

# **Chinese Art Worlds in China and Abroad: Art Collectors, Institutions and Cultural Identity**

**by  
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## **Abstract**

Over the past decades, Chinese art collectors have drawn worldwide attention to their active acquisitions of artworks in both domestic and international art markets. On the one hand, the development of Chinese modern art and contemporary art has been accompanied by anxiety and uncertainty since the beginning of China's search for modernity. On the other hand, with China's reopening to the outside world, particularly concerning its economy, the rapid development of China's art market and involvement in the international art market have brought China to the spotlight of the international art world. Hence, the impacts of the dynamic art market driven by Chinese art collectors in China on shaping the development of contemporary Chinese art and the perceptions of contemporary Chinese art domestically and internationally is worth exploring.

**Keywords: Chinese art collectors, cultural identity, uncertainty, the circle of belief**

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## Glossary

### Names of People (Listed in order of last names or pseudonym in bold)<sup>1</sup>

**Bao** Yifeng (Chinese: 包一峰)

**Chang** Tsong-zung (Chinese: 张颂仁)

David **Chau** (Chinese: 周大伟),

**Chen** Duxiu (Chinese: 陈独秀)

Hongnian **Chen** (Chinese: 陈宏年)

Hong **Yu** (Chinese: 喻红)

Shoutai **Cheng** (Chinese: 程守太)

Fang **Fang** (Chinese: 房方)

Tuanzhang **Hou** (Chinese: 侯团章)

Master **Hsing Yun** (pseudonym of monk) (Chinese: 星云大师)

**Li** Xianting (Chinese: 栗宪庭)

Ding **Liu** (Chinese: 刘鼎)

**Liu** Yi (Chinese: 刘溢)

**Liu** Yiqian (Chinese: 刘益谦)

**Pan** Yuliang (Chinese: 潘玉良)

Qian **Qiao** (Chinese: 乔迁)

**Qi** Baishi (Chinese: 齐白石)

Yi **Shu** (Chinese: 舒怡)

**Wang** Jianlin (Chinese: 王健林)

**Wang** Zhongjun (Chinese: 王中军)

**Wang** Wei (Chinese: 王薇)

**Wu** Shanzhuan (Chinese: 吴山专)

**Xu** Bing (Chinese: 徐冰)

**Xu** Beihong (Chinese: 徐悲鸿)

---

<sup>1</sup> The names are listed according to ways the individuals list them in English publications.

**Xiang** Jing (Chinese: 向京)

**Yang** Bin (Chinese: 杨滨)

**Yue** Minjun (Chinese: 岳敏君)

Kelly **Ying** (Chinese: 应青蓝)

**Zeng** Fanzhi (Chinese: 曾梵志)

**Zhang** Daqian (Chinese: 张大千)

### **Other Terms (styles and techniques)**

Modeng/Modern (Chinese: 摩登)

85 New Wave (Chinese: 85 思潮)

Art Nova 100 (Chinese: 青年艺术 100)

*Bu hezuo fangshi* (Chinese: 不合作方式), or “Fuck off - uncooperative stance”

Chan (Chinese: 禅), or Zen Buddhism

Gong-bi (Chinese: 工笔)

gongyu yishu (Chinese: 公寓艺术), or apartment art

guo hua (Chinese: 国画), or national art

No Name Group (Chinese: 无名画会)

wanshi xianshizhuyi (Chinese: 玩世现实主义), or Cynical Realism

qianwei (Chinese: 前卫), or avant-garde

sixiang jiefang”(Chinese: 思想解放), “thought liberation”

The May Fourth Movement (Chinese: 五四运动)

The Xinhai Revolution (Chinese: 辛亥革命)

Tian Gong Kai Wu (Chinese: 天工开悟)

wu xing (Chinese: 五行)

zhengzhi bopu (Chinese: 政治波普), or Political Pop

Zhongguo dangdai yishu (Chinese: 中国当代艺术), or Chinese contemporary art

## 1. Introduction

This thesis presents insights into the relationships between art collecting, arts organizations and the emergence of contemporary visions of Chinese cultural identity through original empirical research in China and North America. As Jiehong Jiang (2007) argues, the history of China is reflected in the arts. The dramatic social, ideological, political and cultural changes during the twentieth century have significantly transformed the artistic practices in China. One consequence of the Opium wars between China and the British in the mid-nineteenth century was the start of pillaging and export of artistic and cultural works that decimated the national holdings of material culture documenting China's artistic heritage. In the twentieth century during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976), communist iconoclasts destroyed both records of traditional Chinese cultural heritage and works by living artists in ways that are similar to the destruction of art during the French Revolution in the late 18th century (Gamboni, 1997). During the Cultural Revolution, China developed its unique Red Guard Art, a stylistic movement that developed a distinctive set of artistic conventions celebrating a particular interpretation of social realism which still exerts a significant influence on China's contemporary art and design communities today<sup>2</sup>. With the economic development after Deng Xiaoping's economic reform and opening-up policy in 1979 to enhance international trade, an increasing number of Chinese art collectors became active in the international art market. They not only purchased famous Chinese and Western paintings, such as Van Gogh's *Still Life, Vase with Daisies and Poppies*, but also showed enthusiasm for reclaiming antique Chinese artworks in overseas collections and supporting China's new generation of contemporary artists. The resurgent interest in historical Chinese art and artifacts has been noticed by influential European collectors and business entrepreneurs, like Francois Pinault. In 2013, he made a widely-publicized gesture of diplomacy (associated with the expansion of his

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<sup>2</sup> During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, in the art world, the corresponding artistic movement Red Guard Art was developed and led by the students from institutions of higher education in Beijing, such as the Central Academy of Fine Arts, to serve political purposes. The Red Guard Art, borrowing the style of social realism from the Soviet Union, primarily features the portraits of Chairman Mao and the masses, particularly heroic workers, in bright colors, mostly red, and the quotations from Chairman Mao.

luxury goods enterprise, LVMH in China)<sup>3</sup> with arranging the return of two Chinese bronzes— a rabbit and a rat head—that were looted from Beijing’s Old Summer Palace in 1860 by Anglo-French troops during the Second Opium War (Jones, 2013).

There is a lack of detailed studies on the recent enthusiasm for art collecting in China. One of the core research objectives in this study is to understand what Pierre Bourdieu (1980) has called the “creation of belief” in the power of symbolic goods like works of art. From a communication perspective, the focus of this study will be on understanding some of the cultural and political mechanisms that lie beneath Chinese art collectors’ active art acquisitions and the implications that follow from it. It tries to uncover how contemporary art world participants involved with art collecting in China (among them collectors, dealers, advisors, and others) view the place of the art collecting and modern cultural identity in contemporary China. What do they believe art collecting means regarding communicating new cultural values and what does their participation in art collecting have to do with “the social universe of believers” and the field of artistic production (Bourdieu, 1980; edited by Tanner, 2004, 96).

Interviews with eight people involved in China’s art world, including art collectors, artists, and art dealers, and one year of field research at the Artlagoon Gallery in Richmond, BC, which was founded by a Chinese art collector, were conducted for this research. In the first chapter of this thesis, the development of China’s contemporary art in the context of “total modernity” (Gao, 2011), including its art market, will be briefly introduced. In the next chapter, social scientific frameworks for studying perspectives of art worlds by introducing sociologists’ theories of art, particularly Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of production of belief (1980), will be discussed. To justify the focus of this research on the art market, the material and symbolic meanings of the prices of artworks

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<sup>3</sup> LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE, also known as LVMH, is a French multinational luxury goods conglomerate headquartered in Paris. The offer to return the bronze animal heads came from François-Henri Pinault, who was accompanying the French president, François Hollande, on his visit to China in 2013. The French president was seeking to strengthen diplomatic and trade relations with China. It is also this month when Mr. Pinault declared the return of the two bronze heads that Christie’s was allowed to be the first international auction house to operate independently in the Mainland China.

and their implication for the agreed social values will be argued. Then, inequality in the art worlds and the ambivalence of the Chinese artist's identity will be explored. The political and cultural implications of art collecting, the legitimacy of China's cultural rise in the world and position-taking as a culturally powerful country, and the construction of China's cultural identity, will be addressed. In the third chapter, interviews with the participants involved in contemporary Chinese art worlds, including one art collector, one art dealer, three artists and two art institutions managers about their perspectives on China's contemporary art worlds will be analyzed in the next chapter. The field research at the Artlagoon Gallery on its operation, the ideology behind it and how people, including artists, manager, staff and other people involved with its operation, communicate with each other will be discussed.

## **2. Historical and theoretical framework**

In this chapter, a brief history of contemporary Chinese art in the context of “total modernity” defined by Gao (2011) will be introduced, particularly the three critical movements in China’s modern cultural history, including the May Fourth Movement (Chinese: 五四运动) in 1919, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, and China’s reform and opening in 1978, to demonstrate the lasting anxiety and insecurity about cultural identity in China’s modern history. Then, a brief introduction of dynamic China’s art market will be included to indicate the discrepancy between China’s active art market and the relatively periphery art world. A theoretical framework for this study will be introduced to discuss the relations of artworks’ prices to the communication of the artistic value and the success in the art world. Firstly, the symbolic meanings of prices in communicating artistic value will be discussed. Then, the roles that art collectors can play in the process of generating these meanings will be introduced. Thirdly, the relation between the “Chineseness” of the artworks and the Chinese art collectors’ purchase decisions will be explored. Fourthly, the relation between art collectors’ motivations and the construction of cultural identity will be discussed. Then, by introducing Bourdieu’s theories, the process of “the consecration of artworks” (Bourdieu, 1980) and its importance for constructing cultural identity will be explained. Finally, a brief introduction to the organizational models of art institutions and art enterprises involved in the Western art world will be included to provide institutional context for this research.

### **2.1. The development of contemporary Chinese art in the context of “total modernity”**

Since 1920s, China was forced to seek modernity as a result of its defeat by the Western forces. The historical development of modern China experienced major ruptures, including the civil war between 1927 and 1949, the demise of the Republic of China and the founding of People’s Republic of China in 1949, the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, and the launch of the economic reform and opening-up policy in 1979. Max Weber characterized cultural modernity as “the separation of the substantive reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous spheres: morality, science, and art”, while Hebermas indicates that “modernity” is about a historical time and epoch as a result of a transition from the old to the new, from the past to the future (Gao, 2011). However, China’s passive search for modernity should

not be confused with “modernity” in the Euro-American sense of a marker of temporal logical (as part of a sequence from premodern to modern and then postmodern) (Gao, 2011, 1). The modernization in China involved a merging of characteristics from all three periods, adopting them in hybrid forms, and often using incompatible elements at the same time (Gao, 2011, 2) and was characterized by the integration of morality, science, and art, which was defined by Gao (2011) as the “total modernity”. The integration of morality, science, and art was developed during the May Fourth Movement in 1919, which was initiated by Chen Duxiu<sup>4</sup>. Behind this ideology was the heritage of pragmatism as a result of its impatient eagerness to catch up with the West. This heritage of pragmatism has consistently influenced contemporary Chinese art, including the avant-garde projects (Gao, 2011, 4).

The development of contemporary Chinese art has been characterized by “a bringing together of images, attitudes, and techniques appropriated from the western avant-gardes and post avant-gardes with aspects of localized Chinese cultural thought and practice.” (Gladston and Hill, 2012, 100). There were three important movements in China’s modern cultural history which had significantly influenced the development of Chinese culture and art - the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and the launch of reform and opening policy in 1978. The May Fourth Movement in 1919 was initiated by Chen Duxiu (1879 - 1942), who advocated democracy, science, a new system of moral values and new literati art, including the replacement of traditional modes of artistic production associated with literati art by European modes (Wang 2011, 71-78; quoted by Wang, 2012, 223). This movement contributed to “a dramatic shift in cultural sensibilities encompassing debates on the modeng/modern and modernization” (Gladston and Hill, 2012, 102)<sup>5</sup>. During the May Fourth Movement<sup>6</sup>, a group of Chinese

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<sup>4</sup> Chen Duxiu (Chinese: 陈独秀) was a Chinese revolutionary socialist, educator, philosopher, and the co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. Chen was a leading figure in the Xinhai Revolution (Chinese: 辛亥革命) that overthrew the Qing dynasty and the May Fourth Movement for scientific and democratic development in early Republic of China.

<sup>5</sup> Modeng (Chinese: 摩登) is a Chinese word originated from Buddhism, which shares similar meanings and pronunciations with the English word “modern”. It usually means the modern time or fashionable in modern Chinese.

<sup>6</sup> The May Fourth Movement (Chinese: 五四运动) was an anti-imperialist, anti-feudalism, cultural and political movement growing out of student participants in Beijing on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919, protesting

artists studied abroad and started to appropriate technical, stylistic and theoretical influences of western art, who then developed artistic practice into three categories: “modernist”, “traditional” and “modern-literati”(modern-traditional) (Danzker et al. 2004; quoted by Gladston and Hill, 2012, 103). The former is usually associated with western art movements such as Expressionism and Dada while the latter usually combines western modernist techniques with traditional Chinese imagery, such as Chinese “shan-shui” (landscape) paintings.

Between 1949 and 1978, artistic production and distribution within China were under the control of and motivated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which was introduced from the Soviet Union. Following the direction of Mao that artistic production should serve the masses and the revolutionary aims of the CCP, only one art style is permitted, i.e., socialist realism, alongside the use of traditional Chinese art techniques, such as gong-bi<sup>7</sup>. However, the coexistence of western influences and traditional Chinese technique ended during the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976) when traditional Chinese culture was remarkably suppressed in a pursuit of the socialist road with Chinese characteristics and in an attempt to force China into a “decisive revolutionary breaking with its past” (Gladston and Hill, 2012, 104). Artists were referred to as “art workers” and only official advocated art and art practices, a form of socialist realism, was permitted. During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guard art movement was developed with the “stereotypically ‘red, bright, shiny, lofty, big and perfect’ art styles” (Wang, 2007, 34). Led by institutions of higher education in Beijing, such as the Central Academy of Fine arts and Tsing Hua University, together with rebel organizations and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), Red Guard art prominently features the images of Chairman Mao and images of him with the masses. Although the Cultural Revolution severely restricted the artistic production within the Mainland China, it is the foundation of the development of contemporary art in China and a crucial source of identity for Chinese art in the global art

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against the Chinese government’s weak response to the Treaty of Versailles, especially allowing Japan to receive territories in Shandong which had been surrendered by Germany after the Siege of Tsingtao.

<sup>7</sup> Gong-bi (Chinese: 工笔) is a careful realist technique in traditional Chinese painting. The gong-bi technique uses highly detailed brushstrokes that delimit details very precisely and without independent or expressive variation. It is often highly coloured and usually depicts figural or narrative subjects.



world today (Jiang, 2007, 2). The typical Red Guard art symbols, such as the images of Chairman Mao, the masses, and the red color, have had a lasting influence on contemporary Chinese artists, such as Xu Bing (Chinese: 徐冰), Wu Shanzhuan (Chinese: 吴山专), and Yue Minjun (Chinese: 岳敏君). Meanwhile, art influenced by early western modernists was still produced underground, such as by the No Name Group of artists, who went into self-exile from political life by portraying a utopian world in their landscape life drawings (Gao, 2011, 4)<sup>8</sup>.

With China's reopening to the outside world and the acceptance of Deng Xiaoping's program of social and economic reforms in 1978<sup>9</sup>, China has experienced radical changes economically, socially and culturally. Particularly under the directive of the modernization of education, which calls for greater diversity of thought and public debate, artistic production within China has not only been able to embrace modern non-Chinese art influences but also align with "a new officially sanctioned spirit of individualism and entrepreneurship" (Gladston and Hill, 2012, 105). The new generation of Chinese artists, tired of the left-leaning art world, wanted to challenge the political status quo and seek to enlighten the masses about Western artistic production practices. Under such circumstances, "85 New Wave" (Chinese: 85 思潮) emerged in China during the mid-1980s, which was strongly influenced by western modernist and postmodernist art and provoked nationwide debates on its appropriation of western appearances (Wang, 2012, 223). As a result, a diversity of non-socialist-realist art has spread all over China. The 1980s were referred to as a decade of "sixiang jiefang" (Chinese: 思想解放), or "thought liberation" (Xiang, 2011) and were considered as the beginning of contemporary Chinese art (Gao, 2011, 1). During this period, while the officially supported art form of socialist-realism persists, three supplemented modes of artistic

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<sup>8</sup> The No Name Group (Chinese: 无名画会) was an underground avant-garde group that was active during the 1960s and 1970s. These artists had been pursuing an ideal Chinese aestheticism in their impressionist/literati landscape paintings since the 1960s. This "art for art's sake" appearance was strikingly political under the domination of the Cultural Revolution's propagandist art (Gao, 2011, 8).

<sup>9</sup> Since 1949, China adopted planned economy policy, which gradually isolated the economic development of China from the rest of the world. China's reform and opening up policy refers to the program of economic reforms termed "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Deng, 1978) in the people's Republic of China that was started in December 1978 by reformists within the Communist Party of China, led by Deng Xiaoping.

production existed as identified by Gladston and Hill (2012): a return to the traditional form of Chinese art referred to as guo hua (Chinese: 国画), or national art; an officially supported modern art that tends to mix traditional Chinese and modern western techniques; and modern art known as Zhongguo dangdai yishu (Chinese: 中国当代艺术), or contemporary Chinese art, which was profoundly influenced by western modernism and international postmodernism, particularly in forms with critical aestheticism tendency, such as Dada, surrealism, and pop, along with traditional Chinese philosophy, such as Chan (Chinese: 禅), or Zen Buddhism, as well as Mao's revolutionary heritage (Gao, 2011, 5). Zhongguo dangdai yishu has often been used to signify qianwei (Chinese: 前卫), or avant-garde in China (Wu, 2008,16; quoted by Gladston and Hill, 2012, 109). In the 1980s, although China already started its economic reform, it still lacked an art market, either local or international (Gao, 2011, 7).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art were held in Hong Kong and abroad, including "China's New Art, Post-89"<sup>10</sup> in Hong Kong and "China Avant-Garde"<sup>11</sup> in Berlin, which firstly brought contemporary Chinese art to the international art world and established the vision of contemporary Chinese art known as Political Pop, or Zhengzhi Bopu (Chinese: 政治波普), and Cynical Realism, or

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<sup>10</sup> 'China's New Art, Post-1989' was curated by Chang Tsong-zung (Chinese:张颂仁) and Li Xianting (Chinese: 栗宪庭) and co-presented by the Hong Kong Arts Centre, the Hong Kong City Hall and the Hong Kong Arts Festival Society in February 1993, and was the first major survey exhibition of Chinese avant-garde art to take place outside of Mainland China (Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture, 2011). The exhibition sought to sum up the cultural sensibilities emblematic of the avant-garde in 1990, contrasting the most exciting but less focused explorations of the 1980s with works done in the intervening years between 1989 and 1991 in the post-Tiananmen era (Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture, 2011). The exhibition adopted Li's original terms zhengzhi bopu (Chinese: 政治波普), or Political Pop, and wanshi xianshizhuyi (Chinese: 玩世现实主义), or Cynical Realism (Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture, 2011, [https://contemporary\\_chinese\\_culture.academic.ru/132/China%E2%80%99s\\_New\\_Art%2C\\_Post-89](https://contemporary_chinese_culture.academic.ru/132/China%E2%80%99s_New_Art%2C_Post-89)).

<sup>11</sup> "China Avant-Garde" was a similar retrospective exhibition, which was organized by Hans van Dijk, Jochen Noth and Andreas Schmid for the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin in January 1993. It brought the existence of Chinese avant-garde art to the attention of European audiences (Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture, 2011 [https://contemporary\\_chinese\\_culture.academic.ru/132/China%E2%80%99s\\_New\\_Art%2C\\_Post-89](https://contemporary_chinese_culture.academic.ru/132/China%E2%80%99s_New_Art%2C_Post-89)).

Wanshi Xianshizhuyi (Chinese: 玩世现实主义), which was further reinforced by the significant international profile gained by the artist Ai Weiwei (Gladson and Hill, 2012, 107). Political Pop combines popular international capitalist and Chinese communist party imagery, while Cynical Realism depicts cartoon-like figures with grimace or “disingenuous” laughter (Gladson and Hill, 2012, 107), which were presented as coded attacks on the authoritarianism of the Chinese Communist Party. Contemporary Chinese art, with its anti-authoritarian characteristics, was also included in a series of international exhibitions, such as Venice Biennale, which sought to use the hybridity in visual arts as a resistance to the West-centric monopoly in intellectual and everyday life (Gladston and Hill, 2012, 107). Even though Chinese avant-garde artists share many “ideological similarities on the levels of abstract spirituality and basic attitudes of rebelliousness” (Gao, 2011, 7) with the western avant-garde, under the continued censorship of the Chinese government, the social and political criticism of contemporary Chinese art was in a necessarily coded form, which was open to interpretation.

During the 1990s, with the booming economic development within China<sup>12</sup>, the artistic production within China existed within a complex network of markets and globalization. In addition to acting as the focus of coded social and political critique, since the 1990s, contemporary Chinese art became influenced by an increasing sense of nationalism within China, seeking to construct a Chinese cultural identity, which has persisted since China’s earliest engagement with modernity at the end of the nineteenth century (Louie in Clarke, 2008, 274; quoted by Gladston and Hill, 2012, 111). Deng’s Reform and Opening Up policy, as an attempt to catch up with the West, further placed China under the immediate influence of globalization and the dominance of western ideas, including western cultural ideas. Therefore, contemporary Chinese art has become a platform for asserting a modern Chinese cultural identity and a resistance to the western cultural dominance along with the globalization. This sense of nationalism was supported by a continued attempt by contemporary Chinese artists to distinguish the development of contemporary Chinese art from western avant-garde developments, such as their attempt to close the gulf between art and real space, rather than merely represent

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<sup>12</sup> In 1992, Deng Xiaoping made a series of political pronouncements designed to give new impetus to and reinvigorate the process of economic reform. The average growth rate of real GDP has been an impressive 9.4% (Tomas Hirst, 2015).

consciousness in materialized aesthetic space that fundamentally distinguishes Chinese avant-garde from its Euro-American counterparts (Gao, 2011, 4). It was also supported by a continuing tendency among Chinese artists to “incorporate readily recognizable signifiers of ‘Chineseness’ as part of their work” (Gladston and Hill, 2012, 112), such as the portraits of Chairman Mao of the Political Pop, which is also a significant selling point of contemporary Chinese art in the international market. Meanwhile, as a response to a gradually commercialized art world with the establishment of local art markets and the expansion of the international art market into China, contemporary Chinese art has developed apartment art to “symbolize the self-confinement that separated the avant-garde from the official art system and market” (Gao, 2011, 8)<sup>13</sup>.

Since the turn of the millennium, while the sense of nationalism and the authoritarian constraints by the government still exert considerable influence on the development of contemporary Chinese art, some critics believe that there has been an increasing marginalization of avant-garde attitudes within China and a burgeoning market-oriented tendency in contemporary Chinese art world (i.e., Gao, 2011; Gladston and Hill, 2012; Wang, 2012). These scholars argue that since Ai Weiwei’s exhibition *Bu hezuo fangshi* (Chinese: 不合作方式), or “Fuck off - uncooperative stance”, at the Eastlink Gallery in Shanghai, contemporary Chinese art has presented a rather less challenging public face (Gladston and Hill, 2012, 113) with the booming of China’s contemporary art market, and criticizing the well-marketed artworks like Political Pop and Cynical Realism as they have abandoned the independent criticism and catered to western tastes. Also, there is concern about the appropriation of western modes of artistic production and its popularity in the international art market, which signifies, for some, a loss of national pride and confidence and may lead to “total Westernization”(Wang, 2012, 225).

The debate about the “Chineseness” of contemporary Chinese art was heated. Chen (2010, 44) argues that Chinese artists should uphold Chinese tradition and explore their

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<sup>13</sup> After the Tian’anmen Square incident and during the booming commercial society of the early 1990s, the avant-garde lacked the acceptance by both official and commercial galleries, media and the organizers of some Chinese avant-garde exhibitions overseas. Conceptual artists, with few financial resources, had to retreat to confined spaces and were forced to do their work at home; to employ inexpensive materials in small-scale works that can only be displayed in private spaces; to communicate only with a small audience of artists and interested persons. This unique phenomenon is called *gongyu yishu* (Chinese: 公寓艺术), or apartment art (Gao, 2011, 10).

own cultural context rather than that of the West. Ong (2012, 482) argues that the “Chineseness” of Chinese artists is defined by their distance or closeness to China as the motherland. Meanwhile, some art critics, including Li Xianting, argue that these artworks were produced in the cultural, social and political context of China, refuting the accusation that Chinese artists catered simply to western tastes. These concerns reveal the constant conflict between “Chineseness” and “Western-ness” since the unfolding of Chinese modernity until the present day and an underlying uncertainty and anxiety over the meaning and function of contemporary Chinese art. The commercialization of the Chinese art world also contributes to perceptions that Chinese artists are interested only in commercial benefits.

With the associated economic benefits of contemporary Chinese art and China’s ambition to reposition its cultural competence in a globalizing world, from Hu Jintao’s soft power policies<sup>14</sup> to Xi Jinping’s “cultural confidence” speech on the 18<sup>th</sup> Communist Party of China National Congress in 2012, the Chinese government has started to actively encourage and support the cultural development within China, which includes the development of contemporary Chinese art, by establishing artists’ villas and creative industry districts. As a result, the role of contemporary Chinese art as a platform for asserting a modern Chinese cultural identity and a resistance to the western cultural dominance as part of globalization have been further strengthened, with the government’s support.

## **2.2. The development of China’s art market**

On the other hand, since 2000, China’s art market has been in rapid development and has remained one of the top three art markets in the world. For example, according to Schultheis et al. (2016), the share of China in the international art market increased from 23 percent in the year of 2010 to 30 percent in 2011 and overtook the USA as the top art

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<sup>14</sup> In 2006, Hu Jintao officially proposed the idea of the soft power of China on the 8<sup>th</sup> China Federation of Literary and Art Circles. In 2008, this idea was further developed on the National Publicity and Ideology Meeting as a way to enhance the development of China’s comprehensive national power and increase the influence and affinity of China. In 2010, the 12<sup>th</sup> five-year plan pointed out that the government needed to push the development of the cultural industry to enhance China’s international influence and competence. In 2011, on the Seventh Session of the Sixth Plenary Session, this idea was emphasized again, and *the Decision of The CPC Central Committee on Major Issues Pertaining to Deepening Reform of the Cultural System and Promoting the Great Development and Flourishing of Socialist Culture* was passed.

market. China's auction market grew by 177 percent in 2010 and by 64 percent in 2011 (Schultheis et al., 2016, 24). In the same year, among the five most successful artists in the international auction market, three were Chinese artists (Schultheis et al., 2016, 24). Chinese landscape painter Zhang Daqian (Chinese: 张大千) even superseded Picasso as the artist with the highest turnover (Schultheis et al, 2016, 24). In the years between 2012 and 2014, China's share in the global art market fell back to 22 percent. However, according to the Artprice 2017, with the recovery of global art market, China was back to the second place in 2017 and contemporary Chinese artists occupied 162 places in the Top 500 artists in 2016, versus 139 Europeans and 97 Americans, with Chinese artist Zeng Fanzhi (Chinese: 曾梵志) ranking among the Top 10 artists.

Moreover, the Top 10 of the auction debuts ranking is mostly dominated by Chinese artists, and as the Artprice (2017) put it "this Chinese presence primarily reflects the appetite of Chinese buyers for contemporary works in ink, works that evoke the great traditional culture of China." In addition, among the Top 10 auction houses between 2016 and 2017, four were Chinese auction houses, including the Poly International Auction, China Guardian Auctions, Beijing Council International Auctions and Beijing Hanhai Art Auction, with the expansion of the most renowned international auction houses Christie's and Sotheby's into mainland China in 2013 and 2012 respectively (Artprice, 2017).

In the meantime, an increasing number of private museums supported by Chinese art collectors have opened all over China, such as the Long Museum in Shanghai. According to Larry's List and AMMA (Art Market Monitor of Artron), until the beginning of 2016, there were 317 private art galleries and museums supported by art collectors all over the world, among which 26 belonged to Chinese art collectors, ranking the fourth after South Korea, Germany, and Italy. These private art galleries and museums have become the primary purchasing power in the international art market.

Moreover, except for the international art fair Art Basel's expansion into China in 2013 by taking over the Hong Kong International Art Fair, China has started to develop its art fairs which have attracted a considerable amount of attention, even from the international well-known art galleries and museums. For example, in 2017, the Art021

Shanghai Contemporary Art Fair, was founded by young Chinese art collector David Chau (Chinese: 周大伟), his wife Kelly Ying (Chinese: 应青蓝) and the public relations expert Bao Yifeng (Chinese: 包一峰)<sup>15</sup>. It not only attracted leading galleries like the Gagosian Gallery, David Zwirner, Hauser & Wirth, and Whitestone Gallery for their first participation (except for the Gagosian Gallery, who participated for the third time) but also drew scholarly attention from leading art museums like the MoMA, Tate Modern, and Centre Georges Pompidou.

However, despite the impressive development of China's art market, it lacks established art institutions, a recently developed gallery system, and an educated public (Schultheis et al., 2016). In other words, China's art world has not developed a healthy system with a tightly knit national network of artists, galleries, auction houses and collectors, state institutions such as academies, public and private museums, biennials and art fairs, or curators, art critics and other relevant actors and professional groups (Schultheis et al, 2016, 249). Meanwhile, the art market has been, to some extent, filling in the gap by educating the audience, mainly through media coverage of auction prices and exhibitions at private museums, as well as financially supporting the artists through auction houses.

China has a vast pool of artistic talents, notably China's contemporary artists, who have attracted considerable attention in the global art market. The best works have been snapped up by Western art collectors who have begun to generate a market for contemporary Chinese art. Many foreign collectors and curators play the role as gatekeepers, whose criteria and choices shape Western perceptions of modern Chinese

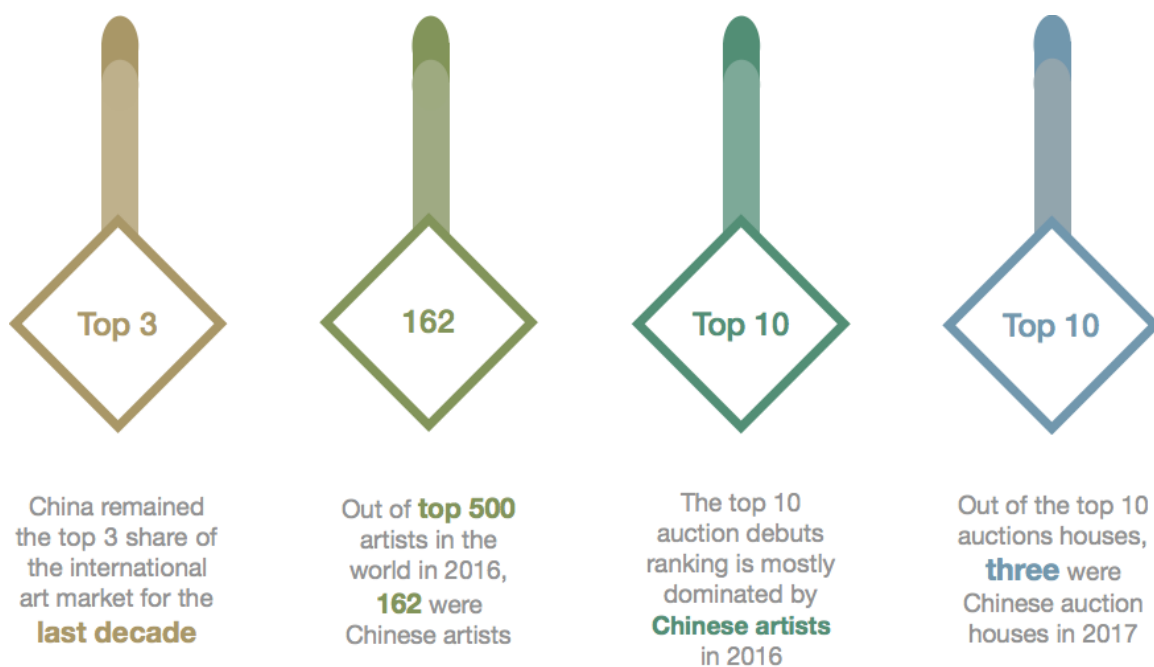
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<sup>15</sup> David Chau is a 30-year-old Shanghai-based art collector. He studied Chinese classical painting at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Chau began collecting in 2003, and now is funding two of Shanghai's top galleries: Leo Xu Projects and Antenna Space. His art collection includes contemporary Chinese artists such as conceptual artist Xu Zhen and auteur filmmaker, Yang Fudong. Kelly Ying is a Shanghai-based art collector, who is married to David Chau. She formerly worked in the fashion industry and now focuses entirely on art. She is the co-founder of Art021 Shanghai Contemporary Art Fair, with a collection of contemporary artists coming out of China, who are of similar age to her. Recently, she has started to look at younger international artists. Bao Yifeng is one of the leading public relations experts in China focuses on luxury brands, lifestyle products, entertainment, art & design promotions. Bao began his career in the international luxury brand industry in the 90s. He is also a co-founder of Art021 (Art021, 2018, <http://www.art021.org/en/aboutus.asp>).

art. Western readings of Chinese avant-gardism either criticize contemporary Chinese art as sham avant-gardism developed in response to global market interest, or authentic Chinese (Chinese patriots), or celebrate it for its "presumed cosmopolitanism" (Ong, 2012, 473). "Chineseness", or Chinese entrepreneurialism or Chinese patriotism as defined by Ong (2012), implies that contemporary Chinese art has market value in Western and Asian markets by using typical Chinese symbols, such as the images of Chairman Mao, but questionable political valence and a lack of ideology of civil society and human rights (Ong, 2012). At the same time, the very "Chineseness" in contemporary Chinese art has been an "irreducible part of its cultural appeal to Asian collectors who may otherwise have been indifferent to art" (Ong, 2012, 482). The term "Cosmopolitan", or genuine avant-garde, refers to the autonomy of the artists to comment independently, serving neither the state nor the market (Gao, 2011, 5). The very "vulnerability of the most provocative art", such as Political Pop that criticizes Mao and other political figures in coded forms, to state censorship appears to engender the commercial art boom, as state repression seems to arouse global commercial interest in forbidden Chinese art (Ong, 2012, 474). Thus, Western market and cosmopolitan interests, on the one hand, and the Chinese state's ambivalent relationship to art, on the other, have led to a "bifurcated reception of contemporary Chinese art" (Ong, 2012, 474). Hence, the different and complicated valuation of Chineseness, the struggling between market value and political intervention contribute to Chinese artists' sensitivity and ambivalence to fully embracing Chinese identity that "derives from China's own inner dynamics" (Wang, 2012, 225).

On the one hand, the development of Chinese modern art and contemporary art has been accompanied by anxiety and uncertainty since the beginning of China's embrace of modernity in the 1920s. On the other hand, with China's reopening its borders to the outside world, particularly with regard to its economy, the rapid development of China's art market and involvement in the international art market has brought a "hitherto largely unknown white spot on the map of the art world" into the international limelight (Schultheis et al., 2016, 10). Hence, the impacts of the dynamic art market driven by Chinese art collectors in China on shaping the development of contemporary Chinese art and the perceptions of contemporary Chinese art domestically and internationally is worth further exploring.





