BRILL

The Image Rhetoric and Narrative Aesthetics of "Teasing and Irony" in Contemporary Chinese Art

Yongliang Liu
Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
Academy of Fine Arts Anhui University of Arts, Hefei, China
115544646@qq.com

Sone Simatrang
Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
sonesimatrang@yahoo.com

Abstract

The "scar art" of the 1980s mainly came from reflection on and criticism of the entire society. In 1990s China, influenced by both Western modernism and postmodernism, a phenomenon of "Teasing and Irony" emerged in contemporary Chinese art. At this time, contemporary art began to present a state of deconstruction from poetry, novels, film and television, art, performance art, conceptual art and so on, to people's real lives. Deconstruction of authority and of classics became the pursuit of the times. The emergence of this cultural trend of Teasing and Irony involved a game of power and discourse. There were also expressions of criticism, ridicule, irony and kitsch, forming an abnormal postmodern narrative aesthetic that formed the main ecology of contemporary Chinese art in the 1990s.

Keywords

1 Introduction

The diversion of art during the Post Cultural Revolution in China in the late 1970s was mainly manifested in the exploration of local art, scar art and aesthetic forms. At the same time, contemporary art groups also emerged among the people, initiating the modern art movement. In the 1970s and 1980s, in the creation of art works during the Post Cultural Revolution period, artists continued to reject history with a skeptical and critical attitude and, at the same time, were also making up for the cultural deficiencies brought about by The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s and 1990s, the transformation of China's political and economic system began to have an effect on the country's social and cultural spheres. Chinese contemporary art experienced the exploration of modern art in the 1980s and entered the stage of contemporary art in the 1990s. At this time, the emergence of "mischievous reality" and "political pop" became avant-garde art and served as a turning point from modern to contemporary art. Chinese avant-garde artists, at that point, were striving to break free from the scars brought about by the political system and gradually shed their critical idealism. Under the impact of the market economy, they were trying to find their discourse power and economic status throughout society. Thus, in the 1990s, various complex cultural interactions, such as international relations, national policies, ethnic beliefs, popular culture, art markets and survival conditions, emerged in contemporary art. "The self's physical sensations, emotions, judgments and unconscious experiences did not admit any limitations and definitions. Everyone wanted to realize their full potential, so the contradiction between the promotion of the subject spirit and the alienation of economic and technological roles continued to deepen" (Daozi 2007, 55). Contemporary art has opened up new forms of artistic expression in artistic themes and forms. There has been a shift in contemporary art from simply serving politics in the past to expressing oneself for the sake of art, life and self. The artistic trends of political pop art, playful realism art and vulgar art that emerged in contemporary Chinese art in the 1990s all utilized the image rhetoric and narrative strategy of Teasing and Irony, demonstrating a postmodern narrative aesthetic that opposed modernism. Chinese contemporary artists combined the traditional cultural value system with a critical spirit, moral care and an innovative practical element of cultural spirit, forming the cultural ecology of Chinese contemporary art.

2   Objective

The culture of Teasing and Irony that emerged in contemporary art was a unique cultural phenomenon formed in art trends mainly concentrated in the 1980s and 1990s. With the emergence of postmodernism, the Chinese and Western art markets gradually opened up, while people's concepts of art were also changing. In contemporary art, the visual art expression of Teasing and Irony emerged in playful realism, pop art and vulgar art. This study aims to delineate the narrative language and narrative methods of works in contemporary Chinese art through iconography. Through the study of these schematic patterns, it is found that this artistic expression of Teasing and Irony was not accidental. Firstly, in traditional Chinese culture, artists always prefer circuitous and metaphorical expressions. That is, to speak of one thing, one must speak of others first. Artistic works are created by means of expressing emotion through scenery and indicating aspirations through objects. Secondly, influenced by postmodern trends, people had begun to reject classics and focus on themselves. Art works of the time had the main characteristics of deconstruction and appropriation and were expressed through ironic and humorous rhetoric. This phenomenon occurred in visual art forms such as painting, sculpture, performance art and graphic art. Once again, contemporary artists used Teasing and Irony to escape political oppression and gain greater economic value in the international community. Affected by the development of the Western art market and the domestic economy, China's art system and art ecology had undergone significant changes involving new issues such as postcolonialism and the understanding of the relationship between art and the market. In short, studying the cultural phenomena of Teasing and Irony in contemporary art to examine the development laws of Chinese art and explore cultural trends, the purpose of this paper holds important social significance for the development and cognition of contemporary social culture.

3   Method

Using the research strategy of visual culture and the comprehensive application of image studies to analyze works, we aim to identify the rhetorical semantics, artistic aesthetics and international politics behind artistic works. In the study of visual culture, we take the image resources (artworks) of Teasing and Irony that appear in contemporary art as the research object so that visual culture can appear in front of us in a sincere and down-to-earth phenomenological perspective. This will allow us to hone in on and interpret visual culture

itself. Cultural phenomena such as international art markets, political rights, discourse, postcolonialism and postmodernism are all relevant to this research. The first step was to form a writing theme by gathering a substantial number of books on contemporary art, relevant image resources and writing references, and then to gain first-hand knowledge through interviews with artists and art critics and specific exhibitions. The second step was to use image analysis methods and visual cultural research methods to analyze contemporary art works and contemporary art phenomena in order to conduct in-depth research on visual culture and attempt to interpret the cultural significance of visual images, discourse, text and mass life in the postmodern context. From this, we can understand the inner essence from surface phenomena and analyze the laws of artistic development.

