

# 智慧之影，心叶

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## Shadows of Wisdom, Leaves of the Heart

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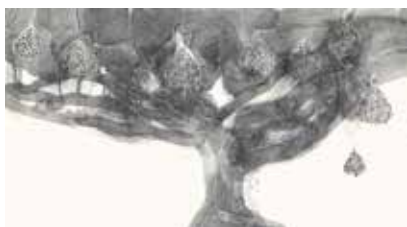


图1. 任天进,《智慧之影I》,2019年,立轴,纸本水墨。芝加哥艺术博物馆藏,玛格丽特·金特尔斯基金捐赠。

Fig. 1. Ren Tianjin, *The Shadow of Wisdom I*, 2019. Hanging scroll; ink on paper. The Art Institute of Chicago, Margaret Gentles Endowment Fund.



图2. 任天进,《心经小方·三》,2016年,纸本水墨  
Fig. 2. Ren Tianjin, *Heart Sutra III, Small Square III*, 2016. Ink on paper.

《心经》是东亚佛教中最常诵读与研习的经典之一。其中关于五蕴首蕴的著名论述——“色即是空，空即是色”——被广泛引用，几近成为陈词滥调。然而其教义更趋深远，所指不止于个体的解脱，而是通向对一切存在之诸法空性的体悟——色、受、想、行、识，皆如幻化，无常而无我。正因其以262个汉字的惊人简洁传递深邃真谛，《心经》启迪了无数代的艺术家。数百年来，人们诵读它、书写它，甚至将其融入绘画创作。本文主要讨论的作品《智慧之影I》(图1)是任天进《菩提》系列的一部分，也承载着《心经》的经文。任天进的树不仅是在形与空之间进行游戏，更体现了五蕴本身。它们以阴影一般但生动的形式层层叠叠，从他自己的思想和经验中生长出来。

### 树

任天进追溯他与书法初次深刻邂逅的时刻，是1986年秋天在灵岩山中国佛学院师从洪丕谟的期间。某夜于香堂，洪丕谟演示书法时，窗外松林随风摇曳，声声入耳，室内则聚集着好奇的年轻僧侣，彻夜追问不休。破晓时分，他被诵经声唤醒，寺庙里回荡着钟鼓声的共鸣。他后来如此形容这段沉浸于书法与佛教修行节奏之中的经历：“宛如一幅画，一幅难以言喻的画”。艺术与精神氛围交融的瞬间，为他后来的艺术探索埋下了种子。

任天进的《心经小方·三》(图2)以层叠的浓墨探索光影，在混沌中营造秩序感。其狂放奔放的行书字迹，隐约可见王冬龄的痕迹，却更显

流畅幽邃，宛若水流。墨汁在纸上晕染扩散，笔触化作涟漪与水流，唤起幽深水潭的意境。《智慧之影》中的《心经》经文营造出相似的效果。最终呈现的沉浸式画面将观者引入《心经》的流动性与瞬息性，捕捉墨汁在吸水纸上转瞬即逝的轨迹。这种阴影与湿润的互动也出现在冯明秋的作品中（图3）。在一组对开作品中，冯明秋以两种截然不同的方式呈现《心经》文本：一幅卷轴以淡墨书写文字，另一幅仅用水痕刻画。当墨色刷过湿润纸面时，被纤维阻隔的隐形文字如幽灵般显现。冯明秋通过墨与纸的物质特性，具象化了《心经》核心意涵：色空不二。

冯明秋与任天进皆尝试突破传统形式，将书法文本压缩叠加为抽象构图，藉此捕捉经文的精髓，而非逐字转录。正如娜塔莎·海勒（Natasha Heller）所言，抄写经文未必旨在创造可供使用的文本。<sup>1</sup>抄写过程中的视觉元素与身体律动本身，即能积聚功德。在此语境下，无论作品中呈现的经文多么“模糊不清”，抄写过程作为虔诚的修行，本身即具有重要意义。但两人的创作手法存在差异：冯明秋的《心经》将书法排列于无形网格中，形成抽象而形式克制的视觉效果；而任天进的《智慧之影》则更倾向具象表现，借助菩提树意象将构图设定在可识别的形态。

