

Visual Representation of Social Issue-Themed Animal Imagery by Huang Yong Ping

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Abstract

Huang Yong Ping's artistic creations deeply reflect his critical thinking on social issues, particularly in the contexts of culture, power, and economy. Through the presentation of various animal imagery, he explores these themes. This paper aims to analyze the different forms of expression in Huang Yong Ping's animal-themed works, focusing on their social implications, cultural significance, and artistic style. The research employs a content analysis method, utilizing both document and artwork analysis as key instruments. Feldman's art criticism model is used in the analysis to interpret the social and symbolic meanings embedded in the artworks. The study reveals that Huang Yong Ping uses animal imagery to address social themes, particularly migration, which ties into issues of racism, exploitation, and discrimination. The animals chosen are deeply connected to Chinese cultural beliefs, as well as the characteristic aspects and natural nature of the animals. Additionally, Huang expands the scope of artistic expression through complex mixed-media installations, offering audiences a profound multi-dimensional social and cultural reflections. This new perspective broadens the framework for visualization, emphasizing the potential of animal imagery to develop a cross-species metaphorical language that critiques social power structures, cultural conflicts, and economic tensions. It deepens the understanding of human societal issues while encouraging reflection on the underlying mechanisms of these social systems. The significance of this research lies in its ability to transcend traditional artistic language, evolving into a complex environmental experience that offers a refreshed view of cultural values and social power dynamics. These findings provide valuable insights into artistic practice and open new pathways for interpreting social phenomena and fostering cultural transformation.

Keywords: Social Issue, Themed Animal, Visual Representation, Huang Yong Ping

Introduction

Huang Yong Ping was born in 1954 in Xiamen, Fujian, and studied in the Oil Painting Department of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (renamed China Academy of Art in 1993). He graduated in 1982 and moved to France in 1989 after participating in the "Magiciens de la Terre" exhibition in Paris. He passed away in 2019 (Qi, 2022).

He was a pioneer of contemporary art and is regarded as one of the most influential Chinese artists on the global stage (Wang, 2021). He began his career in painting but later transitioned to installation art, earning international recognition for his cross-cultural creations and profound social critique. He represented France at the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999 and received numerous prestigious honours, including the "Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" from the French Ministry of Culture, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's "Prize for the Promotion of the Arts," and the Wolfgang Hahn Prize in 2016, becoming the first Chinese artist to receive this award (Phillips & Zheng, 2008).

Influenced by Western artists such as Joseph Beuys, John Cage, and Marcel Duchamp, as well as Dadaism and Zen philosophy, He launched the "Xiamen Dada" movement in 1986, marking the beginning of his avant-garde artistic career (Gladston, 2013). Renowned for his striking visual impact and profound conceptual depth, his works explore the complex interactions between culture, history, and social issues, redefining the relationship between art and cultural narratives. His use of animal imagery reflects his sharp insight into social issues, highlighting the unique value of his artistic practice (Cacchione, 2014).

Animal imagery plays a central role in His works, serving as a critical tool for his social critique. He challenges power structures, cultural conflicts, and ecological tensions through animal symbolism, constructing a highly metaphorical and critical framework. Unlike other artists who often use animals as abstract symbols, his works directly engage with social issues, using installation art to reveal the dynamics of power struggles, racial divisions, and cultural oppositions (Pan, 2020).

In art, animals are often employed as symbols and metaphors, reflecting societal, cultural, and political concerns. Animal imagery transcends specific linguistic and cultural boundaries, becoming a powerful tool for expressing complex social phenomena. Historically, artists have used animals to symbolize power, strength, fear, and virtue (Gelfand, 2023). Anthropologist Marvin (1994) noted that cultural wisdom often borrows and channels the forces of nature, a concept widely applied in artistic expression. Hall (1996) further argued that symbols and images carry profound social meanings within cultural contexts. When it comes to animals, these often reveal cultural anxieties and conflicts. In visual art, symbols and imagery go beyond mere aesthetic value to implicitly or indirectly convey deeper social meanings. Sociologists Steven Best and Douglas Kellner emphasized in *The Postmodern Turn* (1997) that animal imagery in contemporary art is not just a form of visual expression but also a crucial tool for exploring power structures and social justice. The purpose of this study is to analyze and identify the forms and content of how animal imagery is used in Huang Yong Ping's artworks to represent social themes, including issues, cultural relationships, and artistic expression.

Literature Review

Animal imagery in Contemporary Art

Animal imagery has long played a significant role in art history, often serving as symbols to express cultural and social meanings. Whether it is the dragon and phoenix of ancient China or Anubis of ancient Egypt, these animals symbolize divinity, power, and strength. These symbols transcend time, space, and culture, continually appearing in artworks and offering viewers a rich field for interpretation (DeMello, 2021).

In contemporary art, animal imagery remains an important tool for artists to express their views on issues such as environmental protection, animal rights, and social justice. For example, Damien Hirst explores the relationship between man and nature and the fear of death through his installation of sharks (Gabrielson, 2019; Cheng, 2007). Similarly, Sue Coe uses graphic depictions of animals in her works to critique the meat industry and advocate for animal rights, while Olafur Eliasson incorporates animal forms in his art to address environmental concerns and the impact of human activity on nature (Gabrielson, 2019; Veraart, 2013).

Linda Kalof and Roel Sterckx's research, respectively, explores the differing perceptions and cultural assumptions about animals in Western countries and China. In her book "Looking at Animals in Human History", Kalof focuses on the cultural representations of animals and how these representations have shifted with changing social conditions in European and American history. Kalof points out that during the Enlightenment, philosophers like René Descartes attempted to draw a clear distinction between humans and animals, emphasizing the central position and superiority of humans while relegating animals to a marginal and inferior status (Gelfand, 2023).