The phenomenon of Teasing and Irony in contemporary art mainly refers to the contemporary visual expression of artists breaking through traditional concepts and emphasizing personalized thinking. Among them, there are followers of the market, negations of idealism and elitism, deconstruction and appropriation of historical images. Visual cultural analysis is the key to interpreting the deep connotations beneath this surface. The study of image narrative can further interpret research on image post-linguistics and post-semiotics, viewing it as a complex interaction between vision, machines, institutions, discourse, body and metaphor. By examining the image resources surrounding the phenomenon of Teasing and Irony in contemporary art, we can better understand the trends and directions of contemporary cultural development. This will reveal the real function of visual culture research focusing not on what the reproduced object should look like but, rather, the encoding behind visual data. That is, instead of employing knowledge of visual image expression, we should focus on how a visual image becomes foundational to that knowledge. Furthermore, the subject of visual image is not our focus here, but rather, how the subject can construct itself based on the norms of knowledge and power. This study, as such, involves in-depth investigation and research on contemporary art, using a large number of image resources as the basis material, to examine the connotations of the ideological concepts of contemporary artists, as well as their understanding of the country, international relations, democracy and science, to reflect the issues of social and cultural development.

3.1   *The Phenomenon of Teasing and Irony in the Art of Playful Realism*
The art of playful realism is commonly referred to as "splashy reality" art. Like the ruffian novels of the same period, splashy art is the expression of ruffian culture in contemporary art. Realists view the world in a mocking way. Playful

realism has a more sarcastic and ironic meaning in artistic expression. These artists like to exaggerate the relationship between the picture and reality in a self-mocking way in order to dispel authority and ideals that they do not recognize and thus cleverly evade the accountability of reality. These playful realistic artists are mainly concentrated in the third generation of artists born in the 1960s and graduated in the 1980s. When planning the Post 89 Chinese New Art Exhibition, Li Xianting included works by Fang Lijun, Liu Wei, Wang Jinsong, Liu Xiaodong and others under the theme of "Boredom and Cynicism".

In 1989, Fang Lijun graduated from the Printmaking Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts and was one of the earliest painters to settle in the Yuanmingyuan Painters' Village. Fang Lijun cast doubt on the idealism and classicism of the 1980s with a playful and ironic attitude towards realism; in artistic expression, observing the numbness and inertia in the hearts of contemporary people was the way of gazing. His paintings were no longer a criticism of the image of the Cultural Revolution nor a melancholic expression of men and women but rather a mockery of the soul of modern people. In Fang Lijun's painting *The Bald Rogue* became the image symbol of his painting. The characters portrayed are all foolish, idle farmers and urban hooligans. Some of the characters in the picture are bareheaded, while others are yawning with wide grins, their eyes glazed and their faces expressionless, completely different from the images of the Cultural Revolution and the ideals pursued in the 1980s. Fang Ljuni applied a typological approach to the characters on the screen. There was a sense of emptiness and numbness hidden in the portrayal of characters who were dull, laughing, crying and shouting. The series of works by Fang Lijun's oil painting *The Yawning Man* (Figure 1) depicts the image of a "mischievous bald head", with the main characters yawning and their expressions dull, demonstrating the hopelessness and numbness of young people towards real life. The political and economic openness of China in the 1990s prevented young people from seeing the direction ahead. The ideals of the past had all collapsed in front of reality and the living environment could not provide them with answers. As a result, "They do not believe in the dominant meaning system, nor do they believe in the illusory efforts to construct new meanings in the form of confrontation" (Lv 2007, 832). The characters portrayed are bald and mischievous, with no ideals, no sense of direction for future development and no pursuit of becoming heroes and elites in society. In real life, they can only choose to wait helplessly and numbly. These young people can only dissolve all meaning in a boring and mischievous way of life.

The development of Chinese society in the 1990s had a specific social, political and cultural context, and the expression of humorous and ironic images and

FIGURE 1   Fang Lijun, Yawning Man, oil painting,
              200*230cm, 1991-1992

narrative strategies in contemporary Chinese art had historical inevitability. From the perspective of the external cultural environment, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in Germany in 1989, the drastic changes in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s and the disintegration of the former Soviet Union all brought a unique social and cultural context to China's social development. Changes in the international situation made China the largest socialist country. In terms of the domestic environment, the reform and opening up of the 1990s accelerated the integration of Chinese society and the global political economy, while with the development of economic globalization, culture also gradually began to globalize. With the rise of the art market in China, avant-garde painting in China was attempting to find a cultural space to enter the global perspective. The 1993 Venice Biennale allowed Fang Lijun's works to be recognized in the Western discourse system. In such an era of social transformation, Fang Lijun gained social recognition amidst numbness within society, which was an opportunity for him to conform to modes of artistic expression under the ideological confrontation between the East and the West and won accolades in the art market. The political criticism embodied in Fang Lijun's playful realism works was introduced by Western critics into the discourse system of postcolonial and ideological confrontation between China and the West, which also led to the phenomenon of "pan-political pop" artists following suit in their creations. At the same time, there was also a group of realistic artists at work, including Liu Wei, Yue Minjun, Zeng Fanzhi, Guo Wei, Yang Shaobin, Deng Jianjin, Song Yonghong, Zhong Biao and others.

