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Lin Tianmiao's Threads and the Art of Ambivalence

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This thesis examines Chinese artist Lin Tianmiao's (1961-) usage of white cotton thread in the multimedia installations *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* (1995), *Bound and Unbound* (1997), and *Braiding* (1998). A socially feminized material, thread and its centrality in Lin's installations has engendered numerous interpretations circumscribed within problematic, essentializing lenses of feminism and dissidence. Conversely, this paper argues that Lin not only uses thread to meditate on the tangled relationship between labor and gender identity, but also to enunciate ambivalent feelings towards her own experiences of womanhood—experiences especially complex as they were molded by the discordant gender ideologies of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Epitomizing contradictory meanings and histories, thread, an ambivalent material in its own right, complements Lin's endeavor to visualize her attachments and repulsions toward being woman.

The thesis of Natalie Lien Zhang is approved.

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Introduction

Lin Tianmiao's 林天苗 (b. 1961) multimedia installations allude to classic ideals of femininity while conjuring uncanny scenes of domestic interiority. White cotton thread abounds in ovum-like skeins in *The Proliferation of Thread Winding* (1995), wraps the contours of hundreds of domestic instruments in *Bound and Unbound* (1997), and, like hair, is plaited into a braid of infinite lengths in *Braiding* (1998). The spinning and weaving of thread, a socially feminized material, seemingly accentuates women's performances of gendered identity through various forms of labor—this ranges from the act of grooming to the more physically and emotionally demanding act of childbirth. Monitors, embedded in each installation, break the stillness of Lin's environments, playing videos of her disembodied hands winding and binding thread in a recursive loop. The magnification of this simple, repetitive labor at the foundation of each work generates a sense of precarity and ambiguity– is this performance of womanhood freeing, or is it stultifying? Is it volitional or compulsory? Does this elevate women's work, or condemn patriarchy's binds?

The artist has repeatedly stated that her installations derive from her experience as a Chinese woman–an experience that is especially thorny given the contradictions of the different gender orders that she endured during and after the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).[1] It is through thread that Lin Tianmiao draws upon a tangled history of gendered labor to convey her ambivalence toward her complex experiences of womanhood. Historically, thread

[1] Peggy Wang, "Tensile Strength: Threads of Resistance in Lin Tianmiao's Art.," *Positions: Asia Critique* 28, no. 1 (February 2020): 121.

had been a medium that "manufactured femininities as it manufactured cloth" in China.[2] The 5th century BCE adage "男耕女织" *nan geng nü zhi* (men till, women weave), conveys the significance of textile work as a defining aspect of womanhood and a clearly delineated sociospatial relationship between women working "inside" and men "outside" the home. Although textile work had been a respected domain of women's knowledge for millennia, it nevertheless embodied the fraught intersection where threads of oppression were interwoven with empowerment. As gendered divisions of labor were vital in allocating textual and oratorial matters to the outer sphere, male authority legitimized ideals of femininity to sustain social order. Statesmen and philosophers had considerable influence in shaping the parameters of womanhood and regarded textile work as an ideal practice to inculcate young women with values of self-discipline, productivity, and diligence. Nevertheless, the same threads were central to the development of women's sense of purpose, self-worth, creativity, and pride. Despite being a domestic activity, weaving, sewing, and embroidering were inherently powerful as they connected women to the outside world—the reproduction of the Chinese social fabric lay directly in their hands.[3]

During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the turbulent sociopolitical movement where Communist leader Mao Zedong (1893-1976) sought to reconstruct a society free from capitalist influences, longstanding paradigms of "women's work" were aggressively challenged. Mao perceived domesticity as a marker of backwardness; unpaid domestic labor did not achieve anything beyond family-oriented consumption, exacerbated gender inequality, and prevented

[2] Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 176.

[3] Ibid.

women from contributing to state-building efforts.[4]As put by Jacob Eyferth, "To the extent that [domestic labor] was perceived at all, it came to be thought of as part of physical reproduction: necessary perhaps, but repetitive, circular, and ultimately futile." [5] Echoing the Engelsian idea that women's liberation rested on their involvement in paid, public work, Mao publicly heroized women's participation in "productive" labor and minimized their domestic labor through official media. [6] Lin Tianmiao, who came of age during that decade, bore witness to the incongruencies of the state's gender equalization project. Despite the state's inability to meet the necessary material conditions to sustain women's full-time work, women quietly accepted their domestic duties in the wake of its very public denigration.[7] Material scarcity drove many women to repurpose factory workers' dirtied garments at home, where after hours, they transformed used cotton uniforms and gloves into yards of valuable thread.[8] Once more, thread would persist as a symbol of women's overlapping freedom and subordination. Repurposed thread not only served practical mending projects, but also facilitated creative hobbies and the making of *xiaozi,* "petit-bourgeoisie" items for one's private enjoyment. [9] Young Lin Tianmiao was tasked by her mother to unravel white cotton gloves and rewind the thread into a neat skein. [10] She despised its tedium,

[4] Phyllis Andors, "Politics of Chinese Development: The Case of Women, 1960-1966," *Signs* 2, no. 1 (1976): 93, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173423.

[5] Jacob Eyferth, "Women's Work and the Politics of Homespun in Socialist China, 1949–1980," *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 3 (September 13, 2012): 375. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020859012000521.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Yihong Jin, Kimberley Ens Manning, and Lianyun Chu, "Rethinking the 'Iron Girls': Gender and Labour during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," *Gender & History* 18, no. 3 (November 2006): 629, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2006.00458.x.

[8] Yunfan Sun. Interview: Lin Tianmiao on Art, Influence, and "Bodily Reaction" as Inspiration, interview by Yunfan Sun, *Asia Society*, September 26, 2012, https://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/interview-lin-tianmiao-art-influence-and-bodily-reaction-inspiration.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

deeming it "corporal punishment."[11] Upon the birth of her artistic career three decades later, she would unexpectedly gravitate in the direction of white cotton thread and center her practice around the techniques of winding and binding.

While Lin's installations do reveal the numerous inconsistencies of Maoist gender ideologies, they do not seek to be outwardly polemical or galvanizing. Instead, they provide her the space to enunciate her subjectivity and express the various textures of her thoughts and emotions. In this paper, I argue that Lin's manipulation of thread in *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* (1995), *Bound and Unbound* (1997), and *Braiding* (1998) allowed her to process the uneven gender ideologies she endured while articulating her ambivalence towards the various forms of labor that make *woman*—each work grapples with contentious issues pertaining to women such as childbirth, housework, and gender expression. To quote art historian Ellen Tani, ambivalence is a "productive vehicle for keeping conflicting desires in suspension, of recognizing irreconcilable conditions in order to hold space beyond them." [12] Thus, Lin's fixation with thread, a material pregnant with contradicting meanings and histories, visualizes both her attachments and repulsions toward various facets of womanhood. Moreover, by infusing 'quotidian' objects like thread with layers of embodied experiences and memories, she challenges viewers to acknowledge the complexities of what is felt in addition to what is seen.