Wu Mei Chun, in her work "Contemporary Art and Rural Culture: Huang Yong Ping", highlights Huang Yong Ping's animal works and animal representations through the chapter "Animal Party." In her research report "Repositioning the 'Other' Animal in Chinese Contemporary Art," Abigail Ashford made significant contributions to the field of animal-focused Chinese contemporary art. Ashford argues that physical interaction with animals is crucial for Chinese artists, as they adeptly reference Western conceptual works by artists like Joseph Beuys while striving to establish a foundational Chinese identity that can gain international recognition in the context of early 21st-century globalization and exchange. Additionally, Ashford offers an eco-political perspective, suggesting that in artworks centred on animals, the relationship between humans and animals is more about maintaining power rather than developing an aesthetic free from political control (Kerr, 2006). Her research provides theoretical insights into the diversity of animal representations in Chinese contemporary art and further asserts the existence of speciesist structures within Chinese animal art.

Heinich (2014) emphasizes that animal-themed artworks in contemporary art are complex case studies that demonstrate various evaluation criteria and conflicting values. In her study on "Art That Causes Suffering," she elucidates the relationship between animal-themed artworks, moral boundaries, and audience acceptance. Furthermore, she argues that crossing boundaries is a key factor in contemporary art, and the use of living animals has surpassed established aesthetic, ethical, and legal limits.

Huang Yong Ping: Social Issue-Themed Animal Imagery

Huang's early artistic career was a pivotal stage in establishing his artistic philosophy and creative methodology (Sun, 2020). In the 1980s, China experienced the "85 New Wave Art Movement," a trend emphasizing experimentation and intellectual innovation (Gladston, 2013). In 1986, Huang initiated the anti-traditional "Xiamen Dada" movement, focusing on destructive and deconstructive artistic practices (Cacchione, 2014). Together with other artists, he challenged traditional aesthetics and societal value systems through acts such as burning paintings, issuing radical art manifestos, and performing avant-garde actions (Gladston, 2013). During this period, his work was influenced by Chinese Zen Buddhism and Taoist thought while also integrating Western postmodern art and the philosophies of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Marcel Duchamp (Wang, 2021).

During this time, Huang developed his methodology of "non-expressive painting," which emphasized chance, anti-art, and spontaneity in artistic creation. This approach subverted the traditional notion of art as a vehicle for personal emotional expression and reflected a critique of control and order. In 1987, he created the iconic installation *The History of Chinese Painting and the History of Modern Western Art Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes*. This piece physically and randomly mixed two vastly different art traditions, symbolizing the collision and fusion of cultures, marking a significant milestone in the history of contemporary Chinese art (Gladston, 2013). This experimental practice not only reflected his contemplation of the boundaries of art but also demonstrated his deep insight into the exchange and conflict between Eastern and Western cultures.

After relocating to France in 1990, Huang's art entered a broader global context. During this period, his works shifted from a foundation rooted in Chinese traditional thought to multi-dimensional explorations of historical, contemporary political, and sociocultural issues. Animal imagery became a central tool for his social critique (Qi, 2022). His works were featured in major international exhibitions, including those at the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Guggenheim Museum in New York. In this phase, Huang focused on human society in the context of globalization, using allegorical taxidermy and live animals in installations and performance art to reveal power structures and cultural conflicts (Silvester, 2024). For example, in *Theater of the World*, he incorporated live animals, whose natural behaviours created an unpredictable and dynamic process, challenging traditional art's reliance on static and controlled works. This approach symbolized the fluid and unpredictable nature of social power dynamics while deepening his concept of "anti-art." His works transcended static objects, becoming records and representations of dynamic processes (Burchmore, 2022).

Animals in his work served as both microcosms of human society and embodiments of the primal laws of nature. He placed animals within the context of cultural clashes between East and West, exposing more profound contradictions in human society (Aloi, 2012). For example, his large-scale installation "0 Man, Nine Animals", created for the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999, incorporated fantastical beasts from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* into a modern installation. This created a cultural flashpoint where animals were imbued with complex symbolic meanings. This approach reflected Huang's critical stance of "using the East to critique the West, and the West to critique the East," simultaneously addressing Western misunderstandings of Eastern culture and reflecting on the contradictions within Eastern

traditions (Burchmore, 2022). This perspective, existing outside specific cultural or power systems, earned him broad international recognition.

In the 21st century, Huang's art became increasingly expansive and narrative-driven, addressing themes such as ecology, religious conflict, and globalization. During this period, his works blurred the boundaries between Eastern and Western cultures, using animal imagery and symbolic visual language to reflect on the tensions between human society and nature (Sun, 2023). In his later works, animals evolved from mere social metaphors to symbols of the coexistence of culture and nature in the globalized era. For example, his monumental piece "Ocean Snake" used a giant serpent installation to explore intersections of religion, history, and migration. Through this symbolic visual language, Huang revealed the dilemmas of humanity in the age of globalization. Another representative work, *Circus*, centred on animal sculptures to metaphorically depict power struggles and cultural conflicts. By employing taxidermy and natural materials, these works offered intense visual impact while provoking deep reflections on societal structures and historical narratives (Tavin, Kallio-Tavin, & Ryyänen, 2019). In his later years, Huang increasingly used symbolic visual language, imbuing his art with a global perspective and profound social critique (Liu, 2017).