**Figure 1** China's Art Market<sup>16</sup>

### 2.3. Money and art: prices and the communication of artistic value

"Art" and money have always been intertwined (Reitlinger, 1961; quoted by Inglis, 2005, 25). Once artworks enter the "uncertain" and "subjective" (Bourdieu, 1980, 281) art market concerning the commercial and artistic values of artworks, there is the unmeasurable that needs to be confirmed by the measurable. Prices, as a medium, have to "reconcile a fierce opposition between commercial and artistic values" (Velthuis, 2007, 142) and can be used to translate the quality differences of artworks (Velthuis, 2007, 92), through which dealers, artists, and collectors communicate non-economic values. All values are socially constructed and negotiated. The prices of artworks, although many participants in art worlds are reluctant to talk about them, can directly reveal the preferences and success of artworks and be understood as the "cultural entities" containing symbolic meanings (Velthuis 2003, 3). In other words, high prices sustain faith in the power and status of these "symbolic goods" (the artworks), to follow Bourdieu's theories. Hence, prices are connected with quality, reputation, and status (Thaler, 1999; quoted by Velthuis, 2003, 159).

<sup>16</sup> . Illustration by the author of this thesis.

Prices can generate various meanings for artists, art dealers, and art collectors. Velthuis (2007) argues that prices are a source of identity and confirm status hierarchies among art dealers, collectors, and artists. Prices, particularly rising prices, confirm the agreed quality of the artworks. For artists, rising prices can signal the excess demand for artworks by certain artists, which demonstrates the acceptance of the artistic value of the artwork and commercial success of this artist in the art world. Also, the excess demand for certain styles of artworks can have an effect on encouraging particular styles of artistic practice (Inglis, 2005, 26). A rising price could reveal the establishment of reputation and the growing status of the artists, which would also strengthen the artists' self-esteem. Meanwhile, a price decrease could shake the self-esteem of the artists as they interpret it as a lowered judgment over their self-worth and the quality of their works. For art dealers, they can use rising prices of artworks by their consigned artists to distinguish themselves from their colleagues and auction houses, to demonstrate their success in the art market, and justify their aesthetic judgments. Meanwhile, auction house prices can also serve as an index for art dealers' pricing strategies. For art collectors, rising prices are a sense-making tool for them about their purchasing decisions, which characterize their "aesthetic eye" for the quality potential in the artworks. Through price increases, art collectors and art dealers are able to reassure the economic and cultural values of the artwork and their faith in the artists.

Besides, price signals do not just concern the individuals, but also concern "the entire artistic movements or the position of countries in the international art world." (Velthuis, 2007, 168) by confirming the rise and decline of certain artistic movements and their importance that the artists' "own aesthetic evaluations could not confer" (Fitzgerald, 1995; Gee, 1981; quoted by Velthuis, 2007, 169) to the international art world.

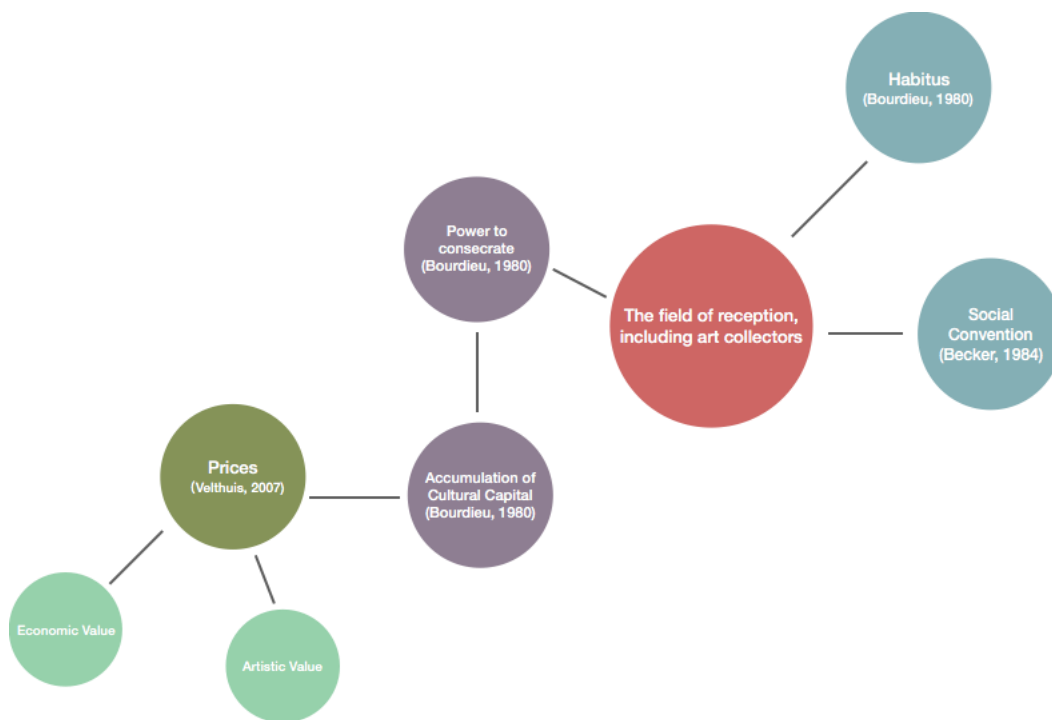
Therefore, the astonishing price increases of contemporary Chinese artworks in the international art market have a far-reaching impact on the development of contemporary Chinese art world. They confirm the rising reputation and status of contemporary Chinese artists in the international art world. For art dealers and art collectors involved in the contemporary Chinese art world, the rising prices strengthen their confidence in the economic and artistic values of contemporary Chinese art. The circulation of Chinese artworks in the international art market brings the "peripheral art world" (Velthuis, 2013, 296) in Western art history closer to the hegemonic art centers like New York, London, Berlin, or Paris. Moreover, the good market performance of contemporary Chinese

artworks, to some extent, contributes to the rise and acceptance of artistic styles like Political Pop and Cynical Realism by the international art world. However, the interpretation of prices may vary according to different people. Something that means a lot to this circuit may mean nothing to another circuit. Hence, prices can also symbolize and mark the differences between various circuits, which contribute to a sense of identity for their members. Thus, “as in and of themselves, super prices are worthy of closer scrutiny” because they indicate collective agreement on the value of contemporary Chinese art, especially the value of particular works of art that has been reached (Koenigsberg 1989, 25; quoted by Tang, 2008, 168).

#### **2.4. The roles that art collectors play in the marketization of artworks**

While the rising prices of contemporary Chinese artworks contribute to the reassurance of the economic and artistic value of them, this reassurance is always bound up with politics in its broadest sense, where it refers to conflicts and struggles between different social groups (Inglis, 2005, 12). Becker (1974) argues that the “artistic” nature of an “artwork” is not due to intrinsic and inalienable properties of the object, but rather is a label put onto it by certain interested parties, members of social groups who define something as “art” and whose interests are augmented by the object being defined as “art” (quoted by Inglis, 2005, 12). He believes that art is social in the sense that it is created by networks of people acting together, whose collective action is mediated by accepted or newly developed conventions. Social conventions, which Becker (1984) defined as the elaborate modes of cooperation among specialized personnel and agreements, are embodied in equipment, materials, training, available facilities and sites, systems of notation and the like, all of which must be changed if any one segment is. Not only the production and distribution of the artworks are under the significant influence of the interested parties, but also artistic reception highly relies on the social conditions, such as the education of the audience. Therefore, a work of art that finally is put in the market is not a work created only by the artist, but also a result of the coordinated activities of all the people involved in the process, including the art dealers and art collectors. Hence, art collectors, as the focus of this research, are more than just participants in the field of reception, but also are contributors to the establishment of meaning and values associated with the artworks.

Velthuis (2013) identified three ways for art collectors to contribute to the process of marketization of artworks. Art collectors can support the artist or the dealer by directly acquiring an artwork. In addition, art collectors can assist the art dealer in promotional activities for the artists by bringing the artwork from this artist to the notice of fellow collectors or other stakeholders in the art world (Velthuis, 2013, 72). Moreover, art collectors, albeit only a small group, can support the dealer by providing financial services (Velthuis, 2013. 72). Therefore, art collectors can contribute to the establishment of the reputation of an artist and the establishment of a firm market for his or her works by their economic power, during which their interests, either economical or cultural, are involved. Moreover, though it is generally acknowledged that "external variables" (Ekelund, Ressler, and Watson 2000; quoted by Braden, 2015, 8), such as the death of the artist, affect the recognition of an art object, the owner's social characteristics influence the perceived value of owned objects. The inclusion of certain artist's works to prestigious art collectors' collections would, in turn, contribute to the recognition and the reputation of this artists. Therefore, the characteristics of art collectors should be a factor in an art collection's critical recognition.



**Figure 2** Concept Map

## **2.5. Art collecting in China and “Chineseness”**

Due to art collectors' influences on the marketization of the artworks and the recognition of the artists and their works, their preferences for certain forms of art rather than the other forms of art are worthy of scrutiny. The main source of tastes or needs is the habitus (Fowler, 1997, 47), or “the body of taste preferences” (DeNora and Acord, 2008, 225). Bourdieu (1998) defines the habitus as a “generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle, that is, a unitary set of choices of persons, goods, practices.” A person's habitus is shaped in three ways, according to Bennett (2007), which are social position and trajectory, institutionalized training, and access to particular kinds of institutionalized training and discourses. In other words, people born into a family of a certain class are constantly under the influence of the lifestyle of that class through family upbringing, education, and access to particular kinds of training and discourses. As a result, they develop a unitary set of unconscious preferences over certain persons, goods, and practices, which unites those who share similar characteristics and distinguishes them from others. Habitus is a mobile, structured-yet-structuring structure, which “asserts itself in an improvised confrontation with ever-renewed situations...” (Bennett, 2007, 203). The transformation of habitus could be either gradual and mostly imperceptible or sudden and dramatic (Silverstein, 2004, 558). This idea may be of particular help when analyzing the preferences of Chinese art collectors, whose habitus was disrupted during the Cultural Revolution and has experienced a dominant influence from Western culture.

Janssen, Kuipers, and Verboord (2008) find that a nation's cultural standing influences both canonical choices and cross-national media coverage more than other national characteristics, such as size and cultural policy (quoted by Braden, 2015, 10).

Collectors, particularly collectors of culturally central nations in the art worlds, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and France, tend to focus on their own national culture. However, collectors from peripheral countries are also under a significant influence from the pervading culture of central nations, which result in the insecurity of their own cultural identity. The first research question in this study focuses on identifying the characteristics of the art collections of Chinese art collectors, with an attempt to know if Chinese art collectors demonstrate a significant trend of buying artworks

associated with China (e.g., the nationality of the artists, the “Chineseness” of the artworks):

Question 1: Is there a relationship between the Chinese characteristics of artworks and the buying activities of Chinese art collectors?

## **2.5. Buying Chinese art as a way to establish Chinese cultural identity**

Through economically supporting the careers of certain artists and art dealers, art collectors are able to shape the artworks with their interests. Collectors buy art for “personal consumption” (Braden, 2015, 2) for various reasons. While some buy art exclusively for enjoyment, many collectors are investors, buying strategically and developing a collection of artworks with the hope of attaining value beyond aesthetic enjoyment, such as high social status (Braden, 2015). Tang (2008, 172) argues that individuals assign personal and political meanings to the consumption of art, which, at the same time, are shaped by and involved in shaping the economic aspects of art. She also pointed out that one prominent use of contemporary Chinese art is to legitimate the geopolitical rise of China and to deal with the asymmetry of power between China and the centers of capitalist modernity in Europe and North America. This idea echoes with Bourdieu’s argument that the bourgeoisie “legitimize” and “naturalize” its political and economic rise by invoking its refined cultural tastes (Bourdieu, 1991; quoted by Lane, 2005, 35). The inclusion of Chinese artists in market sales has played a significant role in bringing the cultural periphery into the global core. However, the discrepancy between seasoned collectors from the West and what Tang describes as “crass buying practices”<sup>17</sup> of some Chinese buyers exposes a “worrisome lack of cultural know-how necessary for building a more mature system of connoisseurship appropriate to the task of representing the modern cultural accomplishments of the nation” (Tang, 2008, 175). The struggle to define the motivations and tastes of Chinese buyers continues to be a source of uncertainty that links to more significant questions about China’s national integrity and its repositioning as a culturally competent country in a rapidly globalizing world. The second thesis question hopes to explore these issues and seeks further insights into the values and motives of Chinese art collectors:

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<sup>17</sup> On the contrary to seasoned collectors in the West, who regularly acquire artworks primarily from art galleries and claim to collect art out of their passion for art, Chinese art collectors often acquire artworks directly from auction houses and some of them quickly resell their collections for profit, which is condemned in the Western culture of collecting.

Question 2: Is the buying of Chinese artworks in the international art market as a way of reclaiming and promoting Chinese cultural identity one of the factors that affects Chinese art collectors' decisions on purchases?

## **2.6. The power to consecrate**

For objects of “symbolic significance”, just material ownership is not enough (Braden, 2015, 4). The owners need to convince others of their good taste and cultural vision. A means of convincing others, and thus protecting access to and accumulation of cultural capital, is by attaining an “authorized perspective of cultural competence” from a cultural authority (Bourdieu, 1991, 240). For example, while anyone with money can establish a collection of artworks, being recognized as one of the top art collectors in an art world requires the acknowledgment of cultural experts, such as critics, which implies not only a good taste, but also the capability of identifying outstanding art. Moreover, during the recognition processes, the value of art is confirmed again and again, “legitimizing both the distinguished and those with the power to distinguish...” (Braden, 2015, 9).

The art world consists two fields, the field of artistic production, including artists, and the field of reception, including art dealers, critics, and collectors, which plays a role in conferring value on the products of that field of production (Lane, 2005, 32). The intrinsic or artistic value of art is socially produced by the field of reception, including art dealers, critics, and collectors. Bourdieu (1980) argues that the art business exists by disavowing its economic interest, which can only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing. Through the disavowal of the economy, people involved in the art world accumulate cultural capital, which eventually justifies their profits from artworks. For people in art worlds, the only legitimate accumulation of “cultural capital” consists of making authority and prestige, “a capital of consecration”, the power to consecrate objects, to give value and to “appropriate the profits from this operation”, through the disavowal of economy (Bourdieu, 1980, 262). Cultural capital can be understood as “symbolically valued cultural accouterments and attitudes” (Grenfell and Hardy, 2007, 30), which, according to Bourdieu (1997, 47), exist in three forms. The first is “in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (Bourdieu, 1997, 47). The accumulation of cultural capital involves investment in the self and the external wealth being “converted into an integral part of the person” (Bourdieu, 1997, 48). The second form refers to “objects such as, books, works of art that requires specialized cultural

abilities to use” (Swartz, 1997, 76). The third is “an institutionalized state” that refers to educational qualifications (Newman, Goulding & Whitehead, 2013, 461).

## **2.7. The social universe of believers**

Bourdieu (1980) argues that the social universe of believers, the field of artistic production, includes “everyone engaged in art”: artists, art historians, gallery owners, teachers, and others (Quoted by Albertsen and Diken, 2004, 37). The value of works of art and belief is continuously generated through the field of production, which can be understood as “the system of objective relations” between agents or institutions and as “the site of the struggles” for the monopolistic power to consecrate (Bourdieu, 1980, 265). He (1980, 206) claims that “the more complicated this is, the more it becomes invisible, which, in turn, makes its structure more misrecognizable, and thus magnifies the effect of belief.” Legitimacy in the field of artistic production is “inherently unequal” and is defined by those who have “dominant field positions” (Newman, Goulding & Whitehead 2013:460), such as certain artists, curators, and critics.

Bourdieu (1980) believes that the ‘charisma’ ideology, or the consecration, is the ultimate basis of belief in the value of art, which makes it the basis of functioning of the field of production and circulation of cultural commodities. The cultural businessman, such as art dealers and art collectors, consecrates a product which he or she has “discovered” by putting it on the market and the more consecrated he or she personally is, the more strongly he or she consecrates the work (Bourdieu, 1980, 263). Among the makers of the work of art, art collectors, as both audiences and traders, can help to make its value by “appropriating it materially or symbolically” (Bourdieu, 1980, 265). In general, the value of artworks and the beliefs that underlie it, are generated in the “incessant, innumerable struggles to establish the value of this or that particular work” (Bourdieu, 1980, 265). This struggle reveals ultimate conflicts involving the whole relation to the economy. The relation to economy, the opposition between ‘commercial’ and ‘non-commercial’ or ‘genuine’ art, distinguishes the dominant, who already accumulate economic and cultural capital in earlier struggle, and the dominated or newcomers, “who have and want no other audience than their competitors” (Bourdieu, 1980, 269). The dominant, or established producers, who tend to be discredited by new products imposed by newcomers or other newcomers with “whom they vie in novelty” (Bourdieu, 1980, 269). Hence, the production of belief is not only a process of moving



from collective unrecognized to recognized, but also a struggle for the monopoly discourse about the value of artworks.

Bourdieu's theories are based on the genesis of the autonomy of art. Partly due to the political intervention in China, it may be challenging to apply Bourdieu's theories to contemporary Chinese art worlds. However, the participants in China's art world are essential for creating belief in art. Bourdieu and Becker both discussed art from a sociological view. Becker focuses on the interpersonal ties and visible relationships within an art world, while Bourdieu concentrates on the structure, the position-takings of individuals in the fields of production. Bourdieu (1980) states that activities influencing an existing field can be considered part of it. Becker (1984) points out, however, that the worlds of various disciplines are often subdivided into 'separate and almost noncommunicating segments' (Mannen, 2009, 33). If Becker is the one who shows the complexity of an art world by presenting examples, Bourdieu tries to discover general structures, laws, and mechanisms in that complex world. Sociology and art history are rooted in the origins of Western modernity and share specific values and interests which compose the core of Western culture. Hence, the historical genesis of individual autonomy and the contemporary political, economic, and cultural conditions in China may be significantly different from Western societies. The theories by Bourdieu and Becker provide a starting-off point, both regarding theory backgrounds and methodologies for this study in the contemporary Chinese art world.

Therefore, the backbone of the art world is constituted by the professionalism of art appraisers who can vouch for the originality, provenance, rarity, and physical qualities of the work. Tang (2008, 170) argues that "in addition to capturing the physical beauty of a particular work of art, specialists are also responsible for crafting short yet tantalizing catalog vignettes that can convey its authenticity, art historical significance, and relative uniqueness." The instrumental use of their expertise in the art market signals a shared belief in using price as markers of the "historical, emotive, and social merits of the artworks" (Tang, 2008, 170). In this way, the pricing mechanism effectively captures the "simultaneous and multiple meanings of art to produce a more standardized judgment that rests on the technical expertise of art world insiders"(Mukeriji, 1978; Velthuis, 2005; quoted by Tang, 2008, 171). This leads to the third research question:

Question 3: What cultural specialists or experts (if any) do Chinese art collectors consult about setting priorities for their collections?

## **2.8 Theoretical Frameworks and Histories of Arts Organizations**

Theoretical frameworks are often based on observations of organizations. However, it is important to note that there are many traditions and distinctions in the organizational models of institutions and enterprises involved with the display and sale of modern and contemporary art, which vary nationally and internationally. As Bourdieu and other scholars have observed, major participants in art worlds and in art markets have often tended to emphasize the aesthetic value of artworks, rather than their economic worth (Bourdieu, 1980), a trend that is not clearly present in art entrepreneurship in China.

In addition to conducting documentary research and interviews in China, my research also involved participant observation of a new gallery in the Vancouver area. This gallery is under Chinese leadership and, as will be apparent in the findings it has struggled to find ways to combine very different models that connect the emerging values in Chinese art worlds with expectations in the North American and Western contexts.

In Canada, and in many other Western regions of the world, a variety of types of organizations involved with the display and sale of artworks exist. Arts institutions with the primary goal of exhibiting (and preserving) art works include organizations that may be called museums, cultural heritage institutions, collections or galleries. These may be funded (or partly supported) by governments, universities or private donors. In some the visitors' admission is free although, increasingly, many charge an admission fee to assist in the management and preservation of collections. (Fee charges are often hotly disputed in the case of publicly funded museums, such as the recent institution of fee charges for non-residents at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.) Many of these types of organizations have permanent collections but also host visiting exhibitions. The survival of these institutions does not normally depend on sales of art (and in some cases the organizations are not allowed to sell items in the permanent collection, particularly if they have not-for-profit status granted by governments).

Cooperative galleries (or artist-run initiatives) may also receive some government support. They customarily (in Canada) are run as not-for-profit organizations. Often this type of gallery charges artists fees to support the running of the organization and receive government grants.

Commercial art galleries typically host exhibitions of artists that they represent or whose works they have to sell. They normally have an exhibition area where they feature changing artists and admission to these exhibitions, such as the prominent shows in the Chelsea district of Manhattan, are usually free of charge. They are generally open to the public (although there may be private events for invited guests such as art experts, for example, for openings).

Other types of organizations involved with the exhibition of modern and contemporary art include studio galleries (usually devoted to the work of a single artist or group of artists), rental spaces, exhibitions in commercial enterprises, as well as arts and crafts boutiques (run like stores). Recently there has also been a profusion of web-based exhibition spaces (which usually offer works for sale). Most of these spaces offer free admission to visitors.

In addition, there are other events and spaces in which contemporary art is displayed and sold. These include dealers' showrooms, auctions, art fairs, and regular recurring exhibitions (like the Venice Biennale held every two years in Venice). At these events, artists, art collectors and art dealers show works that are usually for sale. While dealers, auctions and art fairs display work that is for sale, the works on exhibit at recurring exhibitions are not always for sale. Sometimes audiences are charged entry fees, but not always.

One of the interesting features of many of the exhibition spaces devoted to the display of contemporary art is their location in former industrial spaces. Such locations are often also the workspaces of avant-garde artists in leading arts centres like New York, where modern artists began to settle particularly after city factories began to re-locate outside of Manhattan. Famous early commercial and artist-run galleries in New York City were frequently housed in these former factory spaces, notably in the Soho district and in Chelsea. In China, contemporary art galleries like the well-known Gallery 798

established in 2002-3, flourished in old military factory spaces in the neighbourhood of Dashanzi in the Chaoyang area of Beijing. The Gallery 798 was not the first avant-garde art organization in the district. Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) and some individual artists began to move there in the 1990s. Although the factory spaces provided much room, these types of spaces did engender particular types of exhibition conventions, such as large spaces with high walls. However, the Vancouver area does not have districts with such extensive factory spaces, therefore other types of commercial spaces were sought, like automobile dealerships. These spaces present different types of challenges as they are converted to exhibition spaces for fine art, with other types of constraints for art centre organizers as I discuss later.

Thus, both organizational models of various types and architectural conventions established by leaders in the development of the contemporary arts scenes and markets all provide additional considerations that have affected recent participants as the research findings will illustrate.

The methodological strategy provided diverse opportunities to explore China's emerging contemporary arts participants and ways that they have confronted the challenges of forging fresh approaches.

**01** Art Institutions (museum, cultural heritage institutions, collections or galleries)

**02** Cooperative Galleries

**03** Commercial art galleries

**04** Other types of organizations (studio galleries, rental spaces, exhibition in commercial enterprises, arts and crafts boutique)

**05** Other events or spaces (auctions, art fairs, and regular recurring exhibitions)

**Figure 3      Conventional Arts Associations**

### **3. Methodology**

The purposes of this research are to look at the particular patterns of Chinese art collectors' collecting activities, to seek to explain why and how they decide to purchase certain kinds of art, thereby understanding better the interplay of the arts, social identities, power and inequality between periphery art world and hegemonic art centers. In this chapter, the original plan for this research to conduct documentary research on the auction results and interviews with top Chinese art collectors will be introduced. However, as the research went on, it became very challenging to collect enough data on the buyers of Chinese artworks to generate patterns of Chinese art collectors' art acquisition. In addition, arranging interviews with the intended top Chinese art collectors turned out to be challenging as well. Hence, an evolved plan for interviews with other core participants will be explained later in this chapter. Meanwhile, a chance to study the operation of a local art gallery founded by a Chinese businessman in Richmond, British Columbia was offered, and will be included at the end of this chapter. As a result, this study includes in-depth interviews with eight people involved in China's art world, including an art collector, an art dealer, two art managers, and four artists. Also, it includes a one-year fieldwork project at a local art gallery on its operation, the ideology behind its operation, and how people, including artists, manager, staff and other people involved with its operation, communicate with each other.

#### **3.1. Original plans for the research methods**

Initially, both quantitative and qualitative methods were going to be adopted since all methods had biases and weaknesses and the use of both methods could make up for the shortfalls of each form of data generation (Creswell, 2014, 15). According to the original plan, in order to demonstrate the collecting patterns of Chinese art collectors, their acquisitions focusing on the national origins or cultural heritage affiliation of the art or artists they collected, and the themes of the artworks in the collections were going to be analyzed. Unobtrusive documentary research methods were going to be used to collect data. For the first research question, the plan to use unobtrusive methods was aimed at reducing the reactivity of the respondent and the subtle and substantial effects of the questions on the responses received (Lee, 2000, 3) so that the results would be more objective. Moreover, unobtrusive methods like documentary research have the potential to provide an alternative where "direct elicitation is, for various reasons, difficult or dangerous" (Lee, 2000, 13). Given the difficulty of conducting surveys on a large

number of elite art collectors, these unobtrusive methods were chosen to be helpful and effective in this research.

In order to find out who bought what in China's art market, I planned to look at the auction results from the top four auction houses in China (according to their financial transactions) in 2017, which were the Christie's, China Guardian Auction, Sotheby's, and Beijing Poly International Auction respectively, in spring and autumn, the two most important seasons for auction houses, from 2000 to 2015. The reason for limiting the data to auction results was that auction sales account for 70% of art sales in China, compared to 48% of the global art market sales, according to TEFAF, the world's leading art fair (Maneker, 2013). Based on the auction records, I planned to use the internet as an information resource, particularly the biggest search engine in China, Baidu, to retrieve the archives about the buyers of these artworks. Many activities that are difficult to study directly, leave their traces online, which would also justify the plan to use network analysis later in the interviews for identifying potential interviewees. Also, the connectivity of the Internet would provide easier access to more extensive and more diverse information resources. Only the artworks that were sold would be recorded. For example, according to the auction results of Beijing Poly International Auction in the autumn in 2015, a painting by Wu Guanzhong (Chinese: 吴冠中) called *Bei Hai* was sold at the price of 2,300,000 RMB. Then the buyer of this painting would be searched on Baidu. If the buyer could be successfully identified and the buyer was Chinese, then the buyer would be included in this sample. If the buyer could not be identified or the buyer was not Chinese according to the search results, then it would be excluded.

However, my research attempts indicated that the auction houses often keep their buyers' information confidential except a few who bought artworks at record-breaking prices, which were covered by media. Hence, it was difficult to find enough samples for the quantitative research to generate patterns. The information of the auction records on the four auction houses' websites mostly only showed the detailed information about the artworks, such as their sizes, names and the names of the artists, and the sold prices. Since this research aims at discovering the demographics and attitudes of Chinese art collectors, which would be coded by their ethnicity, age, gender, industry/business background and educational background, the difficulty in gathering these kinds of information made the quantitative research impossible to be carried out using published

information about sales. However, the documentary research I conducted served to help establish a list of prominent field sites for visits to exhibitions associated with prominent dealers and experts involved with art collectors in China (primarily in Beijing and Shanghai), because they indicated where the art sales were the most active. Among the four top auction houses in mainland China, the Christie's and Sotheby's both have branches in Beijing and Shanghai. Meanwhile, the Poly International Auction and China Guardian Auction both have their headquarters in Beijing<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, Beijing has attracted a large number of artists with an increasing number of galleries, artist villages, such as Song Zhuang Artist Village, and creative industry districts, including the renowned Dashanzi Art District. On the other hand, before Expo 2010, Shanghai government was motivated to reframe the city as a cultural hub and launched a series of preferential policies as well as the Le Freeport West Bund, a bonded warehouse built to help the tax-free import, export, and storage of artworks. Hence, Shanghai and Beijing have attracted the most of the Chinese art collectors, art dealers and other experts involved in China's art world.

### **3.2. Plans for finding Chinese art collectors and other people involved in the art world**

The documentary research also provided a list of prominent dealers and experts that might be the initial contact for the interviews. Although the attempt to find the corresponding collectors to the auction results failed, it offered a list of four internationally recognized Chinese art collectors based in mainland China for the interview, Wang Jianlin (Chinese: 王健林), Wang Zhongjun (Chinese: 王中军), the couple Wang Wei (Chinese: 王薇) and Liu Yiqian (Chinese: 刘益谦) as well as Yang Bin (Chinese: 杨滨). They were listed among the top 200 art collectors around the world by the *Artnews*, one of the most well-known art magazines (founded in 1902) in the world. The reasons for choosing these art collectors were not only because of their reputation but also because of their willingness to share their insights. Given a significant amount of media coverage on them, I thought they might be more likely to be comfortable with talking about their art collections with researchers. In addition, with these media

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<sup>18</sup> Christie's has its branches in both Jing'an District and Huangpu District in Shanghai, and a branch in Dongcheng District in Beijing. Sotheby's has a branch in Dongcheng District in Beijing and a branch in Jing'an District in Shanghai. The headquarters of Poly International Auction and China Guardian Auction are both located in Dongcheng District in Beijing.



coverages, it was more likely to find out about their art collecting networks and contact information. One advantage of network method is that it often reveals patterns “not necessarily discernible” by the participants involved, particularly in organizational contexts, who sends what to whom can reveal about patterns of “informal organization, influence and so on” (Lee, 2000, 129). The study of the networks of these art collectors could not only help identify potential interviewees but also to understand how the “circle of consecration” (Bourdieu, 1980) was formed among the art collectors, art dealers, advisors, and others. Considering the possible difficulty in scheduling interviews with these famous art collectors directly, snowball sampling would be adopted. As each of the four major collectors mentioned above either has a gallery or a museum open to the public, the initial plan was to arrange interviews with the representatives of these galleries, museums, and other art advisors or art dealers identified through network analysis. Then depending on who responded to interview request emails, phone calls or messages through social media, they would be asked to recommend other participants that they might know within the network surrounding this particular art collector.

However, as it turned out to be difficult to get replies from the intended interviewees for interview through emails or social media, face-to-face interview requests with other core participants by visiting art fairs and art forums were adopted, as an attempt to increase the possibility for them to accept the interview request. Also, by interviewing some art dealers or art collectors and asking for their recommendations, the research might eventually be able to include the top dealers and collectors, since access to prestigious dealers (and art collectors) in particular can only be gained through these recommendations (Warchol 1992; Plattner 1996; cf. Abolafia 1998; quoted by Velthuis, 2005, 38). A couple of art related WeChat accounts, such as the Guanghua School of Management of Peking University, which frequently updated news about art forums and events in Beijing, provided a list of events to look for potential interviewees. As a result, eight interviews with people involved in China’s art world were conducted from September to October in 2016, and the interviews lasted between 30 minutes to over two hours.

### **3.3. Oral history interviews in China**

The oral history (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2009) method was adopted to generate information about the interviewees’ personal life or the life of other people involved in

China's art collecting activities and to extract the collecting patterns of Chinese art collectors. Accurate notes of what goes on during the interviews were made. Since this is a study of what and why people care about artworks, interviewees were asked to share the history of their interests in art and their involvement with art collecting, what themes of artworks art collectors prefer, what are the important factors affecting their choices.



**Figure 4 Summary of Interview Questions**

I met my first interviewee Shoutai Cheng (Chinese: 程守太) at an art collector forum at the Art Nova 100 (Chinese: 青年艺术 100) in Beijing. The Art Nova 100 was firstly launched in September 2011, and for its series of annual art exhibitions and promotion events, Art Nova 100 nominates about 100 artists from across China each year, as well as inviting a small selection of international artists (Art Nova 100, 2018). All of the nominated artists were born in or after 1975 and worked in a variety of media, including oil painting, sculpture, ink on paper, printmaking, photography, and installation (Art Nova 100, 2018). The exhibition tour of these artists' works took place both in China and abroad (Art Nova 100, 2018). These exhibitions and their related events provided a

large-scale promoting platform for the most promising young artists. I read about the art collector forum on the Guanghua School of Management of Peking University WeChat account and believed that it might be a possibly good source for me to find my potential interviewees.

At the art collector forum, there were two art collectors and an editor from the well-known art magazine *Harper's Bazaar Art* attending. After the art forum was over, the two art collectors were surrounded by people who hoped to have their contacts. I carefully approached Cheng and explained my research to him. He asked me to send the details of my research to him first, and then he would arrange an interview with me. Cheng is a successful lawyer from Sichuan province, who founded the Tahota Law Firm in 2000. Until now, he has expanded his law firm into 12 cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Hongkong, and 3 cities abroad, including Washington, Seoul, and Busan. The Tahota Law Firm has clients from a variety of industries, including finance, real estate, airline and medical. Then I approached the editor Sun from *Harper's Bazaar Art*, who agreed to my interview request delightedly. However, when I tried to confirm the interview with him the next day, he never replied. After I sent Cheng my Interview Guide, Consent Form and Letter of Invitation, I tried to confirm the interview with him as well. He also did not respond to my first request and I anxiously sent him another request, to which he finally confirmed the interview. We met at a café in the hotel where he was staying during his trip to Beijing and he asked me to start the interview as soon as we were seated. He was going to the VIP preview of Zeng Fanzhi's exhibition at UCCA (Ullnes Center for Contemporary Art) later, where he was also one of the board members. He liked to talk slowly to allow himself more time to think. At the end of the interview, I asked him if he would like to recommend any other art collectors for the interview, to which he responded as follows:

*I can't say that they are willing to accept your interview. To be honest, I accept your interview for two reasons. We both have the same surname, Cheng, and your research topic interests me. Chinese people prefer to 'hide your wealth'. They don't think of art collecting as a reasonable way of investment and tax evasion. They are less likely to share their collections with others. I think art collectors should not only collect but also share. In this way, contemporary Chinese art can really be recognized and promoted. But I will keep an eye out for the potential interviewees for you.*

However, I did not hear from him about any potential interviews afterwards.

My second interviewee Fang Fang (Chinese: 房方) was found at the Art Beijing 2016 (Chinese: 艺术北京 2016). Established in 2006, Art Beijing was one of the top art fairs in China, which continued to adapt to market trends and further defined its position in a continually changing industry (Art Beijing, 2016). It was supported by China's first art gallery association, the Art Gallery Association, Beijing, China. I joined a gallery tour group organized by the Guanghua School of Management of Peking University to visit this art fair. Fang's gallery was one of the busiest ones, and sold three pieces of artworks during our short visit. After the tour was over, I returned to his gallery booth attempting to approach him. As he was accepting an interview from a newspaper, I waited a while before his interview was finally finished. I explained to him about my research and asked him if he would like to accept my interview request. At first, he looked surprised and showed a reluctant look for a second. However, he eventually agreed to my interview request. Also, I sent him my Interview Guide, Consent Form and Letter of Invitation through WeChat the day after and confirmed the interview with him.