"Foolish Laughter" is a special symbol in Yue Minjun's artistic creation. The characters portrayed in his works are often giggling, mouths agape. The painter expresses his art in a humorous and ironic way, while also expressing his playful attitude towards the world. He thinks nothing matters; it is all just a joke. Foolish Laughter has become a visual symbol for mass production. In many of his works, Foolish Laughter is neatly arranged on the canvas, giving people a feeling of monotony, superficiality, vulgarity and boredom. Yue Minjun's work *Free Guide to the People* (Figure 2) depicts several different poses of "foolish laughter" according to the composition style of Delacroix's original painting. Such visual symbol is presented in different poses and smiles on the canvas, making people feel humorous and superficial. "This kind of laughter does not represent any emotions, it is just a collective unconscious expression. Artists of playful realism use mischievous images to dispel the meaning of their works, which becomes the biggest reason for their existence." (Zhang 2010, 250) In the process of social change, Yue Minjun had not had time to see the changes in society clearly and expressed their attitude in a playful and self-deprecating way, thereby breaking free from various contradictions and pressures.

Liu Wei often takes the people and things around him, including television, scenery, plants, loved ones and ancient images, as his creative themes. His work *Wandering in the Garden: Dad in front of TV* (1991-1992) (Figure 3) depicts his own father. His father stood in front of the TV, as if facing the consumer culture of the 1990s; as a soldier, he seemed somewhat confused. At this point, the sacred aura of a soldier-like father was also removed. In his paintings, he jokingly depicts daily life, and his work, lacking an idealistic tone, dispels the grand narrative of collective beliefs. In addition, works such as Yang Shaobin's

FIGURE 2   Yue Minjun, Freedom Guides the People, oil
                   painting, 250 *360cm, 1995

FIGURE 3   Liu Wei, Dream in the Garden: Dad in front of TV,
              oil painting, 75*95cm, 1991-1992

The Police and the People are the Members of One Family, Song Yonghong's *Blue Grid Bed Sheets* (Figure 4), *Beijing Hutong* and *By the Swimming Pool* are all based on real life, depicting the characters around his daily life. Snippets of boring and trivial daily life became the creative content. Song Yonghong's work *Blue Checkered Bed Sheets* presents a scene of family life, where a woman lied naked on the bed while the man gazed at the wall in front of the window. The real picture presents a humorous visual representation.

3.2   *The Trend of Teasing and Irony in Political Pop Art*

If Chinese playful realism art is a manifestation of idleness and self-avoidance in the face of changes in social reality, so political pop art is a pursuit of art

FIGURE 4   Song Yonghong, Blue Lattice Sheet, oil painting,
              150*110, 1995

marketization in the process of learning from Western popular culture. Pop art originated in the early 1960s and flourished in the late 1960s in the West. "Pop art" originates from the artistic style of commercial art forms and is a product of commercial civilization. Pop art focuses on turning popular commercial culture into an important part of pop art creation, such as that of city advertisements, posters, signs, magazines, television, cartoons, comics, etc. Richard Hamilton, Jasper Jones, Robert Rauschenberg and others are representative pop artists. In 1972, after President Nixon's visit to China, Andy Warhol created a series of portraits of Chairman Mao in a pop style, combining pop art with political imagery. These portraits, with vivid colors similar to commercial posters, commercialize and package serious leadership images, presenting them to the mass consumer market and setting a record high auction price of tens of millions of dollars in the art auction market. His work *Brillo Box* has also sparked discussions in the art community about the ontology of art. In 1985, the China National Art Museum introduced an exhibition of installation works by American pop artist Laushen Berg. The creative concept of pop art has deeply inspired many young artists in China and has launched a wave of pop art creation in China.

Since the 1989 Modern Art Exhibition in Beijing, the rise of China's art market has led to a weakness of political consciousness while the inertia of the "1985 spirit" still plays a role. Works such as Wu Shanzhuan's *Red Humor* and Xu Bing's *Analysis of the World* use humorous and ironic ways to express artistic concepts. "The Hubei Pop Art trend that emerged at the Guangzhou Biennale in 1992, the presentation of 'abstract pop' in the literature exhibition and the post-1989 China New Art Exhibition held in Hong Kong all indicated that pop art had entered China" (Gu 1999, 27). There were also works by artists such as Li Shan, Yu Youhan, Liu Dahong and Ye Yongqing. The exhibition "Post-1989 Chinese New Art" (1993) planned by Li Xianting and Zhang Songren explicitly used the concept of "political pop style" for the first time and pushed pop art to the international market. The artists involved included Wang Guangyi, Zhang Xiaogang, Yu Youhan, Li Shan, Geng Jianyi, Wu Shanzhuan, Ye Yongqing, Wang Ziwei, Feng Mengbo, Hong Hao, Liu Dahong, Ren Jian, Wei Guangqing, Qiu Zhijie and others.

At the 1989 Modern Art Exhibition, Wang Guangyi's *Red Grid 1* (1988) (Figure 5) drew a huge leader statue in gray and black, with red squares painted on top. Red squares were a creative mode of standard portraits during the Cultural Revolution. Wang Guangyi expressed a political pop concept through the reproduction of the standard image of the red square. The standard image, as a ready-made image, was once again misappropriated in his works to deconstruct the original meaning of the image. Although Wang himself did not

provide any interpretation of the work, what would be brought to the audience in different historical contexts is infinite. The political pop represented by Wang Guangyi had a significant impact during this period and promoted the shift in contemporary Chinese art concepts. The series *Great Criticism* created by Wang Guangyi was a typical work of political pop art. He combined the symbols of the Cultural Revolution with the commercial symbols of the reform and opening up for artistic creation. His work *The Great Criticism – Coca Cola* (Figure 6) juxtaposes the image of workers, peasants and soldiers with the popular commercial product Coca-Cola. This image, which combined political symbols and economic cultural reconstruction, enriched the meaning of the entire work. He abandoned the painting technique by juxtaposing different symbols of deconstruction and appropriation from the revolutionary and consumer eras. "Artists juxtaposed historical images with today's foreign goods, placing them in a critical position, to evoke an absurd interest and parody and mock the special historical period in which the artist lived" (Lv

FIGURE 5   Wang Guangyi, Mao Zedong Hongge No. 1, oil
                        painting, 148.5*120cm, 1988

FIGURE 6   Wang Guangyi, Great Criticism of Coca Cola, oil
                painting, 200*200cm, 1992

2007, 867). Wang Guangyi changed the direct criticism strategy, rethinking political culture with a sarcastic and humorous attitude. This approach not only freed him from political pressure but was also in line with the public's aesthetic of the times.