In his late career, Huang's art delved deeply into critiques of ecology, religious conflict, and globalization. His works became more monumental and narrative-driven, with animal imagery as a recurring motif and a core tool for examining the contradictions within human society. In "Ocean Snake", he explored the intersections of religion, migration, and history through a massive serpent installation. *Circus*, one of his most iconic late installations, showcased a variety of animal sculptures, metaphorically addressing power struggles and cultural conflicts. By using taxidermy and natural materials, his works gained a heightened sense of authenticity and visual impact. In his later period, Huang's use of symbolic visual language emphasized a global perspective, endowing his art with profound social critique and relevance in the modern world (Qi, 2022).

Methods

The research employs a content analysis method, utilizing both document and artwork analysis as key instruments. The document analysis includes relevant texts from books, journals, exhibition catalogues, magazines, and newspapers, providing a contextual understanding of the research subject. On the other hand, the artwork analysis systematically interprets the visual features of Huang's creations, revealing how the arrangement and design of animal elements shape the overall expression of the works.

This study examines five large-scale installation artworks by Huang that were created after his relocation to France, with animal imagery as their central theme. These five works hold significant research value: four focus on the social issues of migration, while the other explores cultural and social topics. These works were selected because they exemplify his unique artistic expression in both form and theme, particularly through the use of animal imagery to profoundly reflect the complex relationship between society and culture, which has garnered widespread attention.

The research adopts Feldman's art criticism model, which comprises four steps: description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. This model explores the underlying social symbolism

by examining the animal imagery, prominent formal elements, and artistic principles in each work. As Ragans (1967) points out, Feldman's four-step art criticism method is interconnected and effectively unveils the deeper meanings embedded within artworks. The steps of the model are as follows:

The art criticism model is as follows:

- i. Description: Involves studying the materials and subject matter of the artwork.
- ii. Analysis: Interprets the design elements and principles.
- iii. Interpretation: Clarifies the meaning of the artwork.
- iv. Evaluation: Assesses the success of the artist's work, considering the ideas, form, and content of the piece.

These analyses will contribute to a better understanding of the formal characteristics of the artworks, the metaphorical significance of the animal elements, and how these features interact with the meaning and themes of the artworks.

Results and Discussion

Yellow Peril, 1993



Figure 1. Yellow Peril (1993). Installation, 605cm x 465cm x 256 cm

This installation artwork is centred on two white triangular spatial tents, each leaning against one of the side walls of the exhibition space. Inside the tents, there is a transparent glass enclosure containing five live scorpions and a thousand locusts. The glass design allows viewers to closely observe the activities of these creatures, enhancing the work's interactivity and sense of engagement. The locusts roam chaotically within the interplay of light and shadow in the tents, displaying dynamic vitality, while the scorpions remain almost motionless in a threatening posture, creating a static presence. The materials used include silk, linen tents, glass enclosures, and live insects. The colour palette is minimalist, dominated by white and transparent tones, complemented by dim orange lighting, creating a repressive, sombre, and tension-filled visual atmosphere. The enclosed space and lighting effects further intensify the audience's psychological discomfort, deepening the emotional impact of the work (Phillips & Zheng, 2008).

In terms of design elements and artistic principles, the work constructs heightened visual tension and metaphor through the stark contrast between movement and stillness, the use of colour and light, and the symbolic interplay of space and materials. The chaotic movement of the locusts contrasts sharply with the scorpions' stationary posture, highlighting dual metaphors of disorder versus control and struggle versus suppression. In

terms of colour, the combination of white tents and orange lighting creates a calm yet oppressive atmosphere. The transparent glass design not only provides an opportunity for interaction with the living creatures but also reinforces the audience's reflection on the relationship between life and control. By incorporating live insects as unconventional materials, the work transcends aesthetic and ethical boundaries, evoking profound emotional impact and critical thinking. This design strategy not only challenges the audience's aesthetic perceptions but also unveils the metaphorical structures of power relations in a globalized society (Sun, 2023).

Table 1

Animal coding - Yellow Peril

| Animal | Representation | Code |
|----------|-----------------|--------------|
| Locusts | Chinese people | Migration |
| Scorpion | French industry | Exploitation |

In this work, Huang uses symbolic creatures—locusts and scorpions—to reveal the conflicts and inequalities between immigrant groups and capitalist forces in the context of globalization. The locusts symbolize the vulnerable and helpless migrant labour groups, marginalized in society and filled with anxiety and struggle in their wandering state. This sense of unease and fragility reflects the survival dilemmas faced by migrants in Western societies (Qi, 2022). Hou (2005) argues that the symbolic meaning of locusts further unveils the helplessness and social marginalization brought about by mass migration during globalization. Through this symbolic design, he not only expresses his concern for migration issues from an artistic perspective but also critiques the structural inequalities within society under globalization.

The scorpions symbolize the capitalist class that holds power, reflecting the inequalities within labour relations. The scorpion's sting represents the hostility and defensiveness of Western societies toward outsiders, viewing immigrant groups as potential threats (Pan, 2020). This hostility stems from deep-rooted cultural and economic conflicts. This metaphorical design has an intrinsic connection with Foucault's (1975) theory of power. Foucault (1975) suggests that power in modern society is not merely defensive but operates through control and surveillance to maintain inequalities. Thus, the scorpion serves as a metaphor for this "micro-power," which relies on constant monitoring and suppression to secure its unchallenged position.

Table 2

Social coding - Yellow Peril

| Dimension 1 | Dimension 2 | Dimension 3 | Dimension 4 |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Social issues | Migration | Racism | Exploitation |

This work profoundly reflects the social conflicts, migration issues, and racism and exploitation in the context of globalization. Through the two core metaphors of locusts and scorpions, the piece constructs a symbolic social structure: the locusts represent exploited and displaced migrant labour groups, embodying their rootlessness and struggles, while the scorpions symbolize the capitalist and power-holding class, reflecting the unequal power dynamics in modern society (Liu & Wang, 2022). The stark contrast between the dynamic and static states of the two highlights the realities of class exploitation and social inequality.

