

# Symbolic Analysis on Chinese and Malaysian Soft Sculpture During Post-Pandemic Era

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## Abstract

Contemporary soft sculpture, as an emerging art form, can not only show the characteristics and charm of national culture, but also play an important role in cross-cultural communication. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, this study provides an in-depth exploration of soft sculpture works by Chinese and Malaysian artists in the post-pandemic era. Through detailed analyses of specific works by artists from both countries, this study reveals how soft sculpture can be a powerful semiotic tool that reflects and conveys social emotions and cultural concepts in the post-pandemic era. The method of analysis is mainly based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory: it includes an examination of the symbolic analysis, narrative structure, and cultural context of the works. Firstly, the symbolic significance of the soft sculpture is analysed by observing and describing the physical characteristics of the work. Second, the deeper cultural and social values represented by the works are explored by interpreting their themes and symbolic elements. Finally, by placing the work in a specific cultural context, it analyses how the soft sculpture reflects and responds to the social significance of the specific situation and challenges of the post-pandemic era. The results show that the soft sculptures by Chinese artists often reflect the integration and transformation of traditional Chinese culture and values, while the works by Malaysian artists show the intermingling and harmony of Malaysian multiculturalism. The works of both artists emphasised the harmonious relationship between human and nature, individual and society, tradition and modernity, and conveyed people's desire for peace, hope and future in the post-pandemic era. Overall, this study provides a new perspective for understanding the symbolic value of soft sculpture works, reveals the complex interactions between soft sculpture art and society and culture, and helps to promote the theoretical and practical development of the research field of soft sculpture and society and culture.

**Keywords:** Art, Soft Sculpture, Development, Culture, Contemporary.

## Introduction

In recent years, with the expanding inclusiveness in the field of contemporary art, soft sculpture art has gradually emerged, and more and more artists from different fields have begun to experiment with making soft sculpture artworks.

Soft sculpture is blending with other artistic categories to present its colorful posture. It expands the expression of the texture and gives people a sense of warmth, thus eliminating the monotonous sense of indifference formed by the use of a large number of hard materials in modern life.(Tan,L.,&Li,Y.C.2015)<sup>1</sup>.As an expression of modern art, soft sculpture art, since its introduction into China in the 1980s, has shown a strong vitality and sense of the times in its development in China. Today, however, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire social and economic order, and has also had a certain impact on the development of soft sculpture art. Under the impact of the pandemic, the global culture and art industry has suffered a huge impact. In particular, modern art forms such as soft sculpture art have been restricted in their exhibitions, public art projects, and individual creations, and market demand and consumer tastes have been changing. This has a great impact on the promotion and development of soft sculpture art.

In the past decades, with the continuous development of society and the rapid change of culture and art, soft sculpture around the world has played an increasingly important role in art and culture. Especially in the post-pandemic era, the sustainability of sculpture art has become an issue of concern due to the changing lifestyles and perceptions of people. At the same time, soft sculpture art, as a diversified emerging art field, should contribute its own contribution to the principle of sustainable development. Therefore, in the field of culture and art, studying the current sustainable development of soft sculpture art is of great significance for us to improve our own culture and art and promote the development of culture and art.

"Art is an endless semiotic system: nothing in it is natural, all is cultural." Barthes, R. (1967)<sup>2</sup>, the theoretical framework of this study was proposed by Roland Barthes, which is a structure constructed by description, analysis, interpretation and judgment.It is hoped that through the research of the soft sculpture art in China and Malaysia, it is possible to further deepen the mutual understanding and solidarity and cooperation between the people of China and Malaysia. With the deep cultural and artistic heritage and origin of the two countries, through the in-depth discussion of soft sculpture art, the exchange and cooperation between the two peoples in the field of culture and art will be enhanced, and the sustainable development of soft sculpture art in China and Malaysia will be jointly promoted. This is of great significance to strengthen the cultural exchange between China and Malaysia and to shape the cultural image of China and Malaysia.