Li Shan's work *Rouge Series* (Figure 7) is also a piece of pop art created using political symbols. It emphasized the contrastive use of colors, giving people a

FIGURE 7   Li Shan,Rouge Series propylene, oil painting,
                20*28cm, 1994

bright and eye-catching feeling through the rendering of large areas of rouge, green and blue. The gentle eyes, slender eyebrows, bright powder blusher, plump lips and petals or butterflies in some paintings also enriched the characters. Filled with humor and ridicule, the image of leader was not serious and authoritative in the political sense but became more feminine, secular, vulgar and even a visual consumption symbol. Yu Youhan's work *Mao Zedong Waving* highlighted the image of a leader on the canvas, showing the outer contours of the characters and symbolizing them. Applying ethnic patterns to the contours of characters placed greater emphasis on planarization and composition. The scene was full of ridicule, humor and irony. It appeared to have a critical consciousness on the surface. But, facing the needs of the Western market, Chinese artists began to pay attention to reputation status adjustment and income distribution and even hoped to have the same discourse power as leaders. From this, it can be seen that the visual expression of political pop satisfied the utilitarianism and pragmatism pursued by artists while reconciling with the secular world.

Li Bangyao's *Product Trus*t (Figure 8) directly deconstructs popular and commodity culture, listing various metal daily necessities produced in batches in the West in his works. The images included electric irons, pressure cookers, watches, lipsticks and metal tableware, all of which were sparkling and exquisite Western industrial products. The Product Trust expressed that we are being invaded by Western consumer culture, especially with the emergence of new products that encourage consumers to engage in repetitive, transitional and comparable consumption.

FIGURE 8   Li Bangyao, Product Trust, oil paint, 1992

3.3   *The Phenomenon of Teasing and Irony in Vulgar Art*

In contemporary Chinese art, the political pop and splashy art of the early 1990s unconsciously used certain images and symbols related to political ideology in pioneering ways. Vulgar art is more rooted in commercial culture, using all available resources to achieve profits. It portrays our daily lives and absurd events in a comedic way, with depictions and parodies of traditional art, as well as the appropriation and splicing of ready-made products. In the mid-1990s, vulgar art began to prosper with a large number of works that borrowed political ideology and exploited Chinese cultural symbols. "Although kitsch is the proliferation and vulgarity of political pop, it continues political pop and expands its influence" (Yi 2007, 10). Gorgeous art differs from the earlier avant-garde spirit and gradually adopts a kitsch aesthetic taste while pursuing economic benefits, forming a "new kitsch". Critic Gao Minglu believes that vulgar art is a typical form of kitsch. Regarding types of kitsch, the first is "political kitsch", the second is "cultural kitsch", and the third is "image kitsch". In the later stages of "vulgar art", exaggerated shapes, vulgar colors, personalized symbols, and strong political reflections are used to make the work more vulgar, in order to attract more capital and commercial interests. Greenberg argues that "in terms of avant-garde art, this culture is provided by an elite class in the ruling society, and avant-garde art assumes that it is abandoned by this society, always adhering to society through an umbilical cord of money" (Greenberg 2004, 1). The 'vulgar' artists actively cater to Western imaginations of Chinese society, politics, and culture to pursue personal interests in the international art market. According to critic Wang Nanming, this reflects a typical post-colonial taste.

In comparison to pop art, which straightforwardly utilizes and assembles Chinese visual resources, vulgar art distinguishes itself by weakening political symbols and incorporating ethnic and nostalgic styles. "It often incorporates rich and colorful floral symbols with strong color contrasts, resulting in flashy and ostentatious works" (Lv 2000, 208). Li Xianting organized the Popular Model and Colorful Makeup Life vulgar art exhibitions in 1996, followed by the Cross Century Rainbow and Phenol Styrene exhibitions in 1999. These exhibitions featured works that blend political symbols with vulgar expressions aimed at consumerist themes. "Representative works include Feng Zhengjie's wedding dress series, Qi Zhilong's consumerist imagery, Wang Qingsong's consumer symbols, and Liu Liguo's human vase" (Zhang 2010, 261). Artists such as Qi Zhilong, Xu Yihui, Yang Wei, Feng Zhengjie, Wang Qingsong, Liu Zheng, Li Luming, the Luo Brothers, Liu Liguo, Cong Fangzheng, Liu Zhen, Shen Jingdong, Hu Xiangdong, among others, are associated with these exhibitions.