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[11] Lin Tianmiao, "Wrapping and Severing (1997)," in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. Wu Hung and Peggy Wang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 197.

[12] Ellen Tani, "'Come out to Show Them': Speech and Ambivalence in the Work of Steve Reich and Glenn Ligon," *Art Journal* 78, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 30, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2019.1684107.

Artist Biography

Lin Tianmiao was born in Taiyuan, Shanxi, in 1961, making her part of a generation of Chinese women whose formative years were shaped by the Cultural Revolution.[13] Her nascent understanding of womanhood was thus informed by the uneven parameters of Maoist gender ideology. As women's "liberation" was ensconced in the state's overarching agenda of industrialization and economic growth, Mao Zedong proposed that gender equality hinged on the mass mobilization of women into the labor force. The state widely disseminated didactic images of brawny heroines performing future-forward labor once exclusive to men, often appending them with Mao's rousing declarations of gender equality. However triumphant and assured his statements such as "Women hold up half the sky" (妇女能顶半边天） and "the times have changed, men and women are the same" (时代不同了， 男女都一样) may appear, they belied the persisting inequalities in women's private lives that remained unspoken.[14]

Indeed, Mao's gender equalization project was ultimately selective and did not penetrate the domestic sphere. Redistribution of domestic labor among men and women was rare; women worked along unstated gender lines as they balanced the "invisible" yet obligatory responsibilities of childrearing and housework alongside their public endeavors. [15] Though "the divide between work in public and work in private was increasingly defined as a divide between revolutionary and non-revolutionary deeds," paradoxically, women's domestic labor buttressed

[13] Karen Smith, "Lin Tianmiao," in *Lin Tianmiao: Non-Zero* (Beijing: Beijing Tokyo Art Projects and Timezone 8, 2004), 5.

[14] Yihong Jin, Kimberley Ens Manning, and Lianyun Chu, "Rethinking the 'Iron Girls': Gender and Labour during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," *Gender & History* 18, no. 3 (November 2006): 617, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2006.00458.x.

[15] Jacob Eyferth, "Women's Work and the Politics of Homespun in Socialist China, 1949–1980," *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 3 (September 13, 2012): 390. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020859012000521.

Communist accumulation. [16] As aforementioned, resourceful women saw dirtied factory garments as reservoirs of precious thread and endless possibilities: they could be used for sewing, darning, and embroidering. Washed, dried, and rewound, the thread could even be surreptitiously exchanged for ration tickets or other essential commodities.[17] For women, thread was both a harbinger of new clothes and fuller stomachs, as well as a reminder of one's never-ending domestic labor.

Lin Tianmiao's first engagements with thread occurred under these fraught conditions. At the age of four, she was first assigned by her mother to unravel pilfered white cotton gloves and rewind their loose threads into skeins. [18] Acknowledging her daughter's natural dexterity and determination, Lin's mother eventually designated the task of unraveling and raveling to Lin. Lin's relationship with the material came to be equally fraught. As a rambunctious tomboy, she despised the chore, but would inexplicably return to the activity without fail.[19] Her keen sensitivity toward material and her natural affinity to tactile, repetitive processes like thread-winding would serve her well in an apprenticeship to a shadow puppet-maker in her teens, during which she meticulously sharpened her master's set of hundred carving knives each morning.[20]

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[16] Yihong Jin, Kimberley Ens Manning, and Lianyun Chu, "Rethinking the 'Iron Girls': Gender and Labour during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," *Gender & History* 18, no. 3 (November 2006): 629, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2006.00458.x.

[17] Jacob Eyferth, "Women's Work and the Politics of Homespun in Socialist China, 1949–1980," *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 3 (September 13, 2012): 377. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020859012000521.

[18] Karen Smith, "Lin Tianmiao," in *Lin Tianmiao: Non Zero* (Beijing: Beijing Tokyo Art Projects and Timezone 8, 2004), 9.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Sam Gaskin, "Lin Tianmiao Speaks to Artnet News about the Art of Endurance," artnet News (artnet, October 1, 2015), https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artist-lin-tianmiao-artwork-336164.

Following the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, Lin enrolled in courses at Capital Normal University Beijing (CNU), a teacher's college, where she trained in the Socialist Realism tradition and considered a future career in art pedagogy.[21] At CNU she met her future husband, the artist Wang Gongxin (1960-), and the two sojourned to New York in the early 1980s, where Wang was a visiting scholar at SUNY Cortland.[22] Lin immediately took to the flourishing avant-garde art scene of New York City and was overwhelmed by the new avenues of expression. She abandoned her plans to teach art, citing the mechanic application and memorization of art theories as the reason behind her decision.[23] Instead of swiftly inaugurating her artistic career, Lin decided to pursue textile design. Ironically, she had returned to the materials and processes of her past that she had once derided. Her deep appreciation for materials and the labor required to transform them clearly endured. However, after eight years, Lin once again felt restricted by the tedium of pattern-making. Was it she who controlled the material, or did the material control her?

This deeply entrenched ambivalence toward thread was foundational to Lin Tianmiao's art career, which formally began her return to China in 1994. Lin's move was purely intuitive; she knew the experimental art from New York City that inspired her would not be favorably received in her home country and could be politically risky. Most commercial galleries in China were hesitant to exhibit "new media" art, which led to a lack of domestic and international media

[21] Peggy Wang, "Subversion, Culture Shock, and 'Women's Art': An Interview with Lin Tianmiao." Interview by Peggy Wang. N. paradoxa International Feminist Art Journal 29 (January 2012): 23.

[22] Barbara London, "China: Then and Now," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 11, no. 3 (2012): 13–29, http://yishu-online.com/wp-content/uploads/mm-products_issues/uploads/yishu_50.pdf.