任天进的创作亦承袭更宽广的视觉脉络。其富有表现力的书法风格，令人联想到现代派书法家井上有一（Inoue Yūichi）与王冬龄——此二人挥洒自如的笔触，与弗朗茨·克莱因（Franz Klein）、罗伯特·马瑟韦尔（Robert Motherwell）等美国抽象表现主义者的大胆单色抽象作品共鸣。<sup>2</sup>任天进的理论兴趣，同样聚焦于欧美现代主义与中华书法传统的艺术对话。然而，他《菩提》系列的整体呈现，似乎更趋具象而非抽象。最重要的是，其作品在概念与形式上，均根植于单一有机要素——树木。这棵树象征着他对五蕴即佛性的领悟。《菩提》系列同时呼应了五蕴的词源学意义，即“众多、数量、集合”，通常指躯体、树干、茎秆、经验观察到的粗重物体，或任何可被感官察觉的实体。<sup>3</sup>

任天进更进一步将书法转化为心灵之树的立体形态。现在陈列于旧金山亚洲艺术博物馆前的八尺雕塑《太湖石·东风》，正是将草书“东风”转化为立体形态的杰作。此雕塑乍看宛若太湖石，实则以镍银铸成，将墨韵的淌流凝结成树状实体。其名呼应《三国演义》名句“只欠东风”，暗喻万事俱备，却仍需最后关键要素的缺憾。通过雕塑形式呈现这一隐喻，他解构了传统中国艺术中文字仅限于纸上墨迹的惯例，将其重新构想为立体的实体。此作品难以简单归类——既非山石，亦非树木。它融合了书法、金属与隐喻的多重物质性，凝结成全新的艺术语言。



图3. 冯明秋，《心经》，2001年，对幅立轴，纸本水墨。纽约大都会艺术博物馆藏，苏珊、L.本宁森与史蒂文·阿伦斯捐赠，谨此纪念雷内·本宁森，2011年。

Fig. 3. Fung Ming Chip, *Heart Sutra*, 2001. Pair of hanging scrolls; ink on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Susan and L. Beningson and Steven Arons, in memory of Renée Beningson, 2011. [Maxwell K. Hearn, *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 60]

## 叶

任天进的《菩提》系列始于他在印度洋西南海岸毛里求斯岛的一次邂逅。伫立于参天古树前，他感受着阳光、空气与微风在枝叶间流转。刹那间，一句脍炙人口的箴言浮现心头：“一花一如来，一叶一世界。”此箴言虽不见于经文，却与《梵网经》与《华严经》所阐述的宇宙观遥相呼应——二者皆强调诸界众生无量相依。在《梵网经》中，毗卢遮那佛描述其净土为千叶莲台，每片莲叶皆含一世界，而每个世界又展开为无量世界。《华严经》亦教导：一尊如来于莲座之身，遍及诸世界。在这些传统中，莲花成为佛性的象征，亦即众生与生俱来的觉悟潜能。正如莲花从泥淖中无染而生，如来藏虽孕育人类所以存在的五蕴，其核心却始终纯净。

从这个角度看，任天进在毛里求斯与树木的相遇具有深意。尽管那并非释迦牟尼悟道的历史菩提树，但这次体验将他想象力带往菩提伽耶，并引发顿悟：每棵树都蕴藏着成为菩提树的潜能。此洞见催生出一系列水墨画作，交织着意识与潜意识的印记。在这些作品中，他将对树木的瞬息观察，转化为对觉悟的冥想。以单色水墨呈现的画面，在植物形态与象征性的菩提树间游移。系列作品从单字草书《莲》到《五蕴》，描绘出层叠堆积的树影。整体作品暗喻莲花作为佛性的象征——自污泥中无染而生，却蕴藏圆满觉悟。其中《智慧之影I》通过叠层意象，标志着他对五蕴探索的巅峰。此作以刻有《心经》的叶片覆盖树形，将书写转化为艺术家思想情感的记录。墨色晕染、虚实交错处，光影仿佛穿透画面，唤起树影摇曳与时光流转的意境。这种层次感运用与《五蕴》形成鲜明的对比——后者以纯粹的墨色描绘树木，未加以任何文字。两种手法共同展现了他对形相、空性及多层次感知的持续冥想。