Qi Zhilong's *Consumer Image* (Figure 9) juxtaposes beauty consumption, leadership imagery, and flower symbols as symbols of consumption, targeting the mass cultural market. Qi Zhilong believes that all ideologies in today's open

FIGURE 9   Qi Zhilong, Consumer Image 12, Oil Painting, 1993

society can be commodified. Vulgar art, lacking depth, often portrays flashy and ostentatious images as its mode of expression, embodying a peasant-style burst of interest. Flowers, beauties, radishes, and cabbage have become common motifs for artists, who employ exaggerated, flat, and glossy techniques to enhance visual appeal. Feng Zhengjie's work *Romantic Journey* (Figure 10) uses wedding photography as material for creative reinterpretation. The work disguises couples from different periods as wealthy or cultural figures, using rich and vivid colors along with humorous and exaggerated postures. Some hold teapots, while others hold tea fans, illustrating the identity demands of popular culture. In terms of color treatment, clothing features strong contrasts and bright colors. Cong Fangzheng's oil painting series "Rose Girl" (Figure 11) further appropriates everyday life. He intertwines sensual beauties through abstract hair textures, each girl holding a rose in her mouth. These figures exude a consistent allure of sensuality, elegance, and delicacy. Sensuality may be the contemporary fashion ideal for women, yet these abstract red strands, resembling twisting blood, create an eerie effect, evoking both fear and a sense of detachment. The painter astutely captures the aesthetic aspirations of urban women today and the psychological responses of modern society. Through his depiction, the painter renders his rose girls seductive, infusing art with a hint of allure.

4   Results/Findings

"In terms of creative attitude, playful realism treats everything with jokes, mischievous behavior, and humor, infusing its works with a playful atmosphere.

FIGURE 10   Feng Zhengjie, Romantic Journey, Oil Painting,
             70*83cm, 2009

This generation of artists confronts their true sense of survival, and I observed the significance of boredom and mischievous behavior in deconstructing ideology among these young artists at that time" (Li 2000, 427). Looking at the reasons for the emergence of playful realism art, firstly, the new generation of artists in the early 1990s experienced the complete collapse of lofty ideals and social values formed before the 1990s. Many young people could not find a direction for

FIGURE 11   Congfangzheng's Rose Girl 180x150cm Print 2009

future development amidst social changes. They expressed their confusion and anxiety through art, manifesting a nihilistic and bored reality through playful realism. Secondly, playful realism adopts a compromising nature. Its attitude no longer actively criticizes and negates reality but expresses reality through ridicule, deconstruction, and a shift away from grand narratives, focusing instead on personal existential states. Creatively, it employs self-deprecating, joking, mocking, and ironic techniques, refraining from taking political stances during this time. Thirdly, since the Post 89 China Art Nouveau Exhibition, the Western art market began to pay attention to the emergence of mischievous reality and political pop within contemporary Chinese art, endowing these works with excessive political and cultural connotations. This enriched and complexified the meanings conveyed by these artworks in their circulation.

From the perspective of the themes of political pop art, it mainly has the following characteristics: firstly, political pop art regards political leaders as elements of artistic creation. It expands to the appropriation and deconstruction of various political symbols such as memories of the Cultural Revolution, images of soldiers, workers, and peasants, Tiananmen Square, the Little Red Book, and model operas. Secondly, in the expression of works, it borrows from consumption and commercial popular symbols such as industrial products, Coca-Cola, Marlboro, beauty, numerals, McDonald's, and other elements. Thirdly, historical and traditional themes included Chinese painting, traditional Spring Festival couplets, children, mascots, and traditional patterns. Yuan Xiaofang's work *The Phantom Operation* juxtaposes traditional Chinese painting *Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*" with bombers representing modern Western civilization, where a military aircraft flies over the *Thousand Li Jiang Shan Tu*. The way Yuan Xiaofang employs commercial advertisements appears to express both cultural invasion and political oppression. Wei Guangqing's *Red Wall* series combines the concept of "red wall" with woodcut illustrations, integrating traditional Chinese elements such as harmony in the family and gratitude into these woodcuts. The artist uses historical visual imagery to convey contemporary concepts and reflections on historical legacy issues. "The prominent feature of political pop art is the juxtaposition of Chinese political symbols and consumer culture symbols, deconstructing and appropriating revolutionary images, and expressing the dual significance of form and cultural themes through humorous and sarcastic rhetoric" (Liu 2016, 73). These works use the technique of appropriation and juxtaposition to balance commercial cultural symbols, political symbols and traditional folk symbols in their creative techniques. These artists have embraced Western postmodern ideas and attempted to borrow elements and symbols from various contexts for juxtaposition;

questioning the authenticity of serious politics and deconstructing the classic narrative of noble and grand politics. By using the methods of appropriation and juxtaposition, the potential space for art to generate new meanings has been increased, allowing the audience to interpret and re-interpret the work according to their own understanding. The original seriousness has become mocking and ironic.

Vulgar art, with a burst of interest, regards commercial culture and popular life as the content of one's own creation, including the scenes of light and wine, singing and dancing, fast food, and machine copying, as well as various commercial cultures of sensuality and materialism that arise in society. In terms of creative techniques, various cultural symbols were forcibly combined together through deconstruction, appropriation, collage and other methods. Vulgar art exhibited the characteristics of immediacy and utilitarianism through exaggerated composition, intensed lighting and gaudy visuals. "The starting point of vulgar art may be irony and criticism, but the spirit conveyed by works was often the object of irony and criticism – the vulgar itself" (Gao Brothers 2003, 196). The ambiguous artistic expression expressed the collective aphasia of vulgar artists. Vulgar artists attempted to express modern life through Teasing and Irony, thereby exploring the social significance of these aspects of life. In terms of its characteristics: firstly, vulgar art borrows the expression methods and context of pop art and vulgar art, making its artistic expression more and more vulgar. Since the popularity of political pop in the West in the 1990s, vulgar art has become a pan-politicized form of vulgar art that caters to the Western art market. Some of the works catered to and pleased the Western postcolonial imagination of Chinese culture; Secondly, vulgar art incorporated ethnic and nostalgic elements in its expressive language. Vulgar art gave people the aesthetic characteristics of creating flat images, colorful vulgarization, symbolic images and aesthetic vulgarization; Thirdly, it also borrowed postmodern structures and methods of appropriation, using image rhetoric and narrative strategies of Teasing and Irony to express images.

