

# ‘Mapping’ China’s Art Industry: Understanding Contemporary China Through Qiu Zhijie’s Maps as a Medium of Cultural Relations

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## ABSTRACT

Deeply ingrained in the fabric of Chinese society, calligraphy originated as an ancient art form and is known as the chief of all traditional arts in China. In the current artistic context of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), calligraphy has merged with contemporary art forms to reflect the dynamic changes and realities of the country. Addressing gaps in academic literature focusing on China’s soft power and cultural diplomacy, this paper focuses on cultural relations to develop a people-centered pathway that flows “organically” and enables the understanding of current-day China. Inspired by Anne Marie-Slaughter’s conceptualization of a “web” of networks, this paper employs a case study analysis of specific contemporary artworks by Chinese contemporary artist Qiu Zhijie. Indeed, this paper finds that Qiu’s maps reflect nuances of contemporary Chinese society, showcasing the intricate relationship between calligraphy, contemporary Chinese art forms, and Chinese culture and society. Further, due to the unique combination of Chinese characters and English text, woven together through cartography and Chinese calligraphy, Qiu’s maps provide international audiences with basic tools for understanding cross-cultural nuances and contemporary realities. In the context of international relations, Qiu’s maps may act as a medium for improving the international community’s understanding of current-day China.

## 1. Introduction

With its foundations deeply entrenched in Chinese thought and culture, calligraphy has been vital to the development of China’s scholarly and artistic expression throughout the history of Chinese civilization. When walking in parks across China, one may notice people of all ages performing water calligraphy (*dishu*, or 地书) on tiles and concrete, using a brush and water to replace ink (Mirra, 2024).

Although providing a clear definition of “calligraphy” may prove a nearly impossible task, this short paper has chosen renowned British art historian Roger Fry’s simplified conceptualization: “when a line is created in the condition of absolute certainty and reaches

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its goal, we call this kind of line ‘calligraphy’” (Shen, 2020, p. 130). In Chinese art history, the practice of calligraphy and the copying of works of legendary masters, such as the *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering* (兰亭集序) by Wang Xizhi (王羲之), has been regarded as a form of self-cultivation by bodily, emotionally, and intellectually relating to the aesthetic and ethical values of an artwork (Hopfener, 2014; Hung, 2024). In this mind, through years of painstaking imitation of classical modes of writing, that calligraphers mature in their craft (Cheng, 2009, p. 20).

Calligraphers in China discover history by composing history, and artist Qiu Zhijie (邱志傑) represents this kind of experimental communication between Chinese literati tradition and contemporary art.<sup>1</sup> Through his calligraphic practice—which includes routinely imitating his predecessors’ writings—Qiu has developed the view that all schools of Chinese art are “mutations from calligraphy” (Qiu, 2008, p.147).

Qiu’s work has been showcased to global audiences on multiple instances through “solo exhibitions at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, UCCA in Beijing, the Guangdong Museum of Art and Macau’s Fundação Oriente” (Jing Daily, 2012). More recently, some of Qiu Zhijie’s works in the form of maps have been displayed in the viewing rooms of GalleriaContinua in Beijing. Within this display, one specific artwork that charts the complexity of China’s art industry merits scholarly attention due to its unique inter-weaving of China’s cultural and artistic tradition exemplified through calligraphy, modern artistic mediums, and a deep reflection of China’s societal dynamics.

By recognizing the significance of this artwork embodying elements of Chinese culture and society, the paper’s main objective is to draw attention to the importance of cultural relations in understanding China’s contemporary realities. In light of current economic, political, and security developments on a global stage, this paper contends that understanding Chinese culture and society on a deeper level would benefit the international community and enrich the conduct of international relations.

As such, through the case study of Qiu’s map of China’s art industry, this paper draws links between China’s tradition exemplified through calligraphy, modern cultural and societal structure, and concepts key to international relations. Rather than regarding the topic through Joseph Nye’s conceptualization of “soft power” or “cultural diplomacy” (see Nye, 2008), this paper focuses on cultural relations as defined by Richard Arndt (2006) to develop a people-centered pathway that flows “organically” and enables the understanding of current-day China. The people-centered approach adopted by this paper is inspired by Anne Marie-Slaughter’s conceptualization of a “web” of networks, which in this case is seen as networks between people across the globe. Within this method, Qiu’s maps are considered a medium allowing for cultural relations between peoples to flourish as the artworks combine traditional Chinese calligraphy with Western modes of geographical mapping as well as Chinese characters and English text, making them accessible to a wide audience, which does not require art expertise to understand, interpret, and even relate to the content of the artworks.