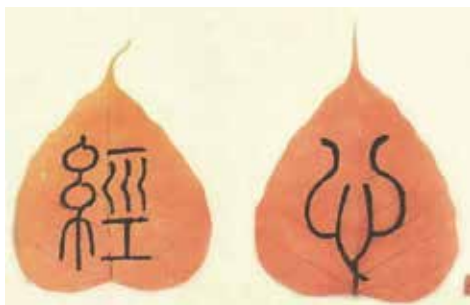


图4. 翁方纲《心经》，1801年，册页，墨笔绘于菩提树叶，北京故宫博物院藏。

Fig. 4. Weng Fanggang, *Heart Sutra*, 1801. Album, ink on dried Bodhi tree leaves. Palace Museum, Beijing.

在《智慧之影》中，菩提叶倒悬于纸面，颠覆了人们熟悉的心形轮廓。这种倒转手法呼应了中国自十七世纪末至十九世纪初盛行的菩提叶题写绘画传统：菩提叶在此成为决定整体构图与物质性的画框与媒介。更接近的先例，是曾于一对菩提叶上题写“心”字与“经”字的清代书法家翁方纲（图4）<sup>4</sup>。在题跋中，翁方纲追忆数十年见到僧人以菩提叶制纱，而这段记忆与他的自省产生共鸣。同样地，任天进至今仍清晰记得灵岩山僧侣诵经声与钟鼓低沉回响交织的场景：“那年，我二十四岁。”当他多年后站在毛里求斯的古树前，这些记忆再度浮现。他想象一位小沙弥在沙沙作响的叶下抄写经文，叶片仿佛带着神圣的低语。他认为这样的时刻让过去与当下交融，将观者带回释迦牟尼打坐冥想的时代。这幅场景不仅带来视觉启迪，更营造出由阳光、空气和自然轻柔乐章所构成的沉浸式感官体验。

翁方纲与任天进皆将《心经》与菩提叶的自然形态相联结，但在媒

介选择上却显现关键差异：翁方纲直接在叶片上题写，而任天进则以纸墨重构叶形。正如米歇尔·马蒂尼（Michele Matteini）精辟指出的，翁方纲的书法受叶脉与凹凸表面制约——叶片质地阻碍了墨汁完全渗透<sup>5</sup>。反观任天进以吸水性强的纸张塑造叶片，从而获得更强的掌控力。但两人皆以树木为媒介，昭示着如来藏遍布万有的本质，也就是贯穿一切存在的佛性。任天进倒置的菩提叶，亦呼应《心经》箴言：众生“颠倒梦想”，却可借空性智慧觉醒。正如层叠倒叶构筑树形，它们共同铸就了“智慧之影”。

在《智慧之影》中，任天进将书法、水墨与《心经》教义熔铸为五蕴的层叠具象。刻上文字的树木邀请观者直面形、受、想、行、识的积聚，也就是构筑人类体验的五蕴。墨色在浑浊与透明间流转，映照无常本性；心形菩提叶上镌刻的圣典，让作品根植于释迦牟尼的智慧。任天进暗示每棵树皆可成菩提树，正如佛性遍存众生。他运用墨纸二味，强化了自然界作为觉悟本源容器的联结。通过将多元媒介熔铸一体，他拓展了佛教艺术的视觉语汇。《智慧之影》最终呈现出生命体验的壮阔图景——转瞬即逝，却又充满光明。

## 注释

1 Natasha Heller, “Between Zhongfeng Mingben and Zhao Mengfu: Chan Letters in their Manuscript Context,” in *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, edited by Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober, and Claudia Brown (London: Routledge, 2008), 第110页。

2 任天进, 《现代书法创新性之比较研究——从井上有一到王冬龄》杭州: 中国美术学院出版社, 2021年。

3 Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1872), 1141.

