75.
In my new house one day I dreamed ...
I heard my grandmother call my nickname 'Yo'.
I answered her.
After that, I never had this kind of dream again.



Figure 4:18. My grandmother proudly seated below collected badges of Chairman Mao. Frame grab from *Towards the Late Evening 2* (2016).

In film poems like *The Heart of Spring* we encounter a work where narrative fragments and visual pauses unfold and certain ideas repeat (for example, fish, bees, flowers and water). This approach relates to the reiterative and progressive structure of the Chinese poetic tradition that became a feature after *Shijing* [诗经].¹¹¹ Di Wang [王迪] (2006) maintains that sentences in Chinese poems after this period became progressive, and narrative developments and poetic changes within the work were achieved through a process of progression. Arguably Li's *Jinse* follows this same technique. Ying Su [苏缨] and Xiaowen Mao [毛晓雯] say, “the structure of *Jinse* may be analysed as qi [起], cheng [承], zhuan [转], and he [合]” (2013, p. 291). They explain that, “qi [起] means the starting point, cheng [承] connects the preceding part of the text and what follows in the text, zhuan [转] may change the emotion to a certain direction, and he [合] is the resolution”(ibid).

This process is mirrored in *The Heart of Spring*. Mei meets an old neighbour. She finds the old photograph of her mother (Figure 4:19). She talks to the doctor (Figure 4:20). Step by step, we move closer to both the truth of Mei's mother and the emotional and narrative “resolution”¹¹² of the work.

¹¹¹In English, this book may be translated as the Book of Odes. It is the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry and it is dated somewhere between the 11th and 6th centuries B.C.

¹¹²I use the word “resolution” in inverted commas because men-long prevents the poem from achieving absolute resolution in a Western sense. Not everything is resolved and cemented into place. We experience the culmination of the film poem as an explanation that is nuanced. It makes us wonder and think. Perhaps it may be better described as a “subtle resolution” ... or a “suggestion” rather than a comprehensive denouement.



Figure 4:19. After the elderly neighbour brings Mei to her grandmother's apartment, the young woman finds an old photograph wrapped in cloth. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).



Figure 4:20. Mei is introduced to the doctor by the elderly neighbour. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

Clarity and mystery

In many of my film poems there is a concurrent sense of clarity and mystery¹¹³ and their proportions are finely tuned. In *The Heart of Spring*, the core of the narrative is Mei's search to answer the question of her childhood and the identity of a mysterious woman. During the narrative's unfolding, we seek an answer from both concrete and enigmatic elements. In the end we may discover the answer to Mei's question which is the fact that her mother was killed during the Cultural Revolution and that, prior to her death, she defiantly demonstrated her love for Mei by coming out of hiding to play to her. However, Mei's memory has not been able to fully recall these details. The spaces in her understanding are filled with enigmatic hauntings.

However, this information is not treated with the explicit clarity of a conventional film drama. I treat the narrative as a mystery. I do not emphasise the historical injustice of what happened, and Mei's emotional response to her past remains uncertain at the end of the work. In addition, details of her life and that of the doctor and elderly neighbour are not provided. Similarly, internal relationships between the characters are expressed indirectly. By adopting this approach, I keep certain parts of the story open for interpretation and utilize "unknowing" in a manner that touches the essence of menglong.

The narrative of *The Heart of Spring* moves from memory to reality, then to imagination. The opening sequence may be interpreted as Mei's frail memory of a mysterious woman playing an erhu. Following the sound of the instrument, she makes a realistic journey through her hometown and its environs in an attempt to find the source of her memory. From the first scene to the antepenultimate scene, the narrative is relatively clear. However, the last two scenes are more mysterious. They may be interpreted as Mei's imagination or a daydream¹¹⁴ that emanates from the doctor's story about her mother (Figure 4:21).



¹¹³This pervading sense of caution and mystery in *The Heart of Spring* is closely related to Li's *Jinse*. Minford and Lau (2002) note that *Jinse* "tells readers that there is a secret, but it does not tell them what the secret is ... and the poem implies that the secret is shocking enough or problematic enough to warrant being kept hidden" (p. 345).

¹¹⁴This idea of "daydream" is also indicative of Li's poems. Dong (1989) believes that "most of Shangyin Li's poems indicate dreams or day dreams that come from his subconsciousness" (p. 7).

¹¹⁵This idea I explored in the experiment *Butterfly Dreams of Me*, see Appendix 1. 3.

¹¹⁶I am touched by what the Chinese poet Dao Bei [北 岛] says in his (2009) lecture: “As a wandering poet, Chinese is the only luggage I have, and going home makes me feel surefooted. However, my way home is not there anymore and my home has changed.” (This is my English translation. The full lecture in Chinese can be retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jz8b9zfkEIU>)

¹¹⁷Owen (2004) suggests that we all have secret desires to revive the places that are touched by our memories.

¹¹⁸I use inverted commas here because history is always a construction of narratives and therefore can never truly be claimed as truth. Kern states, “Once a moment has come and gone, there is no way of knowing exactly what happened. The truth has dissipated with the moment and the evidence left behind – be it a written document or an eye-witness report – only represents one perspective, often flawed or incomplete, of what has just occurred” (2013, para. 4).



Figure 4:21. The scene where Mei encounters the erhu is possibly a dream, because unlike the weathered environment, the erhu has not decayed. This may be interpreted as a spiritual Yi Xiang. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

It is worth noting that in *The Heart of Spring* sometimes the line between memory, reality and imagination is blurred. This quality of “blurriness” is inspired by the line in *Jinse*:

Zhuang Zhou’s morning dream, lost in a butterfly

The line contains an allusion to the fusion between the states of reality and imagination (or daydream) evident in the traditional story of Zhuangzi and The Butterfly Dream.¹¹⁵ In Li’s reference to this enigmatic relationship in his poem we encounter menglong as a state of being. In *The Heart of Spring*, the same device appears as the mysterious woman who plays an erhu. She intersects the narrative as an enigma. We are uncertain if the sounds and images of this woman should be understood as a fragment of memory, a haunting, realistic occurrence or Mei’s imagination.

Emotion and remembrance

The delicate nature of remembrance is also a recurring theme in my work.¹¹⁶ I left China seven years ago, so my image of home has become a memory.¹¹⁷ However, I engage with a desire (and the challenge) of interpreting what I recall. It is impossible to construct memory as an absolute in film because many objects or the indexical links between objects and their history have become tenuous or are missing. Because of this, my work presents thoughts about the past rather than a construction of “historical truths”.¹¹⁸

The coexistence of the past and the present

It is a distinctive device to present remembrance by showing the coexistence of the past and the present. Interestingly, this idea is evident in the lack of tense in Chinese poetry. For example, in a translation into English of the last two lines of *Jinse* we read:

*One should wait until these feelings become remembrance,
It's just that at the moment I was already in a daze.*

In English these lines wrestle uneasily with the past and present as absolutes. However, in the original Chinese text [此情可待成追忆，只是当时已惘然] there is no variation of tense.¹¹⁹ Because of this feature of the Chinese language, poets are able to express ideas that coexist between time and space.¹²⁰

Applying this idea to my film poems, I depict worlds being concurrently forgotten yet still having something occurring. For example, in *The Heart of Spring*, the real (existent) world has the movement of water in it, including the river (Figure 4:22), the well (Figure 4:23), and the poured tea (Figure 4:24). In contrast, I use dryness to talk about what is being lost to time, for example, the dry leaves in the courtyard, the dry books in the doctor's home (Figure 4:25), the creaking stairs and the brittle sere bamboo strips at the entrance to Mei's grandmother's old apartment (Figure 4:26). Throughout the film poem metaphorically, the ongoing existent world is relatively liquid and the remembered world is dry.



Figure 4:22. The small river running through the town. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).



¹¹⁹In Chinese there are no verb conjugations. All verbs have a single form. For example, the verb to “wait” is 待 (dai), which can be used for the past, present and future.

¹²⁰In addition to the grammatical fluid-definition of tense the poem is distinguished by the distinctive use of two contrasting positions. The word ‘remembrance’ [追忆] is in the present but it looks back. However, the word ‘already’ [已] has previously occurred so it is situated in the past.

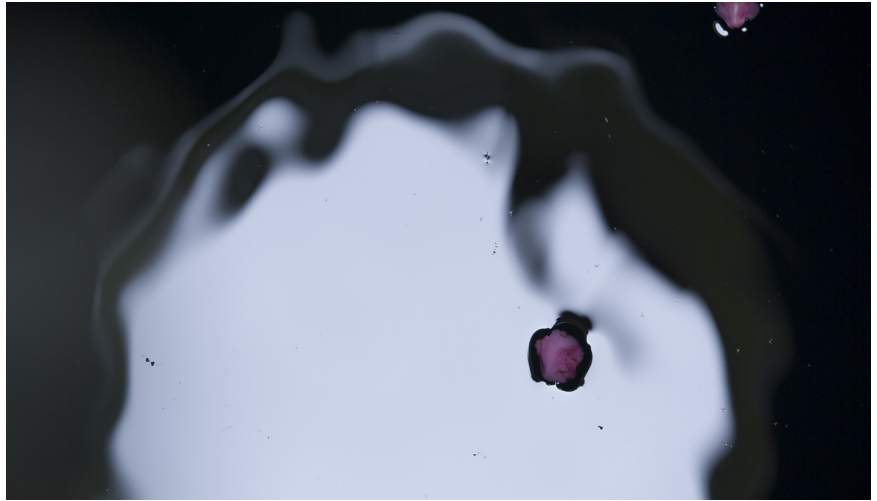


Figure 4:23. A petal floating in the well. The well is a place where women traditionally congregated to wash clothes and discuss events in small Chinese towns. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).



Figure 4:24. The glass of green tea the doctor makes for Mei. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).



Figure 4:25. The doctor's dry and weathered reference books. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).



Figure 4:26. Dried bamboo strips hanging in front of Mei's grandmother's apartment. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).



In addition to this contrast between wetness and the dryness, there are juxtapositions of the modern set against signs of aging. For instance there is a contrast between Mei's contemporary attire and the dated clothing of the doctor and the elderly neighbour (Figure 4:27). Although Mei's clothing is modern, I set her in an environment that resonates the past (both physically and conceptually). Physically, she wanders through ruined buildings, old streets and the interiors of old rooms. She gazes at these worlds as retrospections.