Fang founded his art gallery, the Start Gallery, in 2005, which was devoted to the promotion of Chinese artists born in the 1970s, who were around his age. He graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Art History, and then he produced a highly rated art show called *Art Star* on the China Central Television. He moved his art gallery from Dashanzi Art District to Qi Ke Shu, a new creative industry district in the Chaoyang District, with other art galleries and companies from the creative industry. Right before our interview, he told me that there were two reasons why he accepted my interview request. First and most importantly, he was interested in my research area. Secondly, he also hoped that China could be able to construct its own cultural identity in the future. Fang gave me a tour around his gallery and introduced me the current exhibition there. The Start Gallery looked like an old factory which was converted into an art gallery. Many art galleries from the Dashanzi Art District had similar building styles which were originally factories as well. There were two sections in his gallery, the exhibition area and the office area, which had their entrances separately. He made the office area very cozy and family-like, with a huge rectangle wooden table and a kitchen. During my interview, he had to pick up a phone call from someone seemed like a client, to whom he said one specific artwork was already sold. At the end of my interview, Fang asked me if I interviewed anyone else yet. He looked surprised to find out that I was going to interview

Cheng a week later, whom he claimed was one of his clients as well. He described Cheng as one of the seasoned and sophisticated collectors, one of only a few in China, and was surprised that I was able to dig this deep.



**Figure 5**      **The Start Gallery, photo by the author in August 2016**

My third interviewee Ding Liu (Chinese: 刘鼎) was introduced by Fang Fang, who agreed to keep an eye out for potential interviewees for me at the end of the interview. Ding Liu was an old friend of Fang and an independent artist who founded the Pink Studio in Beijing. He was also the art director of Joy Art, an art institution devoted to the promotion of contemporary art, between 2007 and 2008. I was invited by Fang Fang a few weeks later after the interview to a VIP preview of a new exhibition at his gallery, where I expected to meet more potential interviewees - art collectors. However, at the VIP preview, there were mostly artists who Fang Fang had collaborated with or were his friends. I was sitting next to Ding Liu and talked about my research with him. Later, Fang Fang joined us and told Ding Liu that this could be a very interesting research. Then he suggested to me to arrange an interview with him. I asked Ding Liu for his WeChat number and later sent him all relevant materials. I arranged an interview appointment

with him the day after the VIP preview and had my interview with him at a cafe near his home in Beijing. Liu was not very talkative and liked to answer my questions simply and straightforwardly.

I found the rest of my interviewees through my parents' connections. My mother is a chief editor in a university press, and my father is a professor of advertising. My fourth interviewee Zheng Tu (Chinese: 屠琤) was introduced to me by my mother's friend, who worked at the Shanghai Media Group, one of China's largest media and cultural conglomerates. He and my mother knew each other through business, and as they share the same surname, they soon became friends. In part due to his job at a media company who produced cultural programs, including art-related programs, he had a considerable amount of connections to the contemporary Chinese art world. Tu was the general manager of the Zendai Culture and the manager of the Shanghai Himalayas Centre, a cultural real estate project under the Zendai Culture. The Zendai Culture belonged to the Zendai Group in Shanghai, whose main businesses included financial investment and real estate, with total assets over ten billion Renminbi (around two billion Canadian dollars). The Zendai Culture was founded in 2001 as an attempt to build a comprehensive art services platform. According to its official website, it provided services for artists, private or corporate collectors, art galleries and financial institutions from exhibitions to auctions, consultants, investments, and e-commerce (Zendai Culture, 2018). The Shanghai Himalayas Centre has Zendai Hotel YIN, Zendai Art Hotel, Shanghai Himalayas Museum, Grand Stage and a shopping mall. Following the idea of "combining art and life", the Zendai Hotel YIN and Zendai Art Hotel installed a variety of artworks in their hotels, which were also available for purchase. The Shanghai Himalayas Museum was a non-profit organization devoted to the art collection, exhibitions, education and academic research, who has another branch in Qingpu District in Shanghai, which is designed for international artists in residence programs and public art programs (Shanghai Himalayas Museum, 2018). Since 2005, the Shanghai Himalayas Museum has organized over 60 international artistic exchange events, held exhibitions like *Tony Cragg: Sculptures and Drawings*, *Ofer Lellouche Exhibition*, and *Sean Scully Exhibition*, and participated in international art fairs including La Biennale di Venezia, Kwangju Art Biennial, and Liverpool Biennial (Shanghai Himalayas Museum, 2018). The Grand Stage is a multifunctional theatre, which can host experimental plays, musical plays, dances, or traditional Chinese opera.



**Figure 6** Shanghai Himalayas Centre, photo by the author in September 2016

I had Tu's contact information from my mother's friend, who directly arranged the time of interview with him. We firstly met at a hotel in Shanghai almost at night, where he was having a meeting. He left the meeting for a very short time to meet with me, and I briefly explained my research to him. Partly due to the request of my mother's friend and partly because of his interest in my research, he was happy to share his opinions about China's contemporary art world. However, since he had to return to his meeting soon and we could not find another proper time for another interview, he agreed to be interviewed through email. After I returned to Beijing, I emailed him my Interview Guide, Consent Form and Letter of Invitation, to which he replied a few weeks later. However, unlike in face-to-face conversation, his answers to my questions were relatively short and he skipped a couple of my questions about personal information like his educational background.

Tuanzhang Hou (Chinese: 侯团章), my fifth interviewee, was introduced to me by the same friend of my mother, who introduced me to Tu. He was the manager of a private

art organization called Jinart Institute in Shanghai. The Jinart Institute consisted of Jinart Space, Jinart Auction, Jinart Art Foundation, Jinart Art Research Institute, Jinart Collections and Jinart Gallery. Hou had degrees in medicine, finance, and law, and had worked in finance for about four years, which was his principal work. The Jinart Institute was devoted to promoting traditional Chinese art and building a multi-functional, multi-platform and multi-market business group (Jinart Institute, 2018). The Jinart Space was one of the biggest private art galleries in the world with over 37,000 square foot of exhibition space. The Jinart Space focused on the sale of traditional Chinese art, such as ink paintings and its derivatives as well as painting tools. In addition, with collaborations with major fine art academies in China, the Jinart Space provided art collection management, artwork verification, and consultant services (Jinart Institute, 2018). The Jinart Auction, aiming at promoting Chinese culture and developing China's art market, was founded in 2000, which focused on Chinese artworks from ink paintings and antiques to works of famous contemporary Chinese artists (Jinart Institute, 2018). The Jinart Art Foundation claimed to be a professional organization for providing art investment, art financing and finance consultant services (Jinart Institute, 2018). Following the principle of objective, efficient, and scientific management, the Jinart Art Research Institute employed big data to monitor and study China's art market and build a market index for the artwork trade (Jinart Institute, 2018). The Jinart Collections had acquired a considerable number of artworks from modern Chinese masters, including Xu Beihong (Chinese: 徐悲鸿), Zhang Daqian (Chinese: 张大千) and others for researching, educating the public and promoting Chinese art. The Jinart Gallery was the online trading platform of the Jinart Institute, which can be seen as the online version of the Jinart Space. The Jinart Gallery also focused on selling traditional Chinese art, its derivatives as well as painting tools.

I arranged an interview appointment immediately after I had Hou's contact. Because of my mother's friend, he agreed to my interview request immediately. The interview was arranged at the Jinart Space, which was located on one of the busiest roads in Shanghai. It was before 10 a.m. when I arrived, and the gallery had not opened yet. Hou must have told his staff about the interview, and they were there waiting to open the door for me and giving me a tour of the gallery. It was a two-story gallery with an abundance of artworks from famous ancient and modern Chinese artists, among which the most expensive one was a ten million RMB (around two million Canadian dollars) painting



from Xu Beihong. Soon later, Hou arrived, and we immediately started the interview. Hou gave me an impression that he was more like a manager in finance instead of art and looked detached and distant.



**Figure 7** The Jinart Space, photo by the author in September 2016

Hongnian Chen (Chinese: 陈宏年) and Yi Shu (Chinese: 舒怡) were introduced by my father and were both artists and professors in design. Chen graduated from Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in traditional Chinese painting. His grandfather was a painter in the Palace Museum, majoring in traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy copy and verification. We had the interview at his apartment near the Communication University of China. There were stocks of rice papers on Chen's desk, along with his writing brushes, ink sticks and inkstones lying scattered. Since he and my father were friends, the interview was less reserved, and he was very talkative. Shu referred to herself as an artist, a designer, and a curator. She graduated from Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University and taught design at the Communication University of China. Meanwhile, she initiated an academic group called Tian Gong Kai Wu (Chinese: 天工开悟), which was devoted to creating a society with public art and design, enlightening the

public and creating a future for art. I met her for the first time in her office at the Communication University of China and had the interview there.

After my interview with Shu, she invited me to an exhibition by a famous Chinese artist and surrealist, Hong Yu (Chinese: 喻红), at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. During our visit there, Shu met a couple of her acquaintances, including my eighth interviewee Qian Qiao (Chinese: 乔迁). At first, they just had some small talk, and then Shu introduced me to Qiao. I briefly explained my research topic to him, and Shu suggested me arrange an interview with him. Qiao left his WeChat number, and I contacted him the next day to confirm the interview appointment. He agreed very quickly to the interview at a Starbucks near his apartment. Qiao was a lecturer in sculpture at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, one of the top art academies in China. He claimed that he had been involved in China's art collecting since very early in his academic career and that he knew a couple of famous Chinese art collectors. We were at the Starbucks for about ten minutes, and he complained about the noisy surroundings. Then, we left to have the interview at his apartment. He had some bronze sculptures around his apartment, which were going to be exhibited at an exhibition curated by Shu. According to Qiao, he often invited his friends, including art collectors, over to his apartment to gather together.

#### **3.4. Fieldwork in an emerging art gallery in Canada founded by a Chinese art collector**

After I finished my interviews in Shanghai in September 2016, I was introduced by my mother's friend, who worked at the Shanghai Media Group, to a WeChat group whose members were active participants involved in China's art world, and he briefly introduced about my research on China's art collecting to them. For this fieldwork I have used fictitious names to identify the participants and the gallery in order to maintain a level of confidentiality.

A man called Max from Shanghai friended me through this WeChat group and asked me a favor. He was visiting Vancouver and was going to have a private exhibition for his newborn daughter. He asked me if I could bring him some photos from Shanghai to Vancouver. Since I already left Shanghai, he asked his assistant to mail the photos from Shanghai to Beijing. It was Thanksgiving when I arrived in Vancouver, and I gave him

the photos as soon as I dropped my luggage. He was living in a house in Richmond, a city adjoining the city of Vancouver, that was owned by a Chinese businessman called Richard, who I later found out was the founder of both the Artlagoon and Artlagoon Gallery.

They were having a Thanksgiving party, and Max asked me to stay for dinner. At this party, I met Richard and Michael, the future CEO of the Artlagoon, for the first time. A couple of days later, Max invited me to the opening of the exhibition held in that house. It was a townhouse in Richmond, which Richard bought primarily for serving his guests. The house was hardly furnished except for basic furniture. The exhibition was held mainly on the second floor with typical family photos of Max, his wife, and his two daughters, hanging all over the walls and from the ceiling. In the photos, Max was holding the newborn baby with his wife laying in the hospital bed, or his first daughter, who was already over one year old, was laying side by side with the newborn baby. Also, there were screenshots of his WeChat posts recording his daughters' growth daily and his feelings about being a father in a diary style. After a quick tour of these photos, he introduced me to Guillemin, a director of a prestigious art gallery, and an artist and art professor from a prestigious university, Matthew. There were also some other active Chinese curators and artists in Vancouver attending, who seemed to know each other very well. The exhibition was more like a family gathering, and the guests all brought their families.

A couple of days later, Max asked me if I had time to go to SFU's Burnaby campus with him and another artist, Mason, to which I said yes. During the trip, he was mostly interested in the architecture design of the campus and took many photos of the building details. When the trip was over, he wondered if I could write an article for him about his trip to SFU. Later, I found out that he was an architect and artist from an architectural design office in Shanghai, which also has a branch in the United States. He was invited by Richard to be the Director of his new art gallery in Vancouver, the Artlagoon Gallery. During his trip to Vancouver, he also brought his latest design *Aotu Infinite* to Vancouver, which was bought by Richard. Inspired by Chinese philosophy *ying* and *yang* as well as

the *Wu Xing* (Chinese: 五行)<sup>19</sup>, he created a series of cubes in five colors to represent *Wu Xing*, which can be fit together and freely changed into different forms like puzzles.



**Figure 8**      **The Auto Infinite, photo by the author in December 2016**

Later, Max invited me to an artist's talk by Matthew at the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Vancouver, where I met Matthew and Guillemín again. Since then, he started to introduce me to everyone as his assistant. Three days later, he asked me to go to the Artlagoon (the Artlagoon Gallery still had not been established) with him to have a meeting with Guillemín and Richard's daughter to discuss an art festival plan for the Artlagoon. He suggested that my research could be a part of the Artlagoon's academic achievement. At first, I only wrote some articles about his trips and recorded his meetings with Guillemín. Soon, as he had to leave Vancouver, I started to work at the Artlagoon as his assistant to help him contact potential partners, arrange meetings, and

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<sup>19</sup> The *Wu Xing* (Chinese: 五行) is a fivefold conceptual scheme that many traditional Chinese fields used to explain a wide array of phenomena, from cosmic cycles to the interaction between internal organs, and from the succession of political regimes to the properties of medicinal drugs. *Wu Xing*, or the "Five Phases" are Wood (Mu), Fire (Huo), Earth (Tu), Metal (Jin), and Water (Shui). This order of presentation is known as the "mutual generation" (*xiangsheng*) sequence.

prepare materials for upcoming plans. In November 2016, I was officially hired by the Artlagoon as a part-time employee. After discussing with my supervisor, we thought it would be a good chance for me to study how this Chinese businessman and art collector founded institution operates, the ideology behind its operation and how people, including artists, manager, staff, and other people involved with its operation, communicate with each other, which would give me an insider view of the art world.

The methodology for the thesis evolved over time. At the beginning I conducted extensive documentary research on the art market in China, attempting to identify elite art collectors and their networks. As the work progressed, it became apparent that the art world in China had many other types of core participants. My interviews in China and the networks of art world participants on WeChat opened avenues for a fieldwork study of the inception of a new art center by a leading Chinese businessman in a growing Canadian community of expatriate Chinese residents.

#### **4. Interviews in China**

In-depth interviews with people involved in China's art world, including an art collector, an art dealer, two art managers, and four artists, were conducted for this research between August and October in 2016. In this chapter, the highlighted perspectives of the interviewees regarding the research questions will be organized according to themes. A longer transcript of the interviews will be included in the appendix at the end of the thesis. Firstly, interviewees' perspectives on China's art market will be introduced. Then, the motivations behind Chinese art collectors' active art acquisition will be explained. Thirdly, the collecting patterns of Chinese art collectors will be identified by the interviewees. The relationship between Chinese art collectors' collecting activities and the construction of cultural identity will be explored later. Finally, the cycle of belief in China's art world will be analyzed in this chapter.

##### **4.1. China's art market: young with great potential**

Although China's art market has been developed rapidly during the past decade, it was not as active as it looks. The development of China's contemporary art world is still facing a variety of problems. Fang, the owner of Start Gallery, states: "The art market in China is still in its early stage. It is not as active as it looks to the outside world, and I am not that optimistic about its current development." (F. Fang, art dealer, September 7, 2016). Tu, the manager of Shanghai Himalayas Centre, proclaims: "Compared with a couple of years ago, China's art market has obviously stayed in a wandering period. But overall, it is on the right track." (Z. Tu, art center manager, October 8, 2016). In China's contemporary art market, there are more speculators than real art collectors, who acquire artworks seasonally and systematically. Fang also states: "In terms of the buyers, even though 70% or more of Chinese art collectors covered by media are my clients, there are only a few seasoned collectors, maybe around one hundred of them." An artist from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Qiao, states: "Of course, it [China's contemporary art market] also attracted some speculators, who harmed the development of art and confounded the value of art." (Q. Qiao, artist and professor, October 3, 2016). In addition, China's art market, particularly the traditional Chinese art market, lacks regulations from the government on forgery. Chen, an artist and a professor of design at the Communication University of China, says: "It has already become a stage. They [auction houses] know that some of their artworks are forgeries, but they still sell them to make money." Hou echoes Chen's statement about the

widespread forgery problem in China's traditional art market when talking about how to use new techniques to avoid the trading of forgeries: "Blockchain technique will give each artwork a unique identity code to avoid the illegal trading of forgeries." Also, China's contemporary art market has a lack of academic standards, and the artistic value and economic value of an artwork could sometimes be confused. Tu says: "The real problem of China's contemporary art market lies in the art gallery, art academy, theoretical research, exhibition curation, artistic production, and auction houses." Chen put it as follows: "Nowadays, money has become the standard for success, where auction houses play a significant role." (H.N. Chen, artist and professor, September 24, 2016).

Meanwhile, from the perspective of all the interviewees conducted in China, China's art market, both traditional and contemporary, still has great potential regarding its expansion, particularly with the rise of China's middle class. During the past couple of years, an increasing number of younger generations from wealthy families and Chinese companies have started to actively participate in China's art market. Also, new economic models, such as blockchain, have been introduced to China, which would help with the regulation of the market. Fang is positive about the future development of China's contemporary art market and states: "The rising of China's middle class may act as a significant player in China's art future. Big collectors like Wang Wei [the founder of the Long Museum in Shanghai] are hard to reproduce. But lawyers, doctors or people working in the financial industry, who are more cultivated with a stable income, will be good participants. Also, the younger generation from wealthy families, who studied abroad, are more familiar with contemporary art. They will become buyers." Hou has a similar ring concerning traditional Chinese art market: "I think China's art market has great potential...From an industrial perspective, we still haven't built an art market for the general public. We have a lot of new technologies to help us with promoting art, such as VR [virtual reality] and AI [artificial intelligence]."

Hence, although the interviewees generally share a more conservative attitude towards the current development of China's art market, which is flooded by speculators and lacks regulation on forgery and academic standards, they believe that there is a great potential for the development of China's art market with a massive market share of the rising Chinese middle class.

#### **4.2. Motivations of Chinese art collectors**

“First of all, I have to say that collecting art is a means of investment, which comes with high risks and high profits,” says the collector, Cheng. “Secondly, art collectors need a spiritual home. There is no doubt that they are interested in art. In the third place, I believe that every art collector, no matter what kind of artworks they collect, is passing down Chinese art. Art collecting connects with China’s past, present, and future. I am very glad that more and more people are involved in this. In the fourth place, art collecting has its social value. Art collectors want to be recognized, want a social status. We are mortal, but art collecting can be immortal. Collectors can build a foundation, donate artworks to museums or charities to gain social status. This social status, of course, can be attained through art. Last but not the least, art collecting is also about discovering artistic value, which is its ultimate value. But the reason why I put it to the last is that without the investment potentials, the social value, the interest in art and the pursuit of cultural continuity, it is impossible to talk about artistic value.” (S.T. Cheng, lawyer and art collector, September 16, 2016)

In the burgeoning art market in China, the majority of Chinese art collectors acquire artworks for its investment potential, according to the interviewees, and the Chinese participants in the art world are more at ease when talking about money than their Western counterparts. Among the three motivations identified by Hou, he is convinced that investment plays a significant role in boosting the art market: “The third [types of art collectors] is interested in investment, which I think is the majority. Art itself has historical value, which distinguishes it from other assets. It is perfect for asset allocation. Good artworks, in the long term, always increase value. Hence, it is an excellent investment object for many investors who also understand art.” (T.Z. Hou, art gallery manager, October 9, 2016). Shu echoes with Hou and says: “The real estate and stock market are too risky now. Although art still contains a certain degree of risk, it basically increases value over time as long as you buy the right ones. So collecting attracts people who need to allocate their assets.” (Y. Shu, artist and professor, September 27, 2016). Liu also shares the same opinion: “I believe that any kind of collecting, besides the passion for art, must involve a certain degree of interest in art as a field of investment, which probably is a more important reason.” (D. Liu, independent artist, September 20, 2016). Fang puts it more tactfully: “But this [art collecting] can never be separated from



investment, which is not contradictory. Art collectors all want to be repaid in both economic terms and social terms. I think this is very understandable. The Chinese art collectors I know, if they are not solely buying art for investment, they must be interested in art.”

As mentioned by the interviewees, the second most important motivation for Chinese art collectors is their interest in art. However, the interviewees very cautiously used “interest in art” instead of “passion for art” to describe the second motivation for Chinese art collectors and to indicate the complicated motivations behind Chinese art collectors’ art collecting activities other than just aesthetic pleasure from art. Cheng states: “At first, I looked at collecting art as a hobby, an interest of mine. But later, I started to like contemporary Chinese art. I won’t deny that I also see it as a field of investment. But I want to say that I am a participant, a witness and a contributor to the development of contemporary Chinese art.” While admitting the investment as the most important motivation for Chinese art collectors, the interviewees often put “interest in art” at the beginning to indicate their definition of real art collectors. Although Hou believes that profit motivates the majority of Chinese art collectors, he puts the motivation “interest in art” in the first place: “Firstly, they like art and really enjoy collecting artworks, through which they learn and understand new things. The more they learn, the more they like art. Their interests in art motivate them.” He also added: “I believe every collector shares this interest in art, but some of them just haven’t realized that.” As for Tu, he believes that interest in art should be the first and foremost motivation for art collectors: “For real art collectors, collecting must be out of their liking for art. But for speculators, collecting art should meet their investment needs first.”

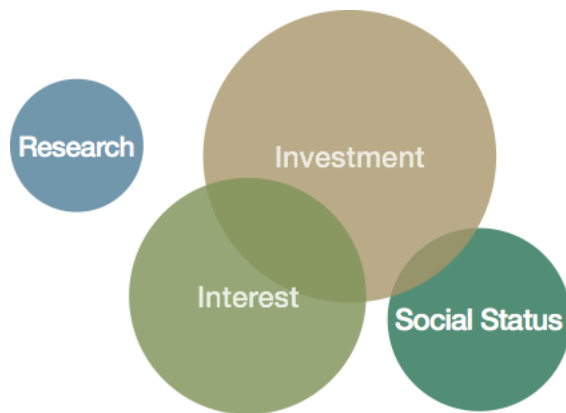
Art can also function as a social tool. As the fourth motivation for collecting art in China identified by Cheng, art collectors want to be recognized and attain social status through acquiring artworks. Except for recognition, Liu believes that art collectors can use art as a way of associating with different social classes, particularly the upper class: “Collecting has been playing a role as a social tool for a very long time. For the new rich, through collecting, they can join the so-called upper class, or the elites. It plays a significant role.” Shu has a similar ring, stating that art can act as a social lubricant: “Except for art appreciation, there also exists a gift market in China [which usually relates with corruption]. Artworks have been circulated in this market as gifts. Of course, after the

18th National Congress in 2012, the whole gift market has shrunk.” She adds: “When building a social network, you need something to make everything easier and artworks are most likely to assume this role.” Liu believes that art collecting is also about wealth competition when he talked about the roles art collecting can play: “It is also a wealth competition, an extended wealth competition. For example, when rich Chinese people start to enter the international art market, he or she will realize that wealth competition is more than just buying luxury cars and huge houses...Through competing with people from all over the world, they can gain pride in winning the wealth competition.”

Two of the interviewees also points out that there is another motivation for Chinese art collectors, which is academic research on culture and history. For these art collectors, they are not interested in the artworks themselves, but the cultural values and historical values behind them. This type of art collector belongs to the second type of art collectors identified by Hou: “The second motivation is research interests. Like researchers or research institutions, they discover art’s cultural and historical values. For collectors belonging to this type [in traditional Chinese art market], they may sell the artworks after they finish their research. I have met a couple of collectors like this. They are not interested in the object, but in the information it carries.” Liu also identifies the research interest motivated art collectors, but this group of art collectors is slightly different from the ones Hou identifies: “Some people collect art for studying [contemporary Chinese art], for their own research. Most of the new art collectors, who do not have an art related background, and build a collection out of interest in art, belong to this group.”

On the increasingly apparent geopolitical shifts in the art market (Schultheis et al, 2014, 39), the roles that art has played for Chinese art collectors are manifold. For the majority of Chinese art collectors, artworks are attractive objects when there are limited means of investment. Different from Bourdieu’s theory about the disavowal of economy, people involved in China’s art world do not condemn economic interests, although they still believe that people who collect art out of passion are the most respectable. In addition to material satisfactions, collecting art can meet their needs for aesthetic pleasure, which, from the interviewees’ perspective, define the real art collectors. These two roles that art has played are inseparable for Chinese art collectors, though the financial reward comes from collecting art often outweigh the aesthetic reward. Art can also be a means of social tool for Chinese art collectors to achieve their ambitions, such as ascending to a higher

social class, and a social lubricant for building a social network. However, the three primary reasons for art collecting identified by the interviewees are not restricted to Chinese art collectors. According to Braden (2015), while some in Western art markets buy art exclusively for enjoyment, many collectors are investors, buying strategically and developing a collection of artworks with the hope of yielding profits beyond aesthetic enjoyment, such as high social status.



**Figure 9** Motivations of Chinese Art Collectors

#### **4.3. Collecting patterns of Chinese art collectors**

All of the interviewees agree that Chinese art collectors show an obvious preference for artworks produced by Chinese artists, with a few of them including non-Chinese artists' works in their collections. Collectors tend to build their collections around their own culture and acquire works they recognize, understand and respond to. Also, Chinese art collectors show an overwhelming interest in traditional Chinese art, such as ink paintings and calligraphies. "They mostly collect with a focus on personal cultural identity when they are looking for an artwork," Fang says, "I think this is a safe choice. Your taste is connected with your overall cultural cultivation." echoes with Fang, Liu states: "Of course they prefer Chinese artists. It's like language. Although many art collectors have started to collect artworks by European or American artists, their focuses are still on Chinese artworks. This can be called cultural identity." Shu also adds: "Chinese art collectors prefer Chinese ink paintings the most, then oil painting, then print and then sculpture." Hou points out the overwhelming interest in traditional Chinese art when he talked about the potential of China's traditional art market: "At present, traditional Chinese art, such as ink paintings and calligraphies, accounts for 70% - 80% of the whole art market,

which is a very important product category.” Qiao identified another explanation of the preference for Chinese artworks from an economic perspective: “If they want someone take over an artwork, it needs to be easy to be understood. If it is a non-Chinese artist’s work, it would be harder for a Chinese art collector to assure its quality. It would be much easier to assess works by Chinese artists. That is why many Western masters’ works sell at a lower price than Chinese artists’. It is not about artistic value.”

Moreover, Chinese art collectors demonstrate another tendency towards buying local artists. In response to the question about Chinese art collectors’ preferences, Hou adds: “Chinese art collectors from different provinces or areas are more likely to buy local masters’ works. It is probably because of their passion for local art. Even local art institutions share this characteristic. For example, an art collector or art organization from Hu Nan [a province in the south of China] would definitely have a couple of works from Qi Baishi<sup>20</sup>.” However, for the big collectors, who spend millions of Renminbi on acquiring artworks, besides Chinese artworks, they also tend to buy Western blue chips, established artists with a reputation. Tu shows a relatively pessimistic attitudes towards the contemporary Chinese art and points out: “I think that more sophisticated art collectors prefer world-renowned modern artworks or famous artists, and traditional Chinese artworks, which shows that they have a lower evaluation of contemporary Chinese art.”

Chinese art collectors tend to show a similar pattern of building their collections. Cheng’s art collecting experience can be very representative of the evolvement of Chinese art collectors’ collecting patterns:

*During the past decade, I have been focusing on collecting Chinese literati art, like ink painting. But for the past couple of years, I started to collect contemporary Chinese art. Also, I started to look at non-Chinese artists, including Japanese, Korean and some Western artists. I believe that art collecting has no national boundaries.*

Other interviewees speak in a similar fashion. Chinese art collectors generally start their collections with traditional Chinese art, and then set their eyes on contemporary Chinese

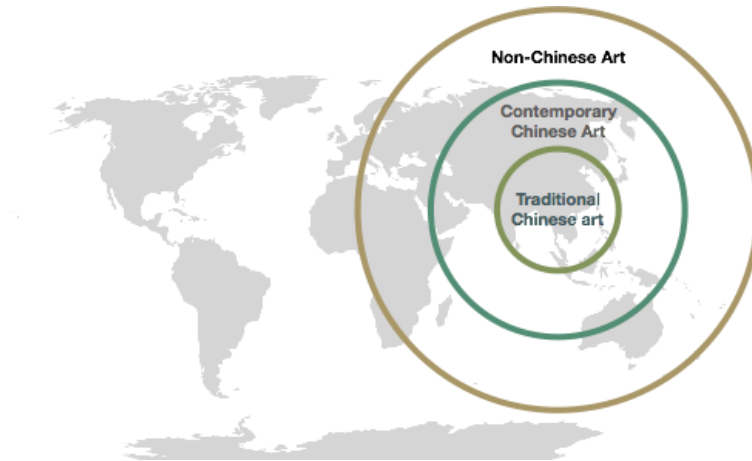
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<sup>20</sup> Qi Baishi (Chinese: 齐白石) was one of the most famous modern Chinese painters. He was born to a peasant family from Xiangtan, Hu Nan and noted for the whimsical, often playful style of his watercolor works.

art. Nowadays, some of the Chinese art collectors start to broaden their collections by including more non-Chinese artists. Fang points out: "I think things are changing. In the early days, Chinese art collectors only bought works by contemporary Chinese artists. But now, they start to look at non-Chinese artists. A few even added some of these artists' works into their collections. However, I still haven't seen anyone who mainly collects non-Chinese artists' works. Maybe there are a few." Shu has a similar ring: "When they enter the mainstream in the international society, they need some international symbols. They need to collect artworks from non-Chinese artists." She also adds: "Of course both areas [traditional Chinese art and Western art] have very sophisticated collectors. But in general, collecting Western art requires some overseas educational background or the collector's thinking and taste to understand it."

According to the interviewees, the obvious preference for Chinese artworks may be explained by what Bourdieu has called "habitus", the body of taste preference. This habitus may be shaped by the person's social position and trajectory, institutionalized training, and access to particular kinds of institutionalized training and discourses, or "overall cultural cultivation" as Fang identified. Chinese art collectors' preference for traditional Chinese art, particularly by ancient and modern Chinese artists, may be a result of the educational training in China, such as the emphasis of traditional Chinese art by China's compulsory education, and the easy access to traditional Chinese art in public museums and on media. Hence, Chinese art collectors have developed a taste and an understanding of traditional Chinese art. Bourdieu (2000) later noted that habitus changes constantly in response to new experiences. With the development of contemporary Chinese art and China's involvement in the international art market, Chinese art collectors are more exposed to a variety of art styles and gradually start to look beyond traditional Chinese art and to include artworks by contemporary Chinese artists and non-Chinese artists to their collections. This may also explain the tendency of younger generations of Chinese art collectors' openness to various styles of art, who often have overseas educational background and are more exposed to western culture and contemporary Chinese art. Moreover, Chinese art collectors' preferences for Chinese artworks, particularly traditional Chinese artworks, may be explained from an economic perspective. Velthuis (2005) argues that the rising prices in the art market reassure the quality of the artworks to art collectors and art dealers. As a result of the habitus, traditional Chinese art is widely accepted by the majority of Chinese art

collectors, which leads to the rising prices of traditional Chinese artworks in the art market. This reassures their qualities and profit potential to art collectors and strengthens the art collectors' faiths in them, thereby further enhancing their popularity in the art market.



**Figure 10** Collecting Patterns of Chinese Art Collectors

#### **4.4. Constructing Chinese identity in the art market**

Although the majority of the interviewees agree that Chinese art collectors mainly collect art as a means of investment, their overwhelming preferences over Chinese art, including both traditional Chinese art and contemporary Chinese art, still lead to the question that if they, to some extent, attempt to construct China's cultural identity and promote China's cultural competitiveness by buying Chinese artworks.

Tu believes that most of the Chinese art collectors still haven't developed the awareness of cultural identity and cultural competitiveness: "I do not think there are many of them, a few. The promotion of Chinese art requires economic strength and a high degree of awareness. Most of the art collectors do not have that overall idea, which I don't think is wrong. It is respectable if they have that ambition. But they are still respectable if they collect Chinese artworks out of love." Qiao is more pessimistic and convinced that Chinese art collectors attempt to make profits out of artworks under the name of "promoting Chinese art": "I do not think they have this ambition [to promote Chinese art], but they will say they have. Of course, to do so, they need to invest in art, to buy and collect some artworks, which objectively help with the promotion of Chinese art."

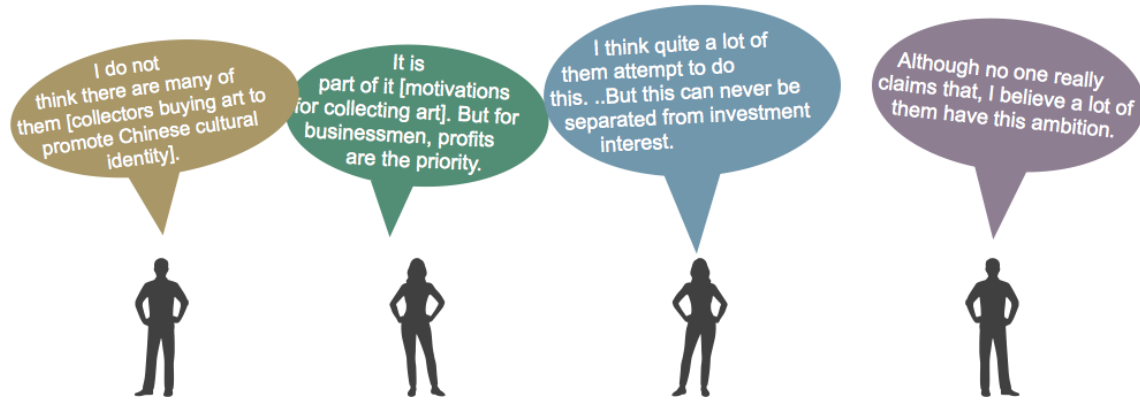
Believing that Chinese art collectors generally see art as a field of investment, Shu agrees that some of the art collectors may still have this ambition: "It is part of it [motivations for collecting art]. But for businessmen, profits are the priority." She adds: "You cannot talk about culture without rationality. It is very complicated. If you only buy art out of this ambition, you will find out that they [auction houses or art galleries] just want your money." Chen shares a similar opinion with them and believe that this ambition to promote Chinese art is often a spin-off of the motivation to make profits: "People who purely have this ambition are rare in any country. Most people are motivated by money and fame, although it is just a matter of degree. For example, an art dealer who promotes a Chinese artist can also promote Chinese art at the same time. But on the other hand, he or she also gains fame. I have met an art collector who collects stone seals, which is very rare. When his collection reaches a certain size, he builds his reputation in this area. Meanwhile, he promoted China's seal cutting art. Also, if you buy from him, he would make much money."

Liu speaks in a more optimistic tone and believes that Chinese art collectors, unconsciously, are motivated by the ambition of promoting Chinese art. However, he points out that this ambition needs to be cautiously scrutinized: "Although no one really claims that, I believe a lot of them have this ambition. But this should be looked at more carefully, to see if it is under the guidance of professionalism, if it is based on the judgments of the whole global art world conditions, if it is a simple understanding of Eurocentrism or America-centrism, if it is just out of nationalism, and if it contributes to cultural theories and global discourse, or if it is just a way to dominate the discourse. I think most of the Chinese art collectors still have nationalist feelings, and it is just a simple resistance, a resistance by instinct." Fang identifies two types of art collectors during the interview, the big collectors, who have years of experience in art collecting and spend over one billion RMB (around 50 million Canadian dollars) per year on art acquisition, and middle-class collectors, including doctors and lawyers. He believes that both of these two types of art collectors, to some extent, have this ambition. However, he emphasizes that this ambition is inseparable with investment interest: "Both two types of art collectors show this interest. I think quite a lot of them attempt to do this. They also hope that what they have collected can be recognized as works of outstanding quality and by great artists. But this can never be separated from investment interest."