[23] Karen Smith, "Lin Tianmiao," in *Lin Tianmiao: Non-Zero* (Beijing: Beijing Tokyo Art Projects and Timezone 8, 2004), 9.

attention, and overall, a paucity of financial resources.[24] Yet, she was compelled to disrupt the "monoculture" of Chinese avant-garde art with her unapologetic individualism.[25] To her, the Chinese avant-garde that had emerged in 1989 was preoccupied with an aesthetic of "collective consciousness and political resistance" and was losing its experimental edge after surging in popularity overseas.[26]

Lin had been correct in assuming that new media art did not yet have a place in China, however, she privileged personal experience as paramount to artmaking and decided to carve out the space for it.[27] As a result, Lin, Wang, and an intimate group of like-minded peers such as Yin Xiuzhen (1963-) and Song Dong (1966-) retreated to their apartments out of necessity, seeking creative freedom in the domestic.[28] They utilized and repurposed inexpensive materials to "produce a number of unsalable and uninhabitable installations" that were intended to "communicate only with a small audience of artists and interested persons."[29] It was during this period that Lin Tianmiao would fortuitously gravitate back toward the white cotton thread and technique of thread winding from her childhood. In a 1997 artist's statement entitled *Wrapping and Severing*, Lin pondered the special relationship that had developed between her and her materials:

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[24] Gao Minglu, "From Elite to Small Man: The Many Faces of a Transitional Avant-Garde in Mainland China," in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, ed. Minglu Gao (University of California Press: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1998), 161.

[25] Kang Kang, "Lin Tianmiao with Kang Kang," The Brooklyn Rail, October 5, 2017, https://brooklynrail.org/2017/10/art/LIN-TIANMIAO-with-Kang-Kang.
[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Peggy Wang, "Subversion, Culture Shock, and 'Women's Art': An Interview with Lin Tianmiao." Interview by Peggy Wang. N.paradoxa International Feminist Art Journal 29 (January 2012): 24.

[29] Gao Minglu, "From Elite to Small Man: The Many Faces of a Transitional Avant-Garde in Mainland China," in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, ed. Minglu Gao (University of California Press: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1998), 161.

> Wrapping once started off as corporal punishment– Every day I would wrap a little, and with each passing day like this, I felt perfectly calm and psychologically at ease. The concept of "corporal punishment" also changed: Was I being punished, or did I go looking for this punishment?

For Lin, thread transformed her as much as she transformed it. The repetitive labor required of her, while stifling, could be generative—even meditative—and facilitated self-reflection. Self-reflexive, mutable, and brimming with histories of women's embodied knowledge, thread presented itself as an ideal medium to communicate Lin's innermost feelings towards womanhood.

Her first multimedia installation entitled *The Proliferation of Thread Winding* 缠的扩散 (1995) debuted at her home, Baofang Hutong #12, shortly after her return to Beijing.[30] The installation featured thousands of half-spooled balls of white thread connected to a mass of sewing needles atop a bed. Embedded in the bed's pillow was a monitor playing a video of Lin's hand raveling and unraveling in a recursive loop. The unassuming motions behind the overgrowth of thread re-presented the woman's laboring hand, often rendered invisible, as a disquieting, formidable power.

Lin's unconventional medium, venue, and dizzyingly meticulous handiwork quickly garnered attention. While her burgeoning career coincided with the "explosive domestic and international interest in contemporary art produced by Chinese women" that occurred during the mid-1990s, Lin found her work "trapped within interpretations about both gender and nation according to problematic metrics of sameness and difference."[31] Domestically and

[30] Kang Kang, "Lin Tianmiao with Kang Kang," The Brooklyn Rail, October 5, 2017, https://brooklynrail.org/2017/10/art/LIN-TIANMIAO-with-Kang-Kang.

[31] Peggy Wang, "Tensile Strength: Threads of Resistance in Lin Tianmiao's Art.," *Positions: Asia Critique* 28, no. 1 (February 2020): 121.

internationally, Chinese women artists like Lin were vulnerable to the politics of curatorial agendas. For example, the effort to recognize women artists' gender consciousness in China had devolved into essentialization. In the monumental exhibit Century Woman (1998), curator Jia Fangzhou asserted that all Chinese women's art, or *nü xing yishu*（女性艺术）was distinguishable by its "childlike fantasy," apoliticism, usage of socially feminized materials, and disinterest in representing the male world. [32] Abroad, Lin Tianmiao was burdened by problematic translations of *nüxing yishu* into 'feminist art,' which would undoubtedly color the interpretations of her installations as broad critiques of the Chinese patriarchy or a symbolic elevation of women's craft practices. While labeling Lin as 'feminist' may have "promised a way of bridging cultural difference by offering commentary on the shared female experience of patriarchy," it flattened her culturally specific experiences of womanhood and reinforced understandings of her work as "a local, particular instantiation of the 'universal Western model' of feminist art."[33]

To move beyond interpreting Lin Tianmiao's works in oversimplified frameworks of *nüxing yishu* and feminist art is to center the personal histories embedded within her thread. It requires greater weight given to the historical context where her initial contact with thread originated, as well as the conditions that shaped her understanding and experiences of

[32] Jia Fangzhou's attempt to highlight the gender consciousness of women artists were essentializing as much as it was well-intentioned. According to Jia: "The criteria for selecting the work was not determined by the fame or achievement of each individual alone, but focused on whether or not the artist's work demonstrated 'female characteristics' or was experienced from a 'woman's perspective.'" Paradoxically, what constituted as "Women's Art" became determined by men, and what aimed to platform women artists eventually confined them to a laundry list of expectations. Jia Fangzhou, *Century Women: Art Exhibition* (Beijing: Shijie huaren yishu chubanshe, 1998), n.p.

[33] Sasha Su-Ling Welland, *Experimental Beijing: Gender and Globalization in Chinese Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018) 172. Also in Peggy Wang, "Tensile Strength: Threads of Resistance in Lin Tianmiao's Art.," *Positions: Asia Critique* 28, no. 1 (February 2020): 123.

womanhood. Only when these measures have been taken can her nuanced expressions of ambivalence come to the surface.

The Proliferation of Threadwinding 缠的扩散 (1995)

First staged within a makeshift gallery space in Lin Tianmiao's own home, *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* (1995) 缠的扩散 (Figure 1) confronts viewers with an unsettling domestic scene, rife with tension. Lin uses unassuming, everyday materials, like white cotton thread, to broach the labor of childbirth—an especially contentious issue during the Cultural Revolution. Not only does she evoke the female reproductive system through socially feminized materials, but she also presents it as a site of a power struggle between woman and state. Here, Lin likens the process of thread winding to reproduction, as both activities encapsulate her contradictory feelings regarding gendered divisions of labor.

The first staging of *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* forced audience members to physically traverse the threshold between public and private space; only by "trespassing" on Lin's personal residence could they be privy to these domestic matters. Within Lin's home, viewers bore witness to the transformation of mundane items such as thread, needles, and paper into entities beyond recognition. At the center of the 1995 installation is an austere metal-framed bed, where twenty-thousand industrial sewing needles pierce the surface of the white mattress. The tufted, oblong mass softens the menacing forms of individual needles, despite their collective prick (Figure 2). Strands of white cotton thread are painstakingly threaded through needle eyes, radiating out toward the floor, each eventually joining a spherical, ping-pong ball-shaped skein. Soft and malleable, thread often makes itself insignificant as it disappears into

warp and weft. Yet, in *The Proliferation of Threadwinding,* its sheer volume and sense of expansion imbue it with an aura of threat.