4 关于翁方纲《心经》的进一步讨论, 参见 Michele Matteini, “Written on a Bodhi Tree Leaf,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 75-76 (2021), 第48页。

5 同上, 第47-48页。

The *Heart Sutra* is one of the most recited and studied texts in East Asian Buddhism. The famous reference to the first of the five skandhas, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form [色即是空, 空即是色],” is so widely quoted that it almost sounds like a cliché. But the teaching goes further, pointing to the emptiness of all things that constitute human existence: form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), volition (*saṅkhāra*), perception (*saṃjñā*), and consciousness (*viññāna*). Because of its profound message in the striking brevity of 262 Chinese characters, the *Heart Sutra* has inspired generations of artists. It has been chanted, copied in calligraphy, and even incorporated into paintings for centuries. The work primarily discussed here, *The Shadow of Wisdom* (Fig. 1), a part of the series *Bodhi Tree* by Ren Tianjin (b. 1962), also carries the text of the *Heart Sutra*. More than a play between form and emptiness, Ren’s trees embody the five aggregates themselves, layered in shadowy yet vivid forms that grow out of his own mind and experience.

## Tree

Ren Tianjin traces his first profound encounter with calligraphy to the fall of 1986, when he stayed with his mentor, Hong Pimo (1940–2005), at the Buddhist Academy of China’s Mt. Lingyan campus. One evening, in the Hall of Fragrance, Hong gave a calligraphy demonstration while Ren assisted by preparing paper and stamping seals. Outside, the woods stirred with the sound of wind in the pines, while curious young monks gathered inside, asking questions late into the night. At dawn, Ren awoke to the chanting of sutras, joined by the resonant beat of drums and bells across the temple grounds. Immersed in calligraphy and the rhythms of Buddhist practice, he later recalled the experience as “like a painting, an indescribable painting.” This moment, where art and spiritual atmosphere converged, planted the seeds for his later artistic explorations.

Ren’s *Heart Sutra, Small Square III* (Fig. 2) explores light and shadow through layers of dark ink that create a sense of order within chaos. His wild, running script, reminiscent of Wang Dongling’s influence, appears more

fluid and shadowy, as if dissolving into water. The ink bleeds across the paper, blurring strokes into ripples and currents, evoking the depth of a shadowy pool. The text of the *Heart Sutra* in *The Shadow of Wisdom* creates a similar effect. The result is an immersive surface that draws the viewer into the liquid, transient qualities of the *Heart Sutra*, capturing the fleeting movement of ink across absorbent paper. This interplay of shadow and wetness also appears in the work of Fung Ming Chip (b. 1951) (Fig. 3). In one series of diptychs, Fung rendered the text of the *Heart Sutra* in two contrasting ways. On one scroll, he wrote the characters in pale ink; on the other, he inscribed the words with only water. When dark ink was later brushed over the dampened paper, the hidden text emerged as ghostly traces, where the fibers resisted full absorption. By exploiting the material qualities of ink and paper, Fung gave form to the central teaching of the *Heart Sutra*: the inseparability of form and emptiness.

Both Fung Ming Chip and Ren Tianjin experiment with compressing and layering calligraphic text into abstract compositions, moving beyond traditional formats to capture an essence rather than a literal transcription of scripture. As Natasha Heller explains, transcribing a sutra was not necessarily intended to create a text for practical reading.<sup>1</sup> The visual elements and bodily discipline of copying the text could generate merit. In this context, no matter how “fuzzy” the resultant texts look in their works, the process of copying matters as their devotional acts. Yet their approaches diverge. Fung’s *Heart Sutra* organizes calligraphy into invisible grids, producing an abstract, formally restrained effect. Ren’s *Shadow of Wisdom*, particularly by contrast, leans toward representation, drawing on the imagery of the Bodhi tree to anchor his compositions in recognizable form.