This retrospection is also a feature of Li's poetry and it is indicative of much Late Tang dynasty writing. Minford and Lau (2002) note:

The poetry of the late Tang often looked backward, and many poets of the period distinguished themselves by the intensity of their retrospective gaze. Beguiling moments of the past, both historical and poetic, caught their attention and haunted their present (p. 5).



Figure 4:27. A comparison of Mei's contemporary clothing and modern bag and the elderly neighbour's traditional handmade attire. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

Traditional rituals

It is worth noting that traditional rituals also play an important role in my film poems. They create a link between the past and the present and constitute a form of *menglong*. This is because such rituals may remind us of what we have lost of the ancestors who we loved. Such rituals may also illustrate the “meaning” of such loss. This is very evident in the tone and content of the two *Towards Late Evening* film poems, where rituals of presentation are used to unfold and make sense of what has passed.

The approach is a little different in *The Heart of Spring*. This film poem occurs during the Qingming festival which is associated with the worship of ancestors. Thus, after telling Mei the truth about her mother, the doctor prays at a family shrine. This action may be interpreted in different ways. It may be a normal daily ritual, a cleansing of conscience or a spiritual communication with Mei’s mother (Figure 4:28).



Figure 4:28. The doctor praying at his family shrine. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

In all three of the film poems, I am aware that actions and objects do not communicate consistent messages across diverse cultural viewings. However, I would suggest that emotional resonances within them are translatable. Illustrative of this is the final image in *The Heart of Spring*. In this view of the bamboo forest, we encounter in the bottom left hand corner, a white flag on a tomb. This flag is a local convention that shows respect for ancestors during the Qingming festival (Figure 4:29). It is unlikely that a Western audience will read this image in the same way as a local Chinese viewer might. However, the loneliness embedded in the solitary flag may be transferable.

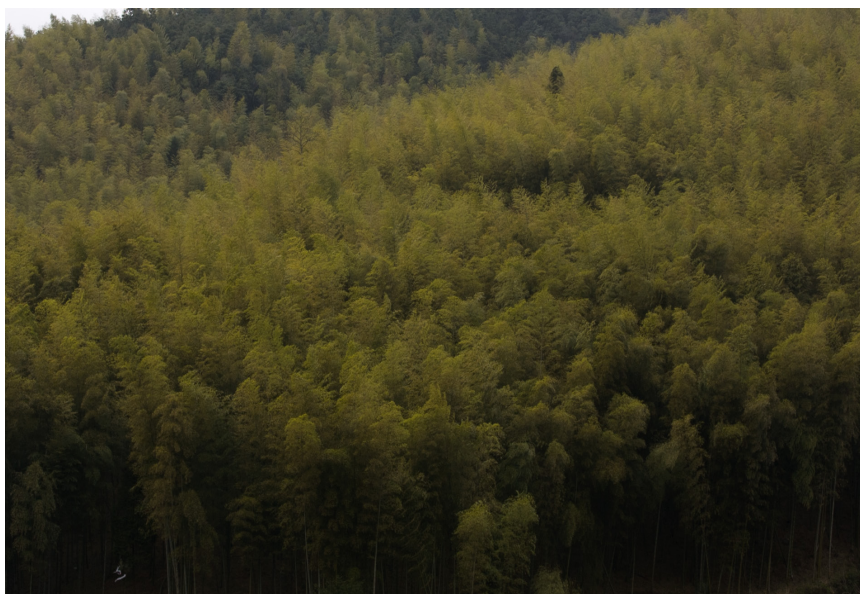


Figure 4:29. In the lower left quarter of the frame, we can see a vague white flag decorating a grave during the Qingming festival. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

Melancholy as an emotional state

Another emotional feature of my work is the presence of melancholy. Owen (2004) draws potential connections between remembrance and the melancholic. He suggests that this occurs, because an experienced event is no longer existent and we can never return to the past. In my film poems, remembrance is often melancholic in tone.

Xu and Ji

In order to explain two types of melancholy that stem from remembrance in my film poems, I would like to borrow from the framework of Xu [墟]¹²¹ and Ji [迹]¹²² as theorized by Hong Wu [巫鸿] (2012).

Wu (2012) suggests that Xu and Ji are two sides of the site of memory. Xu suggests that memory is a lack of the framing of materiality.¹²³ The melancholic nature of Xu stems from the fact that a lost memory cannot be traced back to its physical origin. So, melancholy occurs because what is lost cannot be reconstructed. In my film poems, certain pieces of the past are lost with the death of individual people such as Mrs Gajelia's husband, Mei's mother and grandmother and Chairman Mao. This loss permeates the film poems. We feel it as a *tone* within the work.¹²⁴

The other aspect of memory is Ji. This describes the *marks of decay* that translate the loss of time into materiality and space. We encounter this in the derelict pump house where Mei's mother hid in *The Heart of Spring* (Figure 4:30). It also occurs in the ageing of materiality (a faded table cloth or the interior of my grandmother's home). The physical evidence in Ji evokes a sense of reminiscence.



Figure 4:30. Track to the abandoned pump house where Mei's mother hid during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

¹²¹Literally, Xu means a place that was once famous and prosperous but disappeared. An example of this would be the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

¹²²Literally, Ji means a once prosperous place that has decayed with time. So, there is still existing physical evidence that we are able to trace back to a prosperous past. An example of this would be the Great Wall of China.

¹²³In *The Heart of Spring* this may be seen in Mei's vague, indistinct memory of the mysterious woman with the erhu.

¹²⁴In *the Heart of Spring*, the memory of Mei's mother is a lost piece of the young woman's life. It is something that she is not able to reconstruct. Almost all physical evidence of the existence of her mother has been lost to time. We are left only with some old clothing in a cupboard and an enigmatic photograph. Surrounding this tenuous hold on materiality is a small decaying town that will soon be demolished. Eventually, we know that there may be nothing physical that Mei can link to her mother. This permanent loss of the past results in melancholy.

The melancholy of Ji has two features. First, the decay of the physical past may increase the sense of melancholy. For example, melancholy is created in the last scene of *The Heart of Spring* by a series of decayed objects like the pump and the table (Figure 4:31). Here what was sought was an eroded but beautiful physicality that contains within it the essence of what is past. These fragments of something once more complete can induce a sense of melancholy.



Figure 4:31. The close-ups of the decayed pump and table. They exist in the present, but we see them as objects of the past in a state of decay. They are now only fragments of what was historically a more complete state. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

Second, contrasting elements from the past with the present in the same space and time may produce a sense of melancholia. For example, at the beginning of *The Heart of Spring* we see Mei walk through a decayed world. We see signs of the present (her walking) through fragments of the past (a peeling wall, the broken window and portions of ruined buildings) (Figure 4:32). When viewed together this juxtaposition creates a sense of the melancholic.



Figure 4:32. Mei walks past a wall that has fragments of time etched on to its surface. Then we observe her through a broken window. She is surrounded by ruined fragments of old buildings. Frame grabs from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

Aloneness

Melancholy is also emphasized in my film poems through the sense of “aloneness”. *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2* are about widowed women. *The Heart of Spring* is about a lonely woman returning to a traditional world. Within this world the doctor and the old neighbour are singular as well. However, the tradition of care and respect exists inside the neighbourhood. We see the two elderly neighbours caring for and helping Mei as she tries to discover the secret of her childhood (even though this must be difficult for them). In turn, Mei shows them respect (for example by walking behind them (Figure 4:33), helping them climb stairs and waiting for them to unfold explanations). Thus, the melancholic mood emanates partly through a contrast between the aloneness of the present and the warmth of traditional respect.



Figure 4:33. Mei walks respectfully behind the doctor. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

¹²⁵For example, Jiang (2012) discusses a slightly bored and gratuitously discomfited mood in Li's *Le You Yuan*. He considers this mood as a representation of the state of the Late Tang dynasty. The mood he suggests may also refer to the late stage of someone's life, which follows a slow process from the exuberance of youth through deterioration to death.

Demise

Melancholy is also established through a consideration of *demise*. In achieving this, the mood in these film poems remains restrained (as it is in Li's poetry).¹²⁵ Because the transition from youth to maturity ... and then to old age is part of a circular process (as in the Yi Xiang of the setting sun in *Le You Yuan*), what is tonally melancholic does not become sorrowful. We understand demise as a natural consequence of living a life. There is no anxiety about death in these film poems, nor is memory anxious or grasping. Memory and loss are simply accommodated as part of a flow between the present and what is passing into absence, and this state is rendered as delicately melancholic.

Colour and emotion

Finally, it is useful to briefly consider the role of colour and its relationship to emotion in these three film poems. Although colour and its meaning may be argued as culturally determined (Jones, 2017), given that the poems are designed for spaces within and between diverse cultures, I would like to comment on three dimensions. They are hue, saturation and contrast.

Hue

In *The Heart of Spring*, the basic colour palette consists of brown and dark blue grey. This is a relatively subdued substrate against which I develop subtle variations. For example, I use a dark brown palette consisting of burnt siennas and burnt and raw umbers in Mei's grandmother's house (Figure 4:34), but a pale brown palette of light ochres in the doctor's world. This differentiation is used to suggest a subtle gendering of lived space; the deep, private, feminine in Mei's grandmother's house and a scholarly, frail, but aged masculinity in the doctor's room. These hues are designed to evoke different moods.



Figure 4:34. The deep burnt siennas and burnt umbers of Mei's grandmother's apartment. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

The light ochres in the doctor's yard and house are very dry and similar to the colour of old wood. Emotionally we have the sense of fragility and time here. The interior pale ochres map on to the colours of the preceding exterior showing the doctor's bees and their hive. Thus, the worlds of work are connected and a bee transitions these environments when it flies between them. The palette of the doctor's world is softly lit (Figure 4:35).



Figure 4:35. In the doctor's house, the pale ochres are more flatly lit than the mysteriously deep browns we encounter in the grandmother's apartment. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

Conversely, the grandmother's apartment is rendered in deep browns. In this palette, shadows and burnished wood create a subdued melancholic emotional state. Here there is a sense of timeless, mysterious grace where boxes of memory are opened, forgotten fabrics touched and secrets between women explained. This deeper brown is also used to create less defined spaces than in the doctor's physically inhabited world. The brown palette holds time and loss as mysteries; we cannot see in to every corner of this world. Darkness has settled.

In *Towards the Late Evening I*, the basic colour palette comprises white and pale cyan (Figure 4:36). Similar to the interior of the doctor's place, the cyan here is subtle and relatively bleached. We encounter in the paleness a sense of time faded by light. Emotionally this pallet is restrained. I pared back the colour so the richness of Mrs Garelja's voiced memories would stand out against a restrained world of bleached aquas and mint greens that recall New Zealand's domestic colouring of the late 1940s and 1950s (when she was a young woman).