## Literature Review

Before exploring the semiotic analysis of soft sculpture in China and Malaysia in the post-pandemic era, it is crucial to understand the existing literature and research context. As a vibrant and creative art form, soft sculpture has received much attention and exploration globally in recent years. At the same time, semiotic analyses have provided new perspectives and tools for understanding and interpreting the deeper meanings of artworks. Especially in the post-pandemic era, the relationship between art and society has become more complex and pluralistic, and the analyses and interpretations of art works need to be more refined and in-depth. The literature review section of this study will outline the definition of the concept of soft sculpture, the artistic development of soft sculpture, the theoretical foundations of

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<sup>1</sup> Tan,L.,&Li,Y.C. (2015). The diversified development of soft sculpture art. *Beauty and the times: creativity*.pp.83-84

<sup>2</sup> Barthes, R.(1967). *The Fashion System*.Seuil Editions.

the semiotic analysis method, and the current status of soft sculpture research in China and Malaysia, to provide a theoretical background and research foundation for subsequent analyses and discussions.

### The definition of soft sculpture art

"Sculpture, in essence, is the application of specific materials to implement spatial fabrication to form aesthetic objects full of creativity" Xu,Z.L. (2011)<sup>3</sup>. "Sculptors combine years of craft expertise with a thorough understanding of materials to create three-dimensional forms that depict a particular aspect of the artist's imagination." Arcawan Sculpture Exhibition (2023)<sup>4</sup>. Soft sculpture then is literally understood to be a work of art made by a sculptor using soft materials.

"Soft sculpture is a modern wall hanging derived from traditional weaving techniques. It is named for its flexible texture, strange shape and rich three-dimensional sense of sculpture." Lu,R.L. (1996)<sup>5</sup> pointed out that soft sculpture " is a marginal art that integrates design concepts, materials, technology and form."

"Soft sculpture is a new form and a new expression of the sculpture art, which reflects the social life and personal emotion in its independent language and expression form. Soft sculpture is the sublimation of traditional sculpture, and its appearance expands the breadth and depth of traditional sculpture." Li,H.B.&Chen,A.Q.(2018)<sup>6</sup>.

"Soft material sculpture, also known as" soft sculpture ", as a category in the field of sculpture art, is now becoming popular as a new sculpture creation materials and techniques. In the development of modern art history in nearly a century, soft sculpture has only become a means for various artistic schools to highlight their artistic expression, rather than the research and application of a sculpture material techniques." Han,L.(2014)<sup>7</sup>.

In summary, soft sculpture, as an emerging form of sculpture, breaks the inherent concept of traditional sculpture and provides a more flexible and diverse way of expression. Soft sculpture is a form of art based on modelling, through carefully designed materials and delicate construction, various elements are integrated into three-dimensional space to create works of art with unique charm. Soft sculpture takes fibre material as the core, combines metal, ceramics, glass, plastic and other materials, and creates three-dimensional works of art that can express the author's ideas and thoughts through winding, weaving and other techniques.

### The development of soft sculpture art

As early as the 1910s, Marcel Duchamp placed the jacket of an Underwood typewriter directly on the floor of an exhibition as a work of art, where the spatial character of the sculpture and the use of soft fibre materials were simultaneously manifested. This was the debut of the first soft sculpture in the history of sculpture. Joselit, D. (1998)<sup>8</sup> wrote in his book "Duchamp's readymade was not only an important milestone in modern art, but also had a

<sup>3</sup> Xu,Z.L. (2011). *Introduction to Sculpture*. Tsinghua Press

<sup>4</sup> Arcawan Sculpture Exhibition (2023).from <https://www.homarttrans.com/2023/06/>

<sup>5</sup> Lu,R.L. (1996). Edge Art —— Soft sculpture. *Carve and mould*. pp.28

<sup>6</sup> Li,H.B. &Chen,A.Q. (2018). Emotional expression in a soft sculpture. *Research on fine Arts education*. pp.36-38

<sup>7</sup> Han,L.(2014). "Soft sculpture" in the development of art. *Literature and art contend*.pp.173-175

<sup>8</sup> Joselit, D. (1998). *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp 1910-1941*. MIT Press

profound influence on later art forms such as soft sculpture." As the civilisation of the times continued to evolve and the field of art became more inclusive, artists ventured into the use of soft materials to create and present to the public. Krauss, R. (1986)<sup>9</sup>. Clearly states, "Duchamp's concept of the readymade provided the theoretical basis and inspiration for the soft sculpture movement of the 1960s." It was not until the 1960's that soft sculpture came onto the sculpture scene as an independent personality.



