

Exploring the Embodiment of Female Consciousness in the Soft Sculpture of Contemporary Chinese Artists

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ABSTRACT

In the current era when the internationalization trend of soft sculpture art is significant, soft sculpture has transcended the category of marginalized art forms, which is attributed to the continuous exploration and practice of soft sculpture artists. In the process of female artists creating soft sculptures, the significance of soft fibres has transcended the simple material level, carrying rich social, cultural and emotional information. Artists do not merely create soft sculptures; instead, they use soft materials as a medium to deeply explore more macroscopic issues such as identity, boundaries, labour, and memory. Therefore, this study focuses on the creative practices of contemporary Chinese female soft sculptors and uses interpretive phenomenological analysis methods to deeply explore how they carry female consciousness through soft materials in their works. The research will select representative cases of female artists, analyse the intrinsic connections among their creative concepts, material choices and thematic expressions, aiming to reveal the diverse presentation forms of female consciousness in the unique artistic context of soft sculpture, as well as how this expression reflects the construction and deconstruction process of female identity in the context of social and cultural changes. At present, there are relatively few studies on female soft sculpture artists. This study, by collecting data and conducting in-depth analysis, aims to provide new theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence for contemporary Chinese soft sculpture art. This study employed the methods of literature review, semi-structured interviews, and observation for data collection and analysed the semi-structured interviews using the interpretive phenomenology analysis method.

Contribution/Originality: This study is one of very few studies that have explored the themes of female artists' soft sculpture works and how feminine consciousness is conveyed through soft materials in the artworks via the interpretive phenomenological analysis method.

1. Introduction

When we look back at soft sculptures in the history of art, we will find that the use of this term is more prevalent in the field of sculpture, and it often exists in contrast to traditional hard sculptures. Han (2006) posits that 'The public's first impression of sculptures is that they are made of hard materials. However, art is constantly evolving. Soft sculptures emerged during the modernist period and are mostly composed of soft fibre materials such as cotton, linen, silk and paper (Zhao, 2010).

In the 1960s, Polish artist Magdalena Abakanovic took advantage of the rise of women's art to officially introduce the professional term "soft sculpture" in the field of fibre art. Brenson (1995) observed that Abakan's' weaving device broke through traditional textile techniques. 'In the field of sculpture, this kind of soft sculpture that combines warmth and flexibility breaks through the shackles of the traditional cold and hard appearance. There are no tools between me and the materials. The transmission of energy through her hands reflects her direct tactile relationship with soft materials.'(Jakubowska, 2012)

Golda (2018) 'There is no tool between me and the material I use. I choose it with my hands. I shape it with my hands. My hands transmit my energy to it.' By translating an idea into a shape, they will always pass on something escaping conceptualisation. They will reveal the unconscious.

She attempted to completely erase the practicality of the tapestries, allowing the soft materials to present complex sculptural forms (Abakanowicz & Rose, 1982). Its diversified creative paradigms, multi-dimensional artistic concepts and rich expression techniques have completely changed the development trajectory of traditional sculpture. It attracted people's attention with a brand-new look and inspired their thinking (Zhang, 2008). Meanwhile, Shi (2010) pointed out that today's soft sculptures are no longer confined to a single form and medium. Relying on the advancement of technology, artificial fibres, metal fibres and synthetic fibres have also become materials that soft sculpture artists can use.

Zhang (2017) pointed out that due to the limitations of physiological structure, women are inherently not at an advantage when engaging in heavy physical labour. But the smart ones found a way of working that they were capable of handling. Whether in the myths and legends of the East or the West, textile skills are inseparable from women. Under the ancient social division of labour model, men farmed and women wove cloth. Women almost devoted their entire lives to the loom. Nowadays, soft sculpture art has become a medium for female artists to express their humanistic spirit. Behind every piece of work lies the life experiences, aspirations and pursuits of women, as well as their expectations for self-transformation, social rights and global change (Wang, 2022).

Most of the soft sculpture art focuses on exploring the formal language of soft sculpture, while neglecting its cultural characteristics. In today's diversified art landscape, the view of soft sculpture art should take into account an interdisciplinary perspective more extensively.