Upon closer scrutiny, the scene is charged with allusions to procreation. Both the domestic setting of *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* and the presence of the bed evoke intimate space and labor. The configuration of needles atop the mattress bears an uncanny resemblance to the abstracted form of female genitalia, and its texture possesses a wiry yet downy quality akin to pubic hair. Extending outwards in all directions, the skeins of thread suggest spores or cells—specifically ova (Figure 3). Lin Tianmiao's visualization of the female reproductive system not only recuperates a form of labor that had been devalued during the Cultural Revolution but also the bodily realities of women the state had masked. Mao Zedong, whose conception of gender equality measured women by a male standard of success, was unable to reconcile women's biological differences with his rejection of biological determinism.[34] The state thus encouraged women to simulate their male peers through dress, labor, and behavior, so as to be "taken seriously as [the] symbols of progress and struggle that revolutionary men stood for."[35] Widely disseminated posters that were part of Mao's scopic regime, such as *Thoroughly Criticize the 'Theory of Human Nature' of the Landlord and Capitalist Classes*, attest to the conflation of women's masculinization with gender equality (Figure 4). Official discourse often circumvented explicit references to women's biological differences, particularly their reproductive biology, to avoid reinforcing the stereotype that women's primary roles were limited to reproduction. Consequently, women contended with

[34] Emily Honig, "Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader," in *Maoist Mappings of Gender: Reassessing the Red Guards* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 2002), 264.

[35] Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China: Dominant Discourses of Female Sexuality and Gender since 1949* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 27.

balancing public and private identities. The ideal woman during the Cultural Revolution was "a kind of socialist androgyne: for public purposes a man, at home a loving wife and mother; genderless in public, chaste wives and selfless mothers in private."[36] As put by Mayfair Yang, "It was only when she [a woman] became pregnant and her body swelled up that the category of gender intruded on her self-identity and all who saw the physical markers of her sex."[37] Literally bringing the internal workings of women's bodies to the forefront, Lin Tianmiao reminds her viewers of the uniquely embodied dimensions of womanhood left unrepresented and unaddressed during the Maoist regime.

An enormous pair of trousers made out of white paper hangs to the left of the bed; its exaggeratedly long legs fold and collide into the sprawling threads on the floor. The pants' colossal proportions and pre-established association with masculinity signify an indomitable, patriarchal authority. By overlooking the bed, the pants looming on the vulvic patch of needles evoke a scene of male domination and female subordination, and the intrusive presence is heightened by the pants' undone fly—implicating the potential aftermath of sexual activity. If the bed and needles are indicative of women's reproductive biologies, the pants' encroachment on the sprawling threads and its looming presence communicates the Maoist state's omnipresence and intervention in women's reproductive matters. While the state rejected the stereotype that women's primary roles were reproductive, it recognized that harnessing women's reproductive functions were crucial to maintaining societal stability. Women's bodies were the key to

[36] Marilyn Young, "Chicken Little in China: Some Reflections on Women," in *Marxism and the Chinese Experience* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 256.

[37] Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women's Public Sphere in China," in *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, ed. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (Minneapolis, MN: University Of Minnesota Press, 1999), 41.

population control and the improvement of *su zhi*, or the quality of life.[38] By eliminating traditional, patriarchal family structures and mobilizing women to enter the workforce, the state effectively reduced the authority of male kin. As the state came to "administer women's labor and reproduction directly and transform them into loyal state subjects" it would essentially install itself as the patriarchy, reproducing an almost identical power dynamic.[39] Lin Tianmiao's vaginal cavity of needles, an essentialized image of woman, accounts for the state's tacit perception of women as reproductive machines.

A number of elements blur the boundaries between male/female, hard/soft, and dominated/subjugated in *The Proliferation of Threadwinding,* contributing to its ambiguous message. Scattered clusters of needles migrate from the tufted mass onto the pants; As the needles puncture the surface of the groin area, they destroy its facade of masculine impenetrability (Figure 5). Contrary to their dynamism, the network of white threads is suspended in movement – it is ultimately unclear what their relationship is to the cluster of needles. If perceived as radiating outwards, the threads simulate ova spilling out of a fecund, vaginal cavity. Conversely, when perceiving the thread as moving inwards, the cavity is inundated by sperm cells. Who is oppressing whom? Who overcomes what? Is the work about women's reproductive power or the state's exploitation of it? Both?

A monitor embedded in the bed's pillow heightens the tension between these elements as it plays a looping video of Lin's disembodied hands winding and unwinding thread (Figure 6). Mechanical and rhythmic, it remains unclear whether her repetitive labor stems from compulsion

[38] Ann Anagnost, "The Corporeal Politics of Quality (Suzhi)," *Public Culture* 16, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 190, https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-16-2-189.

[39] Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women's Public Sphere in China," in *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, ed. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (Minneapolis, MN: University Of Minnesota Press, 1999), 46.

or volition. Juxtaposed with the profusion of white thread in the work, the rhythmic movement of Lin's hands prompts viewers to acknowledge the uncomplicated action at its foundation and the transformative power of women's labor. Simultaneously, the restrained nature of her movements recalls the vexed conditions that engendered them and continue to be perpetuated. Lin deliberately likens the act of thread winding to physical reproduction as both acts embody contradictions: they are concurrently generative and stultifying. The duality of the installation encompasses the Maoist state's viewpoint that childbirth and textile work were nothing more than insignificant modes of production to be regulated. Concurrently, it communicates how the mundane and restrictive nature of this labor would give way to physical and emotional self-transformation. Like using fibers to make a certain weave or pattern, procreation was systematic, cyclical, and labor intensive. Yet, it possessed the capability to generate a unique product each time—in tangible and intangible forms alike. During the early stages of fabricating the installation which happened to involve a small group of friends, Lin observed that the seemingly trivial process of thread winding was capable of bringing forth new truths:

> What is true is that individual characters were really revealed through this simple and tedious action. Some people felt calm and relaxed; some tortured and unable to bear it; some of my friends became puzzled whilst others were impatient, and some even seemed bewitched and unable to stop. Beneath the exterior of this seemingly mild and feminized behavior was hidden an inexplicable sense of threat and expansion.[40]

As *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* gradually came into being, so did Lin and her collaborators. Re-harnessing the powerful yet painful act of thread winding would allow Lin Tianmiao to reconcile the aberrances of her past with her present and to articulate her emotional perplexities.

[40] Roxana Marcoci, "Lin Tianmiao," in *Threads of Vision: Toward a New Feminine Poetics* (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 2001), 48.