Hou, manager of the Jinart Institute, claims that he has met some of the Chinese art collectors who attempt to promote Chinese art through buying it. Besides, he emphasizes that the Jinart Institute also aims at promoting Chinese art, particularly traditional Chinese art, by hosting free workshops for the public: “Yes, I have met some. There was an art collector from Xia Men, but I leave his name out. There were some Chinese antiques being auctioned in the international art market. In order to prevent them from leaving China, he raised the price to an extremely high level on purpose and then bit on it. This was out of love and the wish to protect Chinese antiques. There was also a bronze-ware discovered in Hu Nan, which was very precious. A number of art collectors from Hu Nan chipped in and bought it together. Take the Jinart Institute as an example. We provide free events and exhibition, and host art salons and art workshops, which have attracted not only Chinese visitors but also the Western visitors as well. These events provide an opportunity for them to know our art and culture. On the one hand, we are a commercial institution. On the other hand, we also help with cultural promotion.” Regardless of the motivations, the interviewees agree that Chinese art collectors’ collecting activities exert a positive impact on the promotion of Chinese art. While Qiao claims that Chinese art collectors make profits out of art under the name of promoting Chinese art, he agrees that: “These activities consolidate, increase the exposure of, and promote artworks by Chinese artists, which objectively helps with the promotion of Chinese art.”

The majority of the interviewees believe that the Chinese art collectors either do not have or unconsciously have the ambition to promote Chinese art and construct a Chinese cultural identity, which is often inseparable with their interest in yielding profits. However, beyond all the divergences and nuances in the ambition of Chinese art collectors, actors of China’s art world believe that Chinese art collectors’ active acquisitions of Chinese artworks objectively help with the circulation of Chinese artworks in the international art market and the promotion of Chinese art. Velthuis (2003) argues that price is a way to reassure the immeasurable quality of artworks, which indicates the agreed status of the artists and the artistic movements. Hence, as the interviewees pointed out, although Chinese art collectors may primarily be motivated by their interests in profit, their acquisitions of Chinese artworks push the prices of them to a record, and to some extent, confirm the artistic value of them and the rise of certain artistic movements in China’s art world, such as the Political Pop and Cynical Realism.





**Figure 11 Notable Quotes from the Interviewees**

#### **4.5. The roles of the art market and the artistic value of artworks**

The interviewees acknowledge the positive impact of Chinese art collectors' active art acquisitions in the international market on the acceptance and success of Chinese artists in the international art world. However, they also question the influence of economic power on the development of contemporary Chinese art and the acceptance of the intrinsic value of Chinese art in general.

With regard to this question, Qiao answers: "It will promote Chinese artists' status. After all, most of the audience cannot clearly understand and judge an artwork's artistic value. Price is the only way." He also adds: "When the price of a piece of artwork reaches a certain height, everyone pays attention. This is through our economic power to raise the value and status of our artists." Fang agrees with Qiao in terms of the contribution of the active acquisition of Chinese artworks in the international market to the exposure of Chinese art: "Buying is a part of the process, which could raise the public's awareness of art. The auction prices of artworks make people realize that art can not only meet people's aesthetic enjoyment, but also, as a business, it offers a financial reward. In a more mature art market, people think it is normal for an artwork to sell at a high price. But in China, even among the elites, they think of it as a conspiracy if the artworks are sold at high prices."

Tu is relatively pessimistic about the impact of Chinese art collectors' acquisition of art on the performance of Chinese artists in the international market: "If you look at the

international art market, they have little impact. Chinese art collectors do not dominate the rules in the international art market. Besides, the international art market has a more mature system, which cannot be easily changed by capital. Capital does have an overwhelming power, but it does not necessarily mean that it has the decisive power. China is still a peripheral world, even though more and more people have started to pay attention to it.” Liu is more critical about the impact of capital: “Capital can exert a great impact on artistic practices, particularly with the involvement of bigger capital. After the economic crisis in 2008, many museums faced financial problems and desperately needed sponsors, including Chinese sponsors. Then you see works by contemporary Chinese artists being exhibited in the Guggenheim. Although it is still the museum’s choice, without the involvement of capital, it may never have any connection with China. This may lead to the exhibition of a lot of unqualified artworks in the most reputable institutions. As a result, it creates a hallucination, to outsiders or art lovers, that this represents the most advanced academic and professional development of contemporary Chinese art.” Also, as Qiao mentioned before, the speculators in the art market: “...harmed the development of art and confounded the value of it.”

As Liu points out, although works by Chinese artists are exhibited in more reputable institutions nowadays partly due to China’s economic power, it does not necessarily mean that Chinese art, both traditional and contemporary, could be recognized by its artistic value in the international art world. Cheng and Fang state that art collecting cannot assume the responsibility of constructing China’s cultural identity, but is more likely to play a role in encouraging the development of contemporary Chinese art in economic term. On being asked how the active acquisitions of artworks of Chinese art collectors should be assessed Cheng answered: “Chinese art cannot be recognized just through buying...I believe that Chinese art collectors who acquire artworks in the international market, like New York, London, and Paris, play a role in encouraging the development of China’s art industry. They can encourage other people to collect through their personal influence. As a result, more and more people would start to concern about the return of Chinese antiques and the introduction of world-renowned artworks. This will be a long process, but I am glad that there are already some art collectors doing this. Chinese people desire cosmopolitan things, which is one of their characteristics. Chinese art collectors have drawn great attention from all over the world, which proves that Chinese collectors have already started to go west, go international...In the future,

there will be more people involved in art collecting, driving the whole art industry and contributing to the rise of Chinese artists. I really hope to see that one day every family owns some real, original artworks. That is when our culture could rise and go to the world.”

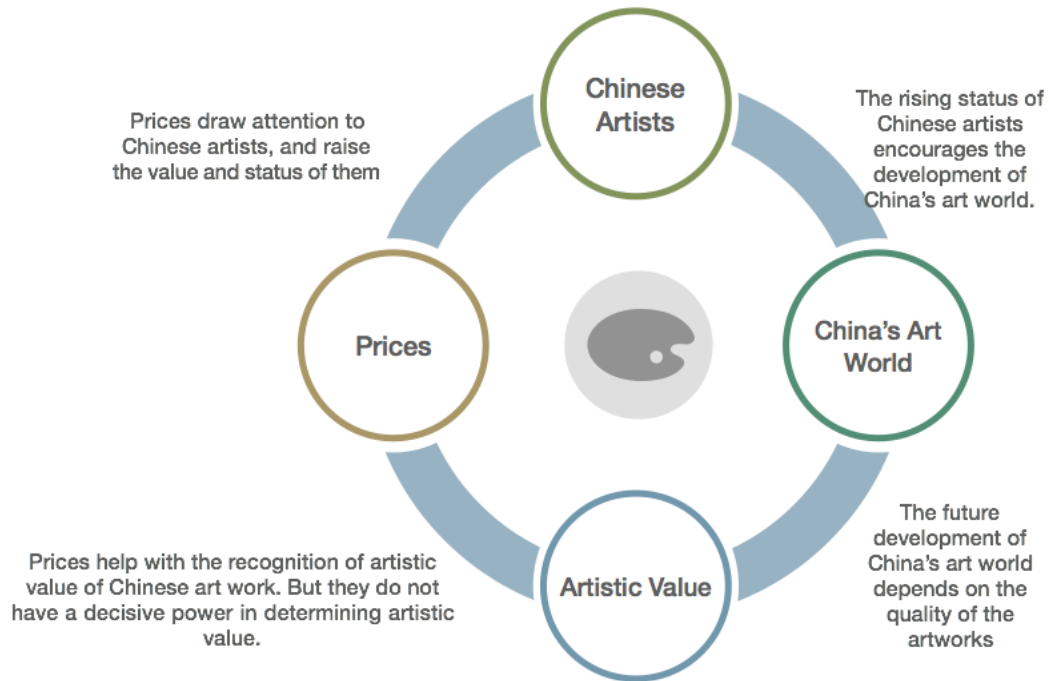
Fang agrees with Cheng on the role Chinese art collectors have played in encouraging the development of Chinese art. He also points out that cultural competitiveness derives from the recognition of the artistic value of the works by contemporary Chinese artists: “I believe that cultural competitiveness comes from the recognized value of the country’s original artworks. It [art collecting] contributes to the achievement of this goal, but this is not the responsibility it should assume.” From the perspective of an art institute manager in traditional Chinese art, Hou believes that Chinese artists’ performance in the international art market is decided both by Chinese art collectors’ purchasing power and the quality of their works. He puts it as follows: “Prices like this directly push Chinese artists to the top in the international art market. This makes a significant contribution to their performance...I think this is, on the one hand, decided by China’s economic development. On the other hand, the quality of China’s artworks is no worse than Western artworks.” Shu speaks in a similar fashion: “Of course, this artist must be very talented. After the promotion, his or her works get a wider acceptance and then can be sold at millions of dollars. The process of increasing value is finished.”

The interviewees’ opinions on the impact of prices echoed with Velthuis (2003) and Tang (2008). Price mechanisms can turn the immeasurable into measurable in a market riddled with uncertainty and subjectivity, which offer “standardized ways of constructing proxies for uncertain and elusive qualities.” (Velthuis, 2003, 160). In other words, prices can act as indexes for people, particularly people outside the art world, of the agreed quality of Chinese artworks. In addition, the rising prices also contribute to the confirmation of the rising status of Chinese artists and strengthen their self-esteem, as the interviewees demonstrated. Moreover, the soaring prices of artworks by Chinese artists not only draw a great attention to China’s art market but also to its “entire artistic movements” and the position of China in the international art world (Velthuis, 2003, 168). For example, the great market performance of artworks in the form of Political Pop and Cynical Realism confirmed this artistic development of contemporary Chinese art, though some may criticize their Chinese entrepreneurism. The inclusion of Chinese

artists in market sales has played a significant role in bringing the cultural periphery into the global core and to legitimate China's rising as a country of culture.

Velthuis (2013) argues that there are three ways for art collectors to contribute to the circulation of artworks in the art market, including direct acquisition, promoting the artist to other art collectors, and direct economic support. Chinese art collectors' direct acquisition of Chinese artworks can financially support Chinese artist and the dealer with their survives and can assist the art dealer in promotional activities for the artists by bringing the artwork by this artist to the notice of fellow collectors or other stakeholders in the art world, which were also identified by the interviewees. However, the concerns expressed by Liu echo with the discrepancy between seasoned collectors from the West and what Tang describes as "crass buying practices" of some Chinese buyers, which exposes a "worrisome lack of cultural know-how necessary for building a more mature system of connoisseurship appropriate to the task of representing the modern cultural accomplishments of the nation" (Tang, 2008, 175).

The development of contemporary Chinese art and the recognition of traditional Chinese art should not count solely on the economic power. The prices of artworks are more likely to act as a medium for communicating the agreed artistic value on the artworks. The increasing prices of artworks by Chinese artists show the faith of art dealers and collectors in the value of them. Velthuis (2013) argues that the interpretation of prices may vary for different groups of people, and as Qiao argues, when the prices are considered speculative, they may cause distrust in the artistic value of Chinese artwork and hinder the development of China's art industry. Hence, the struggle for the monopoly discourse of the value of artworks is only through the accumulation of "cultural capital" - the making of prestige and authority, according to Bourdieu (1980). The rising prices of Chinese artworks cannot assume this role. The cultural capital needs to be accumulated through making a name for oneself, such as a trademark or a signature, through publication and exhibition, and therefore to "give value, and to appropriate the profits from this operation" (Bourdieu, 1980, 262). And when the credits of the artworks have not been accumulated enough, the soaring prices of Chinese artworks would be more likely to create suspicion of an unstable art market which is flooded by speculators and a deficiency of a culture of collecting for the development of a primary market, as Schultheis and others (2014) identify.



**Figure 12 Prices, Aesthetics, Artists and Art World**

#### **4.6. Chinese art collectors and networks for Chinese art**

Bourdieu (1980) argues that the ultimate basis of belief in the value of art lies in the power to consecrate as a result of the accumulated cultural capital, which is continuously generated through "the system of objective relations" between agents or institutions. This system of objective relations includes every actor in the art world, including art dealers, art experts, and art collectors. From the perspectives of the interviewees, in addition to the encouraging role Chinese art collectors play in the art world mentioned above, art collectors are an irreplaceable link in the system, who create art through their purchasing.

As an independent artist, Liu believes that art collecting links parts of the ecosystem: "Every behavior exerts an impact. Art collecting links certain parts of the ecosystem. For example, there are different parts in the art world, including artists, curators, media, and museums, and art collecting links them. Through interacting with art collecting, such as through media and curators, artists are able to form their own judgments on the current situation of the art world and express their understandings with their art. Collectors have their own tastes, and so do artists. But to a certain degree, they can build a mutual

understanding.” Fang, as an art dealer, believes that the creation of art is through the collective actions of both artists and art collectors: “For most people, the primary way of creating art is through buying. Without buying, art would wither. China’s original art indeed depends on selling and buying, or buyers. In western art history, the collectors create the future of art together with the artists. The art market is more democratic, more equal and has more freedom.” In terms of how art collectors make their decisions on art acquisition, Hou states: “Usually, they have a couple of ways to choose an artwork. Firstly, they have their own consultant team or special consultant institution, like the Jinart. We provide our expertise in traditional Chinese art for a lot of big art collectors and collecting institutions. Secondly, the art collectors themselves are experts, who are very knowledgeable about this area. I respect them the most. They make contributions to the development of art. They help with the discovery and communication of values.”

In response to the roles that art dealers can play, Fang is convinced that each participant in the art world works based on their divisions of labors and describes the art dealer as angel investor: “I believe that today what we are doing is to create a future of art, a future of contemporary Chinese art, and this is achieved through the cooperation between the art dealers and the artists. Artists complete their creations, while art dealers finish the other half job. That is why we have the tradition to split the money half and half. This is from a perspective of the division of labor. From an economic perspective, art dealers incubate talented artists by financial support or support from other people, like art collectors, and then instead of commissions, make profits from the steep increase of the prices of the artworks. They are more like angel investors.” He then adds: “The active participation of art galleries can help China to build a healthier system, which will significantly contribute to the development of contemporary Chinese art.” Fang believes that art dealers play a role as the middleman between art collectors and artists to create a mutual understanding: “I chose my artists by instinct, which is a result of years of studying art history and my previous working experiences with artists. Also, I would study the artists I am about to consign or consider to consign... I would have a look at their previous works and take their personalities into account as well... All you can do is to find the artists you appreciate, and then try your best to find the collectors who share your tastes... But what art dealers can do is to communicate with the artist and the art collectors. The mutual understanding between the artists and the art collectors cannot be achieved by the art dealer’s own wishful thinking.” Fang describes himself as

a passive salesman who only gives his opinions when necessary: “I am a very passive salesman. I like art collectors who have their own judgments. I will give them the information about the artist and the works as well as my personal opinions when it is necessary.” He then adds: “I do not like to talk people into buying artworks. It depends on whether you like it or not and if you think it worth the money. Everyone has the right to judge an artwork, and his or her judgments are hard to be influenced by my opinions.”

The attempt to distance themselves from the market was shared by the artists being interviewed, who claim that they barely have connections with art collectors. Liu mentioned his loose connection with art collectors when answering the roles art collecting could play: “I do not directly deal with art collectors. Of course, there are people buying my works, most of them are big collectors or museums from Europe or America. Some Chinese art collectors have started to buy my works as well. But I never meet them and never talk with them. Of course, an artist’s work is part of the art collecting ecosystem. But they will not stop working because that no one collects art.” Chen responds similarly: “I barely have contacts in this area [art collecting]. Of course, I have some friends who collect art, so I know about it more or less.”

As the manager of the Jinart institute, Hou talks about art more like a business: “From an economic perspective, artworks lack the financial liquidity, which requires financial support. That is why I majored in finance and now am working in the art industry. We are working on the industry chain, which involves art galleries, auctions, e-commerce and art foundations. They all focus on fixing the problem of the art trade, the financial liquidity. I am different from other art organization managers. They may prefer to talk about art. I tend to focus on applying new technologies and new financial strategies to help our institute’s development in this industry.”

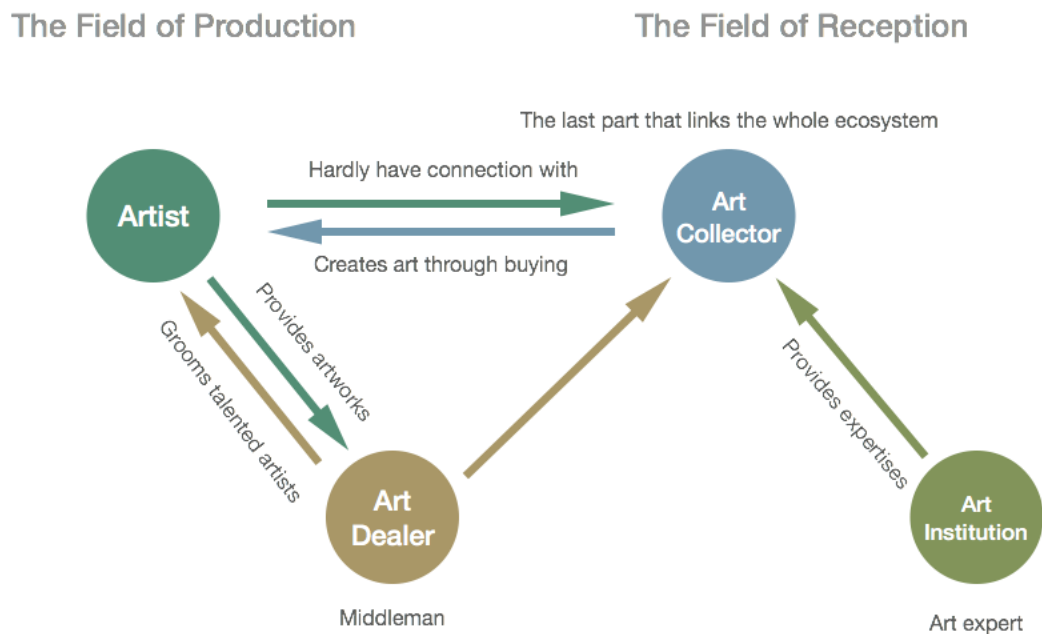
Bourdieu (1980) points out that the circle of belief exists in the relationship with the field of production as a whole. The authority and the credit of a person exist in his objective relations with others involved in the art world, such as whether the critics believe or do not believe in the art dealer’s judgments, or whether the art collectors place their thrust in the art dealer’s judgments by acquiring artworks from his gallery (Bourdieu, 1980, 263). Hence, Chinese art collectors, as the last part that links the whole ecosystem, complete the power to consecrate the artwork by putting their faith and their money in

the choices of the art dealers and works by their artists. Also, the acquisition by famous art collectors could add credit to the artworks and increase the artists' self-esteem as well. When the art dealers choose certain artists by their "years of studying art history and previous working experiences with artists" (Fang, 2018), or their habitus, they put their faith in the artistic value of the artworks by these artists. Then, they consecrate art by communicating with art experts and art collector and reassuring the artistic value of it through the rising prices, as Fang identifies. Fang's passive selling strategies are also a way for him to confirm his confidence and faith in his artists to the art collectors as well as a way to disavow his interest in financial reward to add credits to his judgments. Hou points out that art collectors also seek the artworks endorsed by art experts, such as the consultant team, to reassure the value of the artworks. The artists distance themselves with money as an attempt to add credits to their artworks through creating an image of a genius who create art for art's sake. Hence, from the artists' attempt to distance themselves from money to the art collectors' acquisition of artworks, the cycle of belief in the artistic value of art is accomplished through the accumulation of authority by the disavowal of economy and the endorsement of art experts.

During the process of bringing an artwork from an artist's studio to the art market, it has been given labels by various interested groups. However, in the context of China, the interested group also involves the government, who is often being accused of intervening the artistic production within mainland China. As the interviewees pointed out, the artworks being put in the art market are a result of the collective activities of the people involved in the process, mediated by the conventions, or the shared understanding among them, including the art dealers and art collectors, as Becker (1984) states. The artists, through the communication with the art market, are able to understand the status quo. Then they create works according to their own understandings. The art dealers select the artists they appreciate by their instincts, or in other words, what Bourdieu identifies as their habitus, and find the collectors whom they believe can share the artists' understandings. Hence, the artworks that are eventually sold to the art collectors, are a result of collective actions of artists, art dealers, and art collectors, as Fang states, and have been associated with the labels, such as tastes, economic interests, and artistic interests, of different interested groups through the whole process.



However, Hou’s statement about seeing art purely as an industry and business is contradicted to what Bourdieu (1980) has called the “disavowal of economy”. The Jinart Institute has a different operation model from galleries like Fang’s. The Jinart Institute adopts the industry chain strategy to operate the company and Hou straightforwardly admitted its interest in profit making. This mode shares a lot in common with the Artlagoon Gallery where the fieldwork was conducted, which will be discussed in more detail in the final conclusion chapter.



**Figure 13** Fields of Reception and Production

#### 4.7. China’s art world

Although China’s art market has developed rapidly during the past few decades, it is not as active as it looks to people outside China’s art market, and people involved in China’s art world are not all optimistic about its development. The development of China’s art world is still facing a variety of problems. China’s art market still lacks the support of academic standards and the regulations, particularly on forgeries, from the government. Besides, the culture of collecting is still deficient in China with only a few seasoned and sophisticated collectors. However, there is great potential for the future development of China’s art market as well. With rapid economic development, there will be a rising middle class in China, which would offer a great art market share.

Chinese art collectors show a significant preference for artworks by Chinese artists, particularly traditional artworks like ink paintings and calligraphies, though, with the development of contemporary Chinese art and the expansion of international art markets, they have started to look at contemporary artworks by Asian artists and even non-Asian artists. The popularity of Chinese artists is mostly as a result of what Bourdieu calls the *habitus* of Chinese art collectors, which is changing in response to new experiences. From an artistic perspective, artworks created by Chinese artists are easier for them to understand and respond to. From an economic perspective, because of their popularity, works by Chinese artists have higher possibilities to be sold in the future. Although Chinese art collectors collect art for various reasons, as our findings will illustrate there is a common feeling that the majority of them see art as a field of investment. Purchasing art offers the perfect combination of artistic interest and investment interest for them, though the financial reward that comes with collecting art may outweigh aesthetic enjoyment. Also, art as a social tool is another potential attraction for Chinese art collectors. However, these motivations are not restricted to Chinese art collectors. Hence, even though some of the Chinese art collectors may consciously or by instinct be motivated by the ambition to promote Chinese art and to construct a Chinese cultural identity, our research shows that many of them still just see art as a profitable object.

Chinese art collectors' active art acquisitions contribute to the growing awareness of Chinese art, including both traditional art and contemporary Chinese art, domestically and internationally, and the exposure and rankings of Chinese artists in the international art market. However, the economic purchasing power cannot assume the responsibility of promoting Chinese art and constructing a Chinese cultural identity. Moreover, the obvious pursuit of economic interest, along with the political intervention in China, may arouse suspicion of the quality of the contemporary Chinese art. Hence, the development of contemporary Chinese art world still lies in the establishment of an academic system involving art academies, art critics, art magazines, and other forms of expertise, in China.

After I finished my interviews in China in October, I was friended by an artist and architect from Shanghai called Max through a WeChat group. The WeChat group has a

lot of active participants involved in the contemporary Chinese art world, according to my mother's friend, who introduced me to this group. Max was in Vancouver at that time to help with the establishment of Artlagoon<sup>21</sup> Gallery as the executive director, which was founded by a Chinese businessman from the pharmaceutical industry and asked me a favor to bring some photos to Vancouver. (Note: In the fieldwork chapter the names used for the gallery and related arts endeavours, as well as the names of all of the participants have been changed.) After I met the founder of the gallery, I started to work for him as his assistant and was hired by the newly formed Artlagoon Gallery as a part-time employee. I believe that a study on how this institution operates, the ideology behind its operation and how people, including artists, manager, staff and other people involved with its operation, communicate with each other, could provide an in-depth view inside the art world. I will discuss my fieldwork at the Artlagoon Gallery in the next chapter.

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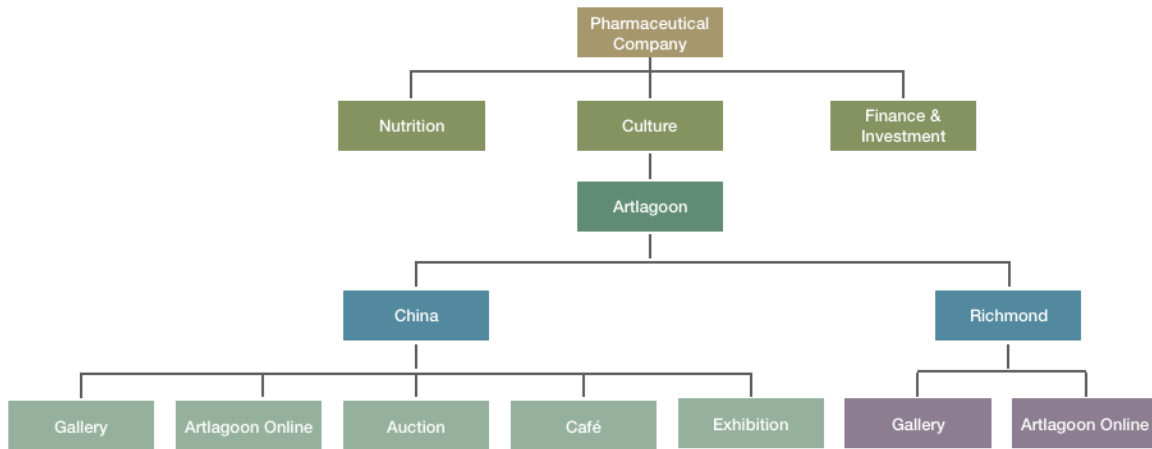
<sup>21</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for all the participants in the art institution, and the organization names have been changed. The name "Artlagoon" refers to the notion of establishing a lagoon for artworks, with reference to the notion of a lagoon as a protected, sheltered area, usually near the ocean.

## **5. Fieldwork at the Artlagoon Gallery**

In order to gain an in-depth insight into the establishment and operation of a new commercial art gallery in the Vancouver area of Canada and a related website that adopts Chinese principles, in this chapter, there will first be a brief introduction to the Artlagoon Gallery on how a leading Chinese businessman founded this commercial art gallery and its operations in North America. Then, the struggle to establish the new gallery and sustain its business in the art industry in Canada will be explored. Finally, the attempts to build a network of art experts and art organizations in Vancouver to endorse its development will be discussed.

### **5.1. Introduction to the Artlagoon Gallery**

The Artlagoon Gallery was founded in 2016 in Richmond, BC Canada, a municipality adjacent to the City of Vancouver. It was situated in the building of the Artlagoon. This Artlagoon Gallery was the Vancouver branch of the Artlagoon Gallery in China, and both of them were ran by a culture company founded by a Chinese pharmaceutical company, which later expanded into products for the nutrition industry, cultural industry, and financial and investment industry. Under this culture company, there were cultural businesses including the Artlagoon Gallery, Artlagoon, Artlagoon Auction, Artlagoon Online, Artlagoon Café, and Artlagoon Derivatives Project. Richard, the founder of the company, studied medicine in Japan and worked in the pharmaceutical industry for over 20 years. He had been collecting art for years, with a collection worth over a hundred million RMB (around 50 million Canadian Dollars). His collection consisted of primarily traditional Chinese art and modern Chinese art, and a small collection of contemporary Chinese art. One of my interviewees, who claimed that he was one of his clients, confirmed his status as one of the biggest and the most famous art collectors in China.



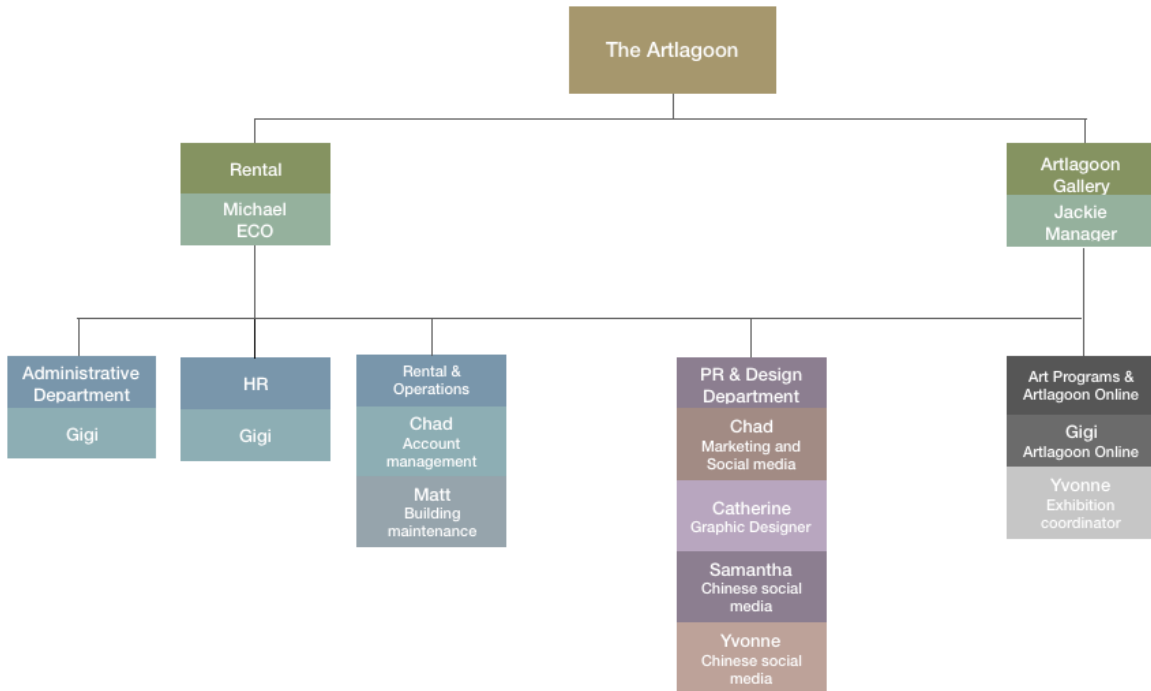
**Figure 14 The organization of the Artlagoon**

The Artlagoon in China was a five-story building located in a Hi-tech Industries Development Zone. It was a cultural group devoted to exhibitions and sales of Chinese art, including traditional Chinese art, such as ink paintings and calligraphies, modern Chinese art and contemporary art, and antiques, including chinaware, bronze ware, and jade ware. In the Artlagoon organization, there were varied initiatives, including the Artlagoon Auction, Artlagoon Exhibition, Artlagoon Gallery, Artlagoon Online, and Artlagoon Café. The Artlagoon Exhibition was located on both the first and third floor of the Artlagoon, with an exhibition space of over 30,000 square feet. Following the idea of cultural exchange between China and the West, it consigned both Chinese and Western artists and regularly hosted events like art salons and artists' talks. However, according to the previous exhibitions at the Artlagoon Exhibition, they showed a strong tendency towards well-known local artists, such as professors from local art academies. The Artlagoon Gallery is located on the second floor of the Artlagoon, with over 10,000 square feet of exhibition area. It was a company permitted by the government to deal with antiques and was proud of its collection of returned antiques from overseas. In addition, it also had a collection of renowned modern and contemporary Chinese artists, including realist painter Xu Beihong (Chinese: 徐悲鸿), impressionist painter Pan Yuliang (Chinese: 潘玉良), and surrealist and pop artist Liu Yi (Chinese: 刘溢). The Artlagoon Auction also shows an overwhelming preference for traditional Chinese art and antiques, particularly ink paintings and calligraphies. It held both online auctions on e-commerce platform the Artlagoon Online, and offline auctions at the Artlagoon.

The Artlagoon in Richmond, as a commercial art space, was the overseas branch of the Artlagoon in China and was founded in January 2017. Its architectural features are influenced by the fact that it was originally designed to be a car dealership. It is a two-story building located in the Central Business District of the city of Richmond, with a shopping mall across the street and many restaurants nearby. With a total area of over 20,000 square feet, the space was divided into two main exhibition areas, the lobby at the front and the garage at the back, in addition to office areas. The lobby faced one of the busiest roads in Richmond with an area of 2,300 square feet and 19 feet high glass windows on three sides. The former garage was converted from the previous maintenance area of the car dealership into an exhibition space, with a total area of 5,500 square feet. Between the lobby and the garage, there were two office areas, one of which was formerly used as the parts and services office of the car dealership. There was one big meeting room and four independent offices surrounding the common area in the middle on the second floor. As the staff of the Artlagoon worked on the first floor, the second floor was mostly rented out for meetings and used by other organizations as temporary offices, such as the Canadian Alliance of Chinese Associations. Besides holding exhibitions, the Artlagoon also rented to events, such as for press conferences, art sales, and other culturally related events. The center was under the management of the CEO, Michael. Michael received a degree in chemistry and was a former employee at the parental company of the Artlagoon in China, who later immigrated to Canada. A couple of years ago, Michael accidentally came across Richard at the Fisherman's Public Market in Richmond and was invited to work at Richard's new pharmaceutical laboratory in Richmond. After the Artlagoon was founded, Michael was transferred there as its CEO.

The Artlagoon Gallery, which was located in the building of the Artlagoon, was under the management of the organization and was positioned to be the high-end branch of the Artlagoon Gallery in China. It aimed to become the premier platform for outstanding arts and cultural resources in both Canada and China by advocating for the integration of business, art and culture. The Artlagoon Gallery aimed to work with local artists, curators, art magazines, designers and multicultural organizations to discover and present outstanding local art (Artlagoon Gallery, 2018). In addition, with the support of the Artlagoon Online, an online OTO platform, the Artlagoon Gallery was able to provide artists in both China and Canada an environment in which to exhibit and sell their works

and to redefine the experience of buying and selling art by making it easy, convenient and welcoming for both collectors and artists. The Artlagoon Gallery was under the management of the executive director, Jackie. Jackie received her MA in Arts Administration and Policy at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and her MA in Museology at the University of Florida. She had organized a variety of exhibitions in America and Vancouver, Canada, including multi-cultural exhibitions and education activities. Also, she was on the board of some other art and cultural organizations in Vancouver, including the Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society, Richmond Art Gallery, and Cinevolution. With trust in her years of experience in art organization management and her connections in Vancouver, Richard invited her to be the Director of Artlagoon Gallery, which started operations in November 2016. Before Jackie became the Director of Artlagoon Gallery, the architect Max who introduced me to the Artlagoon was invited by Richard to serve as the Director of Artlagoon Gallery, and Jackie acted as the Vice-Director of Artlagoon Gallery. However, a couple of months later, I was told that Max resigned from the director position and Jackie became the new Director of Artlagoon Gallery. I will discuss Max in more detail in the last chapter.