Therefore, this study begins with two questions.

- i. What factors stimulate Chinese female soft sculpture artists to create and what ideas are expressed in their works?
- ii. What specific thematic concepts have Chinese female artists expressed?

Johnson and Christensen (2024) pointed out that qualitative data collection methods aim to gather genuine and insightful information to help understand and evaluate engagement levels and behavioural patterns. Therefore, the method for collecting data is semi-structured interviews, and the method for analysing data is IPA analysis.

It is well known that semi-structured interviews are highly effective in qualitative research because they allow researchers to obtain extremely personalized information directly from respondents. Since people are usually more willing to be interviewed in private one-on-one settings than in group settings, these interviews are crucial for examining the participants' viewpoints, motivations, beliefs and experiences. Facts have proved that they are also very advantageous in collecting data on sensitive issues.

This study adopted the IPA analysis method to analyse the data. To apply this method, the recorded interviews were first transcribed word for word, as there was no set of rules and no specific method stipulated for generating transcripts. Nevertheless, at least one accurate and perfect spelling report card is necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, the key issue is to ensure that the necessary information is preserved. The transcribed data were printed and read several times to ensure accuracy and enable researchers to be familiar with the depth and breadth of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This research is based on the soft sculpture art creation of Chinese female artists, delves into the expression of emotions in the themes of female artists' creations, and provides more research support for the development of Chinese female artists in the field of soft sculpture. Soft sculpture art is an important topic in contemporary art, and the number of female artists participating is significantly greater than that of male artists. Therefore, in-depth research on female artists is extremely necessary. The purpose of this study is to analyse the driving forces of soft sculpture art creation by female artists (Kang, 2014). By delving deeply into the creative motivations behind their works, an attempt is made to reveal the current state and creative status of female artists in China.

This research is divided into six parts. The first part discusses the main content, research questions, research methods and significance of the research. The second part is a literature review, mainly introducing how it influences the creations of female artists. The third part introduces the research methods, including how to conduct semi-structured interviews and analyse the collected data. The fourth part is to use the NVivo software to conduct thematic coding and summary of the interview content. The fifth part analyses the encoding results. The last part introduces the findings of this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Female artists and soft sculpture

We must admit that in the development process of most arts, male artists are more common. In the field of sculpture art, due to the objective reasons of the creative materials, the high proportion of male artists is even more obvious. However, outstanding female artists are not willing to be ignored. They break through the limitations brought by the creative materials and create soft sculptures with soft materials. In the development process of soft sculpture art, the number of female artists participating was significantly higher than that of male artists (Zhang, 2017).

The development of soft sculpture art benefited from the second wave brought about by the Western feminist art movement in the 1970s. Representative figures such as Miriam Shapiro and Judy Chicago have made changes to decorative home handicrafts, endowing their artistic language with political overtones (Parker, 2010). Judy Chicago's work "Dinner Party" is a combination of ceramic and embroidery art. By drawing on famous female figures in history, the status of women is re-examined (Chicago & Meyer, 1995). Through these works, female consciousness began to rethink whether traditional female skills such as embroidery, sewing and weaving have new cultural value (Nochlin, 1971; Reckitt, 2001).

Inspired by this, Chinese female soft sculpture artists have also embarked on their own experimental journey. Representative figures include Shi Hui, Lin Tianmiao, etc. In Beijing's weaving theory, it is mentioned that the emergence of soft sculpture has provided a more suitable form of expression for female artists. The relationship between women and weaving and sewing has lasted for thousands of years. By following the instincts of their bodies, they can create works with delicate emotions, starting from the perspective of women and their insights into life. The unique expressions of female artists and the sculptures of male artists have obvious differences. The themes of creation with soft materials focus on emotional expression, personal memory, gender consciousness, and other directions. Shi (2010) pointed out that female artists, through their own efforts and innovations, have found a path for continuous development in the male-dominated field of sculpture art, both for soft sculpture and for themselves.