Furthermore, the concept of the “Yellow Peril” carries deep racial undertones, originating in the late 19th century from Western fears of Asian immigrants, particularly during periods of economic hardship and increased migration. This prejudice was historically institutionalized, as seen in policies like the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and France’s Pasqua laws of 1893, which imposed strict controls and restrictions on immigrant groups, reflecting the hostility and exclusion faced by migrants in Western societies (Mariana & Zirkel, 2012). These historical contexts are closely tied to Huang Yong Ping’s personal experiences as an immigrant, witnessing firsthand the hostility and discrimination against Asian migrants in French society. This experience served as a key motivation for creating this work. Consequently, the piece not only addresses historical racial prejudice but also critiques the systemic discrimination and exploitation faced by migrant groups in modern society, exposing the persistent social contradictions and conflicts of the globalized era (Kim, 2024).

In conclusion, through the symbolic meanings of locusts and scorpions, this artwork deeply examines social issues related to migration, racism, and exploitation. Huang addresses the inequalities brought by globalization and capitalism, emphasizing how cultural differences, power dynamics, and the allocation of social resources directly determine the status and future of marginalized groups. By depicting the vulnerability and struggles of the locusts alongside the threat and oppression represented by the scorpions, he reveals the helplessness of migrant groups in the face of power structures and how the ruling elite perpetuates social order and resource monopolization through oppression and exploitation.

Passage, 1993



Figure 2. Passage (1993). Installation, Dimensions of each cage: 200.7 x 403.9 x 124.5 cm

This installation artwork features a massive scale and height. The main structure consists of two black iron cages that almost entirely occupy the exhibition space. The compact layout and oppressive presence create an unavoidable sense of heaviness in both visual and spatial experience for the audience. Above the cages hang lightboxes bearing the words "Others" and "EC National," mimicking the visual symbols of airport immigration checkpoints (Qi, 2022). The materials used include iron, wood, lightboxes, metal rolling doors, lion excrement, and bones. Scattered inside the two black iron cages are lion excrement and gnawed bones, which not only create a striking visual impact but also provoke a strong sense of discomfort through olfactory stimulation. These elements collectively create a raw and visceral sensory experience (Pan, 2020). Huang initially intended to use live lions within the cages but ultimately opted for the animals, which remains a subtler yet equally impactful choice. The

predominantly black and grey tones intensify the austere atmosphere, while the immense scale and overwhelming presence of the work draw viewers in passively, leaving them unable to escape the oppressive tension conveyed by the piece (Phillips & Zheng, 2008).

In terms of design elements and artistic principles, the work employs colour, material contrasts, and spatial arrangement to create a strong visual impact and an oppressive atmosphere. The cold, hard texture of the black iron cages contrasts sharply with the white light emitted by the lightboxes, making the piece stand out in the dim exhibition space. Inside the cages, scattered lion faeces and gnawed bones, with their natural brown tones juxtaposed against the cold iron bars, break the industrial rationality of the work and add a raw, primal visual intensity. These elements engage not only the viewers' visual senses but also their sense of smell, evoking a visceral experience of the harsh reality of identity segregation and the tension of border decisions. The spatial design carries significant symbolic weight (Sun, 2023). The two entrances are labelled "Others" and "EC National," forcing viewers to make a choice upon entering, as if at a border checkpoint. This interactive design strategy places the audience in a dilemma of identity selection, compelling them to psychologically engage with profound reflections on identity, boundaries, and power conflicts. The lighting enhances the details of the cages and lightboxes while creating a stark contrast between light and shadow, producing a heavy and oppressive spatial atmosphere. This design evokes a sense of unease and compulsion on both visual and psychological levels, leaving viewers with an intense and thought-provoking experience.

Table 3

Animal coding - Passage

| Animal | Representation | Code |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Lion dung and leftover bones | Chinese people | Migration, Discrimination |

In this installation artwork, Huang does not directly use figurative symbols but instead employs lion excrement and leftover meat bones to metaphorically reflect the plight of migrant groups and the systemic oppression of cultural "others" by state mechanisms. The lion excrement in the work represents society's abandonment and stigmatization of migrant groups. As a rejected and discarded substance, excrement suggests the marginalized status of migrants in Western societies, where they are perceived as "superfluous" and thus subjected to discrimination and exclusion (Qi, 2022). Through the impactful symbolism of excrement, Huang forces the audience to confront the injustices faced by migrants in society. Pan (2020) argues that the foul smell emanating from the lion's excrement achieves a satirical "equality" among visitors of different nationalities. This highly provocative symbolic design, evoking discomfort through both visual and olfactory senses, compels viewers to reflect on societal stereotypes and mechanisms of exclusion directed at "others."

In addition to lion excrement, Huang incorporates the symbolic element of leftover meat bones to represent the exploitation of migrant groups and the unequal distribution of resources. The lion's leftover meat bones symbolize the deprivation experienced by migrants in allocating social resources. Through this element, Huang reveals that even in resource-abundant societies, migrant groups often receive only the leftovers (Pan, 2020). This metaphor not only critiques the injustice of material distribution but also exposes how states

maintain national identity by controlling migrant mobility (Qi, 2022). Harvey (2005) argues that under the global capitalist system, resources are often prioritized for those in power, while marginalized migrant groups are forced to accept residual resources. By using the symbolism of leftover meat bones, Huang critiques how neoliberal economic policies exacerbate social inequality through exploitation and exclusion.