Thus, assuming that calligraphy reflects both the historic and contemporary nuances of Chinese culture and society, the paper undertakes the following research questions: In what ways is the traditional art of calligraphy connected to China’s contemporary realities? How can contemporary artworks, specifically Qiu’s maps, create bridges for cultural relations on a global scale and improve the international community’s understanding of China?

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<sup>1</sup>See GalleriaContinua. (n.d.). *XXL ONLINE: Qiu Zhijie presents ‘Racing Against Time’*.  
<https://www.galleriacontinua.com/viewing-room-gallery-xxl?id=66f041e16a60928b05a7e228a89c3799>

In answer to the above, the paper provides a brief overview of the historical development of Chinese characters and calligraphy, outlining the relationship between calligraphy and contemporary art in China. By undertaking one of Qiu Zhijie's "maps" tracing China's art industry as an example of avenues for advancing "cultural relations" across the globe, this paper argues such artworks can potentially ameliorate the international community's understanding of China's realities.

## 2. Calligraphy as the "Chief" of the Arts in China

The earliest extant mention of copying works of calligraphy dates to the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD), whereby a significant proportion of contemporary Chinese characters have retained the same or a similar structure and meaning to their antecedents (Wei & Long, 2022; Zhang et al., 2008). Deeply linked to nature, the aesthetic of Chinese calligraphy presents a balance between strokes and empty spaces left as a form of intentional omission. Indeed, one of the greatest art historians of the Tang dynasty (唐朝), Zhang Yanyuan (张彦远, 815–877 A.D.), praised calligraphy masters such as Wu Daozi (吴道子), claiming that in his work "dots and lines of link are sharp; elliptical space is left between dots and lines" (Shen, 2020, p. 135). This recognition of the specific balance between strokes and empty space in a piece of calligraphy offers incredible insight into Chinese philosophy and what many refer to as the "Chinese mind." As such, it is often claimed that a piece of calligraphy deeply reflects not only the skill of the master but also their personality and state of mind.

Chinese calligraphers either stand or sit at an elevated, elongated rectangular table able to accommodate larger pieces such as scrolls. On the left side are arranged *The Four Treasures of the Room of Literature* (文房四寶), which include a brush (made with a hollow reed or thin bamboo to which is mounted a handle made of precious materials such as jade, gold, or ivory among others), a brush-stand, an inkstone as well as ink, and paper (Yee, 1973). Typically, the ink comes in the form of a stick crafted from burnt pinewood mixed with an adhesive to make it solidify, and the inkstone is commonly made from a rock called red-stone (*ibid.*). Although the "Four Treasures" have been employed by calligraphy masters over the centuries, Chinese calligraphy originally emerged in a different form linked to the origin of Chinese characters.

Since the earliest recovered records of Shell-and-Bone inscriptions carved onto oracle bones during the Shang dynasty (18<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), Chinese characters have continuously evolved to reach their contemporary form. Notably, during the Zhou Dynasty (周朝) in the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C., inscriptions were predominantly carved into bronze vessels used for ritual worship (*ibid.*). Later evolved the writing system of the Western and early Eastern Zhou dynasties known as the *Great Seal* (大篆), which lasted until the Qin dynasty (246–207 B.C.) when China was unified under one Emperor. It was the reign of Emperor Qin Shi Huang Di (秦始皇帝) that brought a set of characters called the *Small Seal* (小篆), which through simplification developed into a form we encounter today — *Li Shu* (隸書) Clerical Script (*ibid.*). Throughout China's long history, calligraphy has evolved hand in hand with written characters (both non-simplified and simplified), encompassing different styles and varieties. Nevertheless, five principal script styles exist to this day, notably: *Zhuan Shu* (篆書) Seal Script, the above-mentioned *Li Shu* (隸書) Clerical Script, *Kai Shu* (楷書) Regular Script, *Xing Shu* (行書) Running Script, and *Cao Shu* (草書) Grass Script (Chen, 2011, p. 16).