In *Towards the Late Evening 2*, the basic colour palette is made up of indigo, Prussian blue and raw umber. Emotionally, this palette is designed to suggest strength, but also the weight of time (Figure 4:37). The houses of my grandmother were not brightly lit. They were furnished in dark wood, solid, strong and permanent like her. I sought in the colour treatment to preserve this background palette so her emotional commitment could be counterpointed dramatically by the sharp reds of the Mao Ze Dong badges and the rich blue that she used to display them.



Figure 4:36. Mrs Garelja's cardigan is a pale cyan and the tablecloths that she owns are generally white (although delicately embroidered). Frame grab from *Towards the Late Evening 1* (2016).



Figure 4:37.. My grandmother wearing a Prussian blue coat and holding a piece of Indigo blue velvet. The furniture in her home is in deep brown. Frame grab from *Towards the Late Evening 2* (2016).

In my work, colour is also used to address contrasts between the past and present, and this in turn reinforces the melancholic. A significant example of this appears in the use of red as an accent in *The Heart of Spring*. In the doctor's room, the bright red plastic thermos emphasizes an intrusion of modernity. The colour (both in its hue and intensity) contrasts with the subdued palette of the rest of the design (Figure 4:38). The red suggests a determined present in a world that has an increasingly fragile grasp on existence, but it may also allude, as it does in my grandmother's world in *Towards Late Evening 2*, to Communist [Red] China and the ideologies associated with it.



Figure 4:38. The doctor pours a cup of tea for Mei using a red plastic thermos. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

Saturation

In terms of saturation, the worlds of *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2* maintain the original colours of the shoot, because these are film poems that gravitate towards documentary. However, in *The Heart of Spring* my approach was more manipulative. The palette in this work is slightly desaturated, although it is still largely based on the natural colours I filmed on location. In designing the palette for this work I wanted to allude to the sense of an old photograph, because the photograph is the vehicle for resolving the question behind the story.¹²⁶ By paring back the colour palettes and slightly desaturating them I was also able to emphasize texture and form over hue, and create a smaller colour range wherein I could bring diverse environments into a greater sense of wholeness (given the subtle differentiations I wanted to establish between the worlds). Thus, desaturated colour was used in the work to suggest time and continuity; it increases a quiet sense of melancholy and functions to restrain emotional drama so more subtle emotions can permeate up through the narrative.

¹²⁶However, I did not want to create a monochromatic scheme because it would position the narrative too far back into the precolour age and its association with film noir and black and white photography. I also needed the small black and white photograph in the grandmother's apartment to stand out as an object from an earlier period.



Contrast

In much of my work I also use contrasts between light and dark to deepen the sense of remembrance and melancholy. We see memory often unfold in darkened rooms, especially in the film poems with Chinese contexts. Backgrounds are often indistinct and we are drawn to accented objects by the light that differentiates them from their surroundings (Figure 4:39). However, I also increase tones subtly as a transitional device. So, in the closing scenes of *The Heart of Spring*, the browns gradually become darker. We encounter a similar approach as an extension of the Yi Xiang of the cup of tea served by the doctor to Mei. After telling Mei the truth about her mother, both Mei's and the doctor's emotions become deeper and more complex, so the colour tones also subtly darken. Thus, the transitioning of tone becomes a vehicle for the gradual deepening of the emotional weight of the sequence.



Figure 4:39. Mei searching for evidence of the mysterious woman. Her hand and the grandmother's jewellery box are lit; other objects from the past are in darkness, creating a sense of mystery. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

Summary

Emotion in my work is often treated as enigmatic and reflective of the *menglong* so evident in Shangyin Li's poems. Emotional trajectories within the work may be understood as running parallel to narrative arcs and these emotions transition as we progress. Among the range of emotions evident in the film poems, two have warranted special consideration. These are remembrance and melancholy. In my film poetry, the major expression of remembrance is the coexistence of the past and the present. In particular, traditional rituals create a connection between these dimensions, although such rituals are often presented as relatively enigmatic (and thus a form of *menglong*).

My use of melancholy may be seen as largely stemming from remembrance. I have applied the framework of Ji and Xu to discuss two types of melancholy and I have suggested that the juxtaposition of the past and the present may be used to underscore the emotional resonance of this state.

Finally, I have considered the role of colour as an emotive and associative element in my work. Palettes have been designed to suggest emotional nuances and to differentiate worlds and emotional responses within them. Saturation is employed to adjust the emotional balance between the existence and memory and to operate as a device for integrating diverse elements within a story. Tone is used to create both mystery and emphasis and to track subtle emotional changes in characters and storylines.

INTEGRATION AND RHYTHM

In this third area of consideration I will discuss integration and rhythm and how they impact on approaches to composition (framing) and editing.

The Yi Xiang system and rhythm in Shangyin Li's poetry

A major source of *menglong* in Shangyin Li's poems occurs through the integration of different layers of Xiang and Yi Xiang. On the surface, different Xiangs may not bear direct or logical relationships to one another in a poem but they contribute to the flow of feelings throughout a poetic text.

Integration and concealment

In general, the level of mystery generated by the integration of Li's Xiang system is much higher than the one might find in a nonpoetic Chinese text.¹²⁷

On the surface, in Li's poetry the connections between Xiangs and Yi Xiangs are relatively ambiguous and remote. Jingbo Zhao [赵景波] (1990) argues that the underlying connections inside the Xiang system come from Li's "stream of consciousness" [意识流]. In other words, the Xiangs and Yi

¹²⁷The mysterious relationship between Xiangs and Yi Xiangs is partly associated with the grammar of the Chinese language. Normally, a Chinese sentence will lack a subject, tense, personal pronouns and conjunctions. This convention can render the link between words ambiguous. The meaning of a sentence relies heavily on context, so sometimes what is written may have multiple meanings that are open to interpretation. Chinese linguist Li Wang [王力] (2015) notes that "the structure of an English sentence is like an interlink that has traces between different links" (p. 64) and "the structure of a Chinese sentence is like seamless clothing that is made up of pieces of fabric but, does not contain sutures" (ibid).

Xiangs are arranged according to Li's psychological sense of space and time.

I suggest that there are two possible reasons behind the menglong of integration in Li's poetry. The first is that the Xiang system is largely based on Li's internal, subjective emotions and these have the quality of menglong.¹²⁸ The second reason is the covert nature of Li's work. Minford and Lau (2002) argue that Li's poetry "simultaneously gestures toward a concealed referent and blocks easy coherence" (p. 364) and J. Y. Ye [叶嘉莹] (2010) suggests that Li consciously avoids exposing the inner world in his poems, and what is "obscured" in his work is often associated with his political ideas and personal relationships.

In Chinese poetic theory "yin" [隐] is similar to the device that Li uses to conceal himself. Zhu [朱光潜] (2012) defines "yin" as "hiding a thing first, then revealing a few clues that may lead people to guess what has been hidden" (p. 42). Zhu utilizes the ageing of wine as a metaphor to describe the quality of these hidden parts. In the darkness he suggests content may be improved over time, until it is discovered at a later time.

Within my work, menglong permeates the manner in which I integrate elements. For example, in *The Heart of Spring* I present a series of slightly mysterious images and sounds. These function as "allusive clues" that suggest but do not disclose a direct relationship. As a consequence, the narrative of the film poem unfolds by suggestion and nuance. The images and sounds we encounter may not always make immediate sense but upon retrospection they suggest connections and weave themselves into the emotional flow of the work.¹²⁹

Editing and rhythm

Ames (2009) argues that according to the Chinese philosophy, the heart is not simply a physical organ; it is the centre of a person. He believes that the rhythm of the heart communicates both social and the physiological relationships and feelings. A number of recent studies have argued that Li's poetry stems from his heart (Wang, 1995; Yuan, 1999; Hao, 1985).¹³⁰

Zhu (2012) suggests that the rhythm of a film is influenced both by the rhythm of the filmmaker's internal emotional flow and the rhythm of external movement captured by the camera. In contrast, my approach to editing is based on the rhythm of the internal emotional flow of my heart. This inner rhythm sets a subtle pace for editing. In the resulting aesthetic, there is an emphasis on cutting as breathing. Images align with each other, movement in one frame often mimics movement in the next and we experience editing as a comparatively harmonious and integrated process. I would argue that,

¹²⁸See the discussion on emotional response.

¹²⁹This type of integration links back to Owen's (1992) definition of mystification which is a similar concept to menglong. Here, "parts are incomprehensible, but the impression of the whole is clear" (p. 103).

¹³⁰Wang (1995) points out that unity is one of the principles of Li's poetry, and he believes that Li wrote poems from his heart. He suggests that "the heart field" [心灵场] permeates the Yi Xiang, allusion, emotion and form of his poems. Yuan (1999) and Shifeng Hao [郝世峰] (1985) also argue that Xiangs and Yi Xiangs in Li's poems come from his heart. Yuan (1999) suggests that when the poet was touched by certain external realities, the irrational and intricate Yi Xiangs emerged naturally from his sensitive heart. Hao (1985) suggests that the non-logical Yi Xiangs in Li's poetry reflect his "misted and faraway heart".

as in Li's poetry, this distinctive "heart" rhythm in my work has the potential to subtly touch audience's emotions because, rather than draw attention to itself, it is subdued and secondary to emphases within the images.

The construction of Yi Xiangs

In general, I consider editing a process of integrating Xiangs. I see imagery, sound, light, colour, music, objects and people as different categories of Xiang. Under each category there exists a series of Xiangs. Depending on the constitution of an audience, different categories of Xiangs may gather together to become either several or a single Yi Xiang. Yi Jing may appear based on the construction of the Yi Xiangs¹³¹ in the work.

For example, when I was editing the scenes of the community where Mei was born (including the scenes of the old street and market), I imported footage and sound that I had recorded. While dwelling with this material, I recalled my senses when I was shooting the material.¹³² I remembered how when I stepped into this world I inhaled the mixed scent of fried food and magnolia ... I heard the subtle sounds of hawkers in the old market ... several light notes of traditional music in the distance ... and the faint sound of water. Concurrently I saw the texture of empty buildings ... goods in the old market ... a wild, blossoming tree growing errantly through the crack of a wall (Figure 4:40) ... and I heard the sound of an old electro car passing.