2.2. The manifestation of female consciousness in artistic creation

In the history of art, "Why haven't there been any outstanding female artists?" It is a topic that has been discussed for a long time. Nochlin (2017) has explored this matter in his works since the 1970s. A large number of research topics have focused on male artists (Diamond, 1986). Nicol and Long (1996) put forward the reasons. They believed that men achieved the vast majority of creative accomplishments. Steele and Ambady (2006) argued that women are more conventional, to the extent that they are unable to break through their established situations. Wang (2021) proposed that women believe that merely managing the household in an orderly manner is their life goal, and they do not focus their energy on work and career. When women encounter setbacks at work, they are more likely to lack confidence, self-negate and even quit their jobs. Schmader (2002) holds that in the current society, there are still many people who believe that women should be more responsible for taking care of the family, while men's job lies in providing the material conditions for life (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). The worst thing is that women are influenced by stereotypes. When they work and live in a state of self-denial, it becomes even more difficult for them to achieve success (McGlone & Pfiester, 2015).

In fact, the challenges that women face in the art world are far greater than those of male artists. First of all, female artists want to have fair opportunities for education, employment, creation and exhibitions. Secondly, society naturally favours male artists, who are more likely to receive support from art funds and favour from male predecessors. Wang (2022) pointed out that even so, there are still many outstanding female artists in the history of art who have broken through conventional thinking and social shackles and overcome numerous challenges. It laid the foundation for the development of female art and found a way out for the younger generation.

The women's movement in the West aims to oppose discrimination against women, enhance their social status and rights, and achieve complete equality with men in all aspects such as politics, economy, culture and society. Carden (1974) established a friendly society that is equal to all genders, providing strong support, encouragement and courage to female victims, as well as eliminating gender-discriminatory terms, practices and laws. After the Western women's movement was introduced to China, the consciousness of Chinese women has also been awakening. Leung (2003) pointed out that after the 1980s, under the influence of feminist ideology, a large number of feminist studies conducted in the Chinese context emerged, which promoted the liberation of female consciousness and laid the foundation for the emergence of more Chinese female artists (Li & Li, 2017).

As many female artists have a certain connection with soft materials in their growth experiences, they are willing to experiment with soft materials in their creations. It is commendable that female artists have utilized their acute intuition to explore the inner emotions of materials and, from a unique female perspective, have led to the rapid development of soft sculpture art. Chinese artist Shi Hui is a very active artist in the field of soft sculpture creation. She is skilled at using soft materials with Chinese characteristics such as silk and Xuan paper, and in her artistic creations, she takes advantage of the inherent deep national attributes of these materials to showcase national traits. Affordable works possess the unique elegance, refinement and acuteness of women (Yin, 2010). Shi Hui herself once told in an interview that she kept trying to find suitable materials for her creations. Once, during a visit to a Xuan paper factory, the artist saw the pulp used to make Xuan paper in the hands of female workers, going through different processes and finally turning into Xuan paper. This natural form seems to be in dialogue with life. Shan (2010) said that Shi Hui's artistic experience to some extent reflects the development process of soft sculpture art in China.

Another well-known soft sculpture artist, Lin Tianmiao, has works that exhibit completely different characteristics. Lin Tianmiao's work "Entwined" is a two-ton giant wool ball wrapped with cotton thread. Caruso (2013) mentioned that this work presents a sense of anxiety and neurotic oppression. The creation of this work originated from the artist's mother's request to wrap an old sweater into a ball of yarn during her teenage years. This oppressive command made the artist think: Must this be a job for women? At this point, the artist had already developed a social aversion to the disciplinary training of girls in his heart. At this time, soft materials existed to express viewpoints, and the artist's works reflected on the concept of women in Chinese society. Haddon (2018) said that from this, it can be known that the creations of female artists mostly rely on their own life insights. They want to express the relationship between women and nature, women and themselves, and women and society. From a sharp female perspective, the themes of art have become increasingly diverse, and new vitality has emerged in creation. Artists speak out for themselves, for society, and for women's rights.