Among the five styles, Regular Script only became a mature script in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.), which has significantly impacted the historical legacy of Chinese calligraphy.

During the Tang Dynasty, calligraphy became one of the four criteria for assessing candidates' fitness for government office, with the other three being stature, speech (vocabulary and diction), and logical judgment skills (McNair, 1995). Further, calligraphy was considered to reveal the moral condition of candidates who were expected, as virtuous people of exemplary correctness, to set an example for others to follow (*ibid.*). Finally, Tang Dynasty rulers collected works by great masters of calligraphy as a sign of cultured rule (Chen, 2022). Specifically, Emperor Taizong (太宗, 626–649 A.D.) was known as an adamant promoter of calligraphic works by Wang Xizhi (王羲之, 303-361 A.D.)—also known as China's "Sage of Calligraphy" (書聖).

Since then, the legacy of copying great masters' work has been passed down through history and remains significant in the current practice of calligraphy within China's art tradition. As mentioned, one artist who adheres to this principle is Qiu Zhijie.

### 3. Qiu Zhijie's Maps: Combining Chinese Literati Tradition and Contemporary Art

As a contemporary artist, writer, curator, and educator, Qiu Zhijie was born in 1969 in Zhangzhou, Fujian Province, and is currently based in Beijing and Hangzhou (*ibid.*). He boasts a diverse portfolio that encompasses calligraphy, sculpture, painting, printmaking, video, photography, and performance, and can be dubbed a "contemporary Chinese artist transculturally entangled in global contemporary art discourses" (Hopfener, 2014, p. 2).

Qiu first rose to international fame in the 1990s with his experimental works, including the *Tattoo* series featuring Chinese characters painted on bare chests (Conrad, 2019). Other distinguished works include *A Suicidology of the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge* (since 2008), which has gained international attention (Hopfener, 2017), and *Copying the Preface of the Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion a Thousand Times* (1990-1995) whereby Qiu copied the canonical calligraphy work *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering* originating from Wang Xizhi (as discussed above), transforming it into a contemporary abstract painting (M+ Museum Hong Kong, n.d.). The latter is considered an artwork of traditional cultural heritage as it satisfies the criteria of copying a defined historical canon of Chinese calligraphy while moving into the sphere of contemporary art (Wei & Long, 2022). The bridge built between calligraphy as a traditional and historical art form and contemporary art deeply reflects China's current-day reality, which blends history, traditional culture, and classical works of Chinese philosophy with contemporary models of politics, economy, and society.

Further, since about 2010, Qiu Zhijie has begun drawing maps as "articulations and mediations of his personal situatedness between locality and globality" (Hopfener, 2014, p.19), considering them orientational instruments to re-order and understand the world. Over the past two decades, Qiu Zhijie has plotted out maps in the form of landscape paintings approaching topics including religion, mythology, politics, and society, woven together to chart their complex relations.<sup>2</sup>

Combining calligraphy with landscape cartography, Qiu created a *Map of Theatre of the World* for the *Art and China after 1989* exhibition, displayed at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2017. Indeed, Qiu's maps have found global success, and some have been featured in the 2016 *Bentu* exhibition at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris. Qiu's *Map of*

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<sup>2</sup>See Galleria Continua. (n.d.). QIU ZHIJIE. <https://www.galleriacontinua.com/artists/qiu-zhijie-63>



*the Third World* (2015), exhibited at the foundation, demonstrates how the Chinese art of calligraphy can be transformed into maps of intangible concepts showcased in an institution outside of China. As discussed below, this blend of calligraphy and cartography may enable the international community to gain a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary China.



Figure 1. “Map of the Third World” by Qiu Zhijie (2015)

Source: *Bentu Chinese Artists in a time of Turbulence and Transformation* exhibition at Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Mapping the Art Industry in the People’s Republic of China

“Mapping is the best way to tell stories,” Qiu Zhijie said in an interview about his more recent artworks as conceptualizations of the world (Conrad, 2019). Indeed, one of his more recent works exhibited in Galleria Continua (in Beijing, China) tells the story of China’s art industry. Although Qiu’s maps have been exhibited globally, this specific piece may prove significant for cross-cultural communication by allowing audiences to understand better the underlying realities of the art industry in contemporary China.