Figure 1. Travel Folding, Marcel Duchamp, 1961,  
The original has been lost, (This work is a later copy)  
(Source:<https://mt.sohu.com/20171012/n517531457.shtml>,2017)

It was not until the 1960s that soft sculpture was able to take on the stage of sculpture with an independent personality. At this time, various countries began to realize the importance of art to the culture of their societies and therefore began to develop local art industries. Typical works are Oldenburg's "Floor Burger" (Figure 2), the Christo's "Wrapped Coast" (Figure 3) and Magdalena Abakanowicz's work "Red Abakan" (Figure 4).



Figure 2. Floor Hamburger, Kas Odenberg, 1962,  
132.1 x 213.4 x 213.4 cm, canvas and foam  
(Source:<http://www.leapleapleap.com/2013/07/claes-oldenburg/>,2013)

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<sup>9</sup> Krauss, R. (1986). *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. MIT Press



Figure 3. Wrap The Coast, Christo & Jeanne-Claude, 1968-1969, Anticorrosive Cloth, 1,609 m  
(Source:<https://www.wired.it/galleries/gait102984/>,2016)



Figure 4. Red Abakan, Magdalena Abakanowicz, 1969, HemPalm, 405×382×400cm  
(Source:<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/magdalena-abakanowicz>,2022)

### Roland Barthes and Semiotic Analysis

Semiotic analysis is an in-depth approach to symbols and cultural and social phenomena, and is particularly applicable to the analysis of works of art. Roland Barthes' theory plays a key role in this regard. Barthes, R. (1967)<sup>10</sup> in his book elaborates the basic concepts and methods of semiotics: "The aim of semiotics is to study the way in which symbolic systems live, whether in social life or in works of art." Barthes, R. (1981)<sup>11</sup> also provides an important semiotic perspective for the analysis of art in another book as well: "The significance of a work of art lies not only in its surface image, but also in the symbolic and cultural structures behind it." This is a good proof that Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method provides important technical methods for art analysis.

Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis is equally applicable to the analysis of soft sculpture works. Lupton, E., & Miller, J. A. (1993)<sup>12</sup> cite Barthes's theory in analysing soft sculpture: "Soft sculpture challenges traditional aesthetics through non-traditional materials and forms, echoing Barthes's deconstructive analysis of symbols and culture. " Roland Barthes' semiotic theory provides an important tool and perspective for understanding and interpreting the

<sup>10</sup> Barthes, R. (1967). *Elements of Semiology*. University of California Press

<sup>11</sup> Barthes, R. (1982). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Hill and Wang

<sup>12</sup> Lupton, E., & Miller, J. A. (1993). *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste*. Princeton Architectural Press and List Visual Arts Center

deeper meanings of soft sculpture. By analysing the relationship between signifier and referent and revealing the symbolic and metaphorical meanings of the work, Barthes's semiotic analysis reveals the complex role of soft sculpture in cultural and social contexts. This approach not only helps to understand the artistic value of soft sculpture, but also provides new horizons for exploring its significance and impact in the post-pandemic era.

### **The State of Soft Sculpture in China and Malaysia**

In China, the development of soft sculpture started relatively late and the process has not been smooth. Soft sculpture first appeared in the middle and late last century, when China was in a period of political and economic transition, and the development of cultural and artistic aspects was greatly affected. Under the leadership of the world-renowned wall-hanging artist Professor Wanman, a group of Chinese artists began to explore soft sculpture as an unfamiliar form of artistic expression, which brought a great shock to the domestic art world. "This discipline history of continuous transformation is just a sample of creative transformation: the wall-hanging studio of the craft department becomes the fiber studio of the sculpture department." Sun,Z.H. (2018)<sup>13</sup>, who also said that soft sculpture " has developed into a relatively complete and independent new discipline." Nowadays, with the development of technology and the change of times, soft sculpture is becoming more and more important in the art field. More and more artists have started to create with soft materials, pushing soft sculpture to a new peak.

In reviewing the data, the author could hardly find any relevant research literature on Malaysian soft sculpture, but many soft sculptures can be seen in Malaysian art exhibitions. There may be a relative lack of theoretical research in the field of Malaysian soft sculpture, which may be due to the fact that the field is relatively new or that the focus of research is more towards the practical and exhibition aspects. However, by observing and analysing the large number of Malaysian soft sculptures displayed in various art exhibitions, we can still gain insight into the current state of Malaysian soft sculpture. These works may reveal the unique styles, themes and techniques of Malaysian soft sculpture, reflecting the influence of local cultural, social and historical contexts. In addition, the art exhibition may also demonstrate how Malaysian soft sculpture artists interact with the international art world and how they incorporate traditional and contemporary elements in their works. Overall, despite the lack of theoretical research, the practical analysis of Malaysian soft sculpture works can still provide insights into the current development of this art form in Malaysia, as well as its status and influence in the local and international art scene.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Soft sculpture is a kind of sculpture art form created using soft materials. With the development of technology and materials, soft sculpture has gradually become a new form of contemporary art. In the context of pandemic, people's pursuit of the material world and cultural life has gained greater space for development, and the plasticity and diversity of soft sculpture make it one of the art forms that are widely concerned and sought after. China and Malaysia have different characteristics and styles in their cultural background and artistic tradition.