2.3. The manifestation of female consciousness in soft sculpture creation

Female consciousness can be interpreted from two perspectives. On the one hand, at the physiological level, women have different perspectives of observation and aesthetic feelings from men. On the other hand, at the social level, women's social status varies in different historical stages, and the values they pursue in art are bound to be different as well (Vogel, 1974). In soft sculpture creation, female consciousness is reflected in the

artist's emotional expression, subject inclination, material metaphor, colour selection, and various other artistic techniques. Female consciousness, as a kind of female self-awareness, female artists will unconsciously add understanding and elements with female characteristics in their soft sculpture creation. At the very beginning of creation, women did not develop their own aesthetic characteristics in the field of art and had no individual expression of their own. They are forced to use the same artistic expression methods as men (Drewes, 2021). In contemporary society, with the rise of female consciousness, they have regained the right to speak out for themselves. In the process of constantly affirming the self-worth and social value of women, female consciousness has been further enhanced and developed in creation, giving it a new interpretation in artistic creation (Nemser, 1975).

Each female artist is an independent individual. Their life experiences are diverse, and the artworks they create are also distinctive (Nochlin, 2018). Starting from their own experiences as women, they are no longer confined to family life and emotional experiences full of feminine sentiments. They have begun to break free from constraints, explore more boldly in the field of art, and also try grand political, historical and social themes. They view the world from a female perspective in their own way of understanding and integrate themselves into the entire social environment. The creative perspective has also become increasingly broad (Chadwick, 2002). However, whether they aim to convey delicate or grand thoughts and emotions, the inspiration for their creations always stems from their experiences of life and their feelings about existence. Only by feeling the present life and modern society with their hearts can they create artworks that are rich in connotation and carry the spirit of the times.

Research materials on female consciousness in the field of soft sculpture art are insufficient, but female artists engaged in soft sculpture art are an important part of the history of Chinese female art. Therefore, in this study, female soft sculpture artists were selected as the research subjects for interviews, and the collected information was analysed and summarized. When more researchers and experts pay attention to the field of soft sculpture art, they will draw the public's attention to it. More female artists will choose to create with soft materials. Diversified aesthetics will give rise to a richer variety of artworks, and this field will also have better development.

2.4. IPA and soft sculpture art

Interpretive phenomenological analysis is a mature qualitative research method that is widely used by researchers in various fields (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). It was originally established for the purpose of exploring, describing and interpreting the personal experiences of interviewees (Larkin et al., 2006; Tuffour, 2017). IPA was originally named by Smith in 1996 and is a qualitative research method in psychology used to explore experience. Since then, it has been applied in various disciplines related to sociology. In the research of art-related disciplines, the extensive application of the IPA analysis method can also be observed. Exploring Instrumental Ensemble Performers (Wentink & Van der Merwe, 2020).

The advantage of interpretive phenomenon analysis lies in its ability to gain a deep understanding of the interviewee's viewpoints and experiences through dialogue (Smith, 2011). When using the IPA method, researchers need to determine the interview topic in advance, conduct research on the participants, and make all necessary preparations before the interview. A successful interview requires the interviewee to

have a certain degree of trust in the researcher to ensure that more accurate information can be obtained. Therefore, IPA is particularly suitable for small-sample interview analysis, with an in-depth focus on details and specific issues.

In the research of art disciplines, data are mainly collected through methods such as in-depth interviews, focus interviews, participatory observations, online interviews, visual diaries, and art creation methods (Spence & Gwinner, 2014). Before collecting data, researchers should set up a list of questions. According to the needs of the interview, they can freely choose whether to send the answers to the interviewees in advance for preparation. As a semi-structured interview, it will be randomly adjusted based on the responses of the interviewees, with the main purpose of obtaining more relevant information. Such interviews also greatly test the researcher's ability. Rich interview experience is more conducive to the development of research. Smith et al. (2021) pointed out that the entire process of the interview would be recorded, and researchers needed to repeatedly watch and listen to the audio or video. Read the transcribed materials repeatedly. Due to the particularity of art, the relevant materials obtained may also be pictures of works, which also need to be analysed carefully.

Soft sculpture art, as an important form of expression in contemporary art, has a relatively short development history in China. Currently, most research on soft sculpture art remains at the basic level such as development, concept, and materials, and has not yet been studied through IPA analysis. Moreover, this study starts from the creative perspective of female artists to investigate the manifestation of female consciousness in soft sculpture. It is highly necessary to conduct this research to explore the relationship between women and soft sculpture, summarize and generalize the creative themes, and draw more people's attention to the development of soft sculpture art.