¹³¹If the audience is only able to sense one Yi Xiang from the work, Yi Jing may emerge through this Yi Xiang retrospectively.

¹³²I filmed these scenes in an old community called Water Conner Bush [水角林] where my mother spent most of her childhood. In the new urban plan, the old houses in this community were destined to be demolished within three months. Most of the residents had moved out, but a few aged people were still living there. My emotional response to the place was deeply melancholic.



Figure 4:40. A wild flowering magnolia growing errantly through a crack in a wall. This tree was used as the background in the scene where Mei and the old neighbour pass by the river. The photograph was taken near Water Conner Bush [水角林], (2016).

In my mind's eye, I "saw" Mei walking along an uninhabited street. I searched through the footage and audio recordings and selected a range of Xiangs (including imagery, sound, light, colour, music, objects and people) that were able to generate the same emotional responses that I felt on location. In this process I was able to connect olfactory, auditory and visual Xiangs,¹³³ and through the contemplation on physical experience surfaced a central Yi Xiang of "the timeless hometown".

Montage

In order to explain my editing technique, it is perhaps useful to compare my approach to the montages of Sergei Eisenstein. My style of editing has certain similarities to his work, because he was inspired by the Chinese hui yi characters¹³⁴ [会意字] and Japanese poetry. Eisenstein (1929) argues that the hui yi character is "what we do in cinema, juxtaposing representational shots that have, as far as possible, the same meaning, that are neutral in terms of their meaning, in meaningful contexts and series" (p. 139). He argues that Japanese poems "are virtually hieroglyphics transposed into phrases" (ibid. p. 140).

A similar idea may be found in Chinese poetry. The foundation of the hui yi characters in the Japanese poems he refers to and the juxtaposition of two or more parts in Li's poetry is arguably similar. I consider these parts as Xiangs, while Eisenstein sees them as hieroglyphs.

In a manner relatable to Eisenstein's montage, the juxtaposition of Xiangs sits at the core of my editing process, and there are two significant similarities between Eisenstein's and my approach.

Firstly, Eisenstein considers montage as a whole, rather than as an assembling of shots. He states, "the shot is by no means a montage element; the shot is a montage cell" (p. 144). By comparison, I consider the Xiang system as an "organic entirety". I believe that everything in my film poetry has an internal, natural rhythm. From a Chinese perspective, this rhythm may be interpreted as breath. Each character, object, movement, colour, sound, note and typographical element has its own breath. I attempt to find the poetic rhythm of each breath and integrate them, while still allowing each element to breathe individually. For example, in *Towards the Late Evening 2*, my grandmother's monologue, movement and her emotional flow have different rhythms. In addition to her rhythms, objects including the badges of Chairman Mao and the blue tablecloth also breathe through the film poem. While editing I attempt to adjust the unique rhythm of each breath and integrate them, based on a flow that is slightly melancholic. In the editing process, such rhythms are altered according to the rhythm of my artistic heart.

¹³³When juxtaposing different visual Xiangs, I generally cut between shots. Only in the first half of the first scene (after the opening sequence) and in the last half of the final scene, do I use dissolving as a device. Dissolving between scenes is employed at these points to emphasize the interior, singular nature of Mei's encounter with uncertainty.

¹³⁴Hui yi characters are also called compound ideographs or associative compounds. They are joined by two or more ideographic characters to suggest meaning influenced by two or more characters. For example, " 鸣 " Ming can be translated as the cry of birds, making a sound. Ming consists of a " 口 " Kou can be translated as mouth, entrance, cut and a " 鸟 " Niao may be translated as bird.

The second similarity between my editing approach and Eisenstein's montage is that our approaches are visually simple.¹³⁵ Inspired by the restrained use of Xiangs in Li's poetry, I remove unnecessary Xiangs rather than add extra material. For instance, while editing *The Heart of Spring* I shortened the performance of Mei by removing many of her dramatic expressions and repetitive actions. I deleted numerous shots of her wandering the town's streets and I shortened the long process of her finding the key in the apartment and the erhu in the pump house. As a result, the Xiangs associated with Mei's emotional flow became more prominent. As a consequence, in the final film poem every image counts. There was no pronounced dramatizing of the narrative arc nor extensive character explanation. Instead, our focus is drawn to the emotional resonance of the work.

However, despite the similarities between Eisenstein's montage and my approach to editing, there are three clear distinctions. These are my contesting of his idea that there is a single concept embedded in each hieroglyph, the ascribing of fixed meaning and the concept of collision.

With regards to the single embedded concept, I might suggest that Eisenstein considered the juxtaposition in the hui yi character in a somewhat simplified way. He stated, "each (hieroglyph) taken separately corresponds to an object but their combination corresponds to a concept" (p. 139). I would argue that each hieroglyph does not only refer to an object, but also to an image that may have several possible meanings behind it.¹³⁶ Thus, I suggest that their combination does not correspond to a single concept, but to multiple concepts. Readers of filmic texts may receive and construct different ideas depending on their context and individual interpretations.

In *The Heart of Spring*, I have applied this technique in several places. For example, there are several possible meanings suggested by the juxtaposing of the slowly rising tealeaf in the glass and the tension between the doctor and Mei. Concurrently, the fundamental meaning of the tea as a single Xiang is still evident. While watching this scene, the audience may pay attention to the single Xiang or to its juxtaposition with the characters' relationship.

The second differentiation of my approach to editing and Eisenstein's montage is the application of blurriness into editing. Although Eisenstein notices that the juxtaposition in the hui yi character and poetry are not identical, he does not consider the deeper application of the blurriness of emotion in his montage theory. He states, "the finely-honed edges of the intellectual formulation of the concept produced by the juxtaposition of hieroglyphs are here (in poetry) blurred, the concept blossoms forth

¹³⁵ Eisenstein (1929) uses the word "laconicism" to describe Japanese poetry. He suggests "this method (juxtaposition), which in hieroglyphics provides a means for the laconic imprinting of an abstract concept, gives rise, when transposed into semantic exposition, to a similarly laconic printed imagery" (p. 140).

¹³⁶ This is the same in Li's poetry. (See the subsection "Object" in "The Poetics of Everyday").

immeasurably in emotional terms” (p. 141). However, he does not consider blurriness as a fundamental way of understanding editing.

In my editing, blurriness is a distinctive feature. Unlike the juxtaposition of hieroglyphs in the hui yi character, the meanings emanating from the juxtaposition of Xiangs in Li’s poetry are not fixed and certain emotions are communicated *through* the juxtaposition. In terms of hui yi characters, when two or more hieroglyphs are placed together, there is a range of potential readings. In Li’s poetry, when he brings two Xiangs together, there are no choices between fixed meanings. Instead, there is possibility. This is where menglong exists. Applying this idea into *The Heart of Spring*, I edited the fallen flower and the image of the doctor together. The connection between them is ambiguous and this creates an open space for the audience to consider. However, a subjective emotion may emerge from the association of these elements where the emphasis is not on logical connection between Xiangs but on an obscure emotional flow that runs beneath them.

Thirdly, Eisenstein considers montage as a form of collision. He states:

What then characterises montage and, consequently, its embryo, the shot? Collision. Conflict between two neighbouring fragments. Conflict. Collision. (Eisenstein, 1929, p. 144)

However, in both Chinese characters and poetry, the relationship between Xiangs is not always collision. In Li’s poetry, the connection between Xiangs is in the form of menglong. Rather than collision, I sense harmony in the integration of Xiangs in Li’s poetry and this sense permeates my approach to editing.

While editing *the Heart of Spring*, I adjusted the rhythm in all the elements and the level of connection between them until a certain level of harmony was achieved. When this harmony became evident, I was able to identify it on the physical surface of the work. Mei’s movements were smooth and her emotional flow ran fluently beneath them. Diverse elements in the work, be they doorways and interiors, cupboards opening to stored contents or relationships between seemingly unrelated objects and people, were edited to suggest a harmonious flow. This approach correlates with Owen’s (2004) observation of integration in Chinese poetry which he describes as “weaving.” At the end of a weaving process, he suggests, each yarn will disappear into the wholeness of the fabric.

Through this subtle, harmonious integration the audience reaches the Yi Jing of the work.



Framing

The second idea I would like to discuss in relation to the principles of integration and rhythm is framing (and by extension, image composition). By framing I refer not only to what is enclosed in the rectangular 16:9 ratio of the film poem but also how objects function within it.

The locked-off frame

Because I tend not to draw attention to the camera as a device for “seeing” in my work, I normally lock off¹³⁷ frames. This approach is used consistently in both *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2* where all of the shots are fixed. In *The Heart of Spring*, the approach is used throughout the film poem with the only exception being an extended pan shot employed near the end of the narrative (Figures 4:41). Locked-off shots in my work are used to establish a sense of poise and stillness and because the frame doesn’t move, our attention is drawn to small movements. This produces a sense of “slow” rhythm in my film poetry.

There are two major considerations behind this approach. Firstly, by locking off frames and slowing the pace of my film poems I attempt to immerse the viewer in a contemplative and melancholic state. Using such an approach I am able to emphasize internal rhythms that dwell in time. Thus, it is elements that move *inside* a contemplative frame where the camera operates as a still observer, rather than a dynamic, moving device that holds our attention.

Secondly, because an overall theme in my work is remembrance I position the viewer as one who considers the past respectfully. Age, time, loss and personal history are not flickered through in a dynamic manner but instead they are waited upon inside poised frames as they reveal subtle details and small progressions. I liken this to the way we might listen to a story from an elder. Attentively we dwell in the protagonist’s often contemplative retracing of a recollection. In the stillness of a locked-off frame, small movements occur while we wait. These movements emphasize a directional flow in a frame. Through these slow but delicate movements, I treat mature women with attentive respect and gentleness (this is especially evident in the *Towards Late Evening* film poems).

In *The Heart of Spring*, I draw attention to the decaying of space and the melancholic atmosphere in the small town through the same stillness. Through a world paused by locked off frames, we travel with Mei on a journey that is slow and dreamlike in its progression towards a final realization. It is only at the conclusion of *The Heart of Spring*, when Mei is reconciled with the past, that the camera begins to move (Figure

¹³⁷By this I mean the camera doesn’t move; it is “locked off” or “fixed”.

4:41). In the episode in the abandoned pump house, the enduring love of her mother transcends death and time (death and time up until this point have been represented by the stillness). This single pan shot may cause us to dislocate and consider the revelation.