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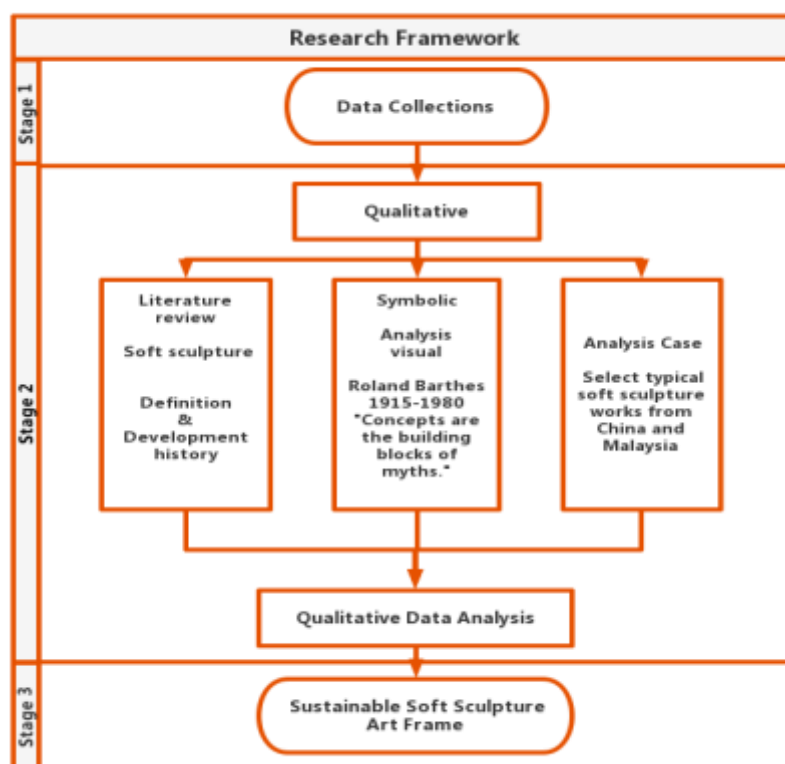
<sup>13</sup> Sun,Z.H.(2018). *The History of Chinese Contemporary Sculpture*. China Youth Publishing House



This study is a qualitative research methodology which, due to the relatively small number of soft sculpture artists worldwide, allows the researcher to delve into individual cases in order to reveal the intrinsic characteristics and significance of soft sculpture. This approach emphasises the understanding of individual experiences and subjective interpretations, making it particularly suitable for analysing and explaining the complexity and diversity of artistic creation. In this study, typical artists engaged in soft sculpture in China and Malaysia will be selected to be investigated and analysed respectively, and then sustainable recommendations for the development of soft sculpture in China and Malaysia will be derived. By collecting online information, books and literature, the author will take eight typical soft sculpture art practitioners in China and Malaysia in the post epidemic era as examples, whose art creations have always been relatively biased towards soft sculpture, and attempt to analyse and compare the symbols, semantics, structures, contents and social impacts of soft sculpture in China and Malaysia respectively. The post epidemic era has brought many new challenges and opportunities to the art world. Choosing the works of artists in this period as the object of study helps to understand how soft sculpture adapts to and reflects the social changes in this special period. By comparing the creative and expressive styles of sculptors from both countries in the field of soft sculpture, we can gain a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences as well as the exchanges and mutual appreciation between China and Malaysia in art and culture.

Table 1

*Method of Art Criticism – The Critical Process by Roland Barthes*



## Findings



In applying Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to compare and analyse the current state of soft sculpture in China and Malaysia, it will start from the aspects of semiotic analysis, narrative structure, examination of cultural background, and social significance.