3. Research Methods

3.1. The research approaches

This study aims to explore the creative themes of contemporary Chinese female soft sculpture artists. Creswell et al. (2011) pointed out that we conduct qualitative research because a problem or a problem needs to be explored. This kind of exploration is necessary to explore these issues, rather than using the pre-determined information in the literature or relying on the results of other studies. This study adopts the qualitative constructivist paradigm of phenomenology. The research data were deeply collected through semi-structured interviews. A total of five artists participated in the interviews to discuss their creative experiences and themes. According to the research requirements, this study adopts the structured interview method. For qualitative research projects, semi-structured interviews are usually the sole source of data, and questions about the interview schedule and location are typically arranged at specific times (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Gill et al. (2008) also holds that the purpose of research interviews is to explore an individual's views, experiences, beliefs and motivations regarding specific issues. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are regarded as providing a deeper understanding of social phenomena than pure quantitative methods, such as questionnaires (Silverman, 2013). Therefore, when there is little knowledge of the research phenomenon or when detailed insights from individual participants are needed, interviews are the most appropriate. They are also particularly suitable for exploring sensitive topics, as participants may not want to discuss such issues in a group setting.

In order to better analyse the relevant data obtained from the interview, this study adopted interpretive phenomenological analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2017). This analysis method focuses on the individual life experiences of the test subjects, summarizes the significance of these experiences, and at the same time allows the test subjects to understand by using their own relevant experiences and backgrounds. Through the process of the hermeneutic circle, the viewpoints of the testers and the subjects are combined. The partial understanding of a phenomenon should depend on the entire phenomenon (Larkin & Thompson, 2011)). The objective of this study is to examine how Chinese female soft sculptors can showcase female art in their daily creations. While delving into each case study, also pay attention to whether there is a connection between the cases and describe each case in detail. Repeated understanding over and over again is the core method of knowledge construction (Smith, 2017).

3.2. Participants and sampling

Five Chinese female soft sculpture artists participated in this study. They all have art education experiences, graduated from art professional colleges, and have been involved in soft sculpture art creation for five years or more. Participants were selected through a purposeful sampling process (Patton, 2014), aiming to target those with different levels of art education, occupations and regions, in order to achieve broader representation of female artists. As shown in Table 1, the artist's educational background, profession, creative tenure, thematic focus, and materials used are clearly presented. The participating artists must be engaged in soft sculpture work, including full-time artists, or be involved in soft sculpture art education. This standard was formulated to ensure that the interviewees are the most suitable people to clarify the research questions. The selection of interviewees can affect the collection of research data and ultimately influence the research results (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015).

Table 1: The following section is introduced by the female artists interviewed.

Respondents	Study level	Occupation	Years of creation	Thematic Keywords	Material Characteristics
1	PhD. student	Artist	11	Flora and fauna	Silk
2	Master	Artist, Lecturer	7	Love from mom	Chinese art paper
3	Undergraduate	Art teacher	15	Life entity	Leather
4	Master	Art teacher	8	Warm and Healin	Wool felt
5	PhD. student	Artist	6	Interact with the audience	Wool weaving

3.3. Data collection

All the data of this study were collected by the first author through approximately one-hour personal in-depth semi-structured interviews with five interviewees. Each participant was interviewed twice, totaling 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews. Some qualitative research data were collected after one-off interviews, but phenomenology particularly emphasizes a deep understanding of the life experiences of interviewees (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Van Manen, 2017). Therefore, some IPA scholars will conduct two interviews with the participants to achieve a deeper understanding (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). This study also adopted the method of conducting two

interviews. The first one was a phenomenological interview and the second one was a hermeneutic interview (Van Manen, 1990). For researchers, the key task of the first interview is to establish a trusting and harmonious interview relationship with the participants, allowing them to share their experiences in a relaxed and comfortable process (Seidman, 2006). The objective of the second interview was to have the interviewees reconstruct their experiences, which could not only enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Tracy, 2010), but also supplement the omitted or not mentioned content.