Table 4

Social coding - Passage

| Dimension 1 | Dimension 2 | Dimension 3 | Dimension 4 |
|---------------|-------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Social issues | Migration | Culture Identities | Restrictions |
| | | | Discrimination |
| | | | Prejudice |

The theme of the artwork revolves around social conflict in the context of globalization, migration issues, national identity, identity division, and social discrimination. Through two black iron cages labelled "EC National" and "Others," Huang Yong Ping simulates real immigration checkpoints, symbolizing the harsh reality of identity differentiation and social segregation. The narrow spatial design of the work, along with elements like lion faeces and meat bones inside the cages, creates an oppressive atmosphere through visual and olfactory impact. This forced interaction allows viewers to experience the unease and exclusion brought by identity screening. This design reflects the social tensions in Europe caused by immigration waves in the 1990s and indirectly responds to the "Islamic Scarf Affair," which highlighted French society's exclusion and cultural assimilation pressures on minority groups (Barker, 2012).

The title of the work symbolizes not only a physical passage but also the individual's predicament between national borders and cultural identity. Through his artistic form, Huang reveals how social restrictions and biases, reinforced by state policies and social structures, continually discipline minority groups and deepen cultural divides between migrants and native societies (Gan, 2020). This critical artistic approach profoundly touches on the identity anxieties and cultural conflicts of the globalized era, encouraging viewers to reflect on their roles and prejudices within societal structures.

In conclusion, this artwork uses the symbolic significance of lion faeces, and leftover remains to explore migration, national identity, and the social issues of restriction, discrimination, and prejudice. Huang highlights the complexity of identity in the context of globalization, suggesting that the marginalized position of migrant groups, caught between state power and societal prejudice, directly determines their exclusion within social structures. Through the symbolic element of the lion, he reveals migrants' sense of deprivation in resource allocation. He critiques how states maintain cultural hegemony through restriction and discrimination, further deepening the systemic oppression of cultural "others."

Theatre of the World, 1993



Figure 3. Theatre of the World (1993). Installation, 166cm x 295cm x 175 cm

This work features a massive arched structure occupying the centre of the exhibition space. Its form resembles both a winding, moving snake and an extended bridge. The primary materials include black metal structures, wood, heating lamps, electrical wires, glass, as well as live insects and reptiles. The black metal framework supports the entire cage structure, which is enclosed in glass, simultaneously “displaying” and “isolating” the animals inside. Within the installation, the “snake-shaped” long cage houses replicas of auspicious Qing Dynasty bronzes borrowed from Chinese collections in Paris, such as the dragon, Xuanwu (a tortoise-snake hybrid), and the toad (Qi, 2022).

The “turtle table” structure beneath the artwork is particularly striking. It is a wooden table with multiple drawers, with its tabletop shaped like a tortoise shell. Inside the table are hundreds of insects and reptiles, including cockroaches, spiders, and scorpions. These creatures continuously crawl and scurry within the cage, fighting each other in the confined space, creating a vivid scene of a struggle for survival (Pan, 2020). The piece was first exhibited in 1994 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris but was removed due to protests from animal rights activists. Nevertheless, it has continued to spark widespread discussion and controversy in subsequent exhibitions.

In terms of spatial design, the arched, snake-like structure conveys a sense of dynamic flow, guiding viewers to move around the work, thereby creating a panoramic and interactive experience. This layout not only breaks the static perception of the artwork but also makes viewers aware of their position as “observers” during the viewing process. Additionally, the combination of the enclosure’s transparency and confinement presents the live insects and reptiles in a “theatrical” setting, highlighting the struggles and resistance of individuals within institutional frameworks. The stark contrast between the cold-toned metal and the warm lighting accentuates the tension between the icy rigidity of the metallic structure and the dynamic vitality of the insects under the light. Shadows of the insects and reptiles are cast onto the ground through the glass, producing dynamic light and shadow effects that enhance the visual depth and dramatic quality of the scene, while symbolizing the unease and anxiety under the watchful gaze of power.

Table 5

Animal coding - Theater of The World

| Animal | Representation | Code |
|---|-----------------------|--------|
| Insects (cockroaches, spiders, crickets, scorpions, etc.) and reptiles (lizards and snakes) | social level migrants | Racism |

In this artwork, Huang Yong Ping explores the power oppression and social marginalization experienced by immigrant groups during globalization. Instead of focusing on individual experiences, he constructs a metaphorical "theater" using symbolic animals (insects and reptiles) to reveal issues of migration, racism, and inequality in the context of globalization. The various creatures in the work not only symbolize oppressed and marginalized social groups but also highlight their struggles and hardships within modern social systems (Burchmore, 2022).

Cockroaches, spiders, crickets, and scorpions are often regarded as "dirty" or "inferior" creatures. Their low stature and swift movements symbolize the survival strategies of groups living at the bottom of society—constantly forced to migrate yet tenaciously seeking cracks to survive. These insects are seen as potential threats to social stability, often labelled as "pests" and subjected to relentless expulsion, extermination, and even the complete erasure of their legitimacy. The cold-blooded nature, slow movements, and secretive survival modes of lizards and snakes symbolize marginalized individuals in society who are compelled to proceed cautiously, avoiding the omnipresent boundaries of power. Despite their slow movements, lizards and snakes exhibit high sensitivity to their surroundings, with every action constrained and monitored by the environment (Gelfand, 2023; Pan, 2020). Hou (2005) argues that the process of globalization is not only an economic integration but also a suppression and exclusion of minority cultures. These insects symbolize not only the survival struggles of marginalized groups but also reflect contemporary society's systemic neglect and exploitation of immigrants, diverse cultural groups, and low-level labourers (Gabrielson, 2019).