### Symbolic Analysis







To ensure that the selected works have distinct differences in the theme, style, and cultural context, in order to better reveal the symbolic differences and commonalities. The author selected the representative soft material sculpture works of China and Malaysia in the post-pandemic era for comparative analysis. The selected sculptures have all been exhibited in the art museum since COVID-19 in 2019, with some of the information coming from the internet and some of the information being images taken by the authors when visited the exhibition site. Chinese artists Shi Hui works "Book Not Book" (2021) using cotton thread as the main material for creation, Liang Shaoji works "Snowbound - Trapped" (2019-2021) choose natural silk as the main material of creation, Wang Lei soft sculpture "Goodbye Classic" (2023) using raw materials is the old newspaper, and Sun Yiyun is using wool as material sculpture "d=15cm" (2020). Malaysian artist Jamil Zakaria chose barbed wire as the main creative material for the work "Battle" (2020), Nor Tijan Firdaus's sculpture named "Just Scan It" (2021) is the use of old resin electronic parts for create, Ain Rahman Work "Crystal Spirits VI" (2021) can clearly see the elastic fabric running through the work, And also Ts Verly Veto Vermol, Zuraidy Abd Rahim and Khairul Nizan Mohd Aris' "Boxxie Head" (2023) made by the three of them was created using cardboard as the main material.

Table 2

*Research sample information of Chinese and Malaysian soft sculpture works*

N O	WORK	AUTHOR& COUNTRY	INFORMATION	SOURCE
1		Shi Hui, China	Book Not Book, Shi Hui, 2021, Cotton thread, wooden board, 40 × 40 × 7 cm × 40, variable size	<a href="http://fiberarthangzhou.caa.edu.cn/2022/show_artist/artist-shi-hui/index.html">http://fiberarthangzhou.caa.edu.cn/2022/show_artist/artist-shi-hui/index.html</a>
2		Liang Shaoji, China	Snowbound - Trapped, partial, Liang Shaoji, 2019- 2021 Cell phone, twigs, chips, silk, cocoons, boards, dimensions variable	<a href="https://www.cafa.com.cn/cn/news/details/8330904">https://www.cafa.com.cn/cn/news/details/8330904</a>



3		Wang Lei, China	Goodbye Classic, Wang Lei, 2023, Old newspaper, thread knitting, 98x48x38cmx2	Source by author, The Sixth Chinese Sculpture Exhibition, Shanghai Art Museum, China, 2023
4		Sun Yiyun, China	d=15cm, Sun Yiyun, 2020, Wool, 65cmx65cmx20cm	<a href="https://www.xiaohongshu.com/explore/61f8b32400000000010291b5">https://www.xiaohongshu.com/explore/61f8b32400000000010291b5</a>
5		Jamil Zakaria, Malaysia	Battle, Jamil Zakaria, 2020, Steel wire, chicken wire, steel rod & plastic, Variable dimension	<a href="https://www.homarttrans.com/2020/12/tarung-installation-art-by-jamil-zakaria.html">https://www.homarttrans.com/2020/12/tarung-installation-art-by-jamil-zakaria.html</a>
6		Nor Tijan Firdaus, Malaysia	Just Scan It, Nor Tijan Firdaus, 2021, E-Waste on Wood Coated with 2k Matte Epoxy Resin, 91.9 x 121.9 cm	<a href="https://www.artsy.net/artwork/nor-tijan-firdaus-just-scan-it">https://www.artsy.net/artwork/nor-tijan-firdaus-just-scan-it</a>
7		Ain Rahman, Malaysia	Crystal Spirits VI, Ain Rahman, 2021, Steel Rod, Elastic Fabric, Elastic Thread and Acrylic Sheet, 42 x 30 cm	<a href="https://www.artsy.net/artwork/ain-rahman-crystal-spirits-vi">https://www.artsy.net/artwork/ain-rahman-crystal-spirits-vi</a>
8		Verly Veto Vermol , Zuraidey Abd Rahim & Khairul Nizan Mohd Aris , Malaysia	Boxxie Head, Ts Verly Veto Vermol , Zuraidey Abd Rahim & Khairul Nizan Mohd Aris , 2023, Cardboard, Size unknown	Source by author, Art Science Prize 2022 Exhibition , Menara Maybank , Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2023

Roland Barthes' analysis method focuses on how signs and symbols generate meaning within a text. For this study, the "text" can be seen as the soft sculpture itself. We need to observe and study these sculptures in detail, understanding how their shape, color, material, and display methods become carriers of cultural, historical, social, and political significance.