**Figure 15** The organization of the Artlagoon in Richmond

## **5.2. Introduction to the Artlagoon Online (an online art trade platform)**

The Artlagoon Online site aimed at providing an international and professional online art trade platform and supporting artists by offering a convenient online sale system and easy access for art lovers (Artlagoon Online, 2018). It adopted the Online-To-Offline (OTO) marketing model, functioning as both an art e-commerce platform and a social network site. On the Artlagoon Online, artists could not only open their virtual studios for free but also built a social network with art collectors and other artists by following them. The development of the Artlagoon Online was the priority of the Artlagoon both in China and Vancouver as a result of Richard's ambition to build an art e-commerce platform that could cover the second and third-tier cities in China.<sup>22</sup>

In order to open a studio on the Artlagoon Online, artists needed to sign up an account and become a registered artist after being verified by the Artlagoon Online. Then they could upload photos and manage their own virtual studios. Registered artists were able to open their studios, exhibit and sell original artworks on this platform. Also, registered artists could upload their works to the Fun Art interface, a new function on the mobile version of the Artlagoon Online, to increase their exposures and hits. Through the Fun Art interface, artists could share their works, express their 'likes', comments, and forward other artists' works as well as start conversations with other artists. The Artlagoon Online took 10% commission from every online order. If the artists were famous or produced outstanding artworks, they would be offered opportunities to have an online exhibition. The qualities of the artworks were decided by the directors of the Artlagoon Gallery in China and Vancouver. The Artlagoon Gallery opened its shop on the Artlagoon Online in May 2017, and Jackie sought agreement with artists who exhibited at the gallery to sell their works on its online shop after the exhibitions. The artists she asked were all glad about this opportunity, and some of the non-Chinese artists expressed their interests in China's art market. However, only twelve Chinese artists eventually uploaded their artworks to the Artlagoon Gallery's shop on the Artlagoon Online. The absence of other artists may due to the language obstacle as the website had not had an English version yet.

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<sup>22</sup> So-called "tier systems" are often used in China to refer to types of cities. This system is used "by analysts to study consumer behaviour, income level, politics, and local trends to help tune strategies to local conditions" (South China Morning Post. <http://multimedia.scmp.com/2016/cities/>). More information and a map from 2016 rankings are also found on that website.



The Artlagoon Online was divided into nine sections, which were the Artworks, Artists, Auction, Exhibition, Experience Shop, Quality Life, Western Art, Chinese Art, and Derivatives respectively. Under the Artworks section, artworks were categorized by their media, including oil paintings, watercolors, prints, ink paintings, calligraphies and seal cuttings. Also, derivatives such as gifts, furniture, and accessories were categorized under the Artworks section. Each artwork had the information of the name of the artwork, its size, the name of the artist, and the price of the artwork. The prices of the artworks ranged from under one hundred Canadian dollars to over 10,000 dollars. The Artists section had already attracted over 1,500 artists to sign up on its website, who could be searched by alphabetic order or by generations, such as artists born in the 1980s or 1970s. On the top of the artists' list, there was a featured artists section. However, the criteria for the selection of featured artists remains uncertain to me. The auction on the Artlagoon Online, according to its manager, was the most profitable business section. The auction time was not fixed but happened frequently. Sometimes there could be fifteen auctions happening at the same time. The majority of the auctions featured traditional Chinese art, such as calligraphies and ink paintings, and Chinese antiques. Occasionally, there were also auctions on themes related to accessories, tea, and food.

As mentioned above, for outstanding artists, the Artlagoon Online organized online exhibitions for them under the section Online Exhibition. Depending on the location of the artists, the Deputy Director of Artlagoon Gallery in either China or Vancouver decided on the artists qualified for the online exhibitions. However, the criteria for outstanding artists in China remains uncertain to me. In Vancouver, all the exhibitions organized and curated by the Artlagoon Gallery were asked by Jackie to upload to the Artlagoon Online for the exhibitions. To organize the online exhibition, Gigi needed to fill out an exhibition registration form, which included the artworks' names, dates, the name of organizer, the number of artworks, and a brief statement of the exhibition in both English and Chinese. Also, Catherine needed to design posters and banners for the online exhibitions. Then, Gigi sent the registration form, along with the posters, banners, and the artwork inventory to the staff of Artlagoon Online for the exhibition organization.

Under the Experience Shop, the Artlagoon Online users could sign up an account for their offline shops, such as cafes and galleries. They could post photos and introductions

of their offline shops on the Artlagoon Online as an attempt to attract visitors to their offline shops. The Quality Life section provided a direct view of how the artworks on the Artlagoon Online would look like in your rooms. It offered a couple of featured artworks of the Artlagoon Online, and you could click to put them in the photos of different rooms. For example, if users would like to see how this oil painting called *Wind Chaser* look like in their living room, the users could click the painting of interest on the right column, and then choose the photo of a living room that has a similar style to their living room. Then the users can adjust the painting to the place where to give the users a more direct view.

The Western Art section was categorized by media, including oil paintings, watercolors, sculptures, prints, and drawings. Meanwhile, the Chinese Art section was divided into paintings, calligraphies and seal cuttings, chinaware and pottery, and cartoons. Under the Derivatives section, there were ten categories including the creative gifts, handcraft accessories, furniture, handicrafts, photography, folk art, designer works, textiles, painting photocopies, and weddings. The products under each section sometimes overlapped. For example, silk scarves could be put both under creative gifts and textiles.

The Artlagoon Online's mobile application was mostly popular in the second and the third tiers cities in China<sup>23</sup>, particularly in Shaanxi. The application had attracted almost 40,000 views, over 4,000 registered members, and over 500 certified artists, among which only ten of them successfully sold their works. However, it was hard to get access to the detailed information about who bought these artworks on either the Artlagoon Online website or its mobile application. Although both the website and the mobile application of the Artlagoon Online did not have the English version yet, I was asked to help with some of the translations of the user guide, which, to some extent, revealed the ambition of the Artlagoon Online's international expansion.

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<sup>23</sup> So-called "tier systems" are often used in China, although there are usually four tiers (not three). This system is used "by analysts to study consumer behaviour, income level, politics, and local trends to help tune strategies to local conditions" (South China Morning Post. <http://multimedia.scmp.com/2016/cities/>). More information and a map from 2016 rankings are also found on that website.

### **5.3. The establishment of standards for operating a commercial art gallery**

The Artlagoon Gallery had established a series of standards for running a commercial art gallery from scratch, including its facilities, exhibition preparation procedure, staff training, discovery of artists, and artworks storage and protection. As an expert in museum management and art administration, the establishment of the standards for the operation of the Artlagoon Gallery was highly relied on Jackie. In this section, the establishment of standards of facilities will be introduced in the first place, and then the plans to establish its image as a commercial art gallery will be discussed. The exhibition preparation procedure will be included next. Fourthly, the establishment of artwork storage and protection standards will be explored. Then, the three ways to discover artists will be explained. Finally, in order to better demonstrate the exhibition preparation procedure, an exhibition case will be discussed in detail.

#### **5.3.1. The establishment of facility standards**

As a previous car dealership, the Artlagoon building provided great potential for art exhibitions but also posed some challenges for the Artlagoon Gallery to convert it into an art gallery that could be seen as a representative of an international network of leading contemporary art galleries. When the Artlagoon Gallery was just founded in 2016, it kept most of the facilities from the previous car dealership except for the parts and services area where all the office desks and furniture were taken down as a result of limited budget. Gradually, the Artlagoon Gallery had installed more professional facilities for exhibition overtime to meet the standards for a professional commercial art gallery in Vancouver. In order to meet the standards, all the improvements made to the Artlagoon Gallery were with reference to the established galleries in Vancouver. There were two main areas for exhibitions, which were the lobby and the former garage. The lobby faced one of the busiest roads in Richmond with an area of 2,300 square feet and 19 feet high glass windows on three sides of the lobby. The garage was converted from the previous maintenance area of the car dealership into the central exhibition space, which had a total area of 5,500 square feet.

With reference to the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre in Vancouver (very close geographically but in a different municipality), where the exhibition walls were movable with height adjust equipment, the Artlagoon Gallery built a number of moving walls so that the exhibition spaces can be conveniently adjusted under different

exhibition requirements. Matt was instructed to build 25 white moving walls with the same size of 8' x 8'. There were four wheels attached under the wall for the convenience to move them. Considering the level floors of both the lobby and the garage, no height adjust equipment was added. To keep a professional look, the walls needed to be kept in proper condition for exhibitions, and Matt was required to repaint the walls frequently to keep them clean and white. However, there were challenges posed by the structure. Since the gallery walls were built in a short period, they were not exactly of the same size, and the floors were not as level as expected. Therefore, the walls sometimes cannot be neatly aligned, and a gap was left between two walls, which sometimes created a negative impact on the display effect and made the walls unstable.



**Figure 16**      **The lobby of the Artlagoon Gallery, photo by the author in December 2016**



**Figure 17** The garage of the Artlagoon Gallery, photo by the author in December 2016

For more professional exhibition display effect and more efficient installation process, the Artlagoon Gallery initiated some attempts to improve its equipment to display artworks. In the beginning, the Artlagoon Gallery used nails for hanging the artworks. However, as this required many preparations for each exhibition, such as repainting the walls, driving the nails, and calculating the coordination of the nails, hanging wires were used instead for hanging paintings, referring to some museums had Jackie visited. A hanging wire consisted of one braided wire and three adjustable hooks. Hence, the height of the paintings hung on the wires can easily be adjusted by moving the hooks attached to the wire up and down. Since every two wires can hang three artworks, this system made the hanging of multiple paintings on the same wall more manageable and efficient. However, when multiple artworks needed to be installed, the wires could, to some extent, interfere with the display effects and broke the principle of a clean and neat exhibition environment. For example, during the exhibition organized by the Global Chinese Photography Association (GCPA) in September 2017, there were 150 photographs to be installed so that each gallery wall needed to hang two to three

photographs, and the wires became very distracting for the viewers of the artworks. Hence, for more professional exhibition display effect, the Artlagoon Gallery stopped using wires for the *In Darkness* exhibition in October 2017 and went back to using nails for hanging artworks.

Due to limited budget, the Artlagoon Gallery struggled with improving its lighting for professional exhibition. The lighting from the previous car dealership remained until the Global Chinese Photography Association (GCPA) expressed their need for professional exhibition lighting when they were hosting a photography exhibition at the art gallery. They pointed out that the garage only had incandescent lights in fixed locations, which could not be adjusted in terms of their directions according to the positions of the artworks and requested the Artlagoon Gallery install track lights for better display effect. Hence, track lights were ordered from a lighting company that specially provided lighting for museums and galleries in China. Matt was responsible for the installation of the lighting.

As a previous car dealership, the huge space provided some challenges for the improvements of its facilities to meet the standards for professional galleries in Vancouver, particularly when there is no tradition in Vancouver of converting a car dealership into an art gallery. Hence, although the Artlagoon Gallery was designed to be a professional commercial art gallery, with few examples to refer to and limited budget, the upgrade of its facilities was relatively slow and sometimes might be unconventional for a commercial art gallery in the Vancouver context.

### **5.3.2. Plans to establish an image of an art gallery**

In order to establish an image of the Artlagoon Gallery as a professional art gallery and attract more visitors, a series of plans to improve its exterior and interior were developed. Although most of the plans were still pending during the period studied, some of them were implemented later.

The front of the lobby was used for the display of cars. After the car dealership moved, the space was left empty with stones and weeds. In September 2017, a new lawn was installed under the suggestion by Jackie as an attempt to change the image of the building from a car dealership to an art gallery. Besides, Jackie believed that the new

lawn could provide a better space for large installations or sculptures which would help with the recognition of the Artlagoon building as a place devoted to art.

Art students from a local art center were invited to design the parking lot as an attempt to improve the exterior of the building and attract visitors. The art center aimed at providing art courses for the secondary school students to improve artistically in both mind and technical skills and prepare them for a post-secondary level. Five design proposals were offered for the staff at the Artlagoon Gallery to vote, and the one depicting the cityscape of downtown Vancouver in bright colors of blue and yellow was chosen. Then, Chad was required by Jackie to apply for the license from the Richmond government for painting the parking lot. However, this project was still pending during the period of my fieldwork.

The Artlagoon Gallery planned to transfer the mezzanine level room between the first floor and the second floor into a collectors' club, or "art kitchen", for its VIPs. It was designed to provide an exclusive room for art collectors, artists, curators, and other art experts, to gather together, browse artworks, and build a social network. According to the original plan, the room would be around 1,500 square feet next to the staircase to the second floor. It would have a bar to offer drinks and snacks for the VIPs and the plan was to install furniture in classic European styles. Artworks for sale would be hung on the walls to create an immersive environment for art collectors. Moreover, a projector would be installed for meetings and artists' talks to introduce the art collectors to the artists and their works. During my fieldwork at the Artlagoon Gallery, the plan for the collectors' club was still pending.

The unconventional car dealership building posed some challenges for the Artlagoon Gallery to convert this building into an art gallery. The Artlagoon Gallery had initiated a series of plans to improve its exterior and interior as an attempt to create an image of a commercial art gallery to the public. In addition, in order to follow traditional business model of an art gallery, the Artlagoon Gallery attempted to upgrade its interior to improve its services and attract more art collectors. However, as most of the plans were still pending during my research, the Artlagoon Gallery struggled with establishing an image of professional art gallery.





**Figure 18** The Artlagoon, photo by the author in November 2017

### **5.3.3. The adoption of standard art gallery exhibition preparation procedure**

In order to operate the Artlagoon Gallery more professionally and efficiently, Jackie composed a list of a total of twenty-two steps for the preparation of exhibitions from her previous working experience in other art organizations in Vancouver, which included the standard procedure for exhibition preparations from the artist consignment to a review meeting after the exhibition.

Preparation began when a consignment with the artist was signed by Jackie on behalf of the Artlagoon Gallery. It confirmed the length of the contract with the artist, the responsibilities of the Artlagoon Gallery, such as its responsibility to protect consigned artworks, the inventory of consigned artworks, including names of works, media, sizes, year, artist button lines and retail prices. After the confirmation of the exhibition title and dates with the artist, the exhibition dates were uploaded to the company calendar to inform all the Art Program Department staff. A press release was prepared in both English and Chinese for online promotion, including on the Artlagoon Gallery website, both its English and Chinese social media, and local newspapers in the city of



Richmond. The press release usually included the artist's statement and biography, an introduction to the Artlagoon Gallery, dates of the exhibition, and contact information. The artist's statement and biography were usually prepared by the artist and then translated at the Artlagoon Gallery for the convenience of both English-speaking and Chinese-speaking audiences.

After the initial preparations were completed, the artists were asked for their agreement to sell their artworks on the Artlagoon Online. Meanwhile, an artwork inventory was prepared for the future exhibition preparations, such as the checking of the artworks and captions preparation. The artwork inventory included the thumbnail images of the artworks, both English and Chinese names of the artworks, identification of the media, sizes, year, and retail prices. After finishing the artwork inventory and attaining the agreement with the artists to sell their works on the Artlagoon Online, the relevant materials, including the artwork inventory and photos of artworks, were uploaded to the online shop of the Artlagoon Gallery on the Artlagoon Online site. Once all these steps had been finished, a photographer was confirmed for the photo and video shooting for the exhibition opening receptions.

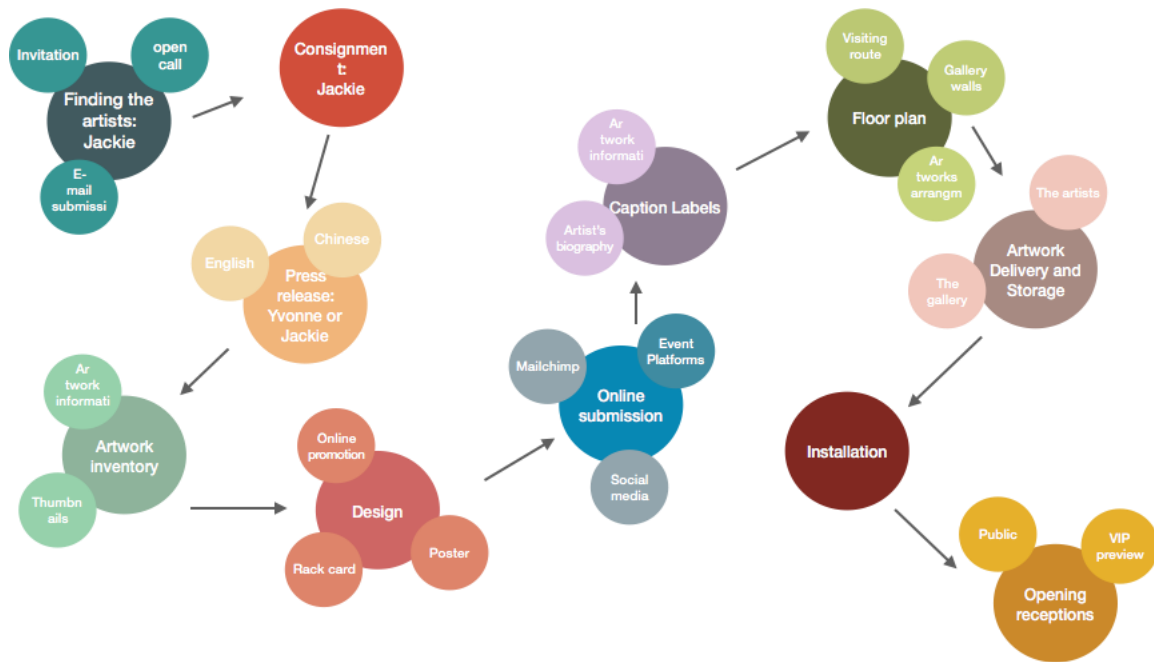
After the confirmation of all exhibition details, poster and rack card designs in different sizes were started for both online and offline promotion, such as promotion on a variety of website calendar submissions and for rack card distribution. Then, all the exhibition-related materials, primarily the press release and poster, needed to be submitted to MailChimp and Eventbrite to invite previous guests and attract new visitors. With all the prepared promotion materials, social media promotion and information distributed on sites such as in WeChat (a popular social media in China) articles, were started. The WeChat articles usually included the exhibition information, such as the dates of the exhibition, and introductions to some featured artworks, or sometimes exhibition reviews from art critics. Meanwhile, all these promotion materials needed to be submitted to paid services, such as the *Preview Magazine*, *Gallerieswest Monthly*, BC Alliance for Arts + Culture, and Richmond Arts Coalition, and free online calendars, such as Yelp and the *Georgia Straight*. The sixteenth step involved the printing of caption labels, which often included the name of the artwork, name of the artist, year, media, size, and price, and the artist's biography. A floor-plan, including the visiting route for the audience, the number of gallery walls needed, and the number of artworks for each gallery wall, was

prepared and then confirmed two or three days in advance before the exhibition installation to allow the preparation of necessary exhibition equipment.

The installation of the exhibition often required all the staff to help to move the gallery walls, hang the artworks following the floor-plan, and stick the printed caption labels and artist's biography to the gallery walls. As other local commercial art galleries, there were usually two opening receptions for each exhibition at the Artlagoon Gallery, the VIP preview and public opening reception.

Supplies and refreshments were prepared for the opening receptions, or hors-d'oeuvres were ordered from nearby restaurants. After the exhibition, the expenses report was filed, and the inventory of the artworks was checked to make sure that there were no missing or damaged works. A "post-project thank you" step was included in the exhibition preparation procedure list to maintain relationships with art collectors, art critics and others involved in the local art scene. However, the "thank-you" step was not carried out during the period studied. During the weekly staff meeting after the end of the exhibition, the staff was asked to share their suggestions to help the Artlagoon Gallery to improve its services.

From the consignment with the artists to the opening receptions for the exhibition, the Artlagoon Gallery followed the standard art gallery operations. Moreover, the Artlagoon Gallery promoted its artists in manifold ways as other commercial art galleries in Vancouver, including its own social media, paid services, and rack cards, and with collaboration with a variety of commercial and art organizations in Vancouver, which will be discussed in more detail in the last section. Hence, the complicated but also standard exhibition preparations adopted by the Artlagoon Gallery indicated its ambition to build itself as a professional art gallery in the Vancouver context.



**Figure 19 Workflow Map**

### 5.3.4. The three ways to discover artists

The Artlagoon Gallery adopted three most popular ways for a commercial art gallery to discover artists, which were by invitation from the gallery, through an open call, and through e-mail submission. Among the three ways to discover artists, artist invitation was the main way for the Artlagoon Gallery to find talented artists. During the period studied, all of the artists that participated in exhibitions organized by the Artlagoon Gallery were invited by Jackie, who often had collaborated with her before. The Artlagoon Gallery would take the responsibility for all the exhibition preparations for its invited artists.

The Artlagoon Gallery showed a significant trend towards Asian artists, particularly Chinese artists. During the period studied, it hosted twelve exhibitions (from November 2016 to October 2017). Out of the twelve exhibitions, five exhibitions were organized by the Artlagoon Gallery, involving seventeen artists, while the other seven exhibitions were hosted by other organizers who rented the place, including the Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society, Global Chinese Photography Association, International Centre of Arts and Technology, and others.

Among the seventeen artists featured in exhibitions organized by the Artlagoon Gallery, eleven of them were Chinese or Chinese-Canadian artists (including the second generation of immigrants), and one was from the Philippines. The rest of the non-Asian artists included two Canadian artists, two British artists, and one Russian artist, who were all Vancouver-based. As the majority of the artists were immigrants and the children of recent immigrants, their artworks tended to draw from a variety of cultural backgrounds and center on the topic of cultural integration.

Nicole was the first artist invited by Jackie for a solo exhibition at the Artlagoon Gallery. Nicole was a Vancouver-based Chinese Canadian artist. Her artwork built on the edge of Eastern and Western cultures and in a style that was between realism and abstraction. Working with another artist and SFU professor Ryan, who used multiple and long exposure techniques to photograph the flow of Nicole's movement as she danced, Nicole captured the dance of ink in water photographically and then transferred both sets of images onto semi-transparent mylar to create a series of images combining the parallel poetry of motion in the forms of body and ink. The second invited artist was Victoria. She was a Vancouver-based Chinese surrealist photographer who graduated in a program at the Fine Arts Institute of Shanghai University and had studied in France. Her works from her solo exhibition at the Artlagoon Gallery were carefully planned to control the frame and the expression of details, to create a cinematic style and bordered on the surreal yet held back enough to keep the work firmly grounded in the real world.

There were two group exhibitions between June and August 2017 at the Artlagoon Gallery. The first group exhibition presented artworks from six artists, Phyllis, Oscar, Jim, Charles, Kelly, and Nicole in a survey that focused on the diversity of cultures in Vancouver. Phyllis was a Canadian realist painter who had been working on different series of paintings of the coastal environment of Vancouver. Oscar was an abstractionist and an oil painter from China, whose works showed flora and fauna of British Columbia, Canada. Jim was a Canadian realist artist, whose acrylic cityscapes were based on photographic images. Charles was a realist artist from China who depicted the views of Vancouver. Kelly used acrylic, oil and local plants that grew in her neighborhood, such as reeds and seaweed, to interpret her surroundings abstractly.

Seven Vancouver-based artists were invited by Jackie to the second group exhibition she curated in July 2017, which offered a peek into the artists' interests and concerns, as interpreted on paper. Patrick was a Chinese artist who used common elements, such as concrete, other than conventional media, like oil or acrylic, to create art in an abstract style. Kathy was an abstractionist from Taiwan, whose works combined the traditional Chinese painting with oil painting techniques. Kevin also came from Taiwan and was a realist artist who drew his inspirations from life experiences. Angela was a Chinese artist born in Canada and a realist painter who made large-scale drawings of animals and imagined monsters to make the audience aware of their existence and reverse the passive relationship between the viewer and artwork. Edward was a calligrapher and abstract painter who shared his views and feelings towards the beautiful aspects of Vancouver as a newcomer. Bernadette was a realist artist from the Philippines who narrated about the lightness of spirit in the whirls of skirts and spontaneous play. Faye was an artist of Chinese heritage born in Canada who focused on sculpture and mixed media installations. Her works explored issues about cycles and sustainability as well as personal, intimate relationships with the environment and the urban landscape.

Three artists, Annette, Maya, and Kate were invited by me for the fifth exhibition organized by the Artlagoon Gallery in October 2017, which was themed on the darkness and the redefinition of fright in a show that highlighted themes related to Halloween and the Day of the Dead. Annette was a Canadian artist who created her works in a minimalist style where the narrative was removed. Maya was a Vancouver-based Russian artist and sculptor, who drew inspirations from her dreams. Kate was a Canadian artist who based in Vancouver and focused on sculpture and installation. She was drawn to materials that perform a relationship to light, while her works were anchored in echoes of contemporary spirituality and expanding notions of ritual as they related to embodiment and process. I will discuss this exhibition in detail later in this chapter.

The second way for the Artlagoon Gallery to discover artists was through an open call. The Artlagoon Gallery composed an Open Call for Art Exhibition Proposals Form, which was available on its website and at the lobby of the Artlagoon. The Artlagoon Gallery welcomed proposals from artists and curators for contemporary art and design exhibitions in any media, and in any subject area (Artlagoon Gallery, 2018). These

included solo, group exhibitions, and touring shows. Also, all the artworks in the exhibition would be for sale both at the Artlagoon Gallery and on the Artlagoon Online's mobile application (Artlagoon Gallery, 2018). If the artists or curators were interested in organizing the exhibition by themselves, they could find a list of rental rates for the lobby and the garage in the form for reference. The Artlagoon Gallery offered two different rates for commercial organizations and nonprofits organization. The listed prices for commercial users were higher than for nonprofit uses (about \$2500 plus tax per day vs. \$1500 per day for nonprofit users during my fieldwork). To encourage the artists and curators to use the Artlagoon's mobile application, Jackie put its QR code both in this form and in the lobby as well.

The Open Call for Art Exhibition Proposals Form also included an art exhibition application form for the artists and curators. The art exhibition application form contained the information about the artist, including the name, biography, previous exhibitions, and website if applicable. Moreover, it included a curator's statement if available, an artist's statement, and a project proposal, which required a complete description of the exhibition or project. A list of artworks for the exhibition was needed, which included the titles of the artworks, the media, dimensions, years, and artist bottom line prices.

The third way to discover artists was through e-mail submission. The artists could find the email address for submission on the Artlagoon Gallery's website under the contact section. However, the website did not indicate the required materials for the artist's submission.

The tendencies towards contemporary Chinese artists and artworks on immigration topics demonstrates the significant influence of the director's preferences for art and personal connections on the development of an art gallery. Although Jackie had been working in the local art scene in Vancouver for years, she still had a relatively stronger connection with Asian organizations and Asian artists, particularly Chinese and Chinese-Canadian artists. As Jackie was on the board of the Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society, Richmond Art Gallery, and Cinevolution, which was founded by a group of Pan Asian filmmakers, artists, and community organizers, she was more likely to have personal contacts with Chinese artists or Asian artists. In addition, the location of the Artlagoon Gallery may also contribute to the strong tendency towards Chinese artists, as

54% of the residents of Richmond were ethnic Chinese people, according to the 2016 census by the city of Richmond (City of Richmond, 2016).

### **5.3.5 The establishment of standards for storing and protecting artworks**

The Artlagoon Gallery developed a series of strategies to store and protect the artworks exhibited there in a professional way with references to other professional art organizations in Vancouver. All of the artworks storage and protection strategies were developed according to Jackie's suggestions, who had previous working experiences in professional art organizations, such as the Richmond Art Gallery.

In the beginning, a storage box, a popular way for art galleries to store their artworks, was used to store and protect the artworks, which was placed near the entrance from the parts and services area to the garage. In order to better protect the stored artworks, a cubic wooden frame was made by Matt, which was divided by strings inside. With the strings, the artworks being stored can be separated without touching each other so that the pigments from works or other features would not stain or damage the other artworks. As the number of artworks being stored increased, and to more appropriately protect the artworks, two empty offices behind Jackie's office were assigned as the storage rooms. For the safety of the artworks, the artworks in the lobby were later de-installed after the gallery was closed in case of break-ins. The doors to the two rooms were locked as well

As artworks can be very sensitive to light, temperature, and humidity, to protect the artworks from the ultraviolet rays in the lobby and keep the room from heating up, UV film was eventually installed to cover all the windows in the lobby. In January 2017, all the windows in the lobby were covered by the UV film by a solar solution company in Coquitlam, BC.

Although the Artlagoon Gallery emphasized that it was not responsible or liable for any loss of or damage to any works exhibited there in its contract with the artist, it started to buy insurance for the exhibitions later. Also, if damage to the artworks indeed happened during the exhibition, the Artlagoon Gallery could compensate the artists by paying for the restoration of the works or buying the damaged artworks.

### **5.3.6. The organization and training of staff**

The organizational structure of the gallery developed during the period of the fieldwork. The Artlagoon organization was divided into the Human Resources Department, the Administrative Department, the Accounting Department and the Rental & Operation Department. Meanwhile, there were three departments under the Artlagoon Gallery, which were the Art Programs & Artlagoon Online Department, the PR & Design Department, and the Photography & Video section. The Art Programs & Artlagoon Online Department was designed as the core department of the Artlagoon Gallery.

The employees at the Artlagoon Gallery came from a variety of educational backgrounds and were usually organized according to their specialized fields. However, as the Artlagoon Gallery was newly founded, the staff often needed to take on multiple responsibilities. Moreover, as the majority of the staff at the Artlagoon Gallery were not academically trained in art, they usually needed to be trained to understand the standards for exhibition preparations and artworks protection.

Gigi had a bachelor's degree in Business and was in charge of the Administrative Department, Human Resource, and Artlagoon Online auction under the Art Programs & Artlagoon Online Department. She was mainly responsible for meeting arrangement, inventory management, license application, and managing the Administrative Department. In addition, for the Human Resource Department, she was primarily responsible for recruiting, screening, interviewing and placing workers, payroll and benefits, employee training, and others. For the Artlagoon Online, her jobs were to upload all the photos of artworks and inventory information to the Artlagoon Gallery's online shop at the Artlagoon Online and help the staff of Artlagoon Online in China to organize the online exhibition.

Chad held a bachelor's degree in Finance at the University of British Columbia and was in both the Rental & Operations Department and PR & Design Department. In the Rental & Operations Department, he was responsible for account management, mostly venue rental customers, including bringing in new customers and maintaining relationships with previous customers. In the PR & Design Department, he was mainly in charge of the management of the Artlagoon's website and English social media, including posting updates about the latest exhibition on Instagram, Facebook, website, and sending



MailChimp invitations to previous guests to the latest exhibitions. He also acted as a salesman for the so-called derivatives, such as postcards, posters, and sunglasses related to the exhibitions.

Catherine held a diploma degree in graphic design and used to work at a fast food box company as a graphic designer, where she was mainly responsible for the design of the fast food tableware. She worked under both the Art Programmes & Artlagoon Online Department and PR & Graphic Design Department. For exhibitions, she needed to design the posters in different sizes under different online platforms' requirements, such as websites, free online calendars, including the *Georgia Straight*, to design the derivatives if there are any, and to make floor plans with a consultant to Jackie. She was also responsible for derivative designs, with a reference to the ones sold at the gift shops at the Vancouver Art Gallery and MoMA. Regarding the Artlagoon Online, she was mostly responsible for the design of front-page advertisements for both the website and mobile versions.

There were two people in charge of Chinese media, including me and a freelancer Samantha. Samantha and I were both introduced by Max. At first, it was planned that she would work at the Artlagoon Gallery as a full-time media expert. However, as the Artlagoon could only afford her as a freelancer, she worked part-time for it. She was responsible for Chinese media contacts, including local newspapers and television stations in Richmond, and the management of WeChat. WeChat is a prevalent chat application in China. Moreover, on WeChat, companies can sign up their official accounts and compose articles to promote their events, sales, and communicate with their followers. It has become one of the leading platforms for Chinese companies' self-promotion. Meanwhile, Samantha also worked at a local advertising company as an advertising copywriter.

When I started at the Artlagoon Gallery, I acted as the assistant to the previous director of Artlagoon Gallery. My jobs were to arrange meetings for him and record the meetings. After his resignation as the Director of Artlagoon Gallery, I was asked to stay at the Artlagoon as the exhibition coordinator for the Art Programs & Artlagoon Online Department. I was primarily responsible for coordinating the exhibition preparations, including the artist's contact, composition of the press release, online calendar

submissions, and others. In addition, I was responsible for managing the WeChat account together with Samantha.

Matt worked under the Rental & Operations Department, that was in charge of all the building maintenance, including exhibition equipment maintenance, such as lighting installation, and the management of sound equipment.

At the beginning of the Artlagoon Gallery, the staff was trained to work professionally by Jackie. They were required to wear white gloves when moving the artworks to avoid leaving fingerprints on the artworks and were told that all the paintings must be moved with hands on each side of them and be held in front of the chest at a distance. In addition, they were also trained on how to properly store the paintings in a way that they were either stored face to face or back to back, with cardboard or foam in between. Before the opening receptions, the staff was trained about the exhibition, and provided the biography of the artists and ways to introduce the artworks. Jackie believed that professionally trained staff could not only build a professional image to the public but also help with the sale of the artworks.

### **5.3.7. The case of *In Darkness* Exhibition**

My direct experience with curating came in 2017 when I organized an exhibition. It was in June 2017 when the idea of *In Darkness* exhibition came up. On a Thursday afternoon, Jackie came to the reception and started talking about some South Korean artists she liked. She said that there was a particular artist she liked, whose name she could not remember, who produced works that expressed some dark feelings. I suddenly came up with the idea that maybe the Artlagoon Gallery could host an exhibition with artworks delivering dark or uneasy feeling in October, a traditional period for celebrations related to the Day of the Dead. As in one of the previous staff meetings, Jackie proposed that one of the Artlagoon Gallery's target markets was the younger generation from wealthy Chinese families, and we hoped that this exhibition could attract more young collectors. Jackie seemed to like this idea and asked me to prepare a proposal for the exhibition. She hoped that for this exhibition, I could find some new talented artists for the future development of the Artlagoon Gallery. This was the first time that the Artlagoon Gallery reached out to artists that were outside Jackie's personal network. As I had no previous experience in organizing an art exhibition, I learned the whole

procedure, from exhibition proposal to arranging studio visits, online and with a consultant with Jackie. At the regular staff meeting in the next week, I presented an exhibition proposal draft, and Jackie assigned an exhibition team including Catherine, me, a new part-time employee Louie, and herself. In the proposal, I suggested the exhibition theme as follows:

*This is an exhibition about darkness and to redefine fright. Art can express feelings that are inexpressible. In Darkness not only talks about the way of the experience of the exhibition but also reveals the dark side of humanity.*

With reference to an exhibition by a famous Chinese artist, Xiang Jing (Chinese: 向京), I suggested that in the exhibition, only track lights should be used directly on the artworks and leave the rest of the exhibition space dark to create an atmosphere of darkness.

Catherine was in charge of all the relevant designs, such as exhibition posters, while Jackie was responsible for the artist consignment. Louie and I were responsible for the initial contacts with artists, the composition of the budget, and finding sponsors. After the meeting, Catherine and I started to search for artists. We started by screening the artists whom we might know that produced art in this style. Without any results, I suggested that maybe we could find the artists through googling “Vancouver artists” and “dark”. Since we wanted to attract younger collectors, I suggested that we might also find some artists on Instagram. Hence, I started searching “Vancouver artists” on Instagram and created a list of artists who produced dark or uneasy art from the Google results and Instagram search results. The initial list consisted of all the artists that I thought were creative and suitable for the exhibition theme, and then a vote on these artists by the exhibition team was organized. This narrowed down the list of artists to around eight artists, which included Annette, Maya, and Kate.

Then I started to email them to arrange a studio visit, along with the exhibition proposal, an introduction to the Artlagoon Gallery, and some photos of the garage, which would be the exhibition space. Most of the artists expressed their happiness that the Artlagoon Gallery reached out to them. However, five of them either were not at Vancouver around the exhibition time or had already scheduled other exhibitions. Among the artists contacted, Annette, Maya, and Kate were available during October. Then, I arranged appointments for the studio visit with them and went with Jackie and Louie. At first, occupied by other business, Jackie suggested Catherine go with us instead of her.