Ren’s work also participates in a broader visual lineage. His expressive calligraphic style recalls the modernist calligraphers Inoue Yūichi (1916–1985) and Wang Dongling (b. 1945), whose gestural brushwork resonates with the bold, monochrome abstractions of American abstract expressionists, such as Franz Klein (1910–1962)

and Robert Motherwell (1915–1991).<sup>2</sup> Ren’s theoretical interest also lies in the artistic conversation between Euro-American modernism and the Chinese calligraphic tradition. His *Bodhi Tree* series as a whole, however, seems more representational than abstract. Most importantly, his work is conceptually and formally grounded in a single organic element: the tree. And this tree represents Ren’s realization of the skandhas as a buddha-nature. His *Bodhi Tree* series also evokes the etymological significance of skandhas, meaning “multitude, quantity, aggregate,” generally in the context of body, trunk, stem, empirically observed gross object, or anything of mass that can be detected by the senses.<sup>3</sup>

Ren also turns his calligraphies, as the “trees” of the heart, into the three-dimensional form. The *East Wind*, an eight-foot-tall sculptural work now installed in front of the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, translates the cursive characters for “east wind” into sculptural form. At first glance, the piece resembles a Taihu rock, but it is in fact cast in nickel silver, erupting from the fluidity of ink into a solid, tree-like presence. The title recalls a famous line from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*: “Everything is ready except the east wind,” a phrase about preparedness and the necessity of one final, missing element. By rendering this metaphor in sculptural form, Ren deconstructs the conventions of traditional Chinese art, where words usually remain confined to ink on paper. Instead, he reimagines them as mass and volume. The result resists easy classification. Neither rock nor tree, the sculpture embodies the layered materiality of calligraphy, metal, and metaphor, coalescing into a new artistic language.

## Leaves

Ren’s *Bodhi Tree* series began with an encounter in Mauritius, off the southwest coast of the Indian Ocean. Standing before a massive old tree, he felt the play of sunlight, air, and wind through its leaves. In that moment, he recalled a well-known phrase: “One flower, one world; one leaf, one tathāgata [一花一如來，一葉一世界].” Although this saying does not appear verbatim in scripture, it echoes ideas from the *Brahma’s Net Sutra* and the *Flower Ornament Sutra*, which both emphasize the boundless interconnectedness of worlds

and beings. In the *Brahma’s Net Sutra*, Vairocana Buddha describes his realm as a lotus platform surrounded by a thousand leaves, each leaf containing a world that unfolds into countless worlds. The *Flower Ornament Sutra* similarly teaches that a single tathāgata’s body on one lotus seat pervades all worlds. In these traditions, the lotus becomes a symbol of buddha-nature—the inherent potential for enlightenment present in every being. Like the lotus rising unstained from the mud, tathāgatagarbha gives rise to the five skandhas of human existence yet remains pure at its core.

Ren’s encounter with the tree in Mauritius can be seen in this light. Though it was not the historical Bodhi tree under which Śākyamuni attained enlightenment, the experience transported him imaginatively to Bodhgaya and led to a realization: every tree has the potential to be the Bodhi tree. From this insight grew a series of ink paintings that weave together conscious and subconscious impressions. In these works, Ren transforms fleeting observations of trees into meditations on enlightenment. Rendered in monochrome ink, his images shift between vegetal forms and the symbolic Bodhi tree. The series ranges from *Lotus*, a single cursive character of “蓮,” to *Five Aggregates*, where shadowy trees accumulate in layered formations. Together, they allude to the lotus as a symbol of buddha-nature, rising unstained from the mud, yet containing within it the fullness of awakening. *The Shadow of Wisdom I* marks the apex of Ren’s exploration of the skandhas through layered imagery. In this work, tree forms are overlaid with leaves inscribed with the *Heart Sutra*, turning the act of writing into a record of the artist’s own thoughts and feelings. Through washes of ink and the play between emptiness and substance, light seems to break through the image, evoking the shifting shadows of trees and the passage of time. This use of tonal layering contrasts with his *Five Aggregates*, where the trees are rendered in solid, opaque ink without textual inscription. Together, these approaches reveal Ren’s evolving meditation on form, emptiness, and the layered nature of perception.