Starting with shape, for soft sculptures, the shape is inevitably a three-dimensional object. It can be a small sculpture or a large installation. This point is the same for both Chinese and Malaysian soft sculpture works. Although it can be expressed in various forms, all of which are diverse, it comes down to three-dimensional shapes; In terms of color, since the soft materials themselves are endowed with a variety of colors, the comparison shows that both Chinese and Malaysian soft sculptures are not fixed on a single color, but are created based on the inherent colors of the materials themselves; Regarding material selection, the soft sculpture creations of China and Malaysia differ significantly. Chinese soft sculptures often use soft materials themselves, combined with a small amount of hard materials such as cotton and linen, pulp, fabric, fiber, leather, etc., to achieve a more delicate sculptural effect. In contrast, Malaysian soft sculptures focus on exploiting the advantages of natural materials, such as discarded ready-made items, deformable metal nets, etc., combined with soft materials for reshaping; In terms of the presentation of soft sculpture works, comparative research finds that, in China, we can see traditional symbols and images, such as Chinese characters, traditional Chinese wicker chairs, being used in new contexts and environments, expressing a desire to return to and protect traditional culture. However, in Malaysian soft sculpture art, we can see more multicultural themes and symbols. For example, based on local Malay fables, encouraging environmentally friendly concepts, etc. Which further reflect Malaysia's cultural diversity and greater inclusivity.

Table 3

*Analysis and comparison of the symbols of the soft sculpture works*

WORK NAME	GEOMETRY	COLOUR	MATERIAL	PRESENTED
<b>Book Not Book</b>	Imitates traditional calligraphic forms.	Natural cotton thread colours are combined with the black of the wood panels.	Use cotton and thread boards.	Presented in calligraphic form,, reflecting nature and tradition.
<b>Snowbound - Trapped</b>	Complex structure, combining multiple elements	The whole is wrapped in greyish-white silk, and the stillness of the snow suppresses the dust.	Mobile phones, twigs, chips, silk, cocoons and boards.	Mixed media, hiding everyday items and electronics through silk wrapping.

<b>Goodbye Classic</b>	Two simulate the form of ancient rattan chairs.	Natural newspaper colours such as grey and beige.	Created using old newspapers and woven through paper rubbing threads.	Two rattan chairs are displayed side by side, reflecting a blend of classic and modern.
<b>d=15cm</b>	Cracked masonry	The natural colours of wool felt are predominantly white and brown.	Using wool felt as the main material	The texture of hard objects is expressed through the "curing" process of felting wool felt.
<b>Battle</b>	A bunch of roosters fighting each other.	Possibly in colours similar to rooster feathers.	Steel wire, chicken wire mesh, steel rods and plastic.	Installation art showing a power struggle through a group of roosters fighting each other.
<b>Just Scan It</b>	Scan the shape of the QR code.	Black and white shades in the original colour of the electronic scrap	E-Waste on Wood Coated with 2k Matte Epoxy Resin	Mixed media artwork, in the form of QR codes, explores the intersection of modern technology and art while embodying the concept of environmental protection.
<b>Crystal Spirits VI</b>	Abstract crystal forms demonstrate a fusion of geometric and natural crystals.	The transparent black colour adds depth and mystery to the piece.	Steel rods, elastic fabrics, elastic threads, acrylic sheets	Crystal forms are presented in an abstract way through transparent and reflective materials and complex geometric compositions.

<b>Boxxie Head</b>	Morphology of the Sumatran rhinoceros.	The main focus is on the natural colours of the cardboard.	Different types of cardboard	Commemorating the extinction of the Sumatran rhinoceros in the wild in Malaysia through a cardboard sculpture.
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### Narrative Structure

Observe and analyze the narrative structure of the soft sculpture works in the two countries. This includes how artists tell stories through their work and how these stories reflect social values, beliefs or expectations.

Chinese soft sculpture contains rich history and tradition. Artist Shi Hui's "Book Not Book" interprets the lines of Chinese calligraphy in the form of knots, transforming the tradition and the present. For Shi Hui, the words of her mentor Wanman, "nationality is respect for her," which profoundly influenced her path to creating soft sculptures. Liang Shaoji's representative work, "Snowbound - Trapped" during the COVID-19 pandemic, uses the web of life to cover up the mixed sound of information and soothe the anxiety of reality. This sculpture art work reproduces the development and innovative spirit of China's new era during the pandemic period. Wang Lei's work "Goodbye Classic", with the way of old newspaper rubbing line, using modern expression techniques, pay tribute to the ancient Chinese cane chair, tells a dialogue between ancient and modern story. Sun Yiyun's "d=15" series is to explore the elements of "pain". With the elements of "broken, peeling, incomplete, erosion", a similar way, the feeling of injury with the image of masonry and cement, with the way of stabbing, presenting various states of "trauma", to express a sense of pain.

