

Doctoral Dissertation Review  
by David Lobdell (2/14/1958) for Muchuan Wang (birthdate unknown)

Institution: Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wroclaw, Poland  
Doctoral School

Title: Inner and Outer Relations from the Book of Changes (I Ching):  
Contemporary Sculpture with Elements Derived from Traditional Chinese Culture

Field of Study: Fine Art and Conservation

I have thoroughly reviewed all the documents associated with the candidate. Each of the five series of works is described appropriately and is clearly stated with regard to the images of the work. That is to say that the descriptions of his thinking process and the images of the work match and are easily related in the mind of the reviewer.

#### The Five Elements

##### Series 1: Clay

This series holds close to the notion of opposites in that it reflects the vision of inside versus outside, mass versus volume as well as internal thought with external appearance. I found it interesting that the work reflects the concept of self, juxtaposed to a sense of other or the reflection of self in another state of thought or being. This references writings of Sigmund Freud, Tony Hillerman or Joseph Campbell as common examples. The general concept represents a wide range of possible imagery and the candidate offers work that fits the concept quite well.

##### Series 2: Metal

This series focuses entirely on cast metal and does not include metal fabrication from preformed shapes. Traditional metal casting can include a large array of procedural steps to achieve the work. Each step offers the philosophical relationship that the candidate notes throughout the writing as the process relies on the shifting positive and negative volumes and masses with each step to accomplish the castings. In short, casting supplies an appropriate metaphor for the aesthetic of the candidate.

In each work, Mr. Wang employs a different molding material. Three parted sand molding materials and three investment molding materials are used. The three parted sand molding materials used are; i.e. green sand which is a mixture of clay and sand, sodium silicate resin molds which is a mixture of catalyzed sodium silicate and silica, and finally, resin bonded petrochemical sand molds. Parted molds are made of various parts that are bound together before casting. The investment molding materials are plaster mixed with silica, ceramic shell and dung molding material. In each case, ceramic materials are bound together with a binding material (which qualifies the name of the molding material.) The molds are monolithic and are not made from bound parts. This investigation into molding materials is significant and requires a vast amount of knowledge and skill to accomplish.

All works with the exception of one uses a pattern to form the mold. This speaks to the yin and yang of mold making, in that the pattern is evacuated from the mold which reveals the impression of the form inside the mold. Then the mold is filled with molten metal and recaptures

the form as a positive. The exterior mold is then removed from the cast form in its final state. The one work that does not use a pattern to form the mold is done in a process called direct mold carving. In this process, one is required to carve the negative impression of the form into the mold material (in this case, green sand.) The process is more intuitive and requires the artist to think in reverse, much like a printmaker. However, a sculptor must also think in terms of depth as well as width and length.

As prior stated, the process is intrinsic with it the aesthetic and collaborates with the content in a meaningful way.

### Series 3: Paper

The reviewer found that the investigation into paper to be proper to Wang's aesthetic in much the same way as to the metal series in that it sometimes used molds to produce. The paper pulp also has a relationship to the metal and clay pieces in that it is sometimes modelled into the form. His reasons for using paper, i.e. prior experience, availability and cultural reference are reasonable. Manipulation of wet paper suited the molding process, whereas, the dry manipulation can best be described as fabricated paper. Each has its merits but the results were quite different in both appearance and meaning.

The wet manipulation of the paper brings its own metaphor in that the paper once communicated ideas through text which was then destroyed to make the cast paper forms. This "Idea to Form" concept is interesting and powerful. It represents the willfulness of the sculptor and the transformative nature of the material.

The dry fabrication of the paper represented more of a collaboration with found shapes intrinsic to the production and packaging of the paper. The works seemed effortless in their production and carry with them a more whimsical approach to the material. Even so, the Tank versus Temple piece is a powerful concept that was revealed through a simple gesture of turning the paper roll downward after extruding the center of the roll. This, I believe, led to the collaborative production of the wooden crank piece of the same content. Its focus on design is as masterful as the content is powerful.

### Series 4: Light

In this series, the light element was integrated with paper as the paper exhibits luminescent properties. Each example explores this luminescent quality and makes the paper work better than the paper works without the light. The light brings a sense of mystery to the work and draws a closer relationship to the interior and the exterior of each piece. The temporal nature of the paper and light creates a symbiotic relationship that brings some fascination to the form. The form exaggerates the light while the light exaggerates the form. Although the investigation is not as extensive as the others, it is non the less in its impact on the viewer.

### Series 5: Water and Glass

One can easily understand why the candidate chose to group these two elements. The reflective and transformative properties of each material have similar appeal and maintain similar qualities with regard to whichever its current state of static or fluid. Both examples given are intriguing, however, the ice temple piece is the most profound in the exhibition of the transformation of ice to water. The temporal nature of ice creates a greater sense of urgency in the viewer simply because the work will disappear after the ice is gone. This becomes a defining characteristic of the work.

The glass work has a reflective quality to it as does water, however, it can support itself at room temperature. This piece is possibly just as effective if it were installed on the wall as it would on the floor. So, the fact that it is free standing is a significant aspect. Because the piece is glass and is free standing, the viewer immediately notes that it is fragile and can be easily broken. This response is similar to the urgency of melting ice and helps the viewer understand the relationship that the artist hopes to communicate to the viewer.

#### Comments on the Five Sculpture Series:

Although the preliminary studies done with the five elements is extremely intriguing, the subsequent works expand the ideas and processes discovered and tend to cross boundaries defined in earlier works. This, I believe, is the best part of research in the arts. Ideas and processes influence each other and a “snow balling” effect occurs; cardboard becomes steel, the flow and heat of metal is illustrated in a paper and light piece, or a paper piece becomes iron, all as a result of cross pollination. The culmination of this research has become multi layered in process, fascinating in visual design and poignant in content.

#### Conclusions:

Of course, each person has their own taste and can find more or less virtue in the five series of works. I enjoyed the sculptures that come from carved books in that they are insightful and delightful in their image. These, for me, are the most successful works along with the cast iron figure from books. Conversely, I find the modeling in some of the cast works to be my least favorite. However, the work fits the description well and qualifies as “successful” in my mind.

Often in the reading of the paper, I could not help but to imagine the circumstances of producing sculpture during the pandemic. I found myself thinking about the context of the situation and expected at least some elements to be sub-par, given the situation. This however, is not the case. The work produced was handled just as well as if the pandemic were not at play. I would attribute this to a strong quality of character and applaud the candidates’ tenacity and willpower regardless of the public health pandemic.

Each reference is properly noted in Chicago style of formatting throughout the paper. In some instances, I questioned the choice of words but I understand the general meaning in the vernacular of translated writings. I also found what may be one typographical error: page 8, paragraph 3 reads, “...interrelations between positive and negative from to show how harmony can be maintained.” This may have been intended to read “form” instead of “from.” This suspected error is so minor that it hardly deserves mention. However, I could find no other flaws in the written work.

Therefore, following my analysis of his dissertation and creative output as well as his professional practice in the field of art, I highly recommend that he be awarded an academic PH.D. title in the field of art, in the discipline of fine arts and conservation.

Signature: 