Table 6

Social coding - Theater of The World

| Dimension 1 | Dimension 2 | Dimension 3 | Dimension 4 |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Social issues | Migration | Racism | Inequality |

This work uses the symbolic imagery of insects and reptiles to explore social conflicts, migration issues, and racial inequality in the context of globalization. The installation art immerses the audience in a "theatre" composed of animals, symbolic objects, and cages, presenting the power struggles and unequal relationships among different groups, metaphorically highlighting the oppression and exclusion faced by marginalized communities in society. The title of the work directly suggests that contemporary society resembles a theatre filled with contradictions and conflicts, reflecting how power structures and social biases in the globalization process marginalize "outsiders" through mechanisms of surveillance and control. The audience is not merely passive observers of these "performances" but is also guided to reflect on the exclusion and struggles experienced by migrant groups within the social structure (Burchmore, 2022).

Huang places insects and reptiles together within the turtle table, symbolizing the enforced surveillance imposed on different racial groups in society. The heavy institutional structures make it difficult for marginalized groups to break free from existing social shackles. Through the dynamic behaviour of insects and reptiles, Huang reveals how these groups struggle to survive under the “panoptic surveillance” system of modern society. This scene resembles the gladiatorial arenas of ancient Rome, with the audience observing coldly, mirroring the indifference and detachment of privileged classes toward the suffering of the underprivileged (Gabrielson, 2019)._Foucault (1975) proposed that the essence of the "Panopticon" lies in continuous surveillance, which internalizes the omnipresent pressure of power within individuals, compelling them to regulate their own behaviour voluntarily. Under such power structures, individuals may appear free but are, in fact, controlled by invisible forces. The stealth and vigilance of the insects and reptiles precisely symbolize this internalized surveillance mechanism. These creatures are not merely biological entities but profound social symbols. Their collective movements echo the large-scale human migrations, reflecting the unequal living conditions faced by mobile populations in the context of globalization, as well as their exclusion and deprivation of rights by society (Burchmore, 2022; Gelfand, 2023).

This work shares a profound thematic connection with his “Yellow Peril”, as both stem from the social tensions and racial conflicts triggered by the global migration waves of the 1990s. Against the backdrop of economic recession and cultural clashes, large numbers of African and Asian migrants poured into Europe, particularly into France, intensifying competition for social resources and fostering xenophobia and racism (Barker, 2012). The passage of the Pasqua Act further reinforced restrictions and surveillance on migrants, trapping them in a situation of identity discrimination and marginalization (Bulmer & Solomos, 2018). Huang responds to this phenomenon through this work, giving concrete form to migration issues, racial discrimination, and power inequality in a globalized society. Through artistic expression, he reveals the injustices within social structures and encourages the audience to reflect on their own roles and cognitive biases within this system.

In conclusion, through the symbolism of insects and reptiles in this artwork, Huang exposes the social issues of migration, racial discrimination, and inequality. He focuses on the institutional oppression faced by lower-class workers, immigrant communities, and ethnic minorities in modern society, arguing that under the dual influence of globalization and capitalism, these groups, while seemingly granted freedom of movement, are, in reality, still confined within rigid social hierarchies. Through the metaphors of insects and reptiles, Huang reveals the vulnerability and powerlessness of marginalized groups when confronted with invisible power structures and how social systems, under the guise of openness but with hidden surveillance, further solidify existing inequalities. This work not only critiques the operation of power in modern society but also provokes a profound reflection on individual freedom and social justice within contemporary social systems.

Kearny Street, 1995

Figure 4. Kearny Street, (1995). Installation, Variable dimensions

This work is a large-scale on-site installation art piece with variable dimensions, composed of elements representing four blocks of Chinatown, including mailboxes, street signs, pedestrian crossing signals, and turtles. Its expansive spatial layout and the heavy choice of materials not only deliver a strong visual impact but also immerse the audience in an experiential environment. Occupying a prominent position in the exhibition space, the central element—a long simulated street installation—stretches across nearly the entire room, making viewers feel a sense of oppression and an outsider's alienation as they walk through it. The primary materials of the work include wood, light signals, water, mailboxes, and 350 turtles. At the end of the street, there is a traffic light in the shape of a human hand that continuously signals, "Do Not Walk." The traffic light's base is supported by 28 turtle-shaped mailboxes cast in concrete, neatly arranged to form a solid foundation, conveying a heavy visual effect. He borrowed 350 live turtles from a Chinatown Chinese restaurant, which roam freely along the street, adding a vivid dynamic element to the entire scene (Valjakka, 2015).

In the work, 350 live turtles crawl slowly along the street installation, creating a striking visual contrast with the surrounding static structures and adding a sense of movement and depth to the scene. The heavy texture of the grey concrete contrasts with the cold, rigid tones of the blue mailboxes, with the overall colour scheme leaning toward cool tones, enhancing the oppressive and subdued atmosphere of the space. At the end of the street, the signal light emits a continuously flashing red glow, standing out sharply against the grey-blue tones. This intense colour contrast draws the viewer's attention and adds a sense of visual tension. The natural tones of the turtles and their slow, dynamic movement introduce a layer of vivid change, forming a stark visual conflict with the surrounding static industrial materials (Burchmore, 2022). The spatial extension, guided by the installation's layout, leads the audience to walk through the scene, allowing them to experience a sense of depth and rhythmic variation visually and physically, further enriching the work's visual expression.