In contrast, Malaysian soft sculptures combine elements of different cultures to form a unique narrative style of multicultural blending. Sculptor Jamil Zakaria, who has achieved a clever fusion of multiple elements in his sculptural techniques, combines the transparent 3D visual quality of barbed wire to create his own unique and intriguing composition. Jamil Zakaria The sculpture series "The Shepherd's Story" is inspired by the traditional Malay proverbs. By adapting to the universality of animals, Jamil Zakaria, is able to metaphorically convey the complexity of human traits. Malaysian artist Nor Tijan Firdaus incorporates discarded electronic component materials into her visual art work. Her artwork involves choosing the appropriate electronic components, then cutting or carving by size, painting, and finally putting together into two-dimensional sculptures. Nor Tijan Firdaus Not only reviving e-waste, but also bringing attention to the impact of our reliance on electronic devices and our addiction to upgrading to the latest model, reinterpreting the relationship between consumerism, humanity and the environment. Ain Rahman The Crystal Spirit Sculpture is part of the "Deep Sea, Above the Galaxy" installation art exhibition. The focus on metaphysics brought Ain Rahman back to Malay culture. The Malays are known to be equally indulged in myth and religious philosophy, often turning to oral tradition or performance as a way of recording and spreading. "Boxxie Head", made by Ts Verly Veto Vermol, Zuraidy Abd Rahim & Khairul Nizan Mohd Aris, is a cardboard work of art commemorating the disappearance of the Sumatran rhino species that once lived in the Asian foothills and rainforests.

In general, there are significant differences in the narrative structure of the soft sculpture art between China and Malaysia. However, the specific differences will depend on the specific artist and the work. Artists innovate and develop the art of soft sculpture in their own unique way, so that the field of soft sculpture has always maintained an active and vibrant state.

### **An investigation of the cultural background**

Under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, people's life, culture and society have undergone tremendous changes. The art works of this period not only reflect people's deep understanding and feelings of the pandemic, but also reveal the complex emotions and reflections of human society in the face of a global crisis.

In this post-pandemic era, Chinese artist Shi Hui's works use cotton, hemp, Chinese rice paper and pulp as the main media, "combining rich changes in simplicity", providing a better interpretation of Chinese men, with both local and cultural characteristics. Wang Lei's works are through the transformation of paper materials. The ancient people recorded the image of the sky with knots. This ancient weaving tradition contains the attitude towards the world, and Wang Lei made his own record of the world in this ancient way. Liang Shaoji is the use of silkworm silk, covered in the mobile phone, recall at that time is like a gray siege, can only rely on the mobile phone as communication. Sun Yiyun uses the work intention to show the fragility of the people she feels. Chinese soft sculpture art works are deeply rooted in thousands of years of history and rich cultural traditions. These works made by the artists are all derived from our understanding of The Times.

As a multicultural country, Malaysia's soft sculpture style also has the local culture and exotic culture characteristics. In terms of the form and content of sculpture, Malaysian soft sculpture has a delicate and energetic expression of natural elements and human forms. For example, the Ain Rahman theme exhibition "Deep Sea, Above the Galaxy" was held in Malaysia due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this era of isolation and isolation, galleries and artists seek ways to connect with artistic audiences in the face of limited physical interaction. This concern for the highly modern way of existence and cognition. The artists Nor Tijan Firdaus and Ts Verly Veto Vermol, Zuraidy Abd Rahim & Khairul Nizan Mohd Aris both emphasize the importance of environmental and ecological protection, and Jamil Zakaria also interprets the unique feeling of COVID-19 in the form of fable stories.

In general, the changes in the elements and cultural background of soft sculpture works in the post-pandemic era reflect people's emotional experience and social reflection in the face of a global crisis. These works not only provide a new perspective on understanding and dealing with the pandemic, but also provide valuable inspiration for us to think about the future of human society.