Figure 4:41. Frame grabs of the opening, intermediate and closing frames from the pan shot of a room in the abandoned pump house in *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

After the pan shot we are returned to a final frame in the work. This again is locked-off so we are poised and rendered still again. We see a bamboo forest and the small tomb with its white flapping flag positioned delicately in the bottom left hand corner. The fixed camera causes us to watch this as if suspended. The mystery is not disturbed by movement. Instead we dwell and notice something subtle and ... over this observation the film poem closes with a delicate recitation of Li's originating poem.



The decentred subject

In terms of composition, there are two significant features in my work. The first concerns the decentred subject. In general, I position characters so they do not occupy the centre of the frame (Figures 4:42). This space is normally reserved for objects that belong to them. In *The Heart of Spring*, we only experience Mei once in centre frame and this is only at the end of the work.



Figure 4:42. Three frames where action is off-centred (respectively) from *Towards the Late Evening 1* (2016), *Towards the Late Evening 2* (2016), and *The Heart of Spring* (2017) showing decentring.

Decentring is a device I use to emphasize the character's world. In so doing, I attempt to focus the audience's attention on to context or action rather than the character. This is not to say that character isn't important. However, I conceive characters as shaped by environments and their contexts reveal nuances about them that may reach beyond the potentials of dialogue or voice over.

By decentring I also emphasize the nature of characters in my film poems as integrated elements. By this I mean, although these women are pivotal to each narrative, they occupy spaces in their worlds that are nonheroic. The environments they occupy are not possessed but dwelt within. We see these worlds as simple but elegant extensions of their distinctive personalities.

Foreground framing

A second compositional element warranting discussion is my use of the foreground. In *The Heart of Spring*, I often position a character's actions so they play out in the midground of the image (Figure 4:43).



Figure 4:43. Examples from *The Heart of Spring* (2017) of foreground elements operating as framing devices behind which action plays out in the mid-ground.

I use foreground framing as a device to pull the audience *behind* the surface of the film. This is a compositional approach that structurally positions a deeper level of character immersion in the world we are experiencing. The approach functions as a structural accent,¹³⁸ and it is enabled partly because the frames in these film poems position the viewer “front on” (in other words, we do not look into these worlds through raked or angled shots). By positioning significant movement in the midground, I emphasize that the world is more than the film poem’s backdrop.

Summary

The manner in which integration functions in my work is inspired by menglong in the Yi Xiang system of Shangyin Li’s poetry. On the surface, there are gaps between Xiangs and Yi Xiangs in Li’s poetry and current theory suggests that these are connected by the poet’s internal world where he has attempted to conceal information.

By applying Li’s form of integration to my film poetry, the viewer is presented with a Xiang system. An audience may interpret links or spaces inside the system in multiple ways, according to their past experiences.

Inspired by the distinctive nature of Li’s poetry, the inner rhythm of my heart sets a subtle pace for editing and I utilize approaches to integration that achieve a breathing flow in my work. My primary concerns when editing are with emotional tension rather than emphasizing dramatic action.

When comparing my approach to Sergei Eisenstein’s montage theory, we can identify both similarities and differences. As with Eisenstein’s approach I see the Xiang system as an organic body rather than a mechanical system. In addition, my editing style may also be described as both laconic and restrained. However, my approach differs from his because I maintain that a combination of Xiangs may suggest several possible meanings. In addition, I do not seek to fix meaning emanating from a juxtaposition of Xiangs. Finally, I consider the integration of Xiangs in my work as elements that suggest harmony rather than collision.

In terms of composition I tend to utilize locked-off frames that contain small movements. Inside these frames and across combinations of them, I build a melancholic and attentive atmosphere. In general, I also position characters so they do not occupy the centre of the frame. This device is used to draw attention to (and empower) environments as aspects of an individual’s personality. Finally, I often place a character in the midground of their environment, using the foreground, as a framing device behind, or through which, we witness a small action. This structural approach is used to

¹³⁸In other words, it is not used in all frames but it is employed judiciously to deepen the sense of field at key moments.



reinforce the nature of the character *inside* their world.

The final section of this commentary will now focus on the concepts of subtlety and space.

SPACE

Space is a feature of menglong and it has a significant influence on my work. It is evident in the sound design of my film poetry including the use of audible and inaudible voices. However, before I discuss this feature it is useful to consider how the principles of space operate in Shangyin Li's poetry.

Space inspired by Shangyin Li's poetry

Broadly, a viewer may discern three considerations of space inspired by Shangyin Li's poetry in my work. They are distance, emptiness and mental quietness.

In communicating a sense of space Li creates a distance between the reader and his poetry through the menglong of a single Xiang (or Yi Xiang). In other words, Li's poetry creates a distance between the past and the present. For example, he utilizes a number of literary quotations from the past and connects them in a seemingly illogical manner, to express his emotional response to what he is currently encountering. In a similar approach, I import allusive Xiangs of sound from the past, which create a distance from the visible present. In other words, we do not experience the present and a concurrent commentary upon it, but instead we are presented with a distance between a visible now and a remembered past. Thus, in the two *Towards Late Evening* film poems, the lyrical stories the women tell are from a time older than the rituals of tea making and badge arrangement we see them undertaking. Conversely, Mei's process of discovering of her mother in *The Heart of Spring* is visually set in a visual present, whereas her typographical narration over what we see is from the future.¹³⁹ My thinking around distance and time is partly shaped by Owen's (2004) observation that in Chinese poetry, distance can be a synonym for charm, and this charm comes from the fact that distance can evoke a heightened level of imagination in the reader.

The second consideration of space relates to flexible meaning. As I have discussed in the preceding section, the Xiangs and Yi Xiangs in Li's poetry appear disconnected on the surface. This creates negotiable spaces. Ye (1985) argues that this type of negotiable space creates a flexible relationship between the reader and the poetry. The reader is able to access meaning from diverse angles and has flexible movement within them. For example,

¹³⁹This is discussed more fully in the section on the audible and inaudible voice.



in *The Heart of Spring* there are negotiable spaces constructed in the sound track (including the narrators' monologues), and these remain open to interpretation. Potentially deep meanings may emerge from these spaces between Xiangs and Yi Xiangs. In *The Heart of Spring*, an example of this negotiable space may be illustrated by the film poem's closing. After experiencing the final Xiang of the work (the last note of the erhu), we are left in darkness. This darkness creates an empty space for us to recall Li's poem through a woman's voice and we may ponder who is reciting the poem and its meaning.

In addition, the Xiang system as a whole forms in itself a negotiable space. Xianming Zhou [周先民] (1984) notes that in most of Li's poetry, core events are normally not shown. Zong (2005) believes that a negotiable space is not empty, because it evokes fullness.

A third consideration of space, Zong [宗白华] (2005) suggests, occurs in the viewer's mind. He discusses this space as a form of "mental absence" that may appear while appreciating beauty. This space he suggests, is a quiet and concentrated mental state that leads to selflessness. From a Daoist perspective, in this state of absence we may reach a form of mental freedom.¹⁴⁰ This is a freedom from preoccupation and within this one becomes isolated from the outside world. Certain poetic works may achieve this because they can contain open spaces where one does not seek rational or fixed meaning, but instead the reader dwells in possibility (that may embrace menglong). In my work this is achieved through a series of carefully constructed open, immersive Xiangs and Yi Xiangs.

Sound design

Space plays out in often subtle ways in the sound design of my film poetry. In considering this, it is useful to look at five ideas:

- How sound is used to subtly suggest a connection between what is encountered in the present and what is remembered
- How sound is used as an integrative device
- How sound is used to adjust the space between the viewer and characters in the film poems
- How music is employed as an agent of representation
- How audible and inaudible "voices" in different spaces function as communicative devices.

The present and the remembered

In my work there are subtle relationships drawn between spaces that contain memory and the space of the experienced present. In *The Heart of Spring*,

¹⁴⁰Zhuangzi utilizes the word "you" [游] to describe this mental freedom. Fuguan Xu [徐复观] (1987) believes that the idea of "you" stems from "you xi" [游戏] which means "play". He argues, that like "you xi", "you" is a state of pure satisfaction that releases one from pragmatic preoccupation.

I collected sounds of Mei's memories of her childhood, including the sound of birds singing in the early morning and the movement of soft grass in the wind. These sounds were used to evoke a sense of warmth and nostalgia, but we do not see birds in the village as she journeys through it, nor do we encounter images of dried grass. These sonic references (from a different space) entice us into a dimension beyond the visually encountered present. The same device of hearing the past in the present occurs in *Towards the Late Evening 1* where we see and hear the sound of china when Mrs Garelja moves a tea cup. Initially, the sound matches a visually depicted movement. However, the sound of this same crockery is also subtly mixed through her narrated memories of the afternoon tea ritual. A similar approach is evident in *The Heart of Spring* when we encounter the pump house. Although the building is deserted and clearly no longer functioning, if we listen we can hear the subtle sound of the old machine working. Given the visual cues, we may sense that it is impossible for this sound to be in the present. So, the sound subtly recalls a time of hiding during the Cultural Revolution when Mei's mother sought refuge in the building while the machinery was still working. By using sound in this manner, I draw a connection between memory and the visually experienced present.

In *The Heart of Spring*, sound suggesting the past but permeating the visually present also occurs when Mei opens the jewellery box in her grandmother's apartment. In this moment, we can discern (delicately worked into the atmos¹⁴¹ of the scene) the sound of an old market. Here again the sound reinforces the idea of memory. Beneath this surface what is reinforced is a melancholic sense of loss.

Sound as subtle integration

The second feature of sound is the manner in which I use it to establish integration in my work. Three approaches warrant discussion here. They are the use of sonic prefiguring, post-appearance permeation and the design of atmos.

In all three of my film poems I use a device I describe as *sonic prefiguring*. This term describes a technique where we encounter a sound before we see the object or environment that produces it. The device is often used to produce a subtle link between different scenes and to create a sense of continuity. For example, when we watch the introductions to *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2* we hear the sounds of china and dry straw respectively, but it is not until later in the work that we encounter these objects visually.

¹⁴¹The design of sonic atmospheres.

In *The Heart of Spring*, I use prefiguring as an integrative device in more

complex ways. For example, in the opening scene when Mei walks along the street and then buys shoes in the market place we hear the sound of a bee. I have designed this at a very subtle level so the insect does not register significantly in our consciousness. However, later we watch bees in the doctor's yard and a thread of their presence is heightened as a single specimen enters his rooms before Mei and the elderly neighbour. Sound in this particular scene is accented so the bee is heightened in our consciousness. This use of sound may be likened to a thread in a woven fabric. It appears and disappears from the surface, yet in overview it forms part of the aesthetic continuity of the work.