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<sup>3</sup>See Fondation Louis Vuitton. (n.d.). *Bentu Chinese Artists in a time of Turbulence and Transformation*. <https://www.fondationlouisvuitton.fr/en/events/bentu-chinese-artists-in-a-time-of-turbulence-and-transformation>



Figure 2. “Letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools contend” by Qiu Zhijie  
Source: Taken by Jood Ghazwan Sharaf at Galleria Continua, Beijing.

Figure 2 presents a map whose theme is “Letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools contend.” Stretching over four wooden panels, this map blends traditional Chinese calligraphy with cartography, representing the art industry in China. There is a lake in the middle, surrounded by mountains and rivers feeding into it. A closer look at Figures 3 and 4 (as below) reveals English words presented with their counterparts in Chinese characters just above.

Figure 3 presents words such as “The Famous Artist Studio Become A Tourist Site” referring to current phenomena in the art scene in China whereby tourists or social media “influencers” visit the studios of rising or established artists in large crowds. This phenomenon is not solely reserved for the PRC. With the rise of social media, international audiences may find a near-universal increase in crowds uploading content of their visits to art studios, galleries, or museums to online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and others.

On the map, words such as “Fake Auction” in the bottom right of Figure 3 are more challenging to read, intentionally obscured, as if in the shadows – metaphorically and literally. Another important and relevant reality can be seen through the words: “The Oversea Students Quarreled Because of their Political Stance.” This points to the political divisions students may encounter, intentionally and non-intentionally, when studying abroad in other countries. Further, this links to the right side of Figure 4, which reads “Internation Media Induce The Artist To Say Extremist Opinions,” which demonstrates occurrences during international media coverage of Chinese artists. Both showcase the permeation of politics into the art scene — sometimes not induced by artists or their artworks themselves. Importantly, this phenomenon is not solely restricted to Chinese artists but rather occurs on a global scale, raising potential considerations over whether the art industry is and ought to be subjected to geographical borders after all.

In Figure 4, words such as “Power 100 List” seem to be referencing the economic and political side of the art industry in China whilst “Artist with Ultrarich Husband” most likely points to artistic expression as a status symbol and its effect on relationships within Chinese society. The obscured section, which spells “Art Prize to Promote the Market,” points to the shifting dynamics of the art market in China and the methods undertaken to affect such processes.





perception refers to the sensory experience as people see and feel an artwork, accompanied by a qualitative appraisal that attaches meaning to the experience (Baumgarten, 1954; Xu & Shen, 2023). Analyzing through five dependent aesthetic measures (simplicity, fluency, interest, pleasure, and overall liking), Xu and Shen found differences in perceptual processing and overall liking between participants from different cultures, concluding that cultural background is associated with viewer's experiences of the Chinese language and their aesthetics expectations. This phenomenon contributes to notable differences in the aesthetic evaluation of Chinese calligraphy. Simply, this means that differing cultural backgrounds would affect the way audiences view Chinese calligraphy, and often, those unfamiliar with calligraphy may find difficulty to appreciate the art form.

However, this phenomenon may be alleviated, albeit not entirely — through instances where contemporary artworks blend traditional Chinese culture and other art mediums. One specific aspect within Qiu's maps, notably the inclusion of the English language as a translation of the Chinese characters, contributes to cross-cultural understanding as it provides international audiences with the basic tools necessary to interpret the artwork and its message. When equipped with crucial yet overlooked tools for cross-cultural artistic communication, international audiences may begin to truly glimpse into the domestic developments of China's art industry. In this light, Qiu Zhijie's maps charter an essential direction for understanding China's contemporary realities, acting as mediums to enhance people-centered cultural relations across the globe.

## **5. Maps and Cultural Relations in Communicating China's Realities**

### **5.1. Defining “Cultural Relations” and “Cultural Diplomacy”**

In one of the most famous works in contemporary international relations, Joseph S. Nye (2009) outlined soft power as the ability to attract, resting primarily on three resources: a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies. Following this conceptualization, cultural diplomacy has been widely studied as a sub-category of public diplomacy, which is considered to be more citizen-oriented (*ibid.*). Other definitions of cultural diplomacy regard it as an international medium for “bridging differences and facilitating mutual understanding” (Goff, 2013, p.421). Similar to the definition provided by Patricia M. Goff, academics such as Milton Cummings view cultural diplomacy as “the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding” (Cummings, 2003). This understanding also aligns with Walter Laqueur's definition of cultural diplomacy as “the use of creative expression and exchanges of ideas, information, and people to increase mutual understanding” (Laqueur, 1994, p.20).