However, Catherine and I agreed that since Jackie was the one who confirmed the artists, she was necessary for the studio visits. Besides, as the Director of the Artlagoon Gallery, her presence would make the visits more formal and efficient. After the visits, the three artists all agreed to participate in the exhibition. As some of the artworks in their studios were already sold, we needed to choose the artworks from the available ones. The choices of the artworks were rather simple and were just based on Catherine's and my preferences, or our tastes. Also, we tried to balance the media of the artworks by including more sculptures and installations as an attempt to enrich the exhibition.

Maya was born and raised in Russia. She was fascinated by the mysterious images of dragons from Asian and Russian folk toys as well as Japanese folk art. She studied classical European sculpture and painting. Annette had graduated from the Emily Carr School of Art and Design in Vancouver. She was attracted to images that were spare and had started to use a rich black melamine paint which spoke to her of simplicity and space. Figures on black seemed more poignant and solid yet in conveyed the sense of undefined spaces. She also discovered vellum paper which allowed her to copy a figure and then use the vellum as a stencil producing multiple images. Kate was born and raised in the Fraser Valley, British Columbia. According to her statement, her practice swung on a pendulum; its pivot point anchored in echoes of contemporary spirituality and expanding notions of ritual as they related to embodiment and process. Her gaze was drawn to materials as they performed a relationship to light, as they refracted, magnified, filtered, captured, blurred, cast into, and altered space. We also decided on another artist, Angela, whose works we believed were suitable for the exhibition, but she was not included in the final exhibition.

At that time, Jackie was also discussing an exhibition tour with a company from the United States. This exhibition tour has already been to Guangdong (China), Las Vegas, the United States, and Victoria, British Columbia. According to the exhibition company, the exhibition in Guangdong had attracted over 600,000 visitors while the one in Victoria had attracted over 200,000 visitors. Jackie believed that this museum level exhibition could prove that exhibitions of outstanding qualities could not only contribute to the reputation of the Artlagoon Gallery but also generate revenues through selling tickets and merchandise.

Maybe inspired by this exhibition tour, at the first meeting of the *In Darkness* exhibition, Catherine and I wondered if we could also sell tickets as a means of making a profit. Also, as the budget for the *In Darkness* exhibition was 2,000 dollars, the fees might help with covering the expenses for the exhibition preparations, including the canapes ordered from a fancy restaurant, venue rental of a bar, and the invitation of a contortionist for the VIP preview. In addition, Louie suggested that we could find some sponsors to cover the cost as well. Jackie agreed to our suggestions and confirmed the tickets prices with reference to the Vancouver Art Gallery, which were half of that of the Vancouver Art Gallery (a gallery funded by the government). At the VIP preview night, one of the artists came to me and wondered why the exhibition sold tickets, since this is not a common practice in commercial galleries in Canada. Then she commented: "Well, you can always try something new."

The *In Darkness* exhibition was also the first attempt by the Artlagoon Gallery to find sponsors for its exhibitions. Louie was in charge of looking for local vendors in the shopping mall across the street from the gallery. However, during a conversation with Louie later, he expressed his frustration about the sponsor results as they all turned him down. The prospective sponsors had complained about a real estate advertisement in the lobby and the yacht boats displayed in front of the building, a space that had been rented to a yacht company. I will discuss this in detail in the next section.

Jackie sent out VIP preview invitations two weeks in advance and was excited by the responses from Matthew, a visual art professor from a well-known university and a curator from a prestigious art gallery. After our visit to Maya's studio, Jackie talked about her frustration about the VIP invitations. Although most of the VIPs were invited through MailChimp, some of the VIPs, including art experts in Vancouver, such as Guillemín, the director of a prestigious art gallery in Vancouver, and art collectors, were invited personally by Jackie. She sent out the invitations to them for every VIP preview at the Artlagoon Gallery. Some of them, such as Guillemín, showed up for the first exhibition, and then they gradually stopped attending these VIP previews. Jackie told me that the venue rentals, merchandise sales, and the sports sunglasses sales for the past year demanded a significant amount of her time and efforts, which she should have spent on

building a network with art experts, looking for new talented artists and art collectors. Hence, she was particularly glad that Matthew attended the VIP preview.

The *In Darkness* Exhibition was the first exhibition in which I participated in the whole preparation procedure, from discovering the artists to the VIP preview. Although the Artlagoon Gallery attempted to organize the exhibition in a more professional way, the exhibition did not conform to the protocols and standards for art exhibits in commercial galleries in Vancouver or Canada and was not successful in terms of art sales. The lack of support from art collectors and art experts in Vancouver indicates the Artlagoon Gallery's struggles with networking in the local art scenes and pointed out some challenges it faced. These struggles may be a result of the conflict between the revenue generation strategies the Artlagoon Gallery adopted and the principle of the disavowal of the economy existed in the Western art world, which I will discuss in detail in the next section. However, Jackie believed that this was the first step for the Artlagoon Gallery to switch its focus back to exhibitions and gradually establish a reputation as a professional art gallery.



**Figure 20** The *In Darkness* exhibition, photo by the author in October 2017

#### **5.4. The challenges of seeking to make profits**

As a newly founded commercial art gallery and a medium sized art gallery with over ten employees, the Artlagoon Gallery struggled with making a profit out of art sales to cover its cost of running a spacious art gallery. Hence, it attempted to adopt more aggressive strategies to promote its artwork sales and expand its revenue generation strategies into

more unconventional areas for commercial art galleries, such as venue rental and derivatives sales.

Moreover, with Richard's ambition to expand the Artlagoon's e-commerce art platform into the Second and the Third-Tier cities in China, the Artlagoon Online was considered as the priority for the Artlagoon Gallery. Although the Artlagoon Gallery was founded as a commercial art gallery, it needed to serve the goals of the Artlagoon Online, in particular, to promote the status of the Artlagoon Online as an international online art sale platform and to increase the sales on it by introducing artworks by Canadian artists. In addition, another task of the Artlagoon Gallery was to increase the value of the Artlagoon as a venue for rental by creating an artsy environment. Although Richard claimed that he had a passion for art, he never evaded talking about money, as he said: "After all, I am a businessman." Hence, from the beginning of the Artlagoon Gallery, the workplace was imprinted with a strong economic interest.

In the next section, the struggle with attracting art collectors will be described in the first place by introducing the few artworks sold by the Artlagoon Gallery, compared with the number of artworks sold by other exhibition organizers who rented its venue. Then, the tension between the venue rental and exhibitions will be explored. Finally, the sales promotion on its social media, mainly on the WeChat, will be discussed.

#### **5.4.1. The challenges of discovering and encouraging art collectors**

As a commercial art gallery, the Artlagoon Gallery struggled with attracting art collectors and managing a sustainable relationship with them, while the majority of its visitors were artists, venue renters, and curious residents in Richmond. There was a total of three artworks successfully sold by the Artlagoon Gallery between November 2016 and October 2017. Among the three artworks sold, two of them were sold to Chinese art collectors, and one of them was sold to a Canadian art collector. Meanwhile, the fieldwork at the Artlagoon Gallery also provided me with an insider's insight into the patterns of Chinese art collectors, such as what kinds of artworks they buy and how they made their acquisition decisions.

The first artwork sold by the Artlagoon Gallery was from its first solo exhibition by Nicole in February 2017. It was an installation called *Blue Dance* and was priced at \$1,500. The concept of this exhibition originated from Nicole's idea about an art installation that combined ink, water, dance, music and photography. Nicole used herself as a model while another artist, Ryan, used multiple and long exposures to photograph the flow of Nicole's dance movements. Playing with time and fleeting moments, Nicole's movement was echoed in the dance of black ink in the water, which was once again captured photographically. The work *Blue Dance* that was sold had images of Nicole dancing in a blue dress, which overlaid with the images of the black ink in the water. It was sold to a seasoned Chinese collector from the Vancouver Art Gallery, who seemed to be a friend of Nicole. She made her purchasing decision right after the opening reception of the exhibition and waited until the exhibition was over to pick up the packed artwork. After *Blue Dance* was sold, I was asked to stick a red dot on the caption of the artwork to announce that it had been sold.

The second artwork was sold to Richard's daughter at \$5,000 at the second solo exhibition at the Artlagoon Gallery by Victoria in April 2017. It was a life-size photography called *Soap Opera - Clown after work*. Victoria's soap opera series of works were staged dramas that could vividly reflect people's lives. She liked to use the roughness of the deliberately constructed backgrounds to produce a visually non-authentic effect as well as symbolic meanings. This series attempted to build artificial rooms, stage performances, and fix the camera from the same viewpoint in each scene. The camera then recorded these cinematic scenes, which were completed by actors reenacting or creating a scene of daily life. The *Soap Opera - Clown After Work* depicted a clown who was off work, sitting in front of a mini store in his costume. Richard's daughter bought this piece of artwork a couple of weeks after the opening reception of the exhibition when she was still in China. As she contacted Jackie directly about the acquisition of this artwork, the details of this acquisition remain unknown to me.

Victoria's work from her *Window* series at the solo exhibition was the third piece of artwork that was sold by the Artlagoon Gallery in the period studied. The sold artwork was called *Window #6* and was sold to a Canadian art collector, according to one of the members of the staff. The art collector was introduced by the artist and made the



acquisition decision quite fast as well. However, since I was not working at the gallery when the acquisition happened, I had very limited information about it. The sold artwork was a medium-sized work, which was sold at the price of \$1,800. According to Victoria, the theme of the work was that one's eyes were the windows to one's soul. She wanted to change the perspective by looking through the window from the outside to the inside to see, to find different emotions and situations. *Window #6* captured a scene of a blonde woman in a red dress standing in the kitchen, with two men sitting far away from each other facing the blonde woman.

During the period studied, the Artlagoon Gallery only successfully sold three artworks by two Chinese artists to art collectors. The majority of the art collectors were Chinese. These art collectors demonstrated their trust in intimate relationships with people involved in art world, such as artists and the staff from the gallery. Two of the art collectors were introduced by the artists themselves, and one of the art collectors contacted the gallery through Jackie. The art collectors made their acquisition decisions very quickly and primarily based on the recommendations of the artists or the director of Artlagoon Gallery. However, the Artlagoon Gallery still struggled with making a profit out of art sales, which may be explained by its struggles with building a network with art experts and art collectors in the local art scenes. In the next section, I will discuss more about the importance of networking by introducing the success of other exhibitions held by different organizers.

#### **5.4.2. The success of some exhibitions hosted by other organizers**

Among the exhibitions hosted by other organizers, three exhibitions successfully sold artworks. The first one was an exhibition organized by the Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society. The second was a photography exhibition held by the Global Chinese Photography Association (GCPA), which sold 29 pieces of artworks. The last one was a solo exhibition held by the artist Hugh, who was also a member of the GCPA.

The exhibition held in May 2017 by the Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society (VAHMS) was a group exhibition presenting 12 artists from Vancouver. It was a part of the annual *explorAsian* festival lasting the whole month of May, and as a signature program of the VAHMS festival, it was created to feature both established and emerging

local artists, who are first-generation Asian Canadians by immigration or birth and to provide a forum for exploring new expressions of Canadian identity (Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society, 2018). The artwork sold was produced by a Philippines artist, Tom. Tom moved to Canada in 2012 and landed a job as a graphic designer at an advertising company in Richmond. His work *DiversCity* contained images he saw and felt of the city, and he painted it in a light-hearted parade of the social nature of the people, their beliefs and perceptions of a diverse lifestyle. A Chinese buyer was introduced by Jackie and dropped by the gallery one afternoon during the exhibition, who asked Jackie to introduce the artworks to him. Since I was told by Michael to make coffee for the buyer, I was not present when he made his purchasing decision. After I brought the coffee to him, Jackie told me that the *DiversCity* was sold to this buyer and reminded me: “If anyone asked whom this artwork was sold to, don’t mention who he is.” I was uncertain why the buyer needed to remain anonymous, but as my documentary research discussed above suggested, it seems common for the art galleries and auctions houses to keep the buyer’s information in confidentiality. This may be explained by Bourdieu’s “charismas” ideology (1980).

The exhibition held by the Global Chinese Photography Association (GCPA) in June 2017 selected 150 photographs from 150 Chinese photographers around the world. The theme of the exhibition was “Harmonizing”. Nearly 40 Chinese photography institutions participated, including the China Artistic Photography Association and the China Pictorial, with almost one thousand submissions from more than 30 countries. The Artlagoon Gallery came to an agreement with GCPA to take a 60% commission of the sold artworks, and the exhibition was held in the garage. Each of the photographs was priced at \$500 and only had one edition. GCPA invited the CEO of a Japanese camera and lens company, Guillemin, the representatives of Chinese photography associations, and others, for the opening reception. If the art collectors wanted to buy artworks, they were offered a list of artworks with titles and thumbnails. Once they made their acquisition decisions, they could tick the box after it. The staff from the GCPA would accompany the potential buyers and give introductions to the artworks that interested them. Meanwhile, a staff from the Artlagoon Gallery was required to stick a red dot to the caption of the artwork they reserved. Then, they could go to the reception in the lobby and show the list to the cashier. The cashier also had a list of artworks to confirm with the buyers. Most of the buyers seemed to be friends with the artists or the art organizers,

and some of them bought more than one photograph. After the payment, they received a receipt and an invoice for picking up the artworks after the exhibition was over, which listed all the artworks they bought. If the buyers were unable to pick up the artworks by themselves, the Artlagoon Gallery could offer a delivery service, or they could authorize someone else to pick the works up by filling a confirmation form about the pick-up arrangement. The photography exhibition was very successful and sold 29 pieces of artworks to all Chinese buyers, including a famous seasoned Chinese art collector in Vancouver.

An exhibition was organized by the artist Hugh right after the photography exhibition organized by GCPA. His works integrated multiple art forms including photography, writing, seal cutting, and handmade Xuan paper to express the spirit of Zen. The artists visited one of the oldest temples in Taiwan and took photos of the most prestigious Buddhist monk in Taiwan, Master Hsing Yun (Chinese: 星云大师). The selling process was more straightforward than the photography exhibition. Since it was a three-day exhibition, unlike other exhibitions which the buyers had to pick up the artworks after the exhibitions were over, the buyers only needed to tell the cashier which artwork they would like to buy, and then after the payment, the staff could help them take down the artworks right away. The artworks sold from this exhibition were all priced at \$2,000, and two were sold to two Chinese art collectors, who seemed to have previous connections with the artist as well.

All the buyers at these exhibitions were Chinese and showed similar art acquisition patterns with the three art collectors mentioned above, who also made their purchase decisions very fast and relied significantly on the recommendations of art experts, especially the staff. This indicates the importance of intimate relationships for the success of an art gallery. The huge success of the exhibition held by the Global Chinese Photography Association (GCPA) particularly demonstrates that the success of art sales relies significantly on the organizer's networks with art collectors and art experts. Compared with the exhibition held by other organizers, the relatively less successful exhibitions in economic terms held by the Artlagoon Gallery points out some challenges it faced regarding networking. These challenges may be caused by the Artlagoon Gallery's failure in disavowing its economic interest, which will be discussed in the next two sections.

### **5.4.3. The tensions between venue rentals and exhibitions**

Although the Arts Program & Artlagoon Online Department was designed as the core department in January 2017, venue rental, as a way to generate revenue to cover the cost for running such a spacious art gallery, was positioned as another important business activity for the Artlagoon Gallery. Meanwhile, rental was also considered as an efficient way to use the enormous spaces of the Artlagoon Gallery. However, under increased pressure for revenue generation over time, venue rentals started to outweigh the exhibitions organized by Artlagoon staff since July 2017. At a regular staff meeting in July, the Artlagoon Gallery was required to switch its focus from exhibition and art sales to more profitable businesses, such as auctions, collectors' club activities, commercial travel exhibitions, venue rental, and merchandise retail, including derivatives and designers' products. During the period studied, the main tensions appeared to be between decisions about venue rentals and exhibitions.

In early 2017, the Artlagoon Gallery had already started to rent its venue to some events that appeared irrelevant to art, such as an event held by the Chinese Canadian Society for Political Engagement in April 2017. Catherine and I, as enthusiasts for the Artlagoon Gallery becoming a professional art gallery, disagreed with these art unrelated venue rental decisions and believed that these events would confuse the public's perspective of the Artlagoon Gallery as a professionally-run commercial art gallery. Besides, the preparations for these events would occupy a significant amount of the staff's time and effort. Hence, there were some requests to reduce venue rentals to events that were relevant to art.

In July 2017, the tension between venue rental and exhibition was raised when the LED screen in the lobby facing the road was rented to a real estate agency. Some visitors to the Artlagoon Gallery questioned the real estate advertisement played on the LED screen, and the staff started to talk to Michael about it, believing that the advertisement would damage the images of the Artlagoon and particularly the Artlagoon Gallery as a place devoted to fine art. One of the staff talked to Michael, hoping that the advertisement could be removed. Moreover, during the first summer group exhibition in July 2017, the artworks exhibited in the lobby were accidentally damaged as a result of

another venue rental. During the exhibition, the lobby was also used by the Global Chinese Photography Associations (GCPA) for a news conference about their upcoming exhibition in July, and some of the gallery walls had to be moved aside while some of them were left to create an artsy environment for the lobby. After the news conference was over, as the crowd was leaving, two of the paintings were accidentally scratched. Jackie, at a regular staff meeting, emphasized that the Artlagoon Gallery should prioritize the use of space for the exhibitions it organized. One idea was to keep the garage area independent from the other uses of the building and devoted only to art exhibitions, and that the Artlagoon Gallery should prioritize the facilities' other uses, such as the LED screen, for exhibitions.

In September 2017, the tension was heated as the area in front of the building was rented to a yacht company to display their products. At the same time, the lobby was rented to an exhibition held by an Asian art society. This exhibition included the artworks from 58 artists and craftspeople and included both traditional and contemporary Asian art. The artworks were handcrafted from natural and sustainable materials and included textiles, paintings, ceramics, weaving, and leather. The exhibition organizers were concerned about the yachts that were on display in front of the building of the Artlagoon and requested that these yachts and the real estate advertisement in the lobby needed to be removed during the exhibition. It was also close to the opening of the *In Darkness* exhibition, the staff started to raise concern about the potential negative impact of a yacht show and worried that it could detract the visitors from the visual art exhibition. Jackie discussed with Michael the tension between the venue rentals and exhibitions, with a hope of reducing the percentage of art and culture irrelevant venue rentals. However, Michael, concerned with the costs of running the Artlagoon and the need to generate revenue for salaries and other expenses, dismissed these worries, saying, "To be honest, I don't care about the image. Now people remember this place because of these yachts, which is already good enough for me." Moreover, after the discussion, it was decided that the Artlagoon Gallery needed to put more effort into revenue generation and reduce the exhibitions organized by the gallery to two each year.

#### **5.4.4. Sales promotion on WeChat**

As the Artlagoon Gallery struggled with art sales, it attempted to adopt a more aggressive sales strategy, which was mainly manifested on its sales promotion on the WeChat. There were three official accounts under the Artlagoon on WeChat, the Artlagoon Gallery, the Artlagoon, and the Artlagoon Online, to promote the businesses. Initially, the Artlagoon Gallery account was designed to publish exhibition-related updates, such as the information about the latest exhibition and the introductions to the artworks. The Artlagoon account was designed to mainly update articles relevant to venue rentals, such as the special discount for the holidays, and news about the rental events. The Artlagoon Online account was designed to publish articles about the online exhibitions on its website, and the new artworks for sale. However, as there were not enough articles for each account, some articles, particularly articles about exhibitions, were published on all three accounts. In this section, as the focus of this research, the promotion on the Artlagoon Gallery account will be discussed.

When the Artlagoon Gallery was first founded, it drew a considerable amount of attention from the local art scene in Richmond. Although the Artlagoon Gallery struggled with attracting followers on WeChat, with only 249 followers by October 30th, 2017, the second article about the open house of the Artlagoon Gallery in January 2017 already had almost 700 views. It was an article about the first open house at the Artlagoon Gallery, in which the Artlagoon Gallery expressed its ambition to promote local artists in Vancouver and collaborate with local curators, art magazines, and art organizations to present artworks by local artists.

However, the WeChat articles soon were required to employ more aggressive sales strategies. Compared with the sale strategies adopted by other commercial art galleries, the sale strategies adopted by the Artlagoon Gallery were more straightforward. During the first exhibition by artist Nicole, the WeChat article began to be required to include sentences like “All the artworks are for sale exclusively on the Artlagoon Online and its app” and the QR code for downloading the Artlagoon Online app at the end of the article. In the next article on the exhibition by Victoria in April 2017, a line of “Limited editions of artworks can be bought on site” was required to be included at the end of the article. In later articles about this exhibition, Samantha was required to emphasize the collectible values of Victoria’s artworks by stressing their limited amount and to include the

aggressive sentence “Limited edition, purchase now.” In addition, Samantha was required to compose an article on the collectible value of photographs for the Artlagoon Gallery account as an attempt to educate the audience and inspire sales. In order to better explain the pricing system of the artworks to the Chinese art collectors and encourage them to “purchase now”, Samantha was asked to publish an article on the “tiered pricing” strategy adopted for this exhibition<sup>24</sup>, which was a popular pricing strategy for photography adopted by commercial art galleries.

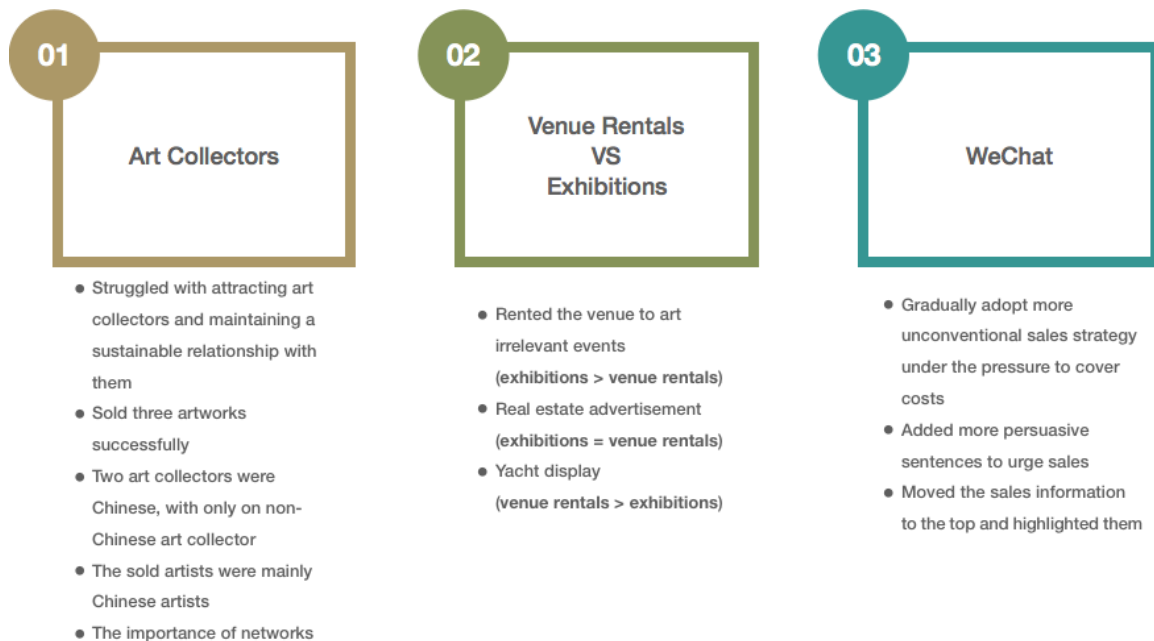
I was concerned about the apparent urge to promote sales on WeChat articles and hoped that the sale strategy could be subtler by giving references to articles published by other popular commercial art galleries like the ShangArt Gallery or Star Gallery in China. In their WeChat articles only the exhibition information, such as the artists, the dates of the exhibition, the introduction of the artworks, and artists’ statements, was included. However, under pressure to cover the costs for running the Artlagoon, in addition to the persuasive sentences mentioned above, the WeChat articles were required to move the prices of artworks to the beginnings of the articles and highlight them as an attempt to attract the readers’ attention and boost the sales of the artworks. In the article for the exhibition organized by the Global Chinese Photography Association, Samantha was required to put “Looking for high-end photographs for \$500?” and highlight it at the top of the article. Also, persuasive sentences like “Only \$500, with more price increase potential” were included in the article as a way to urge the sale of the artworks.

Since September 2017, in order to boost the sales by providing a variety of payment methods and attract Chinese buyers, the Artlagoon Gallery introduced Alipay and WeChat Pay. Alipay and WeChat Pay were the two leading third-party online payment methods in China, which have millions of Chinese users both in China and abroad. For the *In Darkness* exhibition in October, I was required to add “All the artworks are available for sale! (We accept Alipay and WeChat Pay now!)” at the end of the article. Another staff member expressed concern that sentences like this would make the Artlagoon Gallery look like a common retailer instead of an art gallery.

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<sup>24</sup> Tiered pricing is a strategy employed to define a price per unit within a range. Tiered pricing works so that the price per unit increases once each quantity within a “tier” has been sold. The lower price “tiers” may draw customers to make their purchasing decisions.

The unsatisfactory art sales pushed the Artlagoon Gallery to adopt more aggressive revenue generation strategies that even exceeded the practices of professionally-run commercial art galleries as an attempt to boost its profits, including increasing its venue rentals and publishing persuasive articles on its social media. However, as the art sales by the end of my research indicates, these aggressive revenue generation strategies did not bring more sales as expected. On the contrary, the venue rentals even caused some tensions with other exhibition organizers and within the Artlagoon Gallery itself. Moreover, as in the case of the *In Darkness* exhibition pointed out, the obvious economic pursuit of the Artlagoon Gallery made it more difficult for it to establish an image of a commercial art gallery in the Vancouver context. Hence, the Artlagoon Gallery's struggle with making a profit demonstrates the importance of what Bourdieu (1980) has called the disavowal of economy in the art world, which will be further demonstrated in the next section about the Artlagoon Gallery's struggles with building networks with art experts in both China and Vancouver.



**Figure 21 Summary of Some Challenges**



## **5.5. The accumulation of cultural capital: networks with art experts and institutions**

The belief in the value of cultural goods exists in the relationship with the field of artistic production as a whole (Bourdieu, 1980, 264). Hence, in order to accumulate the cultural capital, the Artlagoon Gallery attempted to gather an expert team to endorse its development and help with the establishment of its reputation in the art worlds both in Vancouver and China when it was founded. Max was invited to be the Director of Artlagoon Gallery as an attempt to draw on his influence and connections in China's art world. Guillemin, a prestigious public art gallery director, was also invited to serve as the consultant of Artlagoon Gallery. Moreover, the Artlagoon Gallery signed up for free and paid memberships with a variety of art organizations and business organizations in Vancouver as an attempt to promote its art sales and increase its influence in local art scenes.

### **5.5.1. The initial plans to build a network with art experts and art organizations**

The Artlagoon Gallery initially planned to establish a network with people involved in local art scenes, particularly the art experts, through hosting an art festival to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canada in 2017, which would also be the grand opening of Artlagoon Gallery. With a concept of incorporating art into daily life, the art festival was named *Art and City: Artlagoon Vancouver Art Festival*, and local Chinese art experts Guillemin, Matthew, and Mason, the CEO of a creative center in Richmond, were invited to serve on the art festival committee, along with other four Western scholars and three Chinese scholars in both China and Canada.

Matthew used to teach in major universities both in Canada and China. As an artist, he had participated in the 55<sup>th</sup> edition of La Biennale di Venezia in 2013, Shanghai Biennale in 2004, Montreal International Biennale, and other prestigious events. Another committee member, Mason, received his MFA degree at a Canadian university. His artworks were in collections of a variety of well-known museums. Mason founded a creative center in Richmond in 1995, which was an educational studio that focused on developing art, design and critical thinking skills for high school students. Although there were ten consultants invited by the Artlagoon Gallery, I only met the Matthew and Mason for only a couple of times.

According to the initial plan, the art festival is meant to focus on the connections of the city, art, and life, which would be held in May 2017. The art festival consisted a series of projects, including a photography exhibition on one of the most popular Chinese actress during 1920s and 1930s, the launch of Guillemin's new book, an exhibition on immigrant topics by the Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society, the young curator workshop, an furniture design exhibition by Max, a batik workshop by the Canada Indonesia Diaspora Society, an art project collaboration with a shopping mall, a digital media exhibition by the Cinevolution, a theater project by an architect Will, a photography workshop by the Chung Ai Photographic Society, the Shanghai Design Week, and an exhibition by the International Centre of Arts and Technology.

The photography exhibition of a Chinese actress, the launch of Guillemin's new book, and the young curator workshop were all collaborations between Guillemin and the Artlagoon Gallery. It was also Guillemin who recommended the digital media exhibition by the Cinevolution Society. The exhibition by the Asian Heritage Month Society, batik workshop, and exhibition by the International Centre of Arts and Technology were suggested by Jackie. Among all the proposed projects, the three exhibitions suggested by Jackie were eventually carried out at the gallery in March and May 2017. The exhibition organized by the International Centre of Arts and Technology involved visual arts, music, performance art, and book reading. Invitations were extended to four visual artists, including three photographers and one oil painter, one experimental musician and over 10 writers (to read from their original works). The batik workshop was organized by the Canada Indonesia Diaspora Society, which not only displayed traditional batik from Indonesia but also provided batik-making demonstrations to engage the visitors. The rest of the events, except the photography workshop by the Chung Ai Photographic Society, were recommended by Max. I will discuss the events suggested by Guillemin and Max in detail in later sections. Although the Artlagoon Gallery had developed many projects for the art festival, they were all in draft stages when more detailed contents were needed. However, since Max left Vancouver in December 2017, the progress on the development of these projects was significantly slowed down, and the collaborations with other art organizations and art experts were kept pending, particularly with Guillemin.

#### **5.5.1.1. The initial plans to collaborate with Guillemín**

The Artlagoon Gallery initially invited Guillemín to direct its development as its director and consultant. In addition to a series of co-operation plans with the Artlagoon Gallery, including the Chinese actress exhibition, young curator workshop, and the launch of his new book, Guillemín helped it with the initial establishment of a network with local art experts and art institutions. Also, he was important for the long-term development of the Artlagoon Gallery by supervising its exhibition quality and enhance its academic reputation in the local art scenes. The Artlagoon Gallery organized a couple of meetings with him before it was officially founded in January 2017 to discuss its future development, which will be discussed in this section.

Prior to moving to Vancouver in 1990, Guillemín worked at one of the most prestigious art academies in China as a professor and department chair for more than thirty years. He was the co-founder of an artists' federation and an art center in Vancouver and a former trustee of a famous public art gallery. Currently, Guillemín is a managing editor of a prestigious art magazine and a senior curator for an art fair in Vancouver. He has organized and curated numerous exhibitions on contemporary Chinese art and published a remarkable number of articles on contemporary Chinese art on prestigious art magazines. As an artist, Guillemín has shown work in China, the United States, Canada, and Russia since the 1960s.

The Artlagoon Gallery invited Guillemín to be its consultant as an attempt to establish its academic reputation in the art worlds in both Vancouver and China. The first meeting with Guillemín was in October 2016, before I officially started to work at the Artlagoon Gallery. I was asked by Max to attend the meeting at a restaurant in Chinatown. Guillemín, Max, and Richard's daughter attended this meeting. In the meeting, Guillemín confirmed with Max the space design for the Artlagoon, his collaboration modes with the gallery, and the mission and vision of the Artlagoon. According to the meeting, Guillemín was responsible for the academic development of the Artlagoon Gallery as its art director to ensure its exhibition quality and brand image. Guillemín suggested that the Artlagoon needed one or two managers to be in charge of the art projects and commercial projects. Later, Richard invited Jackie to be the manager of both the

Artlagoon and Artlagoon Gallery. In addition, the mission and vision of the Artlagoon were confirmed as to build it as a center of art, culture, and business.

Guillemin, Max, Richard, his daughter, and Mason attended the second meeting at the Artlagoon in October 2016. This meeting mainly discussed plans for the Artlagoon Vancouver Art Festival. Guillemin suggested a list of potential project partners during the meeting. The young curator workshop was a project aiming at providing opportunities for curators in China to study in Canada. For the young curator workshop, he suggested the Artlagoon Gallery contact Mads, who was an experienced curator and the director of a non-profit artist-run center focusing on immigration topic in contemporary art. Also, he recommended the Artlagoon to contact Alana, a former assistant to him, to help with the young curator workshop. Moreover, Guillemin suggested the Artlagoon compose a proposal to confirm the details of the young curator workshop, including the time of the workshop, staff, and budget as soon as possible. The digital media exhibition by the Cinevolution Media Arts Society was also suggested by Guillemin, who recommended Beverly for the Artlagoon to contact.

After the second meeting, the Artlagoon started to contact the list of experts Guillemin suggested, and Max started to arrange meetings with them, which will be discussed in the next section. However, the co-operative projects between Guillemin and the Artlagoon were kept postponed during the time studied, and the contacts with Guillemin was gradually lost, which may be a result of the leave of Max and the Artlagoon Gallery's less effort on maintaining relationship with him after that. The next time I met Guillemin was at the exhibition by Nicole in February 2017. Both the artist and Jackie were excited about his attendance. The last time I met him was at the exhibition organized by the GCPA, and he was invited by the organizer as a VIP guest. Although Jackie hoped to maintain the Artlagoon Gallery's connection with Guillemin and kept inviting him to the VIP previews of later exhibitions at the Artlagoon Gallery, Guillemin hardly attended these VIP previews. However, when Guillemin showed up at the Artlagoon Gallery for the exhibition opening in January, Jackie tried to provide the best service and asked me to give him a tour of the exhibition.

### **5.5.1.2. The collaborations with Max and his attempts to build a network**

Max was also invited by the Artlagoon Gallery to help with its development. He was invited to be the Director of the Artlagoon Gallery and the Art Director of Artlagoon Online and was mainly in charge of the Art and City: Artlagoon Vancouver Art Festival that the Artlagoon Gallery was going to hold. During his stay in Vancouver, he helped the Artlagoon Gallery with the establishment of a network with local art experts and art institutions and the early plans for its development.

Max was born in Guangzhou, China, and graduated from the Architecture Department of Shenzhen University. He was the founder and director of an art project aimed to promote the interactions of architecture with art, design, music, and movies. He was also the partner of an architectural design office in Shanghai. The design office's works had been widely published and exhibited, including a designer furniture exhibition in the Venice Biennale and Pompidou Center in Paris, and the first solo show in Aedes Gallery in Berlin. Moreover, he was on the academic committee of a private and non-profit museum located in Beijing. He was the curator of a couple of international furniture design exhibitions in Shanghai, Tokyo, and Frankfurt.

After the two meetings with Guillemain as discussed before, Max asked me to arrange a meeting with Beverly from the Cinevolution immediately. Four days later, Beverly and her co-workers had a meeting with Max at the Artlagoon to discuss the potential collaboration. The Cinevolution was founded by a group of Pan Asian filmmakers, artists, and community organizers. It is committed to bringing contemporary migrant experiences into the global conversation through film and media arts while challenging conventional definitions of identity (Cinevolution, 2018). It is a government-funded organization supported by the City of Richmond, the City of Vancouver, the Province of BC, and the federal government of Canada, with its office at the Richmond Cultural Centre. Beverly suggested a collaboration with the Artlagoon to hold workshops and exhibitions that matched their mission.