A related approach may be described as *postappearance permeation*. Here, sound remains after an image has disappeared. In *the Heart of Spring* this device is most notable in the treatment of water (Figure 4:44). As we move through the film poem we see water in bowls and wells, in village streams where women wash clothes and in running rivers that Mei and the doctor cross precariously on wooden planks. Flowers float in water, fish swim in water and it is the lost energy behind a pump house that no longer functions. Yet sonically we are less aware of how water as an integrative device ties these elements and the spaces they occupy together. For example, on the journey to the pump house we hear water flowing in relation to Mei and the doctor crossing a river, yet a subtle residue of this sound resides with us in the interior of the pump house when Mei is introduced to the truth behind her mother's disappearance. However, this same sound of running water also prefigures these scenes. It is discernable when the doctor is praying at his shrine and when Mei dons the blue shoes before they set out on their journey. By utilizing the prefiguring and post appearance permeation of sound, what is visible and what we hear "breathe" with each other but on different timelines.¹⁴² The spaces of before and after the appearance of a physical phenomenon are threaded together.



¹⁴²By this I mean we often hear sound before and after the visual depiction of its origin. Thus, it is not tied to the chronological synchronicity of the image.



Figure 4:44. Diagram illustrating audio prefiguring and postappearance permeation. The first line illustrates in *The Heart of Spring* where the first discernable audio of water appears as a subtle background element. The second block shows where we encounter the audio of water operating as an illustrative element matched to the action. In the next 12 scenes the sound of the river becomes a permeating background element that is subtly mixed into the aural texture of the film. In these scenes we no longer see any water.

Beyond the integrative use of audio material as a prefiguring and postappearance permeation, I also use sound as a background element that helps to integrate and reinforce the power of what we see. By this I mean often what we encounter visually is reinforced by the aural background [atmos]. For example, in *The Heart of Spring* in the doctor's room, the sound of bees and the distant barking of dogs are used to reinforce the aged texture of wood, the faded ochre palette and the dryness of old paper. In postproducing the work I was guided by these two dry sounds as I refined the grade (colour emphasis) and adjusted levels of texture in the images. Thus, sound was not only used as a subtle agent for advancing continuity, it was also employed to emphasize the dryness of the environment and increase the room's physical and emotional atmosphere.

Intimacy and distance

Sound design is also used spatially in my film poetry to draw us into, or position us at a distance from, what we encounter visually. In *The Heart of Spring* when I want to draw the viewer into Mei's mental world I use sound. Indicative of this is the opening sequence where we hear the sound of an old record and the music is played as if it is very close to our ears. This close proximity suggests Mei's inner world and half-forgotten memories.

I also alter sonic emphasis in my work by changing proportions within the atmos. I do this by sometimes removing a primary expected sound and elevating other sounds we might not expect to encounter as dominant. For example, when Mei is inside her grandmother's apartment, we do not hear the logical sound of her high heel shoes on the wooden floor, but we do hear very intimate sounds like the delicate unfolding of cloth and Mei touching an old photograph. This technique of elevating the intimate over the expected is employed to emphasize a sense of the delicate uncovering of meaning.

The representative role of music (the erhu)¹⁴³

Music in *The Heart of Spring*¹⁴⁴ is both *outside* the space of the present but also *within* it. It functions in two distinctive ways.

I use music across the temporal space of this film poem as a subtle arc that takes us from an initial mystery to a place of understanding. For example, at the opening of the film poem the music we hear is not perfectly synchronized with what we see. Across the narrative arc, disconnection decreases and we eventually reach a conclusion where the sound of what is played on the erhu and what we see finally physically correlate. I use this initial disconnection to emphasize Mei's vague memory. In the opening of the film poem, the notes we encounter are like fragments of a haunted dream. We do not know who the erhu player is. As the work progresses, especially after the doctor explains to Mei that her mother was an erhu player, not only does the image of her mother become clearer, but the music also begins to increasingly synchronize with the movements of the player. The film poem concludes with a complete piece of music that suggests a coming together (synchronization) between a mother and a daughter.

Beyond this, the music of the erhu also functions as a representation of Mei's mother. Because in the work she is visually obscure, we "know" her primarily through the mystery of sound. The erhu functions as a memory that won't die; an insistence that has continued across a time of hiding and beyond the event of an execution. This insistence may be understood as an embodiment of maternal love. In the opening sequence, we hear the notes of the instrument breathing in and out of the darkness, like the



¹⁴³I chose the erhu for the soundtrack because it belongs to a traditional world and it has the ability to express a melancholic mood in a distinctly Chinese manner. Visually, Miss Yi Yi performed it for the work. During the post-production, Mr Shiqing Wang composed the original score and I recorded his performance in a professional sound studio.

¹⁴⁴*Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards the Late Evening 2* do not contain any music, so this discussion only concerns *The Heart of Spring*.

spirit of a hovering mother. This sighing of the instrument is revisited in the scene where Mei takes the erhu down from the wall in the pump house (Figure 4:45). At the point of realization, the instrument's notes convey the loneliness and longing of her mother and reinforce the melancholic tone of the film poem.



Figure 4:45. Mei sees the erhu and carefully takes it down from the wall of the pump house. Frame grab from *The Heart of Spring* (2017).

The roles of the audible and inaudible voice

Finally, in a consideration of sound and how it relates to integration and space, it is useful to consider the role of audible and inaudible voices in my work. In this discussion, the term audible voice refers to spoken monologue and the inaudible voice refers to the use of typography as a form of written narration.¹⁴⁵

In drawing upon both Chinese and European conventions, the film poems I create are designed for potentially different readings. This presents a creative challenge because I appreciate that both the epistemological frameworks resourcing the film poems and the languages used to carry meaning within them are not stable devices for transference. I negotiate this situation in a number of ways.

¹⁴⁵In *The Heart of Spring*, this occurs as text integrated with the film poem and in *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *2*, it functions as a system of translation on a catalogue card.

The first is with catalogue cards (Appendix 3). A catalogue card is a printed artefact that contains translated text. It is physically separate from the projected work and as such it removes translation from the surface of the film poem (there are no intrusive subtitles for the monologues). This approach is used in both *Towards the Late Evening 1* and *Towards*

the Late Evening 2. In these complementing works the languages are not the same, Mrs Garelja speaks purely in English and my grandmother speaks in Chinese. The accompanying catalogue card contains their poetic monologues written in both English and Chinese. The card enables readers from either language to access the content of both film poems. The approach may be likened to a device used in cross cultural exhibitions where a printed text or catalogue accompanying the work operates as a translating device and remains with the viewer after they have left the venue.¹⁴⁶ However, the catalogue card for these works draws on a distinctly Chinese convention. Traditionally, poetry is presented in a written form on a piece of paper that people hold in their hands. In reference to conventions of writing, the Mandarin appears in vertical lines¹⁴⁷ and the English is written horizontally. Languages are given equal levels of respect and the viewer walks away with a residue of the experience of the film poem in print form.¹⁴⁸

However, in *The Heart of Spring*, I adopted a different approach. In this work Mei's internal monologue is written in English¹⁴⁹, but this is counterpointed at the close of the work by the appearance of Shangyin Li's poem *Jin Se* read in Chinese.¹⁵⁰ Although the Chinese voice is heard only once when this recitation occurs, the audience is reminded that the narrative is culturally resourced. The device also reinforces a sense of *menglong*,¹⁵¹ because most Western audiences are unlikely to understand the content of the poem. Instead they are left with an impression that suggests in its tone, both mystery and beauty.

In *The Heart of Spring*, inaudible narration (typographical text) has been designed so it is subtle but also readable. To do this I have adjusted its duration and contrast and positioned it in the lower third of the screen. In terms of timing and rhythm, the text behaves like breathing, delicately appearing, being read ... then exhaling into invisibility.

Although this inaudible voice is explicit (in terms of meaning), there is empty space between each sentence. I narrate parts of the story in simple, lyrical language, while leaving time for the audience to generate meaning and emotion from the flow of actions, sound and images. Thus, the written narration functions as a guide, providing explicit information around which there is space left for interpretation. The writing that appears on the surface of the film may be read as Mei's direct address to us. Its positioning on the "skin" of the world keeps us from pulling too closely into the emotional depth of the work.¹⁵² However, visually the type speaks to us in a vulnerable, lyrical voice. It is delicate and restrained. I selected Garamond for the typeface because, in addition to its clarity, when read over moving backgrounds, it communicates the sense of delicacy and restrained calm

¹⁴⁶Viewers may choose not to read the card. In this way, parts of the work will remain in the state of *menglong*, but the emotional tone will still be communicated.

¹⁴⁷In the Late Tang dynasty, normally poems were written vertically.

¹⁴⁸These cards were provided for exhibitions, but not for international film festivals. In exhibition settings, I projected the *Towards the Late Evening* film poems in a loop and placed the catalogue cards in the exhibition space. The audience could choose to read the card before, during or after watching the film poems. After reading the card, audiences often watched the work for a second time. In international film festivals, these cards could not be used because the films were screened only once as part of a curated, single, linear programme.

¹⁴⁹The decision to use English as Mei's monologue was made because the film poem needed to be understood clearly in international contexts.

¹⁵⁰The original poem *Jin Se* appears simultaneously in both written and spoken form in Chinese at the end of the work.

¹⁵¹The poem *Jin Se* also provides a Chinese audience with a sense of *menglong* because of the enigmatic nature of the work itself.

¹⁵²Compared for instance to an intradiegetic voice where actors might speak directly to us from inside the poem's story.

evident in Mei's character. The type is set at 26 point, smaller than normal subtitles in a feature film. Its scale and rhythm produce a sense of intimate, poetic delicacy.

Finally, in the design of the inaudible voice I navigate the space between past and present. The written narration is separated from the immediate time of unfolding action, because Mei's "voice" is in the *past* tense *recollecting* the time when she visited the village and discovered what happened to her mother. By laying this retrospective written narration over unfolding action in the present, the film poem addresses us concurrently in both the past and the present tense. Thus, the retrospective and disconnected Xiangs evoke an audience's emotional experience of the present, and two periods of time are reconnected in an integrated emotional flow.