Although this paper concurs with the above definitions, considering the essence of cultural diplomacy as being rooted in exchanges for the fostering and amelioration of mutual understanding, it has chosen to employ the term “cultural relations” to assess the importance of Qiu Zhijie's maps in facilitating the international community's understanding of contemporary China. The definition presented by American diplomat Richard Arndt makes a distinction between cultural relations, which “grow naturally and organically, without government intervention,” (Arndt, 2006, p. xviii), and cultural diplomacy, which takes “place when formal diplomats, serving national governments, try to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests” (*ibid.*).

As such, unlike cultural relations, which occur organically without interventions to their direction, cultural diplomacy entails some form of government involvement. At this stage, it is important to note that, to some extent, China's political leadership is involved in aspects of



China's cultural diplomacy on a global stage. With the emergence of localized concepts and understandings such as cultural diplomacy (文化外交) as well as people-to-people exchange (人文交流), which Chinese officials increasingly use, China has created its own "model" of diplomacy (Zhao, 2019). Relating this to the art industry, for example, means that systemic promotion can be seen on an institutional level through the establishment of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) – the country's top agency concerned with managing museums and ancient artifacts. SACH follows specific guiding policies such as *The Twelfth Five-Year Plan for Museums and Cultural Heritage* (2011) and *The Outline of the Middle to Long-term Development Plan for Museums* (2011–2020), which consistently emphasize international collaboration (Knell, 2018).

Due to this reality, this paper has chosen to employ the term "cultural relations" rather than "cultural diplomacy" when discussing the potential avenues of international exchanges as the optimal solvent for the prejudice and miscommunication characteristic of international relations. Indeed, cultural relations not only allow for the incorporation of different kinds of non-governmental actors in cross-border cultural activities (Fedyushina & Jones, 2024) but may also better reflect the "web" conceptualization of international relations as described in Anne-Marie Slaughter's book *The Chessboard of the Web: Strategies of Connection in a Networked World* (Slaughter, 2017). In the "web" view, the international system is regarded as a world of intersecting and closely overlapping networks, where the state of nature is "connection" and the units of analysis are people (*ibid.*). Connection, this paper argues, can be facilitated through increased understanding between different non-governmental actors, including civil society, artists, curators, lecturers, philanthropic foundations, NGOs, organized festivals, businesses, and media, among countless others. Among the many networks that can be formed, interactions and exchanges based on cultural components may prove to be an essential avenue for communication, enhanced mutual understanding, and even acceptance.

Culture and particular elements able to capture the deep roots of a society's understanding of itself and the world around it, have the power to transcend political individuality and neutralize polarities. In the case of Chinese culture and society, academic literature has scarcely drawn links between the traditional art of calligraphy and contemporary art, exploring how the intricate relationship between the two offers a glimpse into China's contemporary society. Further, when discussing Chinese culture, the latter is often linked to cultural diplomacy and projects to enhance China's soft power on the global stage through the establishment of Confucius Institutes, cultural promotion through international television broadcasting, initiatives to enhance tourism, and the hosting of international events among others (see, e.g., Ang et al., 2015; Inkster, 2018; Kurlantzick, 2007; Li & Worm, 2011).

To address gaps in existing literature, this short paper draws on the "web" view of international relations, focusing on cultural relations that occur as international audiences engage with Chinese artworks. Considering calligraphy as a component of cultural thought and a deep reflection of Chinese society due to its entanglement with China's historical development and contemporary realities, this paper argues the study of calligraphy in the contemporary context may serve to inform the international community's understanding of contemporary China. To exemplify this, specific artworks combining China's literati tradition and modern art may point international audiences toward the right avenues for beginning to understand China's realities in 2024. This interaction is described as "cultural relations" on a global stage, facilitated through international exhibitions, conferences, workshops, events, and people-to-people relations.