Bound and Unbound 缠了再揭开 (1997)

Lin Tianmiao's fixation with thread winding did not cease after *The Proliferation of Threadwinding*; from 1995 to 1997, she began to mummify time-worn, domestic objects from her own life. Her operation was unsparing and comprehensive–objects of various sizes and intricacies like coal briquette stoves, chopsticks, teacups, and saucers all succumbed to her thread. [41] The process culminated in approximately 800 thread-bound items, which laid the foundation of her subsequent installation, *Bound and Unbound* (1997) *缠了再剪开* (Figure 7). In an artist's statement, Lin described the impetus for this work:

> The impression that such old-fashioned utensils conjure a natural, familiar, harmonious way of life is annihilated by the concept of modern lifestyles. New values negate old ones, and at the same time make it very difficult for people to make rational judgments and choices about them. I, too, find it all confusing, so I simply bound all of these things up. [42]

Bound and Unbound is not solely concerned with the loss of culturally specific expression to rapid globalization. Lin Tianmiao's amassment and display of these objects publicly recognize the diverse forms of household labor rendered invisible by the state, yet consistently shouldered by women. Moreover, she gives primacy to articulating "confusing" feelings surrounding the labor once facilitated by these utensils. By binding these emotionally fraught instruments, Lin articulates intersecting feelings of nostalgia and resentment toward the past.

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[41] Luise Guest, *Half the Sky: Conversations with Women Artists in China* (Dawes Point, New South Wales: Piper Press, 2016), 60.

[42] Lin Tianmiao, "Wrapping and Severing (1997)," in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. Wu Hung and Peggy Wang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 197.

Bound and Unbound was first displayed at the gallery attached to Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts.[43] Hundreds of thread-bound objects ranging from small spoons to more cumbersome items like sewing machines were laid out on the floor. Lin Tianmiao's neat, exacting handiwork contrasted with their state of disarray–numerous objects were toppled over and strewn across the space. Like shrouded bodies discarded in a junkyard, the artist dangles her objects between categories of relic and refuse. Lin's white cotton thread accentuates the objects' external forms while erasing all traces of individualizing surface detail–they are simultaneously visible and invisible (Figures 8 and 9). Through concealing, she reveals how the mysterious objects parallel the liminal status of women's domestic labor during the Cultural Revolution.

Issues of gender inequality proved to be deeply ingrained within Chinese society and could not be simply resolved through matters of labor. Beneath the facade of women's liberation upheld by images of intrepid women workers, socialist transformation largely took place without challenging traditional gender roles.[44] Gender equality was ultimately in the service of the state and thus, unevenly applied. For example, when women's traditional gender roles were deemed "feudal," "bourgeois," and preventive to their participation in the world of work and politics, women's public employment was glorified by the state through heroizing posters. As allegories of socialist progress, these women were depicted performing traditionally masculine tasks, such as welding, line working, and operating tractors (Figures 10, 11, 12).[45] While critical to

[43] Asian Art Archive, *Bound, Unbound 95-97 Installation, 纏了，再剪開 95-97 藝術展*, Pamphlet, *Asian Art Archive*, accessed March 15, 2022, https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/library/bound-unbound-95-97-installation-95-97.

[44] Jiping Zuo, "Women's Liberation and Gender Obligation Equality in Urban China: Work/Family Experiences of Married Individuals in the 1950s," *Science & Society* 77, no. 1 (January 2013): 117, https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.2013.77.1.98.

[45] Marilyn Young, "Chicken Little in China: Some Reflections on Women," in *Marxism and the Chinese Experience* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 256.

bolstering the state's scopic regime, these posters belied the actualities of unstated gender lines that dictated women's work in public and private. In public, most women were placed into auxiliary, non-technical, and service jobs by the state regardless of their education level—far from what these posters conveyed.[46] In private, little was done by the state to alleviate women's domestic duties. Rather than urging husbands to alleviate their wives' burdens, Mao framed women's revolutionary duties as requiring self-sacrifice—women could heroically "overcome" feudal ways of thinking and the "family burden" by shouldering their various obligations.[47] Whether women actually wanted to prove themselves by shouldering these responsibilities was not important— they had little to no choice but to acquiesce.

Lin Tianmiao puts pressure upon the state's arbitrary distinctions between "productive" (public) and "reproductive" (private) labor. By symbolically inserting instruments of domestic labor into an exhibition space, Lin urges her viewers to reassess these objects beyond their functionality. Despite being bound, objects such as chopsticks, lamps, ironing boards, stoves, woks, teapots, and cleavers are discernible by their silhouettes. The sheer variety of objects, all vital to everyday operations, corroborate the diversity of labor women attended to in private. Clearly, the women who wielded these tools bolstered socialist production rather than hindering it.

By dramatizing and reiterating the forms of her objects through thread, Lin continues to challenge her viewers' perceptions of value. Her white cotton thread physically estranges her objects from performing their functions yet retains their original forms. As she de-emphasizes

[46] Phyllis Andors, "Politics of Chinese Development: The Case of Women, 1960-1966," *Signs* 2, no. 1 (1976): 96, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173423.

[47] Yihong Jin, Kimberley Ens Manning, and Lianyun Chu, "Rethinking the 'Iron Girls': Gender and Labour during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," *Gender & History* 18, no. 3 (November 2006): 629, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2006.00458.x.

their use value and functionality, the items re-present themselves as vessels holding women's unarticulated experiences and feelings. Even Lin's act of binding intimates her internal conflict regarding the past: is it a wistful yet futile attempt at preserving memories of "simpler" times? Or, rather, the staunch refusal to let objects so pregnant with counter memories and histories go obsolete?

As in *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* (1995), a video component within *Bound and Unbound* heightens its tone of uncertainty (Figure 13). Projected upon a screen made out of vertically hanging white threads, the video depicts Lin's scissor-wielding hands repeatedly snipping at a fringe of white thread. The incessant and arhythmic noises of the scissors disturb the silence of the bound objects, producing a disquieting visual effect. Although severing binds is a gesture commonly interpreted as a metaphor for liberation, Lin's endless snipping implies that whatever freedom such means seek is far from being imminent. When the severed threads in the video eventually give way, the physical threads that comprise the screen remain unperturbed, producing an illusion of impenetrable layers. Frayed thread trimmings deliberately placed below the screen generate the impression of slow but unflagging progress. The extreme amount of effort required to undo Lin's equally labor-intensive handiwork can be read as the artist's conflicting desire to free herself from the tools that reproduce traditional gender roles while preserving the manifold memories embedded within them. Being unable to free oneself from sentimental attachments is not an uncommon phenomenon; it is unexplainably difficult when nostalgic memories are intertwined with histories of pain. Renouncing these objects, objects that not only facilitate labor crucial to the fabric of everyday life but also manufacture identities, would be equivalent to losing a major component of one's sense of self. Although Lin's snipping and binding are directly in opposition to each other, both actions are almost Sisyphean in nature.