In *The Shadow of Wisdom*, the leaves appear suspended

upside down, reversing the familiar heart-shaped form of the Bodhi leaf. This inversion recalls a long tradition in China of inscribing or painting on Bodhi tree leaves, which flourished from the late seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. Here, Bodhi tree leaves served as a frame and medium that determined the overall composition and materiality of written and painted work. A closer precedent for Ren's use of Bodhi leaves is the Qing calligrapher Weng Fanggang (1733–1818), who wrote the characters for “heart” (心) and “sutra” (经), the abbreviated title of the *Heart Sutra*, on a pair of Bodhi leaves (Fig. 4).<sup>4</sup> In his postscript, Weng recalled seeing monks making gauze from Bodhi leaves decades earlier, a memory that resonates with Ren's own reflections. For Ren, the sound of monks chanting at Mt. Lingyan, blended with the deep tones of drums and bells, remains etched in memory: “That year, I was twenty-four years old.” When he later stood before the ancient tree in Mauritius, these memories resurfaced. He imagined a novice monk transcribing scripture beneath rustling leaves that whispered with sacred presence. Such moments, he suggests, collapse past and present, carrying the viewer back to the time of Śākyamuni's meditation. The scene offers not just visual inspiration but an enveloping sensory experience, shaped by sunlight, air, and the gentle music of nature.

Both Weng Fanggang and Ren Tianjin link the *Heart Sutra* to the natural form of the Bodhi leaf, but their mediums highlight a key difference: Weng inscribed directly on leaves, while Ren reimagined them in ink and paper. As Michele Matteini rightly observes, Weng's calligraphy was shaped by the veins and uneven surface of the leaves, whose texture resisted full absorption of ink.<sup>5</sup> Ren, by contrast, created leaves out of absorbent paper, allowing for greater control. Yet in both cases, the arboreal origin of the medium points to the omnipresence of tathāgatagarbha, the buddha-nature that pervades all existence. Ren's inverted Bodhi leaves also echo a phrase in the *Heart Sutra*: beings are “inverted with dreamlike thoughts (颠倒梦想),” but can awaken through the wisdom of emptiness. Just as multiple inverted leaves form a tree, they together

create the “shadow of wisdom.”

In *The Shadow of Wisdom*, Ren fuses calligraphy, ink painting, and the teachings from the *Heart Sutra* into a layered embodiment of the five skandhas. The inscribed trees invite viewers to encounter the accumulation of form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness—the aggregates that construct human experience. Ink washes shift between opacity and translucence, evoking impermanence, while the heart-shaped Bodhi leaves inscribed with sacred text root the work in the wisdom of Śākyamuni. Ren suggests that every tree can be the Bodhi tree, just as buddha-nature exists in all beings. His use of ink, paper, and tea reinforces this connection to the natural world as a vessel of enlightened essence. By integrating diverse media into a single practice, Ren expands the visual language of Buddhist art. Ultimately, *The Shadow of Wisdom* offers a powerful vision of life's fleeting yet illuminated experiences.

## Notes

1 Natasha Heller, “Between Zhongfeng Mingben and Zhao Mengfu: Chan Letters in their Manuscript Context,” in *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, edited by Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober, and Claudia Brown (London: Routledge, 2008), 110.

2 Ren's monograph discusses the artistic and conceptual conversations between the abstract expressionist movement and the twentieth-century East Asian calligraphers. Ren Tianjin, *Xiandai shufa chuangxinxing zhi bijiao yanjiu—cong Inoue Yūichi dao Wang Dongling 现代书法创新性之比较研究—从井上有一到王冬龄* [A Comparative Study on the Innovativeness of Modern Calligraphy—from Inoue Yūichi to Wang Dongling] (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2021). ]

3 Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1872), 1141.

4 For further discussion on Weng Fanggang's *Heart Sutra*, see Michele Matteini, “Written on a Bodhi Tree Leaf,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 75–76 (2021), 48.

5 Ibid, 47–48.