

# Modeling Language in Oriental Aesthetics System

## -- Take the Works of Three Artists as Examples

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### Abstract

**This article takes three artists: Isamu Noguchi, Anish Kapoor and Zeng Chenggang as examples to discuss their modeling works based on oriental cultural traditions and oriental cultural situations. The reason why I chose these three artists is because, first, they all insist on the artistic creation of sculptural and on-shelf sculpture works. Second, their cultural background or cultural identity is based on the oriental context. Third, it is because they are all in a period of accelerated globalization: from the post-war to the present, with the world becoming more and more integrated and unified, all countries in the world have realized the importance of establishing cultural brands by artistic means, such as American abstract expressionism, German neo-expressionism painting, and Japanese "materialism" and so on. This article will explain, how do these three artists with oriental cultural background cope with the external factors such as globalization trend, national brand strategy and cultural wave to create works based on their identities, experiences and concepts? As practitioners of art forms, what kind of style and features do they present?.**

### Keywords

**Oriental Aesthetics, Oriental Cultural Background, Modeling Language, Artistic Form.**

### 1. Isamu Noguchi's Seeking Identity in His Works

Isamu Noguchi (Japanese-American, 1904-1988) was born in the United States to a Japanese father and an American mother. He spent his time in Japan between the ages of 2 and 14, and his experience of returning to Japan to find his father many times after he became an adult showed his personal pursuit of Japan's root identity and his identification with oriental culture. Isamu Noguchi won a Guggenheim scholarship in 1927 and worked as an assistant to Constantin Brancusi (Romanian, 1876-1957) during his travels in Europe. He came to Beijing in 1930 and studied Chinese painting from Qi Baishi (Chinese, 1864-1957). Later he returned to the United States and held his Chinese painting exhibition. Subsequently, Isamu Noguchi returned to Japan to study ceramic art and gardens, and worked in the United States and Japan for many years. Obviously, Isamu Noguchi's tortuous life experience and global footprint had brought him a positive impact on his creation. Judging from the appearance of his works, he is an artist who transcends national boundaries and is also an expert at absorbing various strengths and internalizing applications.

As for the sculptural form, he was influenced by Brancusi's creative concept and production technology in pursuit of "essential form". This influence reflected in some of Isamu Noguchi's works, such as "Globular" and "Small Torso". These works had simplified the sculpture geometry and transformed the abstract form, and had polished the surface effect of the selected materials accurately. In addition, he was also influenced by artists such as Joan Miró (Spanish, 1893-1983) and Alexander Calder (American, 1898-1976) and applied interesting shapes and unstable structures in his works, such as "Monument to Heroes".

However, reviewing throughout Isamu Noguchi's artistic career, many of his modeling works showed his unique oriental aesthetics in the western context: 1. Nature (inaction) - for example, a large number of stone carvings in the Isamu Noguchi Museum in New York, most of which used stone instead of artificial effects, making the best use of it to achieve a natural appearance. This kind of treatment is obviously different from the western aesthetic system. 2. Completeness - Many of Isamu Noguchi's works are presented in the form of rings or circles, such as "Brazilian Granite" and "Walking in Silence". This circle similar to "Moon Gate" is a "complete" oriental totem, "harmony" and "golden mean" in the context of oriental culture. 3. Yin and Yang (Tai Chi) - The "Detroit Fountain and Philip A. Hart Plaza" and the "Black Slide Mantra" seemed to show Taoist cosmology through "the combination of hardness and softness" and "endless circulation and endless growth". 4. Illusion and Reality - The "Floating Fountains" in Osaka, Japan created a visual and psychological gap like magic, and the "virtual" of water flow and mist and the "real" of metal cube coexist. 5. Oriental Field Structure and Space Modeling - As a few creators who combined sculpture modeling and garden landscaping in the first half of the 20th century, Isamu Noguchi, after learning the building methods of Chinese and Japanese gardens (dry landscape landscaping, bonsai landscaping, etc.), in order to create a field with an oriental spiritual atmosphere, he perfectly combined the problems of locality with the modeling and landscaping methods of modernism, contributing to the promotion of oriental aesthetics to the world and the adaptation of oriental gardens adapting to the times. For example, works such as "Red Cube" (inside and outside borrowing scenes), "Sunken Garden" (spiritual feeling, Zen feeling) "and" Isamu Noguchi Garden "(moving steps and changing scenes). It can be said that Isamu Noguchi Yong was an intelligent creator. Judging from the works listed above, he strived to promote his aesthetic and artistic ideas based on oriental culture to the metaphysical spiritual realm in the formal expression of various works.