5   Suggestions

Firstly, the creative techniques of Teasing and Irony that appear in contemporary art were a form of image rhetoric in semantics. The semantics of ridicule were closer to the expressions of euphemisms, fables, metaphors and fairy tales. In terms of their semantic characteristics, the discourse appeared to be consistent on the surface despite types of logical permutation and diachronic

permutation in the semantic logic; irony had consistent semantics and logic with humor to varying degrees. Irony placed more emphasis on the modification of contradictions and satire, contradictory statements. The reverse usage of word meanings was its logical expression methods. The language rhetoric of Teasing and Irony once been applied to the image expression in contemporary art and the use of this narrative rhetoric and language expression method could more efficiently express the artist's intended expression. The cultural phenomenon of Teasing and Irony in contemporary art was not only a rhetorical device or a narrative strategy but also a way of thinking, a state of mind, an expression of ideas and a cultural model. The way of Teasing and Irony in contemporary art not only allows people to understand the surface meaning that language is intended to express but also requires understanding the underlying meaning of the narrative. In the narrative rhetoric of Teasing and Irony, not only is it necessary to express the author's (speaker's) intention but also the author hopes that readers (listeners) can understand the true purpose they want to achieve. This requires authors and readers to express specific discourse in particular situations.

Secondly, the changes in social, political and economic conditions provided soil for the growth of mockery and irony culture. In the 1990s, with the gradual entry of the market economy, the utopianism and grand narratives held by avant-garde artists were gradually dispelled and the diverse cultural pattern led intellectuals to pay attention to personalized low-level narratives. In the 1990s, there was not only "ruffian literature" represented by Wang Shuo in the field of literature but also some adapted film and television works, such as *The Story of the Editorial Office*, *Love You Not Negotiated*, *Passionate* and *Tell the Truth* and so on; In terms of music, there was a trace of the national elements of Tan Dun's *Heaven, Earth, and Man* in the realm of heaven and man. Cui Jian's pain, loss and confusion in the shouting of rock music *Nothing*. Personalized works such as Zuo Xiaozuzou's *I Can't Sadly Sit by Your Side* and *Journey to the Temple Fair*; Modern dance innovations in dance, such as male versions of *Swan Lake* and non-mainstream street dance; At this time, there were also popular cultural phenomena such as copycat culture, nonmainstream culture and fan culture, which were able to develop in art design, stage performances, and new media dissemination.

Once again, with the changes in social politics and economy, as well as the invasion of postmodern concepts, the attitude of the new generation of artists towards creation has changed. In the creation of contemporary art, there was a crisis in the legalization of classical knowledge, denying classics and subverting authority became advocates of postmodern culture. Postmodernism was like a revolution, bringing uncertainty but also fueling

inherent nature. Uncertainty was not only a reflection of chaotic social reality in the works of writers and artists but also a proactive deconstruction strategy: to break free from the monotonous labor of Western Logos centrism through the agitation of uncertainty and to focus more on grasping accidental events with mysterious codes. "This itself implied indescribability and allowed the senses to keenly feel the impossible, as a result, it became the norm for conceptual art and process art" (Daozi 2007, 156). Pioneer artists faced changing world landscape and surrounding environment. They could not find an appropriate way to separate tradition and modernity. Instead, their way of discourse reconstruction shifted to the cultural system. The concepts and moods of the new generation of artists also shifted when facing reality: from collectivism to individualism, from the metaphysical state to the physical daily life, from anxiety to helplessness, from seriousness to hippy, from responsibility to abandonment, from passion to indifference, from salvation to carefree, from analytical rationality to reflective sensibility, from indirect imagination to direct expression, from adventure to calmness, center to edge, abstract to concrete, poetic to the narrative, and the new generation of artists deconstructed authority and deconstruct classics in their artistic creations. They re-established the concept of time and space and discourse logic through appropriation, juxtaposition, parody and deconstruction, combining social reality, political symbols, commercial and cultural symbols, traditional symbols, and other factors to produce new contextual meanings, thus bringing us a visual effect of Teasing and Irony.

Finally, the reason for the emergence of the sarcastic and ironic culture in contemporary Chinese art lies in the changes in artistic standards. Firstly, it is to follow the development and changes of mainstream Western art. With the influence of Western modernism and postmodernism, contemporary Chinese art has been impacted by the art market and creative concepts have also changed. On the one hand, "Western postmodernism believed that the abstract art of formalism was too monotonous, and art should recall images. However, this is not a return to realism and expressionist art but rather a reorganization of ready-made images in the sense of iconography" (Zhu 2015, 4). On the other hand, "contemporary art stems from the 1960s Western wave art movement, represented by artists such as Henri-Robert-Marcel Duchamp, John Milton Cage Jr. and Joseph Beuys, who believed that 'all forms are possible'. They advocated a return to daily experiences, emphasizing the incidental and procedural nature of art, and utilizing ready-made products and new media for creation. Conceptually, contemporary art opposes the modernist, media-centered definition of art" (Zhu 2015, 4). The pop art featured in the 89 Modern Art Exhibition and the vulgar art exhibition in 1993 aligned Chinese art with the

Western art market. The Venice Biennale in 1993 provided a platform for Chinese contemporary art to gain international exposure and rapidly develop. Since the 1990s, Chinese artists have participated in various international contemporary art exhibitions to establish their discourse and influence in the global market, such as "I don't play cards with Duchamp" in 1991, "The Other Half of the Sky" in 1996, the "New Long March" in 1997, and "Inside Out: New Chinese Art" in 1998. Secondly, it is to follow the changes in the international art market. Chinese contemporary art has gradually formed its discourse power, which has gained favor from foreign galleries and collectors, and has influenced the development of the international art market. With a focus on painting language Chinese art creation began to move towards conceptual art, installation art, performance art, and avant-garde art creation. In the 1990s, the way contemporary Chinese art creation followed foreign markets and ideologies completely. They searched for the foundation and motivation of creation from daily life, with no expectations in spirit and soul, no longer resentful or sad. Teasing and Irony became the main trend of culture.