Then, Max held another meeting with Jackie, who just had joined the Artlagoon Gallery in November 2016, to introduce her to the proposed work schedule. First, he provided Jackie his design for the garage space, whose spacious room was divided into several independent exhibition areas by giant wooden cubes. Since Richard expressed his will

to open a cafe at the Artlagoon, Jackie needed to confirm the design of the cafe and the furniture with Max in the following months. Second, Jackie needed to follow up on the collaboration with the Cinevolution and contact a shopping mall for potential art project collaboration. Also, Jackie needed to discover other potential collaborations with other art organizations in 2017. Third, the Artlagoon needed to compose a PowerPoint about the art festival, including the introductions to the Artlagoon Online and the Artlagoon. Max emphasized that Guillemin, as the Art Director of the Artlagoon Gallery, needed to be highlighted in the PowerPoint. For WeChat, the content needed to be updated at least once a week, and the first one should be published before as soon as possible.

Max also introduced a musical theater project to the Artlagoon Gallery in November 2016, which was designed by a Chinese architect from a prestigious university in Canada named Will. Will has founded his architectural firm in Canada, who was also a peer of Max in the Shenzhen University. I was still the assistant to Max when Will discussed this project with Michael. The stages where the musical was to be performed would be made with reused container boxes, which would surround the audiences on every side creating a 360-degree performance spectacle. To enable the audience to fully enjoy the show, rotating chairs would be used as seating for them. With the concept of a deconstructive theatre play, the audience and performers would be brought together creating more interaction with each other, and settings for the play would deliver more realism, thus further immersing the audiences into the ambiance by using a semi-closed performing stage. Will had one meeting with Michael in November 2016 to inspect the parking lot and to establish a proposal for the performing stages. Will proposed that he could offer the design for free, but the performing stages must be named after his architecture company. After including the expenses for chairs, sound equipment, and lighting equipment, he proposed a budget for the project to Michael. Michael was surprised by the large size of the budget and said that he needed to confirm with Richard. After the meeting, Will was concerned that Michael did not understand art or design, and all he cared about was the budget. After this meeting in 2016, there were no other updates on this project during the period of my fieldwork.

In late November 2017, Max arranged a meeting with an individual named Jack, the manager of an art project at a shopping mall in Richmond, hoping to persuade him to participate in the art festival. After the meeting, he asked me to follow up on the

collaboration with Jack. However, he politely refused the collaboration with the Artlagoon and said that they were troubled by Max's description of Richmond as a "cultural wasteland" by Max. He expressed his hesitance to be part of any project which seeks to project "cultural superiority". Since I did not attend the meeting, how Max discussed the art festival with Jack remains uncertain to me. However, according to other meetings Max arranged with other art organization managers, he often referred Richmond as a cultural wasteland with an inactive art community and believed that the establishment of the Artlagoon Gallery would be a cultural highland for this community.

The next meeting Max held at the Artlagoon Gallery was four months later in March 2017. It was during his second visit to Vancouver, which Richard, Max, Jackie, Michael, Gigi and I attended. In this meeting, Max pointed out that, due to the vast space of the Artlagoon, it was not suitable for the formats used by Western art galleries, which primarily made profits by art sales. The Artlagoon Gallery should focus on the combination of art with life and generate revenue primarily by venue rental. Hence, the goals of the art festival were to promote the Artlagoon as a venue for rental and sales of creative merchandise, and to blur the boundary between art and creative industry. Richard and Max agreed that the focus of the Artlagoon Gallery was not on the exhibition but the Artlagoon Online and implied that the Artlagoon would not invest too much in organizing exhibitions. Also, in this meeting, Max included his *Beyond Architecture* project in detail to the art festival as a part of a design week project. His project, including his furniture design *Auto Infinite*, aimed at combining art and design with daily life, presenting a series of original furniture.

After this meeting, Max had to leave Vancouver again and go back to China. Before he left, he asked me to forward all the work relevant emails to his Chinese email account and keep him updated on the progress of the projects for the art festival. However, since he left, his involvement with the development of the Artlagoon gradually decreased. In April 2017, I was informed that Jackie was the new Director of Artlagoon Gallery. I was told later by one of the employees that, since I was introduced to the Artlagoon by Max, I was excluded from many new plans and decisions by the Artlagoon.

According to the meetings between the Artlagoon Gallery and Guillemain and Max, the Artlagoon Gallery was not designed to be a commercial art gallery in the conventional

sense since the beginning. Many plans, including the art projects for the planned art festival, and the vision of combining art, life, and business that the Artlagoon Gallery adopted were different from traditional commercial art galleries in the Vancouver context. The Artlagoon Gallery attempted to build a network with art experts in China and Vancouver, but as its direction became more commercially-oriented over time, its efforts on maintaining relationships with these art experts significantly decreased. As a result, the connections between the Artlagoon Gallery and local art scenes were fairly loose. However, its short cooperation with Max and Guillemin still helped the Artlagoon Gallery with the establishment of its relationships with some art organizations in Vancouver and Richmond and the promotion of the Artlagoon Gallery as a newly-founded commercial art gallery.

### **5.5.2. The establishment of a network with institutions and media**

Since the Artlagoon Gallery was founded, it had started to build connections with a variety of organizations covering business organizations, art organizations, and media. The Artlagoon Gallery was a subscribed member of seven organizations, including the Tourism Richmond, Richmond Chamber of Commerce, BC Museums Association, BC Alliance for Arts + Culture, Richmond Arts Coalition, *Preview Magazine*, and *GalleriesWest Monthly*. In addition, the Artlagoon Gallery was a sponsor of the Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society. Moreover, the Artlagoon Gallery also had paid to advertise on the *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese art*. A review of Victoria's solo exhibition in April 2017 by an art critic Robert was submitted by Jackie and published on *Yishu's* volume 16 in September 2017. The Artlagoon Gallery also attempted to build cooperative relationships with a couple of media organizations, such as the Oriental Star Media, to promote its exhibitions and artists. However, due to the stringent budget for advertisement, these collaborations with media organizations eventually were not carried out.

#### **5.5.2.1. Becoming a member of two business organizations**

In order to seek cooperative opportunities with other businesses in Richmond and promote the Artlagoon Gallery as a commercial art gallery, it joined two business organizations as one of their members, which were the Tourism Richmond and the Richmond Chamber of Commerce.



The Tourism Richmond is a non-profit, stakeholder-driven marketing organization promoting Richmond as a destination to leisure travelers, meeting planners, travel media, and organizations that influence travel (2018). Its primary mandate is to enhance awareness of its destination through sales and marketing initiatives and by providing excellent visitor and stakeholder services (Tourism Richmond, 2018). The Artlagoon Gallery had become a paid-up member in early 2017 as an attempt to increase its visitors by attracting travelers. As a member, the Artlagoon Gallery was able to submit its latest exhibitions or events to Tourism Richmond's event calendar. Also, the Artlagoon Gallery was recommended by the Tourism Richmond under its "Things To Do" section on its website as a place for people who sought contact and information about contemporary art. The Tourism Richmond regularly organizes paid workshops on marketing and business, which Jackie asked Chad to attend for two times to help with the marketing of the Artlagoon.

The Richmond Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit membership association, with over 80 years of commitment to make Richmond a prosperous and favorable place to do business (2018). It represents over 1,150 member businesses of all sizes from every industry and profession in its region (Richmond Chamber of Commerce, 2018). The mission of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce is to promote and enhance the economic growth and quality of life in the city of Richmond, serve as an advocate for the business community in governmental affairs, and to build value and purpose for its members through education, networking and the fostering of business relationships and serve members with relevant and affordable benefits and business services (Richmond Chamber of Commerce, 2018). The Richmond Chamber of Commerce had organized a series of trade shows and networking events in hotels including the Hilton in Vancouver. The Artlagoon Gallery attended one of the trade shows in October 2017 to promote its upcoming exhibition tour and look for potential partners or sponsors. Also, Jackie and Chad attended two of its Annual Business Excellence Awards in order to build connections with other businesses in Richmond, particularly businesses in tourism, such as hotels. Besides the networking and trade show, the Artlagoon Gallery also posted its latest events and exhibitions on the website calendar of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce to increase exposure.

### **5.5.2.2. Establishing a network with art organizations**

Besides business organization memberships, the Artlagoon Gallery also signed up for memberships in various art organizations in Vancouver, including the BC Museums Association, BC Alliance for Arts + Culture, Richmond Arts Coalition, *Preview Magazine*, and *GalleriesWest Monthly*, to build a network with other art organizations and promote the Artlagoon Gallery's artists and exhibitions.

The British Columbia Museums Association (BCMA) was founded in 1957 with a mission to create a bright future for British Columbia's museums, galleries, and related heritage communities through networking, advocacy, innovation, and professional development (2018). It delivers programs and services to benefit of its members and the sector at large, acting as the cultural and heritage information hub for British Columbia while providing a unified voice for the institutions, trustees, professional staff and volunteers (British Columbia Museums Association, 2018). As a member, the Artlagoon Gallery was able to access and post job and contract opportunities through the BCMA member distribution list online, to access and post news and information through its member distribution list, and to participate in the BCMA Awards for an Outstanding Achievement program. The BCMA Awards for Outstanding Achievement is divided into three categories, including the Distinguished Service Award, Museum Service & Stewardship Award, and Award of Merit. The Distinguished Service Award recognizes an individual who has made a unique and outstanding contribution on a regional, provincial or national basis to the museum, gallery, archives or heritage field over an extended period of time (British Columbia Museums Association, 2018). The Museum Service & Stewardship Award recognizes an outstanding effort and contribution over an extended period, of an individual or organization that has donated funds, services or personnel to the museum, gallery, archives or heritage resources field (British Columbia Museums Association, 2018). The Award of Merit is divided into Excellence in Community Engagement, Excellence in Exhibitions and Excellence in Collections. The Artlagoon Gallery mainly used it to post its exhibitions and events during the time studied.

The BC Alliance for Arts + Culture is a non-profit provincial organization that works to advocate, inform, connect, and serve BC's Creative Community since 1986 (2018). Its members include organizations, professional associations, not-for-profit groups, artists, and cultural workers throughout British Columbia (BC Alliance for Arts + Culture, 2018).

It has strived to serve the arts and cultural sector by monitoring public policy, synthesizing issues for its members, providing support, services and professional development, and representing the interests of artists and cultural workers (BC Alliance for Arts + Culture, 2018). By joining the BC Alliance for Arts + Culture, the Artlagoon Gallery was able to share its news and announcements via the Member News pages, be provided free advertising opportunities (banner and sidebar) on the Member News pages, get discounted rates on the BC ArtsPost broadcasts, which could enable the Artlagoon's press releases to reach its extensive media contact list, get unlimited free postings on its Classifieds Pages, such as call for artists, volunteer postings, get a link in its member directory, get a vote at the BC Alliance for Arts +Culture Annual General Meeting, and participate in other activities. So far, the Artlagoon Gallery primarily used it to share its news and announcements.

The Richmond Arts Coalition is a member-driven organization that serves the interests of artists and arts and culture organizations in Richmond and create support for a diversity of cultural and arts experiences by ensuring that artists, arts organizations and arts supporters can contribute to the quality of life in Richmond (2018). Being a member of the Richmond Arts Coalition, the Artlagoon Gallery can be recognized as a supporter of the Richmond Arts Coalition in the city of Richmond, contribute to the strengthening of the arts in Richmond, be listed on the RAC website with links to its site. Also, the Artlagoon Gallery can submit its events and exhibitions to the Richmond Arts Coalition's online events calendar to reach more audience and people involved in local art scenes.

The *Preview Magazine* is a trusted source of current and upcoming exhibitions, openings and events in art galleries and museums throughout the Pacific Northwest for 30 years (2018). Its editorial spotlights include insightful reviews of exhibitions, previews of new galleries & museums, and interviews with key individuals (Preview Magazine, 2018). It has a total print circulation of 150,000 copies annually and is published every two months. As a member of *Preview Magazine*, the Artlagoon Gallery can be listed in its Galleries + Museums section and can add the Artlagoon's exhibitions and events on both its website and print copies. Unlike other organizations, who have an online submission form for adding events, the *Preview Magazine* emailed bi-monthly reminder and submission links to Jackie. Also, every two months, the *Preview Magazine* delivered

print copies to the Artlagoon Gallery, which were put on the desk next to the entrance for the visitors to pick up.

The *GalleriesWest Monthly* provides timely information about art and artists in communities large and small across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the North (2018). According to its website, the *GalleriesWest* welcomes news about upcoming shows and events through emails including names of artists, opening and closing dates, exhibition title, a brief description and short artist bios with links to their websites (GalleriesWest, 2018). Also, it claims that its editorial contents are managed separately from advertising and editorial choices that are made by the editor and that editorial comments are not for sale (GalleriesWest, 2018). Moreover, it provides online submission forms for art organizations to post their exhibitions and events, which the Artlagoon Gallery mainly used.

The Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society (VAHMS) was founded in 1996 and is a non-profit society that is dedicated to recognizing Asian Canadian participation as an integral part of Canadian society (2018). Its mission is to invite the wider community to experience Asian Canadian arts and culture, encourage and create opportunities for the public to learn about Asian Canadian communities in Canada, provide a platform to address critical issues such as identity and social integration for Asian Canadians, facilitate collaboration across and beyond Asian Canadian communities, and promote access to public arts and cultural institutions for all Canadian communities (Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society, 2018). VAHMS organizes explorASIAN, an annual festival celebrating national Asian Heritage Month to promote understanding and appreciation of Asian-Canadian arts and culture in the month of May<sup>25</sup>. The festival includes programs, activities, and events produced in collaboration with various partners from the diverse communities in Metro Vancouver. As its sponsor, the Artlagoon Gallery was often invited to the openings of a series of cultural events organized by VAHMS,

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<sup>25</sup> The festival includes programs, activities and events produced in collaboration with various partners from the diverse communities in Metro Vancouver (VAHMS, 2018). VAHMS was founded in 1996 by Mishtu Banerjee, Mo-Ling Chui, Grace Eiko Thomson, Jim Wong-Chu and Winston Xin, following the beginning of Asian Heritage celebrations in the USA and Toronto, Canada. In 2001, Senator Vivienne Poy proposed a motion in the Senate to officially recognize Asian Heritage Month in the month of May. Other Canadian cities celebrating Asian Heritage Month include Victoria, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Halifax and Fredericton (VAHMS, 2018, <https://explorasian.org/about-us/>).

such as the opening event for the explorASIAN festival, and to be recognized at the opening speech. Also, the Artlagoon Gallery was able to post its upcoming exhibitions and events on its website calendar. Moreover, VAHMS recognized the Artlagoon Gallery's contribution on its website along with other sponsors, such as the government of British Columbia, University of British Columbia, and Simon Fraser University.

*The Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese art* is the first English language commercial journal to focus on contemporary Chinese art and culture based in Vancouver, Canada<sup>26</sup>. Each bi-monthly issue features scholarly essays on topical issues, interviews with artists and curators, conference proceedings, and critical commentary on exhibitions and books (Yishu, 2018). *Yishu* offers a platform for a wide range of voices who are living and telling the story of contemporary Chinese art from a diversity of perspectives, and who provide dialogue and debate around current visual and literary forms produced within what constitutes an expanded understanding of contemporary Chinese art (Yishu, 2018).

An art critic Robert was invited to visit the Artlagoon Gallery when Victoria had her solo exhibition there in April 2017. Robert was born in Guangdong, China and received his two MA degrees from a well-known Canadian university. He was a visual artist from 2009 to 2010 and a curatorial assistant to the Vancouver Biennale. He also worked at *Yishu Journal* as the Executive Editor. After his visit to the exhibition, he wrote a review in both English and Chinese, which Jackie originally planned to publish on the Artlagoon Gallery's WeChat account. As Robert used to work at *Yishu Journal*, he suggested Jackie submit the English review to *Yishu Journal*. After a couple of rounds of revising

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<sup>26</sup> *Yishu* offers a platform for a wide range of voices who are living and telling the story of contemporary Chinese art from a diversity of perspectives, and who provide dialogue and debate around current visual and literary forms produced within what constitutes an expanded understanding of contemporary Chinese art. Since its inauguration in May 2002, *Yishu* has raised its profile internationally to become one of the most respected journals devoted to contemporary Chinese art. Appealing to professionals in the art and academic fields, as well as art enthusiasts in general, *Yishu* is now the journal of record for the high-quality coverage of issues and events pertinent to Chinese art today. Its high standard of critical writing by thinkers from around the world allows it to voice ideas that communicate across cultures (Yishu, 2018, <http://yishu-online.com/about-yishu/>).

and editing, the review was finally published on *Yishu's* September and October 2017 issue. Jackie and the artist were thrilled at the news and believed that this was a significant academically achievement for both the artist and the gallery. They immediately announced this news on their social media accounts.



**Figure 22 Organizations and Networks**

### 5.6. A new art gallery faces struggles

When the Artlagoon Gallery was founded, its mission was more complicated than traditional commercial art gallery. It aimed to become a professional art gallery and collaborate with local artists, art experts, and other art organizations to present local art and integrate art into people’s daily life. Meanwhile, it was also designed to be more than just a commercial art gallery according to the plans and ideology it adopted. As other commercial art galleries, the Artlagoon Gallery attempted to build its facilities, train its staff, and prepare its exhibitions professionally in the Vancouver context. In addition, it attempted to build networks with art experts and organizations to help with its development as a commercial art gallery. However, during the period studied, the Artlagoon Gallery struggled with making a profit from art sales and was pushed to adopt

a series of aggressive sale strategies and expand its business into unconventional areas for a commercial art gallery.

The Artlagoon Gallery showed a significant connection with the local Chinese community, which was not only demonstrated by the overwhelming Chinese artists presented at the gallery but also by its close network with Chinese art experts and art collectors. The Artlagoon Gallery showed a significant preference for Asian artists, particularly Chinese artists. On the one hand, this strong tendency may be explained by Jackie's personal preference for Chinese artists. On the other hand, as Jackie was occupied by other businesses, she was not able to discover new artists in Vancouver and could only invite artists from her previous connections. Meanwhile, her previous working experiences in relatively Asian-oriented art organizations may also contribute to her limited choices of artists. Therefore, the artists that exhibited at the Artlagoon Gallery were predominantly Chinese. Although the Artlagoon Gallery offered email submission, the overwhelming percentage of the invited artists at the gallery indicated the importance of networks for both the art gallery and the artists.

Becker (1984) argues that social conventions, as the elaborate modes of cooperation among specialized personnel and agreements, are embodied in equipment, materials, training, available facilities and sites, systems of notation and the like, which can help with interpretation and understanding. Although facing a lot of financial challenges, the Artlagoon Gallery had developed a series of strategies to meet the conventions for running a professional art gallery in Vancouver, including the improvement of its facilities and the staff training. Conventions can be changed, but one needs to be prepared to pay the price in increased effort or decreased circulation of one's work (Becker, 1984, 773). Compared with other professional commercial art galleries in Vancouver, like Equinox gallery, there is still some way to go for the Artlagoon Gallery to meet the facility and equipment standards for a professional art gallery in the Vancouver context, such as its moving walls, braided wires for hanging artworks, and huge windows. A lot of art galleries or museums in the world are in repurposed buildings, such as the Dazhanzi, or 798 art zone in China, Musee d'Orsay, and Tate Modern. However, as in Vancouver there was no tradition of art galleries converted from car dealerships, and the Artlagoon Gallery developed few strategies to indicate this building as a place devoted to art, it has struggled to establish an image of a commercial art gallery to the public.

During my one-year of fieldwork at the Artlagoon Gallery, it struggled with making a profit and attracting art collectors, with only three artworks that were successfully sold in exhibitions organized by it, among which two of them were sold to Chinese art collectors. The three sold artworks were all by Chinese artists, which, to some extent, confirmed Chinese art collectors' general preferences for artworks by Chinese artists, even when they were in a more international context. Moreover, the acquisition patterns of Chinese art collectors revealed the importance of networks again as the Chinese art collectors were often introduced by the artist presented by the Artlagoon Gallery or someone who was a staff of the gallery. The art collectors' fast purchasing decisions showed their trust in the close relationships and the artists or the professional's artistic judgments and recommendations, which supports Bourdieu's theory about way that experts can influence the social universe of believers.

While the majority of the organizers who rented the Artlagoon Gallery were Chinese art organizations, the buyers of their artworks were all art collectors of Chinese heritage. The purchases confirmed again Chinese art collectors' preferences for artworks by Chinese artists. Compared with the three artworks sold by the Artlagoon Gallery during the period studied, the success of the exhibition held by other organizers, particularly by the Global Chinese Photography Society, may be explained by the lower prices of their artworks. Its artworks were all sold at \$500 while the artworks sold at the Artlagoon Gallery were usually over \$1000. In addition, their success may also be explained by their more extensive networks with art experts and art collectors. Hence, this demonstrates the importance of networks and the cycle of belief to the commercial success of an art gallery.

The Artlagoon Gallery, as a medium size art gallery with over ten employees and vast spaces, was under significant pressure to generate revenue to cover its operation cost. Bourdieu (1980) points out, art business appropriate profits from the disavowal of the 'economy' as a way to accumulate symbolic capital. However, the Artlagoon Gallery did not evade its interest in generating profit by pushing its art sales and merchandise sales on its social media. Moreover, in order to generate more revenue, the Artlagoon Gallery attempted to expand its businesses into more unconventional areas for a commercial art gallery. As discussed before, traditionally, a commercial art gallery primarily makes profit



from art sales. However, in addition to art sales, the Artlagoon Gallery generated revenues from renting its venue to different art organizations for exhibitions, merchandise sales and derivative sales, admission charge, and others. This business model of the Artlagoon Gallery combined the revenue generation strategies adopted by a variety of commercial and non-profit art organizations, such as commercial art galleries, museums, and vanity galleries. Its unconventional business model may increase its efforts to establish an image and a reputation as a commercial art gallery as how it positioned itself. This business model may be explained by the pressure to cover the cost of its operation. It may also be explained by what Gao (2011) called the “heritage of pragmatism” when he referred to trends in the development of contemporary Chinese art. This model also echoes with some art galleries in China, which will be discussed later in the conclusion chapter. Hence, although the Artlagoon Gallery adopted aggressive sale strategies, it still struggled with attracting art collectors to acquire artworks and generating revenues.

According to Becker (1984), a work of art that is finally put on the market is not a work created only by the artist, but also a result of the coordinated activities of all the people involved in the process. Although the majority of the staff from the Artlagoon Gallery were not previously involved in the art world, they generally followed the principle pointed out by Bourdieu for the promotion of belief in the value of art, the disavowal of economy. They believed that as an art gallery, the Artlagoon Gallery should avoid directly revealing its economic interests and concerned that the apparent economic interest could discredit its authority of aesthetic judgments as a professional art gallery. While it is necessary to consider whether the Artlagoon will be able to cover the costs of its operation, its straightforward pursuit of profit was adverse to engaging the power of the Artlagoon employees and their affiliated “experts” to enhance the faith of the buyers in the quality of its artworks. The process of organizing an exhibition engaged efforts from the staff of the Artlagoon Gallery, such as the design of the posters, the selection of artists, even the food provided at the opening reception, which represented their interests and tastes. Therefore, using tactics like selling cars or other commodities to sell art, as well as using the gallery to advertise real estate and yachts, countered the conventional operation model of a commercial art gallery, which not only increased the effort for the Artlagoon Gallery to be accepted as a professional art gallery by art experts

and art collectors, but also lead to the lack of confidence by its staff in its professionalism.

While adopting a series of unconventional revenue generation strategies, the Artlagoon Gallery attempted to follow the tradition of the art world and established a group of art experts from both China and Canada to accumulate its “cultural capital” and endorse its development. In the same vein, the Artlagoon Gallery joined a series of local, provincial and national art organizations in Vancouver, which provided a variety of ways to promote networking and participate in the local art scenes, promote its exhibitions, build its reputation, and enhance its connections within the greater Vancouver art scenes. Moreover, as an attempt to add credits to its exhibition by establishing connections to “dominant field positions” (Newman, Goulding & Whitehead, 2013, 460), the Artlagoon Gallery invited an art critic to write a review on its exhibition and published it on prestigious art magazine *Yishu*. However, it did not successfully establish a long-term relationship with art experts, such as Guillemin, which may be explained by its over profit-oriented operation strategies and less investment in maintaining the relationship with the art world in the gallery’s later development.

When I was offered the opportunity to study the Artlagoon Gallery, I had an expectation to gain insight into the operation of an emerging art gallery founded by a successful Chinese businessman and art collector in a more international context. However, as the gallery developed, it started to move away from its ambition to build a professional art gallery. It must be recognized that, for the owner, the costs of running a major facility in a very expensive Canadian urban context must be considerable, given the investments in real estate, personnel and other expenses. Hence, my analysis might be too critical as a result of the discrepancy between my expectations and a need to understand the struggles for profit of an emerging art gallery.

## 6. Conclusion

When I started my research, I was hoping to seek insights about the motivations of Chinese art collectors and particularly interested in their “buying power” in relation to the communication of a new cultural identity of China. Then, as my research evolved, I was offered an opportunity to study an art gallery founded by a Chinese businessman and art collector in Vancouver as an insider. The interviews and the fieldwork at the art gallery provided me an extensive research opportunity to study Chinese people involved in the art world, their motivations and ideologies behind their activities, and enabled me to find out the similarities and differences between their activities inside and outside China. As the research demonstrates, the Chinese people involved in the art world both in China and in Vancouver showed significant similarities with each other.

As the interviews conducted in China indicate, Chinese art collectors are often motivated by economic interests. Yet, at the same time, art, as an investment object, perfectly combines the economic interests with artistic interests, which echoes with the claim of Richard, the founder of the Artlagoon Gallery, about his passion for art and also with his interests in profits, as he emphasized in his own self-description: “After all, I am a businessman.” In addition, the fieldwork and the interviews reveal that contemporary Chinese art market is more profit-oriented and has no intention to hide its interest in economic rewards, which challenges Bourdieu’s theory about the disavowal of economy in this cultural context.

Although the Artlagoon Gallery was founded in Vancouver, its business model echoes that of the Jinart Institute, which has expanded its business beyond those of a commercial art gallery by including an art e-commerce platform and auctions. Also, as Max, the former Director of Artlagoon Gallery, positioned the Artlagoon Gallery as a place that connects art and life, Shanghai Himalayas Centre’ Zendai Yin Hotel echoes this ideology by following a model of “combining art and daily life”. This model of combining art with commercial sectors involved in daily life can also be found widely in China in the real estate industry, such as the K11 shopping mall, which was founded with a focus on three core values, Art, People and Nature and merges commerce with exhibitions, incubation of young contemporary Chinese artists, and other activities, creating a business model of “art x commerce”. Compared with the operation model of the Star Gallery owned by Fang, the art dealer I interviewed in 2016, this “art plus”

model is more widely adopted by companies supported commercial art galleries. Moreover, the merging of revenue generation strategies by commercial and non-profit, such as the charges for admission, the sale of merchandise and derivatives, echoes with the ideology behind the “art plus” model, to some extent.

The adoption of a hybrid forms may be explained by the “total modernity” proposed by Gao (2011) as mentioned in the historical frameworks. Unlike the model of Western modernity, China’s pursuit of modernity lacks a clear historical line of progression from premodern to modern and postmodern. The passive revolution in China was characterized by merging of all these periods, an adoption of a hybrid forms and incompatible elements at the same time (Gao, 2011, 3). The ideology behind what Deng Xiaoping said in 1978: “It doesn’t matter whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice.” explains the hybrid forms that exists on the Artlagoon Gallery, the Jinart Institute, and the Shanghai Himalayas Centre’ hotels and the adoption of all possible revenue generation strategies by the Artlagoon Gallery.

Chinese art collectors show a significant tendency towards acquiring artworks by Chinese artists, particularly traditional Chinese art by ancient or modern Chinese artists, such as ink painting and calligraphy. Although with the development of contemporary Chinese art and the involvement in a globalized art market, an increasing number of Chinese art collectors start to collect contemporary art, they still prefer contemporary artworks by Chinese artists. This preference over Chinese artists and artworks confirmed my second research question about Chinese art collectors’ preferences for Chinese artworks. However, this apparently patriotic artwork acquisition is not as a result of what I presumed as nationalism, but mainly because of the habitus, the unconscious dispositions of Chinese art collectors towards artworks by Chinese artists and their economic interests in reselling the artworks easily. Meanwhile, the art collectors who bought at the Artlagoon Gallery showed this tendency towards Chinese artists as well. While the majority of the artists exhibited at the gallery were Chinese artists, all the artworks sold at exhibitions either organized by the Artlagoon Gallery or other art organizations were acquired by Chinese art collectors. The successful art sales all indicate the importance of the networks as the art collectors were all introduced by someone who had connection with the Artlagoon Gallery or the other art organizations. This tendency towards Chinese artists is also shared by the Artlagoon Gallery’s

selection of artists. Among the seventeen artists exhibited at the Artlagoon Gallery, eleven of them were Chinese artists (including Canadian-born artists of Chinese heritage). However, the preference for contemporary Chinese artists of the Artlagoon Gallery is perhaps more likely as a result of the director's networks in the local art scenes and the high percentage of ethnic Chinese residents in Richmond.

Although the definitions of academic support may vary in accounts by the interviewees and work of the Artlagoon Gallery, both the development of China's contemporary art world and the history of the Artlagoon Gallery face problems that raise questions about how they relate to academic theories and scholarly practices. Moreover, as China is involved in a rapidly globalized world, these questions need to be put in an international context as well. China's contemporary art market still lacks the development of an academic judgment system, including work by academic institutions, education systems, and others, to establish standards and endorse the quality of contemporary Chinese artworks. As the interviewees indicated, the struggle to legitimate the development of China's contemporary art market and contemporary Chinese art lies in the establishment of academic conventions through institutions, educational systems supported by art experts, such as critics and curators, rather than relying on Chinese art collectors' buying power, although purchase, to some extent, help with the self-esteem of contemporary Chinese artists and the international status of them. For the Artlagoon Gallery, to legitimate itself as a professional art gallery, it has failed in terms of the endorsement from established experts, mostly as a result of its failure to disavow its economic interests driven by the cost for operating an art gallery of this size, which is demanding. Hence, although the rising prices for Chinese artists contribute to the confidence in China's art world, the academic support and scholarship is decisive for the future development of both China's art world and the Artlagoon Gallery.

The social theories developed by both Pierre Bourdieu and Howard Becker in their analysis of 20<sup>th</sup> century art worlds in the U.S. and France have provided rich insights into ways of analyzing contemporary communications in the art worlds. For example, the creation of belief in the power of symbolic goods (Bourdieu) and the importance of communications among different types of participants (Becker) certainly are apparent. However, this study suggests that Gao's proposal of innovative strategies for new

configurations in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century “total modernity” may suggest the emergence of new forms of leadership based on a more international vision.



**Figure 23 Selected Conclusions**

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## Appendix: Interviews conducted in China

The following appendix presents English translations of excerpts from the interviews conducted in China in Mandarin by the author. The summaries are presented according to the following agenda.

01	China's art market
02	The motivations of Chinese art collectors
03	The collecting patterns of Chinese art collectors
04	Constructing Chinese identity in the art market
05	The roles of the art market and the artistic value of artworks
06	Chinese art collectors and networks for Chinese art

Figure 24      Agenda for Presentation of Interview Summaries

### The Art Collector: Shoutai Cheng

*How did you start collecting art?*

In 2006, I got enrolled in a business class. One day I visited my classmate, where I first encountered a lot of contemporary artworks, including Zhang Xiaogang and Fang Lijun. I was very curious and asked him why he buy all these works. He said that China is a big country, whose economy is experiencing rapid development, and the future will definite be the cultural development. It is his hobby, but also a good investment. In 2004 or 2005, I started to think about collecting art. In addition to friends' recommendations, I also observed art galleries, auction houses and art fairs. I started my first collection in 2006.

*Do you have an art related background?*

I studied law for twelve years. Hence, my understanding of art is superficial. My life had a big change. I want to pass down my wealth. First, I thought I needed to own real estate. It is safe. But to some extent, you realized you want to buy something you are interested in. Real estate doesn't have too much aesthetic enjoyment. After you build your wealth, you want something beautiful. Although I majored in law, I am very happy that I chose to collect art.

*How do you think about the roles of Chinese art collectors play in the whole art collecting activity? Any influence?*

First of all, I am very glad that I can participate in this. A lot of wealthy people in China, they want to make their home, their office, their property looks splendid. But I think that even though China has made great developments in its economy, its cultural industry, including art, has a long way to go. I want to see the time when all Chinese people's desire for culture comes. It will come, but I want to understand it and participate in it earlier. I hope that through my influence in the law industry, I can encourage more people to collect art. In a narrow sense, I collect contemporary art. But in a broad sense, it is about cultural inheritance and cultural renaissance. In the 18th National Congress in 2012, "cultural construction" was mentioned for the first time. Only culture and art can leave China a great fortune, support China, and make China a great cultural country. I am a Chinese, I feel very honored to participate in, to understand, even collecting art. From this perspective, I hope I can assume my responsibility. If China wants to become a cultural country, its culture needs to be discovered and promoted. If China's ink painting, and artists who know western painting skills, and paint "for art's sake", can be recognized in the world, it will make us proud and be our great moment. I won't deny that I think about it as investment as well. But what I really want is to participate, to witness, and to contribute to China's cultural development.

*Do you mainly collect Chinese artists' works?*

During the past decades, I collected Chinese ancient paintings. But for the past couple of years, I started to collect contemporary Chinese art. Also, I started to look at non-Chinese artists, including Japanese, Korean and some Western artists. I believe there are no national boundaries.

*Do you buy artworks from art galleries or auction houses?*

Both. But mainly through professional art galleries. I also follow some art media.

*Do you think experts from art galleries have a great influence on your purchase decision?*

They have a lot of constructive suggestions. But I do not necessarily follow them. For example, the first gallery I had contacted with, it just represents the same couple of

artists over years. Of course, I follow their works in different periods, but it would limit my vision [to only collect artworks by these artists]. As a collector, you need to find what interests you and which area you would like to explore more. I believe in my experience in the market and my judgments.

*What are the motivations behind Chinese art collectors?*

I have to say that collecting art is a means of investment, which has high risks and high profits. Secondly, art collectors need a spiritual home. There is no doubt that they are interested in art. Thirdly, I believe that every art collector, no matter what kind of artworks they collect, is inheriting Chinese culture. Art collecting connects with China's past, present and future. I am very happy that more and more people are involved in this. Fourthly, art collecting has its social value. Art collectors need to be recognized and need an identity. We are mortal, but art collecting can be immortal. They can build foundation, donate to museums or charities to gain social status. This social status, of course, can be attained through art. Last but not the least, art collecting is also about discovering artistic value, which is its ultimate value. But the reasons why I put it last are because without the investment potentials, the social value, the interest in art and the pursuit of cultural inheritance, it is impossible to talk about artistic value. Art itself has values, but they have to be discovered by art collectors, and other circles of society. And then, up to certain degree, it can be culture. Although China has a long history, its artworks started being passed down since the Tang and Song dynasties. Artists express their understandings of life, culture, value and emotion through art, who can create a variety of works of artistic value, which worth the art collectors to pursue. Of course, the artistic value needs to be recognized, either through museum or auction. I believe art consists of artistic value and market value, which are inseparable.