The artist must go to great lengths to sever herself from deep-seated systems of oppression—and, yet when she is on the brink of freedom, a hesitance to let go remains. The result is a never-ending impasse that Lin articulates through her thread.

Braiding (1998)

Entwined in the fibers of her white cotton thread, ambivalence would continue to permeate Lin Tianmiao's subsequent work *Braiding* (1998) (Figure 14). *Braiding* possesses great significance in Lin's oeuvre—not only was it Lin's earliest work featuring her own image, but also the first of many that seriously contend with the complexities of identity, including *Day Dreamer* (2000) and *Spawn* (2001) (Figures 15 and 16). Lin Tianmiao remains in dialogue with the Maoist scopic regime in this work; She destabilizes the power of the image, namely portraiture, as a reflection of truth, and meditates upon the tangled, messy realities of women who were navigating acceptable means of self-presentation amid contradicting ideals of femininity. Closing the distance between political and personal, *Braiding* also addresses Lin's ongoing, individual struggles with identity construction and her feelings of being stuck between contrasting definitions of womanhood.

When viewed frontally, *Braiding* overwhelms the viewer with an immense 13 x 8.5-foot photographic portrait printed onto white fabric. The grayscale image is out of focus, blurring and softening the features of the individual depicted. While it is indeed Lin who is the center of the portrait, her appearance is nondescript. With a shorn head, Lin is depicted from the bust-up, unsmiling, and blankly looking outwards—stripped of any discernible markers of femininity. The immense proportions of Lin's image and her frontal positioning recall the pervasive portrait of Mao Zedong, whose visage was (and continues to be) positively associated with authority,

paternity, and masculinity despite the gratuitous violence and infighting that occurred under his leadership (Figure 17). In a 2018 interview with the Museum of Modern Art, Lin confirms her intent to converse with Mao's image:

> When I was very young, Mao's portrait was everywhere. And [now] we have Social Security with the picture…your picture. [You] must show people where you are from, what are you, what position you have…I think the clear face, clear image, for Chinese [people] is very political. I want the audience to lose focus. [48]

By blurring her image and keeping all external markers suggestive of femininity out of view, Lin undermines the veracity of the image and its purported ability to reveal inner truths about the sitter's character. As it is impossible to make any judgments or assumptions about this uncanny individual, Lin relates this to the ideal of sameness that was standardized during the Cultural Revolution. When notions of progressiveness and "gender sameness" were communicated through superficial elements like dress, they only projected an idealizing image of women's liberation rather than accurately reflecting the underlying gender inequalities that pervaded their lives.[49] Replete with skepticism, her statement, "When you lose focus, that is when you try to understand," gestures at the unreliability of optical "truths" and the necessity of acknowledging and seeking out other forms of veracity.[50]

Behind the scrim, Lin Tianmiao's visage dematerializes into an intricate network of loose, white threads that are inconspicuously stitched onto the surface of her portrait (Figure 18). Like hair, the strands of thread naturally drape downwards and eventually coalesce into a loose

[48] The Museum of Modern Art, "Lin Tianmiao: Focus I C. 2006," Multiplex: Directions in Art, 1970 to Now (MoMA), accessed September 5, 2022. https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/209/2752.

[49] Liao Wen, "The Turbulent History of Chinese Feminist Values and Art," in *Chinese Art at the End of the Millennium*, ed. John Clark (Hong Kong: New Media Art Limited, 2000), 69.

[50] The Museum of Modern Art. "Lin Tianmiao: Focus I C. 2006." Multiplex: Directions in Art, 1970 to Now. MoMA. Accessed September 5, 2022. https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/209/2752.

braid. The quasi-masculine image clashes with the lengthy braid, a traditional marker of feminine adornment; their positionality generates a dualism evocative of the public and private identities women had to juggle. Facing outwards and dwarfing its spectators, Lin's portrait conveys an impenetrability and unflinching stoicism associated with maleness that women were encouraged to mimic in the public sphere. On the other side of the scrim, the threads that are gathered into the braid are soft and lush. Braiding the hair of oneself or another is an intimate, almost maternal act of grooming, and here, Lin uses this labor as a metaphor for the gendered labor and performances of femininity that women continued to uphold in the domestic sphere. Facing away from the portrait, the braid is indicative of how feminized labor conducted in private sustained traditional notions of feminine beauty and desirability. Women had become aware of the political ramifications of adorning themselves with clothes or accessories that were considered too "fashionable," "bourgeoisie," or, simply put, overly *feminine*. However, they continued to surreptitiously enjoy these taboo pleasures in private by fashioning their own clothes out of scrap fabric and thread. These objects fall into the aforementioned category of *xiaozi* or "petit-bourgeoisie" items that young Lin Tianmiao would help her mother make at home.[51]

Perceived simultaneously, the peculiar combination of the masculine visage and feminine braid provides additional insight into expressions of femininity during the Cultural Revolution. The state's conflicting ideals of femininity engendered thorny parameters for women's self-presentation—they were simultaneously lax and extraordinarily restrictive. Women's so-called preoccupation with appearances may have been denounced as decadent and bourgeoisie,

[51] Yunfan Sun. Interview: Lin Tianmiao on Art, Influence, and "Bodily Reaction" as Inspiration, interview by Yunfan Sun, *Asia Society*, September 26, 2012, https://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/interview-lin-tianmiao-art-influence-and-bodily-reaction-inspiration.

however, as put by Hung Yok-Ip, male and female revolutionaries alike sustained an interest in female beauty by mobilizing self-beautification practices and images of attractive women for political purposes (Figures 19 and 20) [52] The ideal, revolutionary appearance for women, which underwent a degree of masculinization, did not fully entail defeminization. Founded on the principles of frugality and classlessness, a "militant interpretation of femininity" evolved during the Cultural Revolution, where "traditional attributes of femininity that carry associations of frail beauty subjected to male desire were replaced by markers of strength and physical vigor."[53] Women donned cropped hairstyles and unisex clothing made of coarse cloth like their male peers, however, their commitment to this aesthetic and its revolutionary associations did not offset their interest in maintaining elements of traditional femininity in their appearances.[54] More often than not, women were able to evade criticism by making subtle changes to their appearances and adding small flourishes that accentuated their femininity—for example, some tailored their military suits to be more form-fitting, while others chose to wear their hair in pigtails and braids.[55] Nevertheless, maintaining an acceptable balance of masculinity and femininity in one's outward appearance was a discreet affair and required a certain degree of self-policing.