6   Conclusion

The expression of visual language is influenced not only by the psychological factors of the artist but also by the social and political environment. The development of the entire social ecology determines how artists express themselves through language, often employing circuitous and obscure methods to convey their art. When analyzing works of art, Erwin Panofsky's theory of iconography suggests that interpretations can be categorized into three levels. The first level concerns the natural meaning of artistic works, described as the "pre-image chronicle". Understanding the emergence of playful realism, political pop art, and vulgar art in contemporary art requires a grasp of stylistic history, along with a basic understanding of creative styles and subjects. The second level, termed image analysis, involves the conventional understanding that most people have when interpreting these artistic images, also referred to as customary meaning. This includes understanding the political events depicted in contemporary art, the portrayal of red symbols, and the artist's historical memory. The third level, known as deeper image analysis, delves into the symbolic meaning of the work, also referred to as internal meaning. The inherent significance of Teasing and Irony in contemporary art arises not only from the influence of various political and economic factors domestically and internationally but also from the aesthetic and cognitive habits of the Chinese people themselves.

Genre	Representative artist	Features of the work (surface meaning of the image)	Analysis of the connotation of works
Cynical Realism	Fang Lijun, Liu Wei, Wang Jinsong, Liu Xiaodong, Liu Wei, Yue Minjun, Zeng Fanzhi, Guo Wei, Yang Shaobin, Deng Jianjin, Song Yonghong, Zhong Biao	Through personal reality, express the boredom of life, the lack of ideals and pursuits. Fun and irony: numbness, utopianism.	1. Creative attitude: teasing and mocking; 2. Creative techniques: deconstruction, appropriation, parody, juxtaposition; 3. Narrative rhetoric: metaphorical, symbolic, and allegorical expressions; 4. Aesthetic internal factors: circuitous expressions; Self-protection mechanism; 5. External factors: Political and economic openness at home and abroad.
Political Pop Art	Wang Guangyi, Zhang Xiaogang, Yu Youhan, Li Shan, Geng Jianyi, Wu Shanzhuan, Ye Yongqing, Wang Ziwei, Feng Mengbo, Hong Hao, Liu Dahong, Ren Jian, Wei Guangqing, Qiu Zhijie, Li Bangyao, Yuan Xiaofang	Expressing social and political events or expressing views on society through Teasing and Irony.	
Gaudy Art	Qi Zhilong, Xu Yihui, Yang Wei, Feng Zhengjie, Wang Qingsong, Liu Zheng, Li Luming, Luo Brothers, Liu Liguo, Cong Fangzheng, Liu Zhen, Shen Jingdong, Hu Xiangdong	Artistic creation is carried out through dramatic imitation, emphasizing the expression of colors and creative forms. The images have the characteristics of parody, ridicule and vulgarity.	

The phenomenon of Teasing and Irony in contemporary art cannot be easily criticized or affirmed, as it is constrained by the development inertia of the entire social culture. The phenomenon of Teasing and Irony that has emerged in the development of contemporary Chinese art has changed the fate of art creation as a tool for cultural and even political struggle. The open political and economic environment of the 1990s changed the survival anxiety of

idealists and began to return to the essence of art, enabling the development of diversified art. Traditional elements, political symbols, consumer culture and self-emotions have all become resources for artistic creation. The various elite styles that once led the spiritual trend, such as critical realism, localism, formalism, quintessence, rationalism, modernism … have all solidified into the form of art history. All previous resources, including visual resources and discourse forms from the revolutionary era, have been solidified and transformed into artistic creation symbols. Li Xiaoshan once proposed that "Chinese avant-garde art is not produced for China itself, but is tailor-made for the West. China's avant-garde art has been fully bought out by Western ideology and the Western market" (Li 2007, 313). With the advent of the consumer era and popular culture, China's art development has been able to align with the international market, so various art forms, methods and styles have consciously found their own positioning in the circulation of the market. Artists can use methods such as deconstruction, collage and appropriation to reorganize visual resources from different historical time and space into new meanings. Various eras have also emerged in terms of artistic style, language style and technical expression.

The political pop, mischievous realism, and vulgar art that emerged in the 1990s used humor and irony to alleviate various social pressures and political contradictions, while objectively catering to the Western postcolonial imagination of the Chinese people. Firstly, there are phenomena worthy of mockery and satire in China's real life, which form the basis for the widespread prevalence of mockery and satire. Secondly, in terms of artistic expression, artists often refrain from expressing their true attitudes directly due to external pressures and prevailing concepts. The artist's sensitive exploration of these issues enables them to express avant-garde ideas. According to Paul Gladstone's interview in "What is China's avant-garde art," he believes that "China's avant-garde art retains a political edge even when avoiding direct politics, leading art presentation to lean towards realism." Once again, artists maintain a skeptical attitude towards their subjects, reflecting on them without reaching definitive conclusions, thereby maintaining a certain distance. The emergence of a culture of satire and mockery arises from the feeling of powerlessness induced by various potent social pressures, depicting the mindset of Chinese intellectuals who are "sad but not hurt, mournful but not sorrowful, resentful but not indignant." In 2000, Chen Danqing also painted a group of realistic leader portraits. The 13 paintings reflect the spiritual outlook of leaders in different periods. The images are more vivid and lifelike. At the same time, they also represent the questions and thoughts of a group of Chinese intellectuals who came out of the "Cultural Revolution" with faith, pursuit, passion, and

fanaticism in the middle of the century and calm, reflection, repentance and critic ism at the end of the century, a process from shallow to deep, from ignorance to maturity. He said: "All my works only give questions, not answers. The 'answer' is always a very complicated 'question'" (Chen 1998, 49).