## 5.2. Building Bridges Through Mapping

Initial bridges ought to be built for the international community to begin crafting a realistic understanding of China rooted in complex realities. Beyond the mapping of China's industry through the work discussed above, Qiu's maps (including the *Map of Mythology* from 2019),<sup>4</sup> can potentially build such bridges. Mapmaking has been, throughout history, a fundamental tool for humanity to make sense of the world by charting concepts and geographical territories. Mixing this arguably universal concept with Chinese literati tradition in the form of calligraphic works demonstrates the intricate interplay between China's tradition, culture, and its relationships with international society. As seen in these maps, China is not entirely a "mystery" or a separate entity from international society – instead, China and specific structural components of its society are shaped by its interactions with the international community. As seen in the more detailed view of Photos 3 and 4, some phenomena, including the effect of social media on the art scene, the permeation of political discourses into the art world, and access to art as a status symbol in society, are not developments solely reserved to China's domestic art industry.

Thus, Qiu's "maps" can be studied by foreign audiences to begin to understand the intricate dynamics within China's art industry and the nuances of Chinese culture and society. Following this logic, on a grander scale, the international community may benefit from improving its understanding of China. However, as this paper argues, such developments need not necessarily come from political, newspaper, or academic resources, which may be difficult for some people whose first language is not English or even Mandarin Chinese to understand. Here, within this gap lies the beauty of cultural relations through art, which may not require a complex historical, political, theoretical, or philosophical background from the viewers. As noted by Gonçalves and Majhanovich (2016), art is a creative process that fosters and protects diversity with its ability to promote intercultural dialogue and cross-cultural barriers (see also Lähdesmäki & Koistinen, 2021). This does not mean art is not deeply rooted and intertwined with other disciplines. Merely, the visual aspects of specific artworks may not require broader audiences to have a prior understanding of such topics, allowing them to begin understanding China and its complex realities through building bridges for communication. In turn, this facilitates and allows for the creation of an inter-connected world reflecting the "web" view of international relations.

## 6. Conclusion

From ancient times to the country's current realities, calligraphy has remained the "chief" of artistic practices in China. Deeply embedded in Chinese culture and society, from everyday social activities to exhibitions in national museums, calligraphy can be considered a core component of Chinese traditional culture.

Under this premise, this paper has briefly introduced the historical development of Chinese characters and the five main scripts in Chinese calligraphy, tracing links between Chinese literati tradition (specifically during the Tang Dynasty) and China's contemporary art practices. Chinese calligraphers mature in their craft by copying the works of great masters, and contemporary artist Qiu Zhijie has conformed to this tradition. Following his early works, Qiu began combining calligraphy with cartography, using "maps" as orientational mediums to understand the world. Specifically, as studied in detail in this paper, Qiu's map displayed

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<sup>4</sup>See Mazzoli, C. (2023). *Qiu Zhijie: Mapping Today's China*. Daily Art Magazine.  
<https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/qiu-zhijie/>

in Galleria Continua offers invaluable insight into China's art industry's complex realities and undercurrents, reflecting both domestic and global trends.

In the eyes of foreign audiences with limited prior exposure and interactions with Chinese culture, traditional calligraphy works may, at times, be challenging to interpret and understand as cultural background affects the aesthetic evaluation of different artworks. However, Qiu's maps offer a blend of China's artistic tradition with nearly universally used cartography (as well as the inclusion of English words), shifting the way aesthetic perception may be understood from a cultural context and building a positive stepping stone for the amelioration of the international community's understanding of China. Thus, by adopting Anne-Marie Slaughter's conception of the "web" of networks, this paper has focused on a people-centered approach to cultural relations, arguing that people-to-people interactions through artistic mediums on a global scale may build connections vital for the future of humanity given the existence of political, climatic, and existential turmoil.

Indeed, cultural relations that occur organically between non-governmental actors on a global scale may facilitate exchanges that would ameliorate mutual understanding. This argument rests on the assumption of willingness for interaction and genuine understanding through exchange and mutual learning processes. Although seemingly simple, this development has sometimes proven challenging for the international community. However, by undertaking one of Qiu Zhijie's maps as a case study, this paper has demonstrated that conceptualized barriers need not remain if the willingness to look beyond them drives humanity.

Perhaps, through the artworks discussed in this paper, international audiences may find similarities in their own experiences of the world. And perhaps, that could be an indication that humanity may have some overlapping understandings of the world that transcend language, geographical borders, and even political and ideological divisions.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that this research article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **Permissions**

The author has obtained the permission of relevant parties, including artist Qiu Zhijie, to discuss the artistic contents presented in this research article.

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