Summary

Sound in my film poetry is designed to suggest a connection between what is encountered in the present and what is remembered. However, I also use it as a subtle device for integration and continuity. This enables me to create quiet, harmonious relationships between imagery and the episodes within a narrative. Sound is generally guided by the ideas of distance, negotiable space and mental quietness (these ideas guide both my artistic exercising of spaces 'between' and the crafting of the Xiang system). Within this, the manner in which sound is positioned becomes an agent for either drawing the viewer into the work or positioning them at a distance.

While these approaches may be considered in relation to my film poems' overall sound design, two distinctive features may be understood as adjuncts to this.

The first is the use of music in *The Heart of Spring*, where the integration of a traditional instrument is employed to represent a character (Mei's mother) and to trace a metaphorical arc from fragmented memory to understanding.

The second adjunct feature of sound relates to the manner in which audible and inaudible "voices" function as communicative devices in my work. On one hand I use them to draw attention to cultural distinctiveness, but I also use them to negotiate a subtle balancing of both the explicit and poetic, and the present and the past.

A critical commentary on a body of creative work can be a very expansive undertaking. However, I understand that in an exegesis with a proscribed word count, one has to draw certain parameters around what is discussed and what is omitted. My concerns in this chapter have therefore been with



relationships. I have tried to demonstrate how certain Chinese principles have shaped the physical and emotional nature of my work. I have described ideas as applications and I have attempted to elucidate my approach as a Chinese filmmaking poet, drawing on principles that have very deep roots in my culture ... roots that are not just historical, but also (I would propose) the substance of a contemporary form of artistic scholarship.



Conclusion

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN IDEAS

At the centre of this thesis reside three film poems *Towards the Late Evening 1*, *Towards the Late Evening 2* and *The Heart of Spring*, and two research questions. The questions are:

- How might the Xiang system be applied to the artistic development of film poetry as both a methodology and central creative strategy?
- What is the potential of menglong as an artistic and narrative device within film poetry?

These questions have led my thinking through a process of reflective critical practice. The poems are the result of innumerable experiments both iteratively (inside each text) and peripherally (as other film poetry experiments provided in Appendix 1). The three film poems have been inspired by the work of the Tang dynasty poet Shangyin Li, specifically his use of menglong and the restraint and delicacy of the Xiang system.

The thesis demonstrates how the Xiang system when applied to the artistic development of film poetry can be used to heighten levels of sensitivity and enhance creative applications of tacit knowing and reflectivity. When applied to practice the Xiang system enables distinctive approaches to integration; it also provides a way of drawing relationships between the surface physicality of objects and their emotional resonance in a concurrent subsurface.

The research also shows how the use of menglong as an artistic and narrative device within film poetry can open spaces for meaning because it elevates the potential of the indefinite. As a consequence, I have been able to demonstrate how menglong is able to communicate nuanced ideas like remembrance and melancholy.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Traditionally at the conclusion of a PhD thesis the researcher discusses new knowledge produced in the inquiry. I understand knowledge as content that is explicit or tacit and useable¹⁵³. However, I would argue that a thesis might also contribute understanding. Understanding, Scrivener (2002) argues,

¹⁵³Tacit knowing when used in problem solving may not be expressible until actioned.



provides “deep insights into emotion, human nature and relationships, and our place in the world” (p. 11). This understanding¹⁵⁴ I suggest, may be seen as a deeper realization in the heart of the artist and the viewer, and may relate to the human condition or the assimilation of an idea. In both my film poetry and this exegesis, knowledge may be conceived as thinking that serves in the development of work and understanding may be understood as a potential outcome of thought. In applying this consideration of knowledge and understanding, I might suggest three contributions emanating from the study.

Film poetry as a media form

The first relates to film poetry itself. By utilizing principles and devices in Shangyin Li’s poems, the research contributes to knowledge about the nature of film poetry. Conventionally, film poetry is constituted as a spoken or written poem inside in film form. However, the body of work in this thesis demonstrates how a film poet might draw upon the “spirit” of a pre-existing Chinese poet’s work, rather than adapt existing poems into short interpretations. This process also expands the way film poetry may be applied to documentary and fictional narrative by drawing upon distinctly Chinese aesthetics and poetic principles (including language features relating to time and tense, considerations of harmony and breathing as a device for editing ideas).

The Xiang system as both a methodology and a creative strategy

While the Xiang system has a long history of application to Chinese poetry, this thesis extends its use in the new medium of film poetry. Here it is employed as both a methodology and a creative strategy. At the core of the Xiang system (as a methodology) is the application of sensitive observation and the surfacing of expressive emotions stimulated by it. In the process of making and iterative reflecting, the researcher’s mental emphasis shifts between Xiang, Yi Xiang and Yi Jing. Tacit knowing is a fundamental driver of this process.

The thesis therefore demonstrates how the extension and application of the Xiang system can contribute to both the processes of making film poetry and values and perspectives underpinning the work. The use of the Xiang system as a creative strategy becomes manifest in the manner in which I perceive everyday objects, the natural world and people as Yi Xiang (a fusion of subjectivity and objectivity). This is achieved through a process of immersion and transition. Based on my internal emotional flow, I integrate different layers of Xiangs and Yi Xiangs in my film poetry. Some

¹⁵⁴Pinola (2014) suggests that the differentiating factor between understanding and knowledge is “empathy”. As such, knowledge may refer to facts, beliefs, mnemonic information and methods. Understanding, he suggests, refers to the transference of empathy with either an idea or condition, and as such it has “the potential to arouse responses such that we are able to associate sensation and feelings with how things were, are, or might be” (Scrivener, 2002, p.11). For example, in the *Towards the Late Evening* poems, we understand the nature of aloneness as manifested in the lives of two widowed women, and in *The Heart of Spring*, we understand the nature of care. We understand these things as part of our human condition.

of the Xiangs and Yi Xiangs contain empty spaces between them and, as a consequence, they may not bear direct, logical connections to one another. However, through association they communicate the same Yi Jing and the same emotional state felt in my poetic heart.¹⁵⁵

While I appreciate that these ideas and their application may seem relatively unfamiliar to a Western framework for understanding poetic development, perhaps the high level of international response to the work suggests some recognition of the poetic value of such an application.

Menglong as an artistic and narrative device

The third significant contribution the thesis makes relates to menlong and the manner in which it may be creatively considered as an artistic and narrative device. My film poetry demonstrates how menglong can be employed to open spaces between what is explicit and what is undefined. As such, menglong is used to increase opportunities for a reader to engage in a more active way with meaning making inside a poetic work. In addition, I also demonstrate how menglong can be used to enable a particular form of delicacy because it can be employed creatively to suggest relationships between ideas that might not logically fit together (but connect within the poet's heart).

Thus, the thesis elevates through practice, knowledge about how menglong can be used to enrich a mysterious and delicate aesthetic (and narrative discourse) from a distinctively Chinese perspective.

FURTHER RESEARCH

In 2002 Mullins and Kiley, when discussing the parameters of a doctoral thesis noted, "It's a PhD, not a Nobel Prize" (2002, p. 369). While their comment was perhaps a little droll, I think their observation draws attention to the nature of research as something that reaches beyond the demarcations of an academic qualification. Certainly when considering an inquiry associated with ongoing artistic concerns it is not possible to draw absolute parameters around where the research ends. My inquiry into film poetry and the potentials of the Xiang system and menglong does not wrap up neatly in a list of definitive conclusions. Because the poetics of thought are living phenomena, there are projections that reach out from this study. In this conclusion I would like to discuss two distinct (but related) strands. One is the creation of film poetry and the other is the publication of written thinking emanating from the inquiry.

Film poetry (new work)

¹⁵⁵I appreciate that certain phrases translated from Chinese like "the poetic heart", may read strangely to a Western reader. I have included them throughout the exegesis because they are concepts that are integral to a Chinese way of understanding. However, other terms can only be translated by approximation and in these instances, I have included the original Chinese word in brackets. This has largely occurred because the thesis has drawn equally on Chinese and English scholarship and many of the texts I have cited have not yet been translated into English.



My practice is so ingrained with my being that there are always new works in gestation. Specifically, I am interested in further exploring the potentials of menglong in film poetry.¹⁵⁶ However, instead of drawing on pre-existing work, I intend to create several pieces that artistically exercise what is enigmatic and inconclusive through internal character narration. By this I mean the character *inside* the work might address us in a poetic voice. In so doing, I will be contributing to a discrete body of contemporary Chinese “menglong poetry” [朦胧诗]¹⁵⁷.

The new work I am considering has the following tentative synopsis.

In a small, remote town in China, Meng (20) is a hairdresser who secretly falls in love with one of his clients, Jing (15). He does not tell her of his affection. Jing’s hair is lighter than most people’s and the hairdresser secretly collects it after she has left his shop.

Because Jing’s parents left town to find work when she was very young, she lives with her aged grandmother. She also dreams of leaving one day. Every afternoon when school closes, she climbs a nearby mountain to look out over the only railway line that passes through the community. When she descends she wanders through the streets, disappearing into random houses to steal small objects. These everyday things are insignificant and normally go unnoticed. At home, she treats the artefacts with care and delicately she writes an imaginative line of poetry about each one.

One day, Jing sneaks into a small house and discovers a beautiful blue vase full of light brown hair hidden under a bed. When she stands, she sees that there is blood coming out from between her legs. She is having her first period.

When the hairdresser comes home, he sees the blood on the floor and hair on his bed.

The hairdresser never sees Jing again.

On a sunny afternoon we see him walking alone, along the railway.

Funding

Because I am now a New Zealand resident, I am able to seek funding through the New Zealand Film Commission through their Short Film Funding provisions.¹⁵⁸ In 2019, I will apply for the *Fresh 30* short film support programme¹⁵⁹ because I qualify to propose a project, having already acquired directing experience (professionally) and I have a designated

¹⁵⁶In this next phase I also want to further refine through practice and reflection, a systematic theory of film poetry based on the Xiang system.

¹⁵⁷From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, a group of Chinese poets who had experienced the Cultural Revolution wrote poems that were distinctively different from the socialist realist style prevalent during the Mao Zhe Dong era. They are named “menglong poets” and their poetry has been officially denounced as “obscure”, “misty”, and “hazy”.

¹⁵⁸The Fresh Shorts funding requirements can be found at: <https://www.nzfilm.co.nz/funds/short-film-fund>

¹⁵⁹If I was successful this grant would provide up to \$ 30,000.00 to help with the development of a new short film. [<https://www.nzfilm.co.nz/funds/short-film-fund>]

producer with whom I can work¹⁶⁰. I am hoping that the application's effectiveness may be enhanced by the international success of the film poems I have developed in this thesis.