When Isamu Noguchi was at his most creative age, he was in the coordinate center of the mainstream creative wave of American abstract expressionism, but he was still expressing the oriental spirit and wisdom with oriental modeling. Apart from his strategic insistence on individual creative language, it was also related to and echoing the Japanese "materialistic" art movement that flourished in the 1960s. This may be the cultural choice and self-identification made by Isamu Noguchi under the view that the oriental humanistic feelings and oriental aesthetic thoughts were the ultimate goals he pursued.

## 2. Anish Kapoor who Skillfully Uses Oriental Philosophy Language

Anish Kapoor (Indian-British, 1954-) was born in Mumbai, India, to an Indian father and an Iraqi Jewish mother. In the early 1970s, Kapoor went to London to study art and later worked and lived in London.

Related to Kapoor's background of growing up in India, accepting Indian culture and accepting Mumbai's various religious cultures, his artistic presentation is different from that of Isamu Noguchi and Zeng Chenggang. The Kapoor's creation cuts into the art is a completely metaphysical perspective-focusing on discussing philosophy, oriental metaphysics and religious issues in his works. The similarities between his works and Isamu Noguchi's works discussed above in terms of cultural standpoint lie in the fact that the two naturalized western creators did not create in order to satisfy the western imagination and curiosity about the oriental culture. They did not emphasize the differences between the oriental and western cultures, but firmly based on their "present" and conducted in-depth research and creation based on their "cultural genes".

Kapoor has made a series of mirror stainless steel works with abstract shapes, simplicity and large size. In order to achieve mirror texture and enhance audience interaction effect, no matter how difficult technical problems were, those problems must be solved because of engineering

objectives, such as "Cloud Gate" and "Non-material". This extreme requirement for craft is due to the need for a clear projection of objective images, no matter whether it is the bizarre visual effects like reverse the distorted or distortion overlap, etc, it will eventually achieve the psychological state of being true or false, being illusion or reality, and the combination of will, spirit and fantasy in the works, as if the philosophical propositions of reality and nothingness, ego and nonego are discussed in a detached state.

Because some of Kapoor's modeling works are excessively large in size, they can arouse a sense of magic and unreality in the audience's mind, as well as doubts about their own perception and even their own existence, such as Marsyas. However, some modeling works, such as Svayambh and Rise, are in the shape of "cannot be fixed". They change according to the changes of environment and space. This kind of "change" has a strong and sacred sense of religion and ritual. The issues discussed in this kind of works are transformed into metaphysical aspects such as material and non-material, existence and disappearance, space and non-space.

"A real object can often lead to an immaterial feeling" - Kapoor's remark showed an oriental philosophical standpoint. Obviously, Kapoor is an artist who is resourceful and calm in his creative attitude. He would not show a fixed attitude, but he would have flexible artistic expression. He is good at using his works to imply an aerial, poetic, but full of sophistry and cunning oriental myth story. When Britain was launching the "National Art Team" with contemporary artists (Damien Hirst, David Hockney, Banksy, Julian Opie, etc.) as cultural symbols, Kapoor still adhered to his creative language based on the concept of the east - it can be said that Kapoor's guiding ideology in artistic creation is oriental, but his position is world-wide.

### 3. Zeng Chenggang, Transforming Oriental Modeling Language

Zeng Chenggang (Chinese, 1960-) was born in Zhejiang Province, China. He studied for a degree in 1978 at China Academy of Art in Zhejiang Province and stayed at school to teach after his master's degree. From 1994 to 1995, he studied in Italy and then transferred to the Art School of Tsinghua University in Beijing to teach till now.

The teaching method of college sculpture major in China follows the teaching system of the West (represented by the Soviet Union and France), with concrete modeling training and realistic training as the main subject basis. It can be said that Zeng Chenggang is a sculptor with orthodox professional background who grew up in the college system. When he entered the Art School for internship in 1978, it coincided with the implementation of China's reform and opening-up policy. In particular, in the 1980s, a large number of relevant materials of western modern art and post-modern art entered the country. Under this social background, he was also in Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now China Academy of Art) in the south of the Yangtze River. The humanistic atmosphere in this region respected traditional Chinese painting, and the major of traditional Chinese painting was the trump card major of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. Zeng Chenggang, who received modeling training in this era and regional atmosphere, constructed his own works with modern western sculpture and subjectively processed them with "Oriental Ink". For example, in the work of "Liangshan Heroes Ruling Lu Zhishen", the dynamic figures in the sculpture and the blank and hollowed-out structure in the formal language, are full of the charm of ink and calligraphy. In the actual practice process, even if the methodology of the construction of personal modeling language is formed in thinking, there will be a gap when it is put into practice to express the concept of creation. For example, the structure of large splash-ink and cursive script is transformed into sculpture, which will not present the rigorous expected effect and certain programs and rules. Therefore, Zeng Chenggang freely created in the direction of this form of language, "sleeping in the studio

overnight directly" and conducted the modern language transformation experiment of oriental traditional modeling with enthusiasm.