### **The social meaning of the symbols**

Through the comparative analysis of the above aspects, the similarities and differences of the current situation of Chinese and Malaysian soft sculpture can be comprehensively understood, and the differences and common points of the meaning and expression modes of symbols in different cultural backgrounds can be revealed. This will help to have a deep understanding of the cultural characteristics, creative trends and social significance in the field of soft sculpture between China and Malaysia, and to promote cross-cultural exchanges and artistic development interaction. In different styles and forms, these sculptors offer unique insights into art and profound insights into real-life problems. Their sculptures are not only a cultural expression, but also an artistic response to the post-pandemic era. With the

joint efforts of Chinese and Malaysian sculptors, the development of contemporary soft sculpture will also have a broader prospect.

### **Discussion**

As an emerging art form, contemporary soft sculpture plays a pivotal role between China and Malaysia cultural exchanges. In the past decades, the friendship and cooperation between China and Malaysia have been deepened and cultural exchanges have been widely developed. As a unique form of artistic expression, contemporary soft sculpture has great appeal and is loved by a wide range of audiences. In the cultural exchange between China and Malaysia, contemporary soft sculpture creations have emerged, not only enriching the cultural life of the two peoples, but also laying a solid foundation for friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

First, the artistic characteristics of contemporary soft sculpture inject new vitality into the cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia. As an emerging art form, contemporary soft sculpture is very different from traditional sculpture in form and content, and is more modern and forward-looking. China and Malaysia have a long cultural tradition, and the modern elements contained by contemporary soft sculpture can bring new experiences and understanding to both cultures. In the process of creation, contemporary soft sculpture often uses new materials and techniques, which also provides an opportunity for further in-depth exchanges between China and Malaysia in the field of sculpture.

Second, the creation of contemporary soft sculpture understands the integration with traditional culture, providing a richer level of cultural exchange between China and Malaysia. The creative form of contemporary soft sculpture not only focuses on the breakthrough in form, but also on the cultural exploration above the connotation. Therefore, contemporary soft sculpture often integrates elements of traditional culture with the realities of contemporary society. The historical and cultural backgrounds of China and Malaysia, as well as their different modes of development, give rise to distinctive styles and characteristics in the creation of sculpture in both countries. Through the cultural exploration of contemporary soft sculpture, the cultural exchange between China and Malaysia has become more and more enriched.

As an important carrier of cultural exchange between China and Malaysia, contemporary soft sculpture is rich and diverse, giving people a shocking, moving and inspiring experience, and playing an active role in promoting cultural exchange in the world. Although the cultural traditions of China and Malaysia are very different, the creative language of contemporary soft sculpture has a natural integration, and it is believed that the closer cooperation between China and Malaysia in the field of sculpture will lead to greater development in the future.

### **Conclusion**

In the post-pandemic era, the development of contemporary soft sculpture presents some common features and unique differences between Chinese and Malaysian artists. Firstly, soft sculpture works in this period are full of symbols and metaphors. By using symbols with specific cultural and social meanings, Chinese and Malaysian artists express people's feelings and reflections on the post-pandemic era. These symbols are not only intuitively visual, but also rich in profound symbolism. Secondly, the choice and combination of symbols in these artists' works also reflect different cultural backgrounds and values. For example, Chinese artists may be more inclined to use symbols related to traditional culture and socialist values, whereas Malaysian artists may be more concerned with symbols related to nature and



the interpretation of allegory. These differences not only reveal the cultural characteristics of the two countries, but also reflect the artists' different understandings and attitudes towards their times and societies. However, despite these differences, Chinese and Malaysian artists share some common tendencies in the use of symbols. They both tend to use symbols to express people's complex emotions about the epidemic and their hopes for the future. These symbols not only enhance the expressive power of the works, but also enable the works to communicate and interact with different audiences across cultural and social boundaries.

Overall, the soft sculpture artworks in the post-pandemic era reflect the artists' deep understanding and reflection on the times, culture and human beings themselves. This study not only provides us with new perspectives for understanding art creations in this period, but also provides valuable insights for us to think about the relationship between art and the times, culture and society.

It can be said that in international cultural exchange, contemporary soft sculpture, as an emerging art form, can not only show the characteristics and charm of national culture, but also play an important role in cross-cultural communication. As cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia and other countries continue to intensify, the role of contemporary soft sculpture in cultural exchanges will be further highlighted. The future outlook for the field of soft sculpture is very broad and requires artists to continue to explore and innovate to take soft sculpture to new heights and make greater contributions to the sustainable development of soft sculpture art in the post-pandemic era.

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