With the development of postmodernism and globalization, many artists have begun creating politically charged works in a vulgar manner to gain recognition in the international art market. Some even manipulate history to blend Chinese and Western cultures, catering to Western ideologies through Teasing and Irony, thus becoming entangled in the postcolonial cultural system. "This postmodern trend of thought, involving the subversion of power, discourse, center, and aesthetics, has shifted towards anti-power, anti-center, anti-discourse, and anti-aesthetics. Studies on postmodernism have pursued various academic intentions, including fostering a postmodern spirit, critiquing postmodernism, and evaluating its positive and negative aspects. It shares several connections with postcolonialism and, naturally, creates some internal tension within the Chinese cultural phenomenon" (Wang 1999, 73). It is worth noting that this trend of Teasing and Irony in art has led to a trend toward vulgar and interesting styles in easel painting, which has expanded to fields such as installation, conceptual and performance art. It spread in Chinese novels, movies, stage performances and new media art in the 1990s and has also led to increasing opportunism and new kitsch phenomena in contemporary art. The Teasing and Irony works of art that appear in contemporary Chinese art have inherent social meanings, just like Michel's profound insight into the meaning of images in "Iconology": "The relationship between words and images reflects our relationship between symbols and the world, symbols and their meanings in the fields of reproduction, meaning, and communication." (Mitchell 2012, 5) "With the postmodern 'exhaustion' of nihilism, a deep cynicism and a 'postcolonial' helplessness in innovation (in both the West and the East)" (Wang 2000, 298). With the economic crisis in the international market, magnificent contemporary art has declined and come to an end under the impact of the revival of traditional Chinese art and culture. The development of contemporary Chinese art has gradually shifted to viewing the revival of traditional Chinese culture as an opportunity. Based on China itself and radiating to the world, it aims to construct a contemporary art scene with Chinese style and spirit.

Acknowledgements

systematically examined the spiritual expression of traditional brushstrokes in ancient Chinese painting and the aesthetic styles of contemporary artists. This article represents a part of my exploration into contemporary Chinese art. Professor Sone Simatrang from the University of the Arts of Thailand provided extensive guidance, while I also benefited from the insights of Professor Veerawat Sirivesmas and Professor Eakachat Joneurairatana on artistic concepts. Under their mentorship, I reviewed a substantial body of literature. During my investigation into contemporary Chinese art, I identified a challenge in the way Chinese artists express themselves. In terms of artistic expression, they tend not to communicate directly but rather employ metaphorical, allegorical, and symbolic languages in their art. China's playful realism, political pop art, and vulgar art often mimic contemporary Western art dramatically. These imitations borrow from foreign art to reflect on life and social issues, avoiding direct criticism and instead employing 'Teasing' and Irony to voice personal aspirations for democratic politics. Some artists create work primarily for financial gain, catering to the Western international art market, which politicizes their art. I am grateful for the support received from other teachers and friends, throughout my research on contemporary Chinese art. Thank you all!

References

Chen, Danqing. 1998. "Visual Experience and Artistic Concepts." *Art Research* 1 (89).
Daozi. 2007. Postmodernism Art Pedigree. Chongqing Publishing House.
Gao Brothers. 2003. *Report on the Artistic State of Chinese Contemporary Art Tendency Series*. Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House.

Greenberg, Clement. 2004. *Avant Garde and Vulgarity. The Decline of New York -- World Art Literature.* Edited by Yi Ying, Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House.

Gu, Chengfeng. 1999. *Feel the Temptation.* Chongqing Publishing House.

Li, Xianting. What is important is not art. Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House 2000 edition.

Li, Xiaoshan. 2007. "The Current Situation of Chinese Avant-garde Art." In The Most Valuable Avant-garde Art Review of Bingtie 1979-2005, edited by Jia Wei. Dunhuang: Dunhuang Literature and Art Publishing House.

Liu, Yongliang. 2016. "The Appropriation and Deconstruction of Leader Images in Contemporary Art." Qilu Art Park3.

Lv, Peng. 2000. *1990-1999 Chinese Contemporary Art History.* Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House.

Lv, Peng. 2007. *20th Century Chinese Art History.* Peking University Press.

Mitchell, W. J. T. 2012. *Iconology Image Text Ideology.* Translated by Chen Yongguo. Peking University Press.

Wang, Yuechuan. 1999. "The Deep Problems of China's Discourse Transformation in the 1990s." Literature Review 3.

Wang, Yuechuan. 2000. *Chinese Mirrors: Cultural Studies in the 1990s.* Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Publishing House.

Yi, Ying. 2007. "The Historical Changes of Political Pop." Journal of Nanjing Academy of Arts (Art and Design Edition).

Zhang, Xiaoling. 2010. *Cultural Fables of Chinese Society in the Age of Consumerism.* Jilin Fine Arts Publishing House.

Zhu, Qi. 2015. *Selected Works of Zhu Qi from the Chinese Contemporary Art Library.* Shanxi Publishing and Media Group.