Publication

Given the relatively new thinking emanating from the thesis I am interested in revisiting the content of the chapter on research design to write an article on the Xiang system as a methodological approach. There are potentially two possible peer reviewed journals for such thinking. The first is the *Journal of Artistic Research* [JAR]¹⁶¹ and the other is *Qualitative Research*¹⁶². Because JAR allows me to position practice at the front of a theoretical discussion, this is probably my preference.

I will also reconstitute and translate thinking from the exegesis to present a discussion paper on the Chinese film poem for the journal *Film Art* (China).¹⁶³ In addition, I am planning to prepare a paper for the 29th Screen Studies Conference in Glasgow (June to July 2019). This is one of the world's leading conferences on screen production and it has an associated journal.¹⁶⁴ Because work can be screened at this conference, it enables me to present a complete film poem along with a discussion of key ideas underpinning its development, aesthetics and structure. This paper will probably unpack the concept of menglong in Shangyin Li's poetry and its relationship to my practice.

... AND IN CONCLUDING ...

It was a cold spring morning in 2014 when I walked along a quiet street in Auckland with the tentative idea of a film poem forming in my head. In front of me a small white flower petal landed on the ground ... then drifted past. I looked around but I could not find a blossoming tree. When I watched the petal, small and fallen, I saw beauty and loss; I saw aging and recalled the familiarity of the town in China where I had grown up. I saw a piece of myself lying quietly ... and in this moment I remembered a delicate line from Shangyin Li's poem:

The east wind lacks strength, all the flowers fade

[东风无力百花残].¹⁶⁵

A quiet melancholy descended.

Today, recalling this flower petal, I realise how deeply certain Chinese poetic

¹⁶⁰Mary Gao.

¹⁶¹The *Journal of Artistic Research* (<http://www.jar-online.net/>) is an international, online, open access publication that enables comparatively wider dissemination of my thinking because readers do not have to pay for a subscription to access articles. The periodical enables me to embed film poem files inside an article and this may help to tie the written discussion more directly to its application.

¹⁶²*Qualitative Research* (<http://journals.sagepub.com/home/qrj>) is a bimonthly peer reviewed SAGE journal concerned with new qualitative methodological thinking and application. It places emphasis on both methodological diversity and it has a multidisciplinary focus.

¹⁶³See *Film Art*: <http://dyys.qikann.com/>

¹⁶⁴See <https://academic.oup.com/screen>. *Screen* is a quarterly journal and is the world's leading international publication on academic film and television studies. In writing an article contributors can discuss a range of issues, from diverse disciplinary perspectives.

¹⁶⁵Translated by Owen, 2006, p. 381.

concepts, (including Xiang system and menglong) have become rooted in my heart. Accompanying them, in the last four years I have experienced the beauty of elderly women, I have felt the nature of dying towns, I have sensed the texture of human emotions ... and I have experienced the power of the ordinary.

This has been the journey of the thesis.

It has also been the journey of my heart.



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Appendices

Appendix 1

EXPERIMENTAL FILM POEMS

Presented here are brief introductions to the five experimental film poems I developed while refining my thinking for the three works submitted as the practice component of the thesis. The experiments were developed between 2014 and 2016. Being experiments these works were not filmed with the high production values used in my later work.

Appendix [1. 1]

Walking in Red (2014)

The online screener for this experiment is available at: <https://vimeo.com/251759745> (Password: hmv8534)

COMMENT

In this experiment I interpreted a poem of the Qing dynasty poetess, Qingzhao Li's [李清照] (1081-1141). The poem was titled *Forlorn* [声声慢].

My interpretation with this experiment was relatively literal. My primary concern was with “translating” the rhythmic pace of the poem into visual language. With this film poem, I did not draw inspiration from the essence of the original work.

The original poem reads:

FORLORN

Li (translated by Yutang Lin [林语堂])

*So dim, so dark,
So dense, so dull,
So damp, so dank,
So dead!*





*The weather, now warm, now cold,
Makes it harder
Than ever to forget!*

*How can a few cups of thin wine
Bring warmth against
The chilly winds of sunset?
I recognize the geese flying overhead:
My old friends,
Bring not the old memories back!*

*Let fallen flowers lie where they fall.
To what purpose
And for whom should I decorate?*

*By the window shut,
Guarding it alone,
To see the sky has turned so black!*

*And the drizzle on the kolanut
Keeps on droning:
Pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat!*

*Is this the kind of mood and moment
To be expressed
By one word "sad"?*

声声慢

李清照

寻寻觅觅
冷冷清清
凄凄惨惨戚戚

乍暖还寒时候
最难将息

三杯两盏淡酒
怎敌他晚来风急

雁过也
正伤心
却是旧时相识

满地黄花堆积
憔悴损
如今有谁堪摘

守着窗儿
独自怎生得黑

梧桐更兼细雨
到黄昏点点滴滴

这次第
怎一个愁字了得



Appendix [1. 2]

Quiet Night Thought [静夜思] (2014)

The online screener for this experiment is available at: <https://vimeo.com/251760746> (Password: hmv8534)

COMMENT

In this work, I considered the spirit of Bai Li's [李白] (701-762) beautiful poem *Quiet Night Thought* [静夜思]. I applied the essence of the work to my emerging re-conception of film poetry. This immersive experimental work reflected lyrically on ideas of loneliness and menglong by using sound

(lonely human voices) and dim moonlight.

The original poem reads:

QUIET NIGHT THOUGHT

Bai Li (Translated by A.Z. Foreman)

*Before my bed tonight the moon shone down
I took it instead for frost upon the ground
I lift my head watching the mountain moon
I lower my head missing my northern home*

静夜思

李白

床前明月光
疑是地上霜
举头望明月
低头思故乡

Appendix [1. 3]

Butterfly Dreams of Me (2014)

The online screener for this experiment is available at: <https://vimeo.com/251762728> (Password: hmv8534)

COMMENT

This experiment reflected on the line “Zhuang Zhou’s morning dream, lost in a butterfly” [庄生晓梦迷蝴蝶] in Shangyin Li’s poem *Jin Se* [锦瑟]. This line alluded to a story about the Chinese philosopher Zhuang Zhou [庄周] (alias: Zhuangzi). Once upon a time, the philosopher Zhuangzi dreamed that he was a butterfly. The butterfly did not know that it was Zhuangzi. Suddenly he awoke, and realized he was Zhuangzi again. We do not know whether it was Zhuangzi in a butterfly’s dream or a butterfly in Zhuangzi’s dream. Thus, within the poem and the film poem we encounter a state of menglong. In this experiment, the identity of the subject was obscured between the butterfly and “me”. I also applied menglong to the narrative

structure, imagery, time and space. It was this experiment that moved my research focus to the menglong in Shangyin Li's poetry.

Appendix [1. 4]

Rose and Pearls (2015)

The online screener for this experiment is available at: <https://vimeo.com/251761293> (Password: hmv8534)

COMMENT:

Rose and Pearls concerns an episode where a man's lover and his wife meet in a café because their partner is missing. In this experiment, I selected several words from Shangyin Li's poem *Jin Se* [锦瑟] including pearls, tears, sea and cry. Based on the characters' emotional responses to these terms, I developed an experimental dramatic script. In doing so I was attempting to apply poetic techniques such as allusion and metaphor as a way of revealing tension between two women. At the same time, I sought to find a balance between menglong and explicitness. In the experiment I was also trying to draw the audience's attention away from the drama of the encounter and focus it instead on the feelings and emotions of the characters. This was partly done by embedding puns in their lyrical dialogue.

Appendix [1. 5]

Self-Portrait (2016)

The online screener for this experiment is available at: <https://vimeo.com/251760212> (Password: hmv8534)

COMMENT:

In this work I was trying to express the concept of loss as it is communicated through much of Shangyin Li's poetry. Visually, I was interested in the potentials of the indistinct, the enigmatic and the mysterious ... interpreted through a form of blurred moving imagery that might overlay a series of still images. These experiments concurrently became explorations into visual interpretations of the aesthetics of menglong.



Appendix 2:

DIRECTOR'S NOTES PROVIDED FOR COLLABORATORS ON THE FILM POEM *THE HEART OF SPRING*

[2. 1]

Short Synopsis

This enigmatic film poem traces a woman's return to find her mother who disappeared during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. While following the sound of an erhu she is helped by two elderly people as she uncovers a delicate but difficult truth about her family. In a distinctively Chinese approach, the work treats narrative, text, sound and image as integrated poetic devices.

[2. 2]

A General Guide to the Collaborators

This guide outlined the topics and aesthetic considerations that might be explored while making *The Heart of Spring*. The notes were produced for the Production Designer (Yiqun Chen), the Director of Photography (Hao Du), the Sound-mix Technician (Dominic Taylor), and the Field Recording Technician (Xiaobei Ren).

1. Tradition and context

- In this world tradition is performed.
- In the performances: We will dwell on the tea ritual served by the doctor, the way the old neighbour lays out her basket and the contemplative manner in which the barber cuts hair.
- In the locations: Interiors will "house" the past and be as authentic as possible. These will contrast with fragments of modernity that the young woman brings with her (e.g. her bag).
- Costume design: The young woman's clothing will contrast with what is worn by the other inhabitants of the small town ... yet in terms of colour there may be a sense of continuity (perhaps a similar blue).

2. The poetics of the ordinary

- In the cinematography: An attentive camera will spend time dwell-

ing on details in locations, treating these poetically ... lifting what is overlooked into significance. There will be a delicate treatment of the world and behaviour within it.

3. Menglong

- In the set design: Objects will not have fixed meanings, but they should be deliberately constructed for a suggested reading (e.g. an empty chair may indicate absence, presence or loneliness).

4. Texture

- In set design: We want to draw attention to the worn and lived nature of this world. Objects should be lit and filmed to emphasize the marks of time. Where possible natural textures of wood and paper should be highlighted.
- In the environment: We should think about a counter balance between what is dry and what is liquid.

5. Sound

- We need to treat sound and music as threads of memory ... as fragments of a forgotten whole.
- We will pay attention to silence.
- We need to let the audience hear the “impossible”.
- Feel free to play with the proportion of sound (such as lifting a secondary sound up to our attention by either lowering or taking out a primary sound)
- The overall sound design needs to be subtle, highly integrated and seemingly simple.



Appendix 3:

THE TRANSLATIVE CATALOGUE CARD FOR TOWARDS THE LATE EVENING 1 AND TOWARDS THE LATE EVENING 2

FRONT & BACK