The interview was conducted in Chinese, which is the native language of both the interviewee and the interviewer. The interview process offers two options: face-to-face interview or online video interview. The interviewee can choose voluntarily based on their own situation. Before the interview begins, the five interviewees will receive recruitment letters in advance. Ultimately, due to the distance, the three interviewees chose the online interview. The two interviewees chose face-to-face interviews. To add a control group, one of the interviewees received a list of interview questions before the interview. Interviews where interviewees know the interview questions in advance allow them to handle their responses more flexibly (Galletta & Cross, 2013), and this can also capture the voices, thoughts, emotions and experiences of different groups of people (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008).

3.4. Data analysis

This study adopts Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The data analysis method of IPA focuses on the subjective perspective of individuals, also known as the "insider perspective" (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Among them, the voices of the participants are the central focus rather than the objective facts that lead to horizontal generalization (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Smith et al., 2021).

The textual records of the interviews followed the six-stage framework (Smith et al., 2021). First, the first author reviewed all the record sheets and familiarized themselves with the relevant data of the interviewees. The second step is to perform initial encoding based on the main characteristics of the data. The third and fourth steps are to generate topics with similar codes and review the topics, condensing them if necessary. The fifth step is to name the main theme and the sub-theme. The sixth step is to present the final analysis in writing.

During this process, the researchers used the NVivo data analysis software. This software facilitates the organisation, coding and theme development processes inherent to thematic analysis, thereby allowing for a more nuanced and in-depth examination of the data. According to the IPA criterion (Smith & Osborn, 2007), data collection stops when it is considered that the depth of the dataset is sufficient.

3.5. Trustworthiness

In qualitative research methods, credibility refers to the degree to which the accuracy of research results can be confidently guaranteed (Anderson, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Yardley, 2017), credibility can be enhanced by adopting specific strategies to ensure credibility, transferability and confirmability (Smith, 2017). Shosha (2012) pointed out that Colaizzi's phenomenological data analysis method strictly followed the system procedures to ensure that the research met the standards of high-quality and ethical

research (Morrow et al., 2015). This study included member checks and researchers' journals to prevent bias and promote triangulation of knowledge through cross-validation from multiple sources (Motulsky, 2021).

The collection and analysis of the interviews were all conducted in Chinese but were eventually translated into English. For this step, I consulted a language translator to ensure the accuracy of the translation.

4. Results

Female soft sculptors, to be precise, the outstanding contributions of female artists are reflected in their unique perspectives, which deeply integrate their personal life experiences, social role perceptions and the characteristics of soft materials, injecting delicate yet tenacious power into the contemporary art field. By innovatively applying flexible materials such as fabrics, fibres and silk threads, they have broken through the traditional art's reliance on rigid media and constructed a visual expression system that is warmer and more emotionally tense. This expression system not only carries the unique thoughts of women on issues such as the body, emotions, family, and cultural inheritance, but also wins space for expression and resonance for the experiences of those women who were once ignored or marginalized in the artistic context.

In their creative practice, they often incorporate traditional handicrafts such as embroidery, weaving and collage into the creative process. These skills themselves are closely related to the life journey of women. Through the transformation of contemporary art, not only has new vitality been endowed to traditional craftsmanship, but also the cultural connotation of the works has become more profound.

Firstly, the creative themes of female artists focus on the in-depth exploration and diverse presentation of individual life experiences. They transform their personal emotional memories, physical perceptions and subtle experiences in daily life into artistic language. Through the medium of soft sculpture, they make those inner worlds that are hard to express concrete and tangible. Some artists draw on their own growth experiences, incorporating fragments of childhood clothing and elements from family photos into their works to explore issues such as family affection, trauma and identity. Some artists also pay attention to the psychological changes of women during the process of social role transition. Through the shaping of material forms, they reveal the emotional tensions behind different identities such as from teenage girls to mothers, from office workers to housewives. These creations are not only the personal inner monologues of the artists, but also reflections of the common life states of women, enabling the audience to find the shadows of their own experiences in the works and thus triggering a strong emotional resonance.