Noticeably, as the braid of white threads extends backward and elongates, it becomes thinner and tenser (Figure 21). Eventually, the end of the braid directs the viewer's gaze to a

[52] Hung-Yok Ip, "Fashioning Appearances," *Modern China* 29, no. 3 (July 2003): 330, https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700403029003003.

[53] Juliane Noth, "Militiawomen, Red Guards, and Images of Female Militancy in Maoist China," *Twentieth-Century China* 46, no. 2 (2021): 154, 164. https://doi.org/10.1353/tcc.2021.0013.

[54] Hung-Yok Ip, "Fashioning Appearances," *Modern China* 29, no. 3 (July 2003): 348, https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700403029003003.

[55] Ibid., 338.

small monitor where Lin Tianmiao's hands are shown braiding three individual strands of white thread (Figure 22). When looking outwards from the position of the monitor, Lin's movements generate a sense of accumulation; the thread becomes more abundant as the number of plaits increases. Conversely, viewed from the back of the scrim, the thread not only appears to diminish in the video but unravels, as Lin is left only with a meager number of strands. Once more, ambivalence is generated through repetition; the boundaries between braiding and unbraiding have become increasingly hazy. Unbraiding, like braiding, is an act that also requires adherence to a pattern and is executed in a rhythmic, cyclical fashion—the act of deconstructing and reconstructing share the same origin. The ambivalence encompassed by the acts of braiding and unbraiding parallels Lin's own quandaries towards the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of female identity. As Lin's portrait shows, dispensing with external markers of femininity does not detach oneself from the inherited, socially constructed, and ingrained aspects of womanhood—the aspects that are not only seen but felt and owned.

Conclusion

Neither a polemical, feminist statement nor a hollow celebration of traditional feminine craft, Lin Tianmiao's thread derives its meaning from a complex legacy of facilitating women's empowerment and subjugation. A material steeped in histories of ambivalence, Lin exploits the physical and metaphorical properties of thread to process her experiences of womanhood and the gendered labor that gives it form. For Lin and the numerous other Chinese women in her generation that lived through the late 60s and 70s, these experiences would be especially complicated given the lasting impact of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the idiosyncrasies of its gender ideology.

As demonstrated, as Lin's installations explore the intersections of gender and labor, the ever-prominent thread surfaces how the countless incongruencies of Maoist gender ideology engendered fraught experiences of womanhood. Through works such as *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* (1995) and *Bound and Unbound* (1997) Lin complicates the purported "gender sameness" of the period by not only revealing the androcentric standards women were held to, but also the unstated gender lines that continued to shape women's sense of self. As she uses thread to process her past and make sense of her present, the tone of these works is not denunciatory but laden with ambivalence. In works such as *Braiding* (1998) Lin probes the interrelationship between performances of femininity and womanhood to explore greater questions of identity and self-presentation. Evidently, Lin does not seek any immediate, concrete answers. Lin uses the process to observe, recognize, and enunciate internal and external frictions and contradictions.

Lin Tianmiao's thread is far from being a static symbol of impasse. The tactile process of thread winding actively generates ambivalence as a mode of operation, giving her the latitude of productively enunciating contradictions and reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable. Her works prove to be about the present as much as they are about the past; they erode the boundaries between personal and political, society and self, history and memory.

Figures

Figure 1: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* 缠的扩散，1995, 300 cm x 500 cm x 100 cm, white cotton thread, 20,000 needles, TV screen, single-channel digital video (black and white, silent), bed, rice paper.

Figure 2: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), Detail from *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* 缠的扩散, 1995, 300 cm x 500 cm x 100 cm, white cotton thread, 20,000 needles, TV screen, single-channel digital video (black and white, silent), bed, rice paper.

Figure 3: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), Detail from *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* 缠的扩散, 1995, 300 cm x 500 cm x 100 cm, white cotton thread, 20,000 needles, TV screen, single-channel digital video (black and white, silent), bed, rice paper.

Figure 4: Revolutionary Committee of the Shanghai National Cotton Factory No. 21, *Thoroughly Criticize the "Theory of Human Nature" of the Landlord and Capitalist Classes*, 1971, 107 x 77 cm reprint of original oil painting, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Figure 5: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), Detail from *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* 缠的扩散, 1995, 300 cm x 500 cm x 100 cm, white cotton thread, 20,000 needles, TV screen, single-channel digital video (black and white, silent), bed, rice paper.

Figure 6: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), Detail from *The Proliferation of Threadwinding* 缠的扩散, 1995, 300 cm x 500 cm x 100 cm, white cotton thread, 20,000 needles, single-channel digital video (black and white, silent), bed, rice paper.

Figure 7: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-) Central Academy of Fine Arts installation view of *Bound and Unbound* 缠了再剪开, 1997, dimensions variable. White cotton thread, 800 household objects, single-channel digital video (black and white, silent).

Figure 8: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-) Detail of *Bound and Unbound 缠了再剪开,* 1997, dimensions variable. White cotton thread, 800 household objects, single-channel digital video (black and white, silent).

Figure 9: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-) Detail of *Bound and Unbound* 缠了再剪开, 1997, dimensions variable. White cotton thread, 800 household objects, single-channel digital video (black and white, silent).

Figure 10: 76 Middle School, *Struggling to Speed up the Realization of Mechanized Agriculture!,* 1971, 53.5 x 77 cm reprint of original oil painting. International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Figure 11: Designer unknown*, It is a Revolutionary Requirement to Marry Late*, ca. 1970s, 77 x 53 cm reprint of original ink/gouache painting, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Figure 12: Yuan Jie, *Lofty Aspirations Reach the Sky*, 1973. Reprint of original oil painting. Collection of the University of Westminster, London.