Table 7

Social coding - Kearny Street

| Animal | Representation | Code |
|---------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Turtles | Chinese people (Migration) | Racism |

Huang Yong Ping uses 350 turtles as the core element of this installation art to reveal the problematic situation of migrant groups in the context of globalization. In the work, the turtles symbolize marginalized migrant groups, who serve as the silent pillars of society yet often fail to receive the recognition they deserve. The turtles' slow crawling mirrors the numerous

obstacles migrants face when integrating into a new society, such as cultural conflicts, language barriers, and systemic restrictions. This indicates that the turtles' slowness not only symbolizes the challenges of migration but also metaphorically represents the institutional barriers migrants encounter while striving to integrate, forcing them to remain on the margins of society (Qi, 2022). Pan (2020) argues that the turtles in the work are not only symbols of migratory hardship but also profound metaphors for the struggle migrants endure in seeking identity within cross-cultural environments.

The turtles in the artwork are not only symbols of migration but also metaphors for supporting societal structures. In Huang Yong Ping's installation art, these turtles are forced to bear the weight of objects representing modern social order, such as mailboxes and traffic lights, implying that migrant groups, as the silent pillars at the bottom of society, continue to suffer from racism and cultural discrimination. The turtles symbolize migrants struggling at the margins of society, burdened with heavy societal responsibilities yet consistently unrecognized by mainstream society. The contributions of migrant groups are often overlooked, yet their efforts and endurance are essential for maintaining the functioning of society (Qi, 2022). Pan (2020) notes that the turtles reveal the unjust treatment migrants face due to identity issues. Harvey (2005) also pointed out that "under the global capitalist system, marginalized groups are forced to bear the heaviest societal burdens while receiving little in return." By placing the turtles within the metaphor of a supporting structure, Huang Yong Ping exposes how modern society, through institutionalized exploitation and social exclusion, relegates migrant groups to the lowest levels of society.

Table 8

Social coding - Kearny Street

| Dimension 1 | Dimension 2 | Dimension 3 | Dimension 4 |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| Social issues | Migration | Racism | Discrimination |

This work focuses on social exclusion, migration issues, and racism in the context of globalization, using symbolic visual language to reveal the oppression and discrimination faced by marginalized groups. In the work, the traffic light continuously flashes the "Do Not Walk" signal, symbolizing society's restrictions and rejection of migrants. The 350 slowly moving turtles represent the humiliation and obstacles endured by migrant groups during the process of migration, reinterpreting the symbolic meaning of turtles as submission and endurance (Sun, 2023).

Additionally, the turtle figures supporting the blue mailboxes metaphorically highlight the reality of migrants silently bearing the burdens of society. The title of the work alludes to the history of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 19th-century America, echoing the slogan of anti-Chinese leader Denis Kearney during the California anti-Chinese movement: "The Chinese Must Go." This critiques the ongoing discrimination and exclusion of "others" in modern society (Zhang, 2019). Through the reuse of historical symbols, Huang Yong Ping questions whether modern society has truly overcome racism or if it continues to perpetuate past prejudices and restrictions in new forms (Peng, 2022).

In conclusion, through the symbolism of turtles in this artwork, Huang Yong Ping effectively merges historical memory with contemporary social conditions. He uses the silent symbol of the "turtle" to critique how modern society controls and excludes the "other" through

institutionalized racism and cultural hegemony. The turtles not only represent the plight of immigrant communities but also metaphorically reflect the silent labour force exploited within capitalist society. Huang's work compels viewers to reconsider whether modern society is genuinely pursuing equality or if it continues to oppress the "other" through invisible means.

The sage learns from the spider to spin a web, 1994



Figure 5. The sage learns from the spider to spin a web (1994). Installation, Variable dimensions

This work is an installation art piece that combines lighting, shadows, and multiple media. The core of the work consists of a large lampshade (cage), a live spider, and a table holding "Conversations with Duchamp". The lightbulb's glow projects the spider's shadow onto the book, creating a visually tense effect (Phillips & Zheng, 2008). The materials used in the work primarily include copper, wires, and wood. The external frame of the lampshade is made of copper, presenting a smooth and solid metallic texture while taking the form of a cage that encloses the elements within. This work was originally exhibited in Duchamp's hometown. The installation is placed in a relatively enclosed exhibition space, with the lampshade and table occupying the centre of the gallery. Viewers can closely observe the details inside the lampshade, particularly the spider's shadow projected by the light (Pan, 2020).

The overall tone of the work is dominated by warm orange-yellow hues. The warm light emitted by the bulb bathes the copper lampshade and wooden tabletop in a soft glow, creating a warm and tranquil atmosphere. The "Conversations with Duchamp" book on the table stands out prominently under the light, while the spider's shadow is sharply projected onto the open pages, forming a striking contrast of light and shadow. The metallic frame of the lampshade casts intricate shadows that intertwine with the book and the spider's shadow on the tabletop, infusing the work with a dynamic visual effect. Through the skilful use of light and shadow, the piece creates a mysterious and thought-provoking ambience (Wang, 2021).

Table 9

Animal coding - The sage learns from the spider to spin a web

| Animal | Representation | Code |
|--------|----------------|--------|
| Spider | Duchamp | Belief |

This work is intended as a tribute to the French artist Marcel Duchamp and explores the connection between artistic creation and the concept of "readymade." In this piece, Huang Yongping uses the image of a spider to represent Duchamp, expressing his homage to Duchamp and his artistic philosophy. Duchamp's use of "readymades" and his deconstruction of traditional art profoundly influenced Huang's creations (Pan, 2020). The spider's act of "web-weaving" symbolizes an ongoing process of "construction" and "deconstruction," reflecting not only an exploration of artistic forms but also Huang's inheritance and transformation of Duchamp's artistic spirit. At the same time, it embodies his practice of re-deconstruction within a cultural context (Pan, 2020). Hou (2005) argued that through symbolic metaphors, Huang's work reveals the complexity and cultural conflicts of contemporary art in the context of globalization. Pan (2020) noted that Huang drew on Duchamp's ideas to redefine the boundaries of art and culture through a deconstructive approach. The spider in this work is not merely a creature of the natural world but, through Huang's transformation, becomes a manifestation of Duchamp's spirit (Dervin & Machart, 2017).