Different from the graceful and restrained temperament in Jiangnan region, Zeng Chenggang's works have mostly maintained a "hard" and powerful expression, probably because sculpture is used as a means to express artistic attitude. Even though there are many attempts in language and structure treatment of sculpture, this "positive" impression has always existed in most of his works. This kind of "positive" indicates that his works are about collective will, not about individuals, nor about self. They exist as a super-personal narrative art, similar to a real drama or an epic. Of course, this "positive" impression does not rule out the reason that his works mostly take stone, steel and copper as the final presentation materials to bring psychological effects. For example, this kind of "positive" and "force" can be seen in his 1989 bronze casting work "Jian Hu San Jie". If the aura of "Jian Hu San Jie" comes from the heroic theme of the work, the positive orientation and clear turn of the sculpture, the full body size of the characters, and the treatment method of combining round sculpture and relief sculpture with academic methods, then the later works refine this aura more purely. Take the work "Mountain God" as example, this bronze work takes a frog as the main body of expression, "How can a weak life show its magic power and strength?" Zeng Chenggang said so. The vision of "creating gods", strong posture, high and rising air field, heavy and upright space volume and impenetrable materials are the conclusions of his status as a sculptor and thinking about practical problems. In addition to the "pen and ink structure" and "upright and upright atmosphere", Zeng Chenggang also uses typical Chinese aesthetic images and elements that embody oriental aesthetics and philosophies to construct new formal languages. For example, "Lotus Notes" used mirror stainless steel to represent dry lotus plumes. This formal language has a strong new literati temperament. In addition, Chinese ancient bronze patterns and modeling elements are also one of the important elements used in his creation. The features of such modeling content are enhanced decoration and more rigid works temperament, such as "Dragon Soul" and "Elf Series-East Deer". This is related to his journey from Zhejiang to Beijing to start working and living: Beijing, as the capital of China, is located in the north and has a totally different regional temperament from the south of the Yangtze River. This increasingly strong and domineering political and humanistic atmosphere, combined with the elements with oriental classical decorative forms refined by him, and his "positive" structural form, makes the sculpture present a simple and unsophisticated impression from inside to outside, while it is visually conservative and upright, forming a field full of oriental spirit. This is similar to Zeng Chenggang's academic temperament-he is sincere, dedicated and eager to his works, and devotes great energy to the inheritance of Chinese culture based on his strong feelings of social responsibility, giving artistic life the task of inheriting Chinese culture.

What needs to be mentioned is that some of Zeng Chenggang's public works of art are very gentle in temperament, such as "Fu Hai Yun Tian" and "Moonlight", which all large-scale works are made of stainless steel. Theoretically, whether it is material or body size, the feeling should be hard and psychologically oppressive, but in front of the eyes, the viewer will find it approachable and even close. For example, the soft lumpy volume in "Fu Hai Yun Tian" is accumulated without base separation, and the specular reflection brings attractive visual impression, like gentle but simple and honest clouds. However, "Moonlight" is atmospheric, slender and elegant, and its structure and form are also based on the oriental implication, creating an oriental spiritual field satisfying visual aesthetics.

Reviewing throughout the works of the three artists with oriental cultural backgrounds, we can find that although the artistic subjects and the creative goals are different, they all share the knowledge structure of the east and the west, these artists insist on showing oriental aesthetics, oriental humanism and oriental spirit in their works. The change of the times and the change of the cultural tide have brought them more creative thinking without affecting their main line of

adhering to individual artistic topics. In addition, their creations have one thing in common, that is, they use the modeling methods mentioned in the article to develop toward creating a spiritual field, or to guide oriental philosophies, which shows us the possibility that art, spirit and philosophy originate from the same ontology in the oriental context. On January 27, 1983, as an art practitioner, Joseph Beuys (U.S., 1921-1986) expressed his position at a seminar: "When I explained pictures to our own organs (meaning the body and brain), I also explained that art should be understood and felt in a brand-new way: as a way to stimulate the creative power of the senses, and this way should be sharper, richer and more powerful. This internal creative power should enhance our thinking mode through intuition, inspiration and imagination, instead of ending with logical understanding. This is the task of art, to develop more feelings, more emotions, and ultimately, to create more will." From the perspective of Boyce's theory, talking about the works of the three artists mentioned above who express their artistic views in the form of plastic shapes clearly shows that the ultimate goal meaning of the materialization of art is to point to spirit or thinking. The reason why the works of these three artists show such a trend may be related to the oriental way of thinking. This formulation does not mean nationalism, but poses a possibility for the development of oriental culture and art. The current "orientalism" is no longer limited to regional issues. Globalization does not mean the pursuit of universal values, but it can reflect on the individual cultural values under this scenario. The emphasis and promotion of cultural existence and cultural orientation will eventually create more possibilities in history.

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