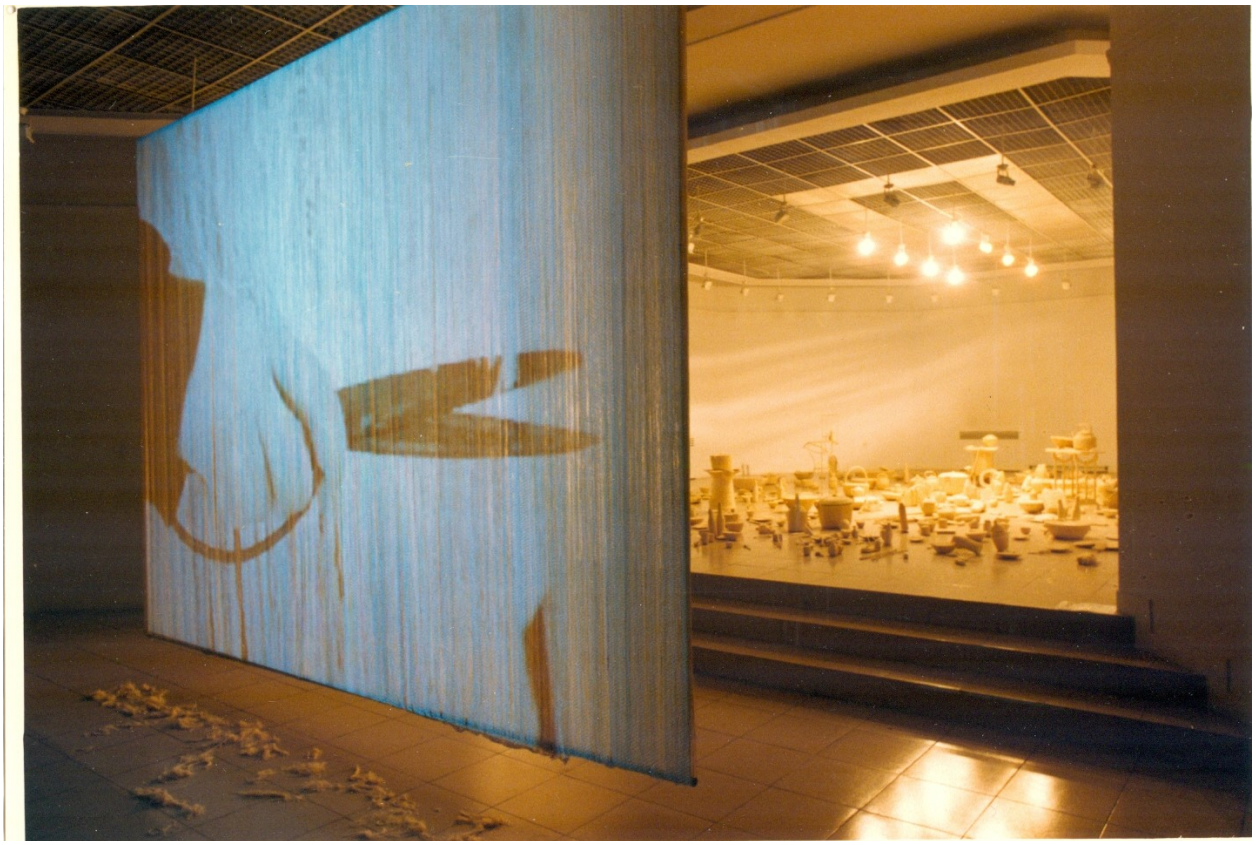

Figure 13: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-) Detail from *Bound and Unbound* 缠了再剪开 (1997), Dimensions variable. White cotton thread, 800 household objects, single-channel digital video (black and white, silent).

Figure 14: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), Installation view of *Braiding,* 1998, 400 × 260 × 1500 cm, digital print on fabric, cotton thread, and single-channel digital video (black and white, silent), Sigg Collection, M+ Museum, Hong Kong.

Figure 15: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), Installation view of *Daydreamer*, 2000, 380 x 200 x 120 cm, white cotton threads, white fabric, and digital photograph.

Figure 16: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), Installation view of *Spawn #3*, 2000, 340 cm, mixed cotton thread, white fabric, digital photograph.

Figure 17: Designer unknown, *The Great Leader and Teacher Chairman Mao Zedong,* 1977, 77 x 53 cm reprint of original oil painting. Stefan R. Landsberger Collection, Amsterdam.

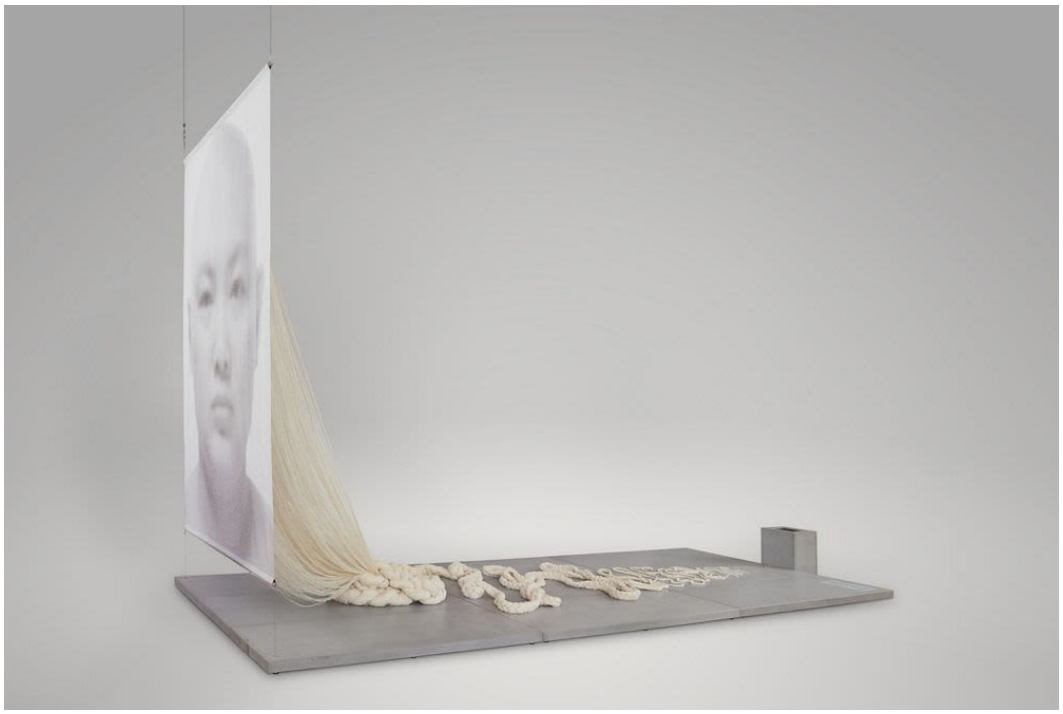

Figure 18: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), M+ Museum installation shot of *Braiding*, 1998, 400 × 260 × 1500 cm, digital print on fabric, cotton thread, and single-channel digital video (black and white, silent), Sigg Collection, M+ Museum, Hong Kong.

Figure 19: Pan Jiajun, *I Am Seagull,* 1972, 53 x 38 cm reprint of original oil painting, collection of University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Figure 20: Ha Qiongwen, *Become a Red Seedling*, 1966, 77 x 53 cm reprint of original ink/gouache painting, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Figure 21: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), M+ Museum installation view of *Braiding,* 1998, 400 × 260 × 1500 cm, digital print on fabric, cotton thread, and single-channel digital video (black and white, silent), Sigg Collection, M+ Museum, Hong Kong.

Figure 22: Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961-), M+ Museum installation view of *Braiding,* 1998, 400 × 260 × 1500 cm, digital print on fabric, cotton thread, and single-channel digital video (black and white, silent), Sigg Collection, M+ Museum, Hong Kong.

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