Secondly, the choice of materials for female artists' creations depends on the emotions they want to express. When aiming to express gentle and delicate emotions, materials such as wool and silk, which have a soft touch, are often chosen. The light and flowing texture of these materials can directly present the gentle and graceful characteristics of emotions. If the theme of tenacity and resistance is to be presented, rough hemp ropes and thick fabrics are the preferred choices. Their tough texture and wear-resistant properties appropriately carry the sense of power of the work. This deep connection between materials and emotions makes materials no longer merely a medium for creation, but an organic component of conceptual expression. It enables the audience to directly perceive the emotions and thoughts that the artist has devoted through the

physical properties of the materials when touching or viewing the works. Some artists also combine industrial materials such as silicone and resin with traditional fabrics. Through the collision and integration of these materials, they showcase the tension of modern women between technology and tradition, rationality and sensibility. This meticulous selection and creative application of materials have enabled soft sculpture works to transcend mere visual presentation, becoming a bridge connecting individual experience with collective cultural memory, and further expanding the scope of artistic expression.

In addition, there are obvious differences between male and female soft sculptors. Male artists usually tend to start their creations from macro social issues, while female artists mostly focus on individual life experiences, emotional worlds, and subtle perceptions in daily life. They approach the creative process from a more delicate and private perspective, endowing their works with unique personal memories and identity. The differences in creation between male and female artists not only reflect the distinct ways in which artists of different genders perceive the world and express themselves, but also add rich possibilities to the diversified development of soft sculpture art, promoting people to understand the influence of gender factors on creation in soft sculpture art from a more comprehensive perspective.

In conclusion, the continuous creation of female soft sculpture artists has brought a brand-new dimension of thinking and expression paradigm to the art world. They used soft materials as a medium, breaking the dominant position of rigid discourse in traditional art and enabling women's experiences and emotions to be expressed in the field of art. Their works not only document the growth and transformation of women themselves, but also reflect the diverse characteristics of contemporary society, providing rich practical cases and theoretical inspirations for subsequent related research.

5. Conclusion

After conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews and case studies with five Chinese female soft sculpture artists, the researchers reached the following conclusions.

The creative themes of Chinese female soft sculpture art mainly cover the following three aspects. First, the individual growth process, that is, the emotions, memories, and insights gained during the process of identity construction and transformation that an individual generates in the process of self-growth. For instance, elements from childhood memories and the accumulation of experiences during the transformation of social identity. Second, the influence of social culture on oneself is reflected in the observation and reflection on the status of women in contemporary society, cultural inheritance, and hot social issues. Thirdly, the special affection for soft materials, their unique shaping and expressive power, as well as the natural fit between women and fibres, make them ideal carriers for expressing delicate emotions.

At the ideological level conveyed by the works, sometimes female artists often use soft sculptures to explore gender identity and social roles, presenting the survival conditions and inner conflicts of women in different fields such as family and the workplace, in order to break through traditional gender stereotypes. Sometimes, their works contain thoughts on cultural inheritance and innovation. They integrate traditional handicrafts such as embroidery and weaving with contemporary artistic language, not only

continuing the cultural context but also endowing traditional craftsmanship with new contemporary connotations. And Sometimes emotional expression is the theme. Artists, relying on the softness and resilience of materials, convey diverse emotions such as love, loneliness, trauma, and hope, making their works a bond that connects individuals with the emotional resonance of others.

In the future, the development prospects of female soft sculpture art hold boundless possibilities and opportunities. In the context of the diversified development of contemporary art, with the continuous breakthroughs in material technology and the constant innovation of artistic concepts, female soft sculpture art will demonstrate more diverse development in creative techniques. Artists will increasingly integrate innovative elements such as digital technology, interactive algorithms, and technological soft fibres to break through the limitations of traditional media. This interdisciplinary creative model will not only expand the dimensions of artistic expression, but also promote in-depth dialogue among different cultural backgrounds, making the works present more diverse characteristics of cross-cultural communication.

The unique perspectives and delicate expressions of female artists will endow soft sculpture art with more emotional depth and social significance, promoting the continuous enhancement of the influence and expressiveness of this art form on a global scale.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of Interest.

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