Table 10

Social coding - The sage learns from the spider to spin a web

| Dimension 1 | Dimension 2 | Dimension 3 | Dimension 4 |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Social issues | Culture | Religion | Belief |

This work explores the profound relationship between artistic creation, culture, religion, and faith. Huang skillfully uses the live spider as a symbolic element to allude to Marcel Duchamp's artistic spirit and his influence on modern art. The spider not only represents patience and wisdom but also suggests the capturing of opportunities and recreation in artistic creation. In the work, the spider's shadow is projected onto the open pages of Conversations with Duchamp, embodying the confusion and enlightenment in the pursuit of knowledge, while the cage-like lampshade symbolizes the tension between restraint and freedom. This visual design provokes reflection on the essence of art and traditional ideas, expressing Huang's reinterpretation of Duchamp's "readymade" concept (Wang, 2021). Additionally, the title of the work originates from Ge Hong's Baopuzi, where a sage learns to weave a web from a spider, symbolizing the process of learning and borrowing in artistic creation, embodying a balance between cultural heritage and innovation (Burchmore, 2022).

This work was created in 1998, during a time of accelerating globalization and cultural clashes. Huang was deeply inspired by Duchamp's concepts, particularly during China's "85 New Wave" art movement in the 1980s (Qi, 2022). Through his works, he boldly challenged traditional artistic ideas, such as burning his works after the "Xiamen Dada" exhibition, reflecting the influence of Duchamp's anti-art and conceptual art. After moving to France, Huang sought a unique language of artistic expression between Eastern and Western cultures. He integrated Chinese Taoist and Buddhist philosophies with Western modern art concepts, exploring the relationship between art and knowledge, faith, and reason. Through the symbolism of the spider, the interplay of light and shadow, and cultural references, this work expresses Huang's deep reflection on artistic identity, cultural borrowing, and recreation in

the context of globalization, demonstrating his unique thoughts on cultural fusion and artistic innovation (Burchmore, 2022).

In conclusion, through the spider as a symbol, Huang not only paid homage to Duchamp's artistic spirit but also explored individual survival strategies in complex cultural environments. Using the metaphor of the spider spinning its web, he revealed how individuals cope with cultural conflicts and identity crises under globalization, redefining themselves in the process. In his work, the intertwining and confrontation of cultures are vividly portrayed, while the artist, like a spider, patiently and intelligently "weaves a web" to find a new position within diverse cultures. Huang's art demonstrates that culture and faith are not fixed but are continually deconstructed and reconstructed, imbuing them with new meaning and vitality.

Conclusion

Huang Yong Ping's animal-themed artworks address social issues within the framework of globalization, using diverse animal imagery and representational techniques. A key feature of these works is Huang's use of animals as powerful social symbols; animals evolve from mere natural icons into metaphors for marginalized groups and power structures. By incorporating various animal forms, the works transcend traditional artistic language, offering a complex portrayal of migration issues and focusing on societal inequality and conflict. They reflect the struggles of marginalized groups under social discrimination and oppression, symbolizing their endurance and ongoing resistance.

Huang Yong Ping's exploration of various media and presentation methods pushes the limits of traditional art by incorporating live animals, unconventional materials, and inventive spatial arrangements, resulting in multi-layered, interactive experiences. These works provide a visual, emotional, and physical impact, generating emotional tension through the dynamic behaviours of the animals. Furthermore, he combined Chinese philosophical traditions with Western modern art concepts, reflecting his distinctive approach to creative expression. By using a variety of animals and exploring unconventional media, Huang utilizes a multi-dimensional artistic language to emphasize social inequality and conflict within the globalized context. The blend of commonalities and differences enables the works to critique contemporary realities while also showcasing profound cultural insights and artistic philosophy, imbuing these animal-themed artworks with intellectual depth and aesthetic significance.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of how Huang Yong Ping utilizes animal imagery to address social issues within the context of globalization, contributing to the existing body of knowledge. It highlights how Huang's works serve as a bridge between traditional artistic practices and contemporary social critique, offering a unique perspective on the intersections of culture, power, and economy. By employing Feldman's art criticism model, this study systematically interprets the visual and symbolic elements within Huang's installations, uncovering the deeper social and cultural meanings embedded in his works. This methodological approach not only enhances the understanding of Huang's artistic practice but also provides a framework for analyzing other contemporary artists who use animal imagery to engage with social issues.

The findings of this research hold significant implications for the fields of art history, cultural studies, and sociology. By demonstrating how Huang Yong Ping's works employ animal symbolism to critique power structures, cultural conflicts, and economic tensions, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on the role of art in social and political commentary. Additionally, it underscores the importance of a cross-cultural perspective in contemporary art, as Huang integrates Chinese philosophical traditions with Western modern art concepts, providing a model for understanding the complexities of cultural exchange and globalization.

In a broader context, this research enriches the understanding of how art serves as a powerful tool for social critique and cultural transformation. It offers insights into how artists utilize visual language to challenge social norms and provoke critical reflection on issues such as migration, racism, and inequality. By situating Huang's works within the historical and cultural framework of globalization, this study emphasizes the significance of his artistic practice in addressing contemporary social challenges and fostering a deeper understanding of the human condition.

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