*How do you think Chinese art collectors active purchasing can have influence on China's cultural competitiveness and its repositioning of cultural power?*

All I can say is that it is a part of it. China's culture cannot be recognized just through buying. To be honest, I think Chinese art collectors who purchase in the international market, like New York, London, Paris, are more likely to encourage and lead the cultural industry through their individual value. As a result, more and more people would care about the return of Chinese antiques and bringing in the world-renowned artworks. It is a long process, but I am glad that there are already some art collectors doing this. Chinese

people desire cosmopolitan things, which is one of their characteristics. Recently, the whole world's attention has been drawn to Chinese art collectors, which proves that Chinese collectors have already started to go west, go international. They want to bring better artworks to China. I believe Chinese art collectors definitely focus on China, but they should look at the world as well. In the future, there will be more individuals driving the whole industry, the rising of artists. So, I really hope to see every family own some real, original artworks. That's when our culture could rise and go to the world.

*I have finished my questions. Do you have anything else you would like to talk about?*

I am glad you are studying this topic. I have a lot of friends there, like David Chau (who found Art021 Shanghai Contemporary Art Fair) and Lin Li. I believe, when you are out of China, and look back China, to study its contemporary art, its culture, and its global cultural competitiveness, it's very constructive.

*Do you have anyone to recommend?*

I can't say that they are willing to accept your interview. To some extent, I accepted your interview for two reasons. First of all, we have the same surname, and you are studying this topic, which interests me. Secondly, Chinese people still prefer to "hide your wealth". They don't think art collecting as a reasonable way of investment and tax evasion. They are less likely to share their collection with others. I think art collectors should not only collect, but also share. In this way, China's contemporary art can really be recognized and promoted. I will keep an eye out for the potential interviewees.

### **The Art Dealer: Fang Fang**

*What made you want to have your own gallery?*

I studied art since I was a kid, and I dreamt about being an artist. However, after I entered university, I realized that my training in painting is far from enough for me to be an artist. I believe that you can change or participate in art in many ways, like being a curator or a journalist. So, I curated an exhibition as my graduation project. The artists were all my peers. I hoped to show my standards and judgments of future artists through this exhibition. Then I became an art journalist in China Central Television for five years, when I got to know a variety of artists. But I hope to participate instead of observing. So, I opened my gallery, with an attempt to promote artists around my age, who were born in 1970s. Also, I hope to prove my ideas about art by my practices.

*What do you think about the development of China's art market?*

The art market is a very general concept and I can only talk about the area I am familiar with - contemporary art. The market in China is still in its forming stage, which is not as active as people expected. In terms of the buyers, even though 70% or more of the art collectors covered by the media are my clients, the seasoned collectors are still relatively few, maybe hundreds of them.

*What are the roles art gallery can play in the art collecting activity?*

Artists and art gallery owners create contemporary the art scene together. Artists achieve their personal accomplishments, while art galleries finish the rest of the work. From a economic perspective, art gallery owners incubate artists and act more like angel investor than art dealers, who invest their own money or art collectors' money in the artists and make profits from the steep increase of the art work prices instead of commission.

*How do you choose your artists?*

Instincts. They come from my understanding of art history and my observation of previous artists. On the other hand, I study my consigned or to-be-consigned artists about their works and their personalities.

*Do you think that you have a big influence on art collectors?*

I am a very passive salesman. I like art collectors who have their own judgments and I will give them the information about the artist and the works, and my personal opinions if necessary.

*What are the major patterns of art collecting in China?*

There are big art collectors who spend billion Chinese yuan on art, like Liu Yiqian and Wang Wei from Long Museum in Shanghai, who I have personal connections as well. On the one hand, they collect based on their own judgments. On the other hand, they have a whole expert system to advise them, including art dealers, curators and famous artists. The seasoned collectors like them can also increase the value of the artworks. There are also collectors who may not be as rich as they are, but they have the spare money to buy art, like lawyers and doctors. They are more subjective and have more

time to study their target works through media and social media instead of direct connection with experts.

*Do you think that Chinese art collectors collect with an attempt to promote China's cultural power?*

Both two types of art collectors show this interest. I think quite a lot of them attempt to do this. They also hope that what they have collected can be recognized as works of outstanding quality and works by great artists. But this can never be separated from investment, which is not contradictory. They all want to be repaid in both economic terms and social status terms. I think this is very understandable. The Chinese art collectors I know, if they are not solely buying for investment, they must be interested in art. They basically centered on personal cultural identity when they are looking for an art work. I think this is a safe choice. Your taste is connected with your overall cultural cultivation.

*Actually, I was about to ask you if Chinese art collectors prefer Chinese artists or China related art works?*

I think things are changing. In early days, Chinese art collectors almost only bought Chinese artists' works. But now they start to look at non-Chinese artists, a few even add some of their works to their collections. I still haven't seen anyone mainly collect non-Chinese artists' works. Maybe there are a few.

*Do you think buying famous artists' works (both Chinese and non-Chinese) in the international art market could contribute to China's cultural competitiveness?*

I believe that competitiveness comes from the recognized value of the country's original art works. Buying is a part of the process, which can raise the public's awareness of art. It contributes to the achievement of this goal, but this is not its original task. The astonishing prices of artworks in the auction houses make people realize that art can not only meet people's spiritual needs, but also, as a business, it has a price. As an investment object, it is important. In a more matured art market, people think it's normal for an artwork to sell at a high price. But in China, even among the elites, they would think it's a conspiracy if the artworks are this expensive.

*That's all my questions. Is there anything else would you like to talk about?*



There are two things that concern me. Firstly, the formation of a mass middle class may act as a significant participant in China's art future. Big collectors like Wang Wei are hard to reproduce. But lawyers, doctors or people working in the financial industry, who are more cultivated with a stable income, will be good participants. Also, the next generation of wealthy people, who studied abroad, are more familiar with contemporary art. They will become buyers. On the other hand, private investment in China is very active, maybe a little bit overactive. Rich people are looking for good investment project. Art gallery's participation can help to build a relatively healthy model, which can contribute to China's development.

*What do you think about the role that an art gallery plays in educating art collectors? or does it still depend on the whole society?*

I don't like to talk people into buying artworks. It depends on if you like it or not, and if you think it is worth the money. Everyone has their own judgments on an artwork, which I find is hard to change, even by experts. All I can do is to find a good artist and find an art collector who likes his or her works. A good artist must be ahead of his or her time, and buyers should also study and learn to catch up with them. An art gallery is like an explorer, who coordinates the artists and art collectors.

### **The Independent Artist: Ding Liu**

*Can you talk about your educational background?*

I was a little bit special. I was home schooled.

*Are your parents artists?*

No. But they wanted me to study art.

*When did you officially enter the art world?*

Around 1995 or 1996.

*What do you think about the recent development of China's art market?*

It was fast. Actually, after the cultural revolution, China has already had art market. It just didn't get noticed. After the 1980s, it started to be active. When you look through art magazines during that time, you would see they started to introduce art galleries in New York, Chelsea, even details about the international standards for frames. In the 1990s,

some of the Chinese artists had already started to emerge in the market. After 2000, due to the sudden economic turnabout, it was an outbreak period for China's art market until 2008. That's when people noticed the existence of art market.

*From your perspective. What do you think about the future development of China's art market?*

It's hard to tell. As long as the economy doesn't collapse, there will be a stable market. China is relatively special, where a lot of people have limited investment channels. There are definitely people who invest in art. There will be more and more people investing as long as the economy is stable.

*As an independent artist, what do you think about the roles art collecting can play?*

First of all, buying traditional art and contemporary art are different. There are families with collecting traditions and art collectors who just start. I will only talk about contemporary art. Collecting has been playing a role as a social tool for a very long time. For the new rich, through collecting, they can enter the so called upper class, the elites. It plays a significant role. Another reason is definitely investment. I believe that any kind of collecting, besides the passion for art, must involve certain degree of investment. Some people collect art for studying, for their own research. Most new art collectors, who doesn't have too much art related background, and collect out of passion for art, belong to this group. With globalization, a lot of art collectors enter the international art market. Global art collecting is also a discourse, being able to participate in this discourse is actually Chinese art collectors' imagination of globalization, an imagination of the personalized experience of globalization. Through art collecting, even art collectors from local places can be connected with the rest of the world. In addition, it is also a wealth competition, an extended wealth competition. For example, when rich people enter global art collecting, they will realize that wealth competition is more than buying a good car and a huge house. This has a lot of meaning, including the imagination of global culture and political power. It's hard to imagine that in China. Our education and dominant ideology limit our vision. More people participate in auctions, competing with other people, Chinese or non-Chinese, they can gain pride from winning the wealth competition. This is more about your personal feelings. I believe, with more people involved and the market more developed over time, Chinese art collectors will feel the cultural competition, or more precisely, a sense of cultural anxiety. They are still

relatively naive to think that building museums or participating in academic area will help them gain discourse power. I don't actually deal with art collectors. Of course, there are people buying my works, most of them are big collectors or museums from Europe or America. Some Chinese art collectors have started to buy my works as well. But I never meet them and never talk about this with them. Of course, an artist's work is part of the art collecting ecosystem. But they won't stop working because that nobody collects art.

*How do you think this is going to affect Chinese artists?*

Every behavior has an influence. Art collecting links certain parts of the ecosystem. For example, there are artists, curators, media, museums, and art collecting links them. Everyone has instinctive reactions. When artists communicate with art collecting, including with media and curators, they will come up with some judgments on the current art situation. This is an interaction. Art collectors have their own taste, so do artists. But to certain degree, they can build a mutual understanding, which cannot simply be described as resistance.

*Do you think Chinese art collectors prefer Chinese artists or China related artworks?*

Of course. It's like language. Although a lot of art collectors have started to collect European or American artworks, the focus is still on Chinese artworks. This can be called cultural identity.

*Do you think if Chinese art collectors collect as an attempt to construct China's own cultural identity and its recognition in the world?*

Although no-one claims that, I believe a lot of them have this ambition. But this should be looked at more carefully, to see if it is under a professional spirit, if it is based on the judgments of the whole global cultural structure, if it is a simple understanding of Eurocentrism or America centrism, if it is just out of nationalism. and if it contributes to cultural theories and the global discourse, or if it is just a way to dominant the discourse. I think most of Chinese art collectors still have nationalist feelings, or just a simple resistance, an instinctive resistance.

*Do you think their activities have an influence on Chinese artists' performance in the global art world?*

Yes. Capital can exert a great impact on the range of artistic activities, particularly with the involvement of bigger capitalists. After the economic crisis in 2008, a lot of museums faced financial problems, and desperately needed sponsors, including Chinese sponsors. Then you see Chinese artists' exhibitions in Guggenheim. Although it is still the museum's choice, without the involvement of capital, they may never have any connection with China. This may create a hallucination that a lot of artworks of low quality are exhibited in globally important institutions. This would mislead people, especially non-professionals and art lovers, who would believe that these artworks represent the most advanced and professional development of contemporary Chinese art.

**The Culture Group Manager: Cheng Tu**

*Can you please talk about yourself and your experience of art collecting in China?*

I entered this area because of my job, when I became the general manager of the Zendai Culture a couple of years ago. The Zendai Culture has a large-scale art foundation, as well as personalized art investment and collection services. It was during that period of time that I had contacts with a lot of art collectors and artists. I also either managed or participated in a lot of art investment and collecting procedures, which gave me a deeper understanding of China's contemporary art collecting.

*What do you think about the development of China's art market and the international art market?*

Compared with a couple of years ago, China's art market has obviously stayed in a wandering period. But overall, it is on the right track. The appearance of the wandering period is as a result of the overall environment's impact and the problem of value systems in the art market. In other words, people who started China's art market have made contributions but also should take responsibility for the problem. They should understand now that value systems in the art market is not like a game for the big players, or the game will be over soon. The law of the game must be subject to the morality and ethical standards in this area. China still hasn't had a big art collector in the real sense. For a big art collector, first of all, he or she collect out of their passion for art. For a fake art collector, investment is the priority. The real problem of China's contemporary art market lies in the art gallery, art academy, theoretical research, exhibition curation, artistic production, art galleries and auction houses. The wandering

period demonstrates that China's art market needs a reshuffle to recover. Western art collectors work at a much bigger scale and are more mature. They are more stable, and their practices are more sustainable than Chinese art collectors. This builds a solid ground for the Western art market.

*What are the patterns of Chinese art collectors' collecting activities?*

I think, so far, there are three patterns. Firstly, the traditional collecting pattern, which is collecting for personal interests. Secondly, the pursuit of the most expensive and most famous artworks. Thirdly, collecting as investment. This third type of art collectors want to collect outstanding artworks, while they also consider their appreciation. As for the speculators, I don't think they can be counted as art collectors.

*What are the motivations for Chinese art collectors?*

There are a lot of reasons. They may collect art out of love, to gain fame, to hoard them [artworks] as rare commodities, or even to show off their wealth. The reasons are similar between Chinese art collectors and their counterparts in the west. But unlike in China, where there are gaps between the cultural continuity, Western art collectors have a longer tradition in art collecting and are more rational and care more about personal feelings.

*How do you think these motivations are going to affect China's art market?*

They will definitely have an impact on China's art market. But if we say art collectors can directly influence the market, even dominate it, there is a problem. The real art collectors, who have a conscience, would never forcefully intervene in the market. They prove their tastes and values through their collections.

*Chinese art collectors have drawn great attention in the international art market with their active purchases. China's art market is the third biggest one in the world and was the biggest one in 2011.*

In the 1980s, Japan had rapid economic development and there was a lot of astonishing art buying in the international art market as well. Chinese art collectors are just repeating that phase. It is, of course, art collecting. But essentially, it is capital acquisition. Because they collect art for fame more than personal preference. Even though China's

is the third biggest art market, it still lacks world-class museums, art galleries, artists, as well as art schools. In short, we are still at the start-up stage.

*Do you think Chinese art collectors prefer Chinese artists or China related artworks?*

I think that more sophisticated art collectors prefer world-renowned modern artworks or world-renowned artists, and Chinese traditional artworks, which shows that they have a lower evaluation of China's contemporary art.

*Do you think Chinese art collectors have attempted to construct China's cultural identity and promote China's cultural competitiveness by buying Chinese antiques from overseas and Chinese artists' works?*

I don't think there are many of them, a few. This requires economic strength and a high degree of awareness. Most of the art collectors won't have that overall idea, which I don't think is wrong. It is respectable if they have that ambition. But they are still respectable if they collect Chinese artworks out of love.

*Do you think their activities can actually affect Chinese artists' performance in the international art market?*

If you look at the international art market, they have little impact. The rules in the international art market are not dominated by Chinese art collectors. Besides, it has a more mature system, which cannot be changed at will. Capital has overwhelming power, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it has the decisive power. China is still a peripheral world, even though more and more people notice it.

*What are the obstacles for the future development of China's art collecting?*

Being shortsighted. The intervention driven by profits. The arrogance, thinking that money can change everything. Learn to respect the rules of art, particularly the rules of value production. More passion for art, and less talk about money.

### **The Art Institute Manager: Tuanzhang Hou**

*Can you talk about your related educational background?*

I have no art related educational background.

*And you majored in?*

I love our traditional culture. My major has an abundant relation with traditional culture. I studied medicine, finance and law. I was particularly interested in China's traditional medicine, which is actually the application and development of our traditional culture in the medical area, so is ink painting and calligraphy. They are connected. I worked in finance for about four years, which was my principal work.

*I heard that traditional Chinese medicines are in an awkward position. They are not accepted as a science in the West.*

Actually, traditional Chinese medicine, ink painting and calligraphy, they all reflect our traditional culture and ways of thinking. We think abstractly and inductively, and they think analytically and deductively. This is the essential difference.

*Jinart Institute involves?*

From an economical perspective, artworks lack liquidity, which requires financial support. That's why I majored in finance and now am working in the art industry. If we look at it as an industry, its biggest problem is the art trade. That's why we are working on the industry chain, which involves art galleries, auctions, e-commerce and art foundation. They all focus on fixing the trade problem. We think of artworks as a business and an industry. I am different from other art organization managers. They may prefer to talk about art. I tend to focus on applying new technologies and new ways of helping our institute enter this industry. For example, an unquoted share may worth one dollar, but once it is listed, it can worth a hundred dollars or even higher. That's what financial liquidity could bring us. It was estimated that China's art industry could be worth 40 trillion, though this has not been proved. But if we could financially liquidize them, this could be an astronomical figure. The financial way is going to benefit China's art industry, tax and the influence of Chinese artworks on a global scale greatly.

*What roles do you think the Jinart Institute can play in China's art collecting activities?*

We are a purely commercial space. It is rare to see such a big art gallery in downtown anywhere in the world. Why? Because we want to have influence and make traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy influential. Shanghai is an international city, and we are located at the heart of it. Again, from a commercial perspective, we see artworks as commodities. When a commodity has a good reputation, the cost for financially liquidize it is the lowest. When you really see it as an industry, reputation and brand are of great

significance. We are not only building the Jinart, but also the whole influence of Chinese painting and calligraphy.

*I saw that most of your artists were from Shanghai or areas around it. How did you position your institute?*

First of all, it is out of love for this style. Secondly, it is because of the value of Hai Pai (the group of artists from Shanghai or areas around it). This is a very big artists' group, which hasn't really been valued by the market yet. It is also very representative, which can exert a great influence on Chinese ink painting and calligraphy. Personally, I prefer Hai Pai art the most as well, maybe because I see them a lot and have a better understanding of them. From the market perspective, we are a commercial institute in Shanghai. It is a reasonable choice. But we are definitely not restricted to Hai Pai, which is only a start. We are very willing to promote other good things.

*Is there an international plan?*

Yes. According to our plan, we will expand our art gallery to the most important art trade spots in the world. We have already been discussing about the locations.

*What patterns do you think Chinese art collectors have? Are you customers mostly Chinese?*

Yes,

*Do they have any preferences?*

It actually depends on their past experiences and tastes. Real art collectors must have a systematic collection. They do research more than just own the artworks. There is a very huge group of art collectors in China. Everyone has their own preferences. But they share one thing in common, they all prefer local masters. Maybe it's out of love for local art. Even local art institutions share this characteristic. Shanghai has Liu Yiqian. He has a very broad vision and distinct characteristics. He loves collecting the top artworks, no matter if they come from China or the West.

*Do you think auction houses or art galleries have a great influence on collectors' purchase decisions?*



Usually, they have a couple of ways to choose an artwork. Firstly, they have their own consultant team or special consultant institution, which is like the Jinart. We provide our expertise for a lot of big art collectors and collecting institutions. Secondly, the art collectors themselves are experts, who are very knowledgeable about this area. I respect them the most. They make contributions to the continuity of artworks and the whole art collecting field, that can discover values and communicate values. The third kind of art collectors study while collecting. Sometimes, for certain kinds of art, it is the art collectors who are the experts. We have our own professional background, which we can use to better serve art collectors and other groups.

*What are the motivations behind their collecting activities?*

The first is love. They like art and really enjoy collecting artworks, through which they learn and understand new things. The more they learn, the more they love art. They are motivated by their interests in art. I believe that every collector shares this. The second is research interests, which is like you or some research institutions. They discover art's cultural and historical values. For people belonging to this type, they may sell the artworks after they finished their research. I have met a couple. They are not interested in the object, but in the information it carries. The third is interested in investment, which I think is the majority. Art itself has historical value, which distinguishes it from other assets. It is very good for asset allocation. Good artworks, in the long term, always increase in value. Hence, it is a very good investment object for a lot of investors who know art.

*Do you think Chinese art collectors also have the ambition to promote Chinese art?*

Yes. I have seen some. There was an art collector from Xia Men, but I leave his or her name out. There were Chinese antiques being auctioned in the Western market. In order to stop that, he or she raised the price to a very high level on purpose and then bought it. This was out of love and protection of Chinese antiques. There was also a bronze ware discovered in Hu Nan, which was very precious. A bunch of art collectors from Hu Nan chipped in and bought it together. Take the Jinart as an example, we provide free events and exhibition. And we also host art salon and free calligraphy and ink painting workshops. There are also Western visitors. It also provides an opportunity for them to know our culture. On the one hand, we are a commercial institution. On the other hand, we also help with cultural promotion.

*Do you think institutions like Jinart and Chinese collectors can have an influence on Chinese artists' performance in the global art world?*

Zhang Daqian's artworks reached the top price in the international art market for a couple of years in a row. Prices like this directly push Chinese artists to the top in the international art market. This makes a significant contribution to their performance. Even though most of the works were sold to Chinese art collectors, it still increased Chinese artworks' recognition in the international market. I think this was, on the one hand, decided by China's economy. On the other hand, China's artworks are no worse than Western artworks. In the auction market, the more high-end the artworks, the more attention they draw. We also have featured artworks in every auction. We are not going into the top artworks trade. This is not usual for an art gallery. We have a lot of top artworks as well, but they are just for our own collections.

*I have finished my questions. Is there anything else you would like to talk about?*

I think China's art market has great potential. In Western countries, the culture industry takes up 20% of the GDP, while in China it's only 6%. China has divided the culture industry into nine categories, including art. This can contribute to our economic development as well as our cultural promotion, which definitely can help influence traditional Chinese art in a global scale. There is a lot of potential in this industry, like derivatives. In the Western market, every dollar from the auctioned artworks can generate three dollars' worth of derivatives. We are still far behind. From an industrial perspective, we still haven't built a popular art market. We have a lot of high technologies to promote art, like blockchain. Big institutions like us already started to look at these technologies and their potential.

### **The Professor and Artist: Hongnian Chen**

*How do you think about your relations with art collecting?*

I barely have contacts in this area. Of course, I have some friends who collect art, so I know about it more or less.

*Do you know some of the art collectors?*

It may sound weird. First of all, I don't like keeping things. I have given away Qi Gong's (a famous traditional Chinese artist, whose works can be sold at 2 million RMB per

square foot) work to someone. That's why I am not very interested in art collecting. I am still interested in it a little bit, but this is how deep I can get involved.

*How do you think about the development of China's art market in the last couple of years?*

Art market or art collecting?

*Art collecting*

It has already become a stage. The auction houses know they have fake things, but they want to make money. They make themselves look like the fairest, and the auction price sets the standard for the artwork. But it is actually not. I have been to some auctions, where they sold my paintings. They hired people there to bid my works at a very high prices so that no one can outbid them, and then they pretended that these works were sold and kept the paintings.

*Raise the price on purpose*

Yes, and then they just kept the paintings. There is another thing. They sometimes claim a fake painting as real. Once they auctioned works that they claimed were my grandfather's paintings, which he would never painted. The auction houses have already ruined their reputation. Ordinary people have started to realize that as well. How is it possible that Fan Zeng's paintings are being sold at over 30 million RMB? It is already beyond the normal scope. No matter how good the painting is, as long as it is not an antique, the price can't be this high. He is still a living artist, whose works can't be this expensive. Also, the return of the two bronze animal heads [by France] is a political trade, which involves more than money and the object itself. It is no longer about art. It is about showing our attitude towards our traditional culture under the name of China, which is supported by the government. I find it doubtful to use this to evaluate an artwork. For example, a rich person liked my painting and asked me if he can buy one. I said I want to hear his offer. He said how about 10,000 RMB. I said deal. He was surprised that I agreed immediately. I told him that this painting only cost me two RMB and I had fun when I painted it. I made a fortune. Nowadays, money has become the standard for success, in which auction houses play a significant role. Still take Fan Zeng as an example. He took fifty paintings to Hong Kong and sold them all at very high prices. Actually, he bribed the first buyer, who has a reputation for sharp eyes. And then

everyone just follows. He made a good fortune, which doesn't necessarily mean that his last painting is better than previous ones. This is not about art again.

*Does the art market still lack evaluation regulations and relevant laws?*

There was a general manager from an auction house, who wanted his child to be admitted to our university. So, he proposed to help me with auctioning my paintings. And then he let his people bid them all at a high price. He didn't need to pay the commission fee, and the works were not sold to anyone. In the end, he took my paintings as well.

*And the paintings?*

They are missing. The boss of this auction house can never compete with that of Guardian or Sotheby's.

*Do you think Chinese art collectors' activities have an influence on Chinese artists? Like they all buy the same style of artworks.*

As an artist myself, I don't think so. Only I myself know if my works are good or not. Their promotion of my works is actually the promotion of themselves. Do you know the most famous Chinese art critics? Like Li Xianting?

Yes.

I am a friend of his. Let's say there is an artist who is popular in the international market. When he or she comes back to China, he or she is popular as well. The art critic has to put in some good words. There is no good in talking badly about this artist. But there are a lot of art critics abroad, who build their reputation for criticizing. A great critic always criticizes. In China, it is on contrary. All the published criticisms are good words. And when some artists are about to fall, everyone gives them a push. In China, everything is about money. You can say my works are bad. But when you take them out in the market with promotion, they are no longer art. So you can't evaluate our cultural renaissance and development with market success. How is this going to affect artist? They cannot be confused by the market, or they will mess up and stop growing. I have a friend, who told me that he would never make bad paintings as well as good paintings. Once he was required to paint 40 paintings. He painted a woman in Cheongsam, and then another woman with different posture in another painting. He finished forty paintings within one night and made 400,000 RMB.

*Do you think Chinese art collectors prefer Chinese artists or China related artworks?*

Some Chinese art collectors only collect traditional Chinese painting, and some of them only collect certain artists in this area. Some art collectors like art, but they may not have that much knowledge. So, they won't limit their collection to one specific area. They follow their interests and feelings. The former kind may not necessarily really love art. They have their purposes. Talking about art collecting, there are three types - for specific interests, for general interests and for money.

*And for money?*

Most of them

*When I was preparing my research, I wanted to know if Chinese art collectors' activities can promote traditional Chinese painting and let more people know about it, thereby accepting traditional Chinese art theories and tastes.*

When you study art collecting or auction houses, you may realize that they all just want money. Everything is just a delusion. But I am not saying that there is no impact. You just need to see the money side. Some people collect for rarity, not because that they understand the art. Your paper can be divided into the collecting market, auction market and market built by collectors instead of auction houses. They will affect the influence and development of Chinese art overseas. But how is it connected with painting or art? It is no longer directly connected with the artist's development.

*Do you think Chinese art collectors have the ambition to promote Chinese art and its competitiveness?*

People who purely have this ambition are very rare in any country. Most people are motivated by money and fame, although this is just a matter of extent. For example, an art dealer who promotes a Chinese artist, can promote Chinese art. But on the other hand, he or she also gains reputation as well. I have seen an art collector who collects stone seals, very rare. When his collection reached certain size, he built his reputation in this area, while he promoted China's seal cutting art. Also, if you buy from him, he makes a lot of money. It's just about which is the focus. Nowadays, too many people just look at money.

*How do you think this is going to affect the future development of China's art market?*

Every coin has two sides. They all want to make money. But when you sold, for example, four master pieces from the Ming Dynasty, it is also a promotion of Chinese art from that time. Meanwhile, both the auction house and the collector make profits. Of course, if you want to collect art, you need to be very wealthy, or you are unable to keep them. But this is how rich people make money. Auction houses not only sell but also buy artworks. Money is needed to acquire good works. Sometimes, you will find out that an auction house is supported by the government.

*There was a guy who donated thousands of artworks to Tsinghua University. And Tsinghua University is going to build a gallery to accommodate his donation and name it after him.*

Yes. This is your achievement. Families with good collections must be rich at least in the past and understand art. If you are very poor, or don't know this area, you would already have sold them. People who collect antiques are called insects. They know very well about this area and go to remote areas to discover ignored artworks.

### **The Professor and Artist: Yi Shu**

*Can you talk about your art-related educational background?*

My father was an artist. I studied oil painting in my undergraduate degree and then learned print making in my graduate degree. I studied design for my doctoral degree. I am in this art environment for a very long time.

*When did you start your career as a curator?*

It was 2008 when my doctoral classmates and I from Tsinghua University started Tian Gong Kai Wu academic group. In Tsinghua history, we had a school director called Pang Xunqin, who started a society. My dad is the founder of Frontier School in the North-West of China. They are both my role models and inspired me to start this academic group. However, non-profit events are hard to continue, and I have to assume all the responsibilities. A lot of curators, they have very good ideas, and then invite artists. But I have to do it all by myself, including marketing, managing and operating. As a non-profit organization, we have to keep doing it even without money. Every coin has two sides. A lot of people focus on academic research and are very professional. But they keep a distance from market and commercial operations. Academic research is one of our

areas, but I am mostly interested in the operation itself. It has more vitality and can last much longer. Tian Gong Kai Wu has already built a certain reputation. More and more people know about us now.

*What do you think about the development of China's public art?*

China is very actively promoting public art now, which benefits every citizen and provides education. With support from the government, you can organize the top exhibitions, with a lot of experts. It is hard for a private organization to do that. Like Riverside Art Gallery, which organized a Picasso exhibition, that cost them like ten million RMB.

*What do you think about the development of private collecting? A lot of art collectors start their own private museums. What do you think about that?*

The real estate and stock market are too risky now. Although art still contains a certain degree of risk, it basically increases in value as long as you buy the right ones. So, collecting attracts people who need to allocate their assets. In addition, it also helps with building your hobby. Besides appreciation, there is a gift market in China. When you reach certain degree of wealth, you will naturally start collecting art. When you spend million dollars on a house, you want some artworks from masters' in it.

*What are the motivations behind their art collecting activities?*

One is interest. This is cultural continuity. Art collectors prefer Chinese ink painting the most, then oil painting, then print and then sculpture. Chinese collectors usually don't have the kind of big house for sculptures. Collecting is human nature. Some people like collecting art. They enjoy appreciating artwork. When they collect a certain number of artworks, they may start their own art galleries, art centers and museums.

*On the one hand, they give back to the society. On the other hand, they have a place for their collections. Do you think they prefer Chinese artists or China related artworks?*

It's not always like this. First of all, they understand Chinese art more. But when they enter the mainstream in society and in the world, they need some international symbols. They will start to collect artworks from non-Chinese artists. I have seen some Chinese people collecting Western top artworks. Also, some may prefer Western paintings. Their tastes are very Westernized.

*Are there a lot of art collectors like that?*

Quite a few. Of course, they are fewer than art collectors who prefer traditional Chinese art. Most of them have some education and understand different cultures. A businessman from a remote area can understand traditional Chinese art. But if you show them an oil painting or abstract art, they can't understand these works. That's why traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy have a much bigger market. Of course, both areas have very sophisticated collectors. But in general, people who collect Western art need some overseas educational background or their own thinking and taste to understand it.

*How do you think their activities influence China's art world, like art galleries and curators?*

Not so much. Art galleries have their art collectors. They need to know what the art collectors like, what they like, and then they look for the artists that can match.

*Do you think Chinese art collectors have the ambition to promote Chinese art and construct China's cultural identity?*

It is part of it. But for businessmen, profits are the priority. Secondly, this provides a reason for Chinese art collectors to move their money among different countries. They transfer their money by buying something abroad, and then sell it to invest in that country.

*Do you think they have an influence on Chinese artists' performance in the global art world?*

Contemporary Chinese artists, like Zhang Daqian, whose works can be circulated outside China.

*How do you help to promote them outside China?*

This is a representative cultural symbol. He was picked, for capital appreciation, not entirely for political or cultural reasons. An artist is like movie stars or sport stars. I pick these artists, who I think are very representative and talented. Their works may not be worth much now, but when they reach a certain height, they are worth millions. I see this potential in this artist, and then help him or her with building a reputation through



marketing and promotion. Of course, this artist must be very talented. After your promotion, his or her works get a wide acceptance and can be sold at millions of dollars. The process of adding value is finished. The original art gallery makes a fortune.

*So, in general it's for investment?*

Yes. The economic basis determines the superstructure. You can't talk about culture without social rationality. It is very complicated. You have this ambition, but when you really buy it, you will realize they just want your money.

*A lot of big collectors, they have this artist' works. Then the others would follow them, thinking these works must be worthy. Then the big collectors make money.*

Exactly. You must understand that this world is nothing. Things that look meaningful are actually meaningless. Things that look valuable are actually valueless. If an artwork is worthy or not, it's all you own recognition. Why is this painting this expensive? He or she just thinks it is worth this much. Some people may think it is worthless.

*I interviewed an art collector. He said he bought a lot of houses at the beginning, and then wanted to buy something else. He was interested in art, which he can enjoy while it adds value.*

An artwork doesn't require as much paperwork as a house. And it also increases in value. In addition, it makes you look well-educated. Art is easy to show off, easy to trade and easy to stock. Like my dad, a real estate agent traded a house with his painting. It's hard for him to sell houses and the profit was not that high. But paintings are good gifts, which can help him to do more business. This is a grey zone. Painting still looks tasteful and mild, which is better than money as a gift. It is easier for art to be the middleman in social life. Sometimes people need this cultural environment, like an exhibition, a concert, to know each other. Art is necessary for humans. It's just that different people use it for different purposes. This is a time that the good and bad are intermingled. But as time passed by, the good works and talented artists will be left.

*Gold will always shine*

From a historical perspective, true things remain. A lot of hot artists were washed out of the history. Their works, in terms of quality and contributions to the art history, are not that significant. Like Fan Zeng, his works have already been turned into mass

production, which may harm the purity of his art. When you look at art history, no matter if it is in the West or in China, you will see that artists with great thought and human emotion will be given fair judgments. But not a lot of people can wait, they just want to make money.

*A lot of artists are like businessmen now.*

They have to. Actually, a lot of masters who earn a comfortable life, they have the business sense. If you keep a distance from it, you can't understand life, nature and the universe.

*I have finished my questions. Do you have anything else you would like to talk about?*

I think collecting is about luck. An artist needs to find his or her patron, who may not necessarily be a billionaire but must love his or her works.

*As long as they like his or her works, they will continue to support him or her.*

It all depends on talent, or the artwork has no power. Hard work needs talent to bring out the best in each other.

*Do you have any recommendation for my interview?*

There is a bunch of them.

How many people have you interviewed so far?

*Five, including you.*

Are they from China or?

*They are all from China. One art gallery owner, one art collector, and two artists.*

Are they doing ink painting or oil painting?

*One is ink painting and one is oil painting.*

May I ask their names?

*One is also from Communication University of China, and the other one is call Liu Ding.*

Where is Liu Ding?

*In Beijing. He opened his own studio called Pink Studio. He is mostly active outside China. Recently he had an exhibition in Tate.*

Who is the art gallery owner?

*He opened Start Gallery.*

In 798?

*He was there before but then he moved to Qi Ke Shu, a creative industry area.*

And who is the art collector?

*Cheng Shoutai.*

Which area does he collect?

*First traditional ink painting and calligraphy, and now contemporary Chinese art.*

Of course, he focuses on ink painting and calligraphy.

*But I think he will expand his collection range.*

He makes it too complicated. It requires him mastering art related knowledge, unless he has consultant. It's like buying stock. You need to be familiar with them. If you want to collect, you have to be very familiar with the history and the achievements of artists. Some people can only collect certain styles or certain parts, or it's too risky.

### **The Lecturer and Artist: Qian Qiao**

*Can you tell me how you entered the Sculpture area?*

It's hard to define if I am a sculptor or a painter or an art theorist. I was an apprentice at a ceramic factory, which involves some sculptures. Then I realized that sculpture is more three dimensional, which is more powerful than painting.

*Is this what you want to do since you were a kid?*

I wanted to be an artist, no specific area. When I was an undergraduate, I learnws pretty much every style. But I really started sculpture when I was a graduate student.

*Do you have contacts with art collectors?*

A lot of them. I was an artist who began collecting very early, so I know a lot of art collectors.

*How you think about the development of China's art market during the past decade?*

*Can you give me some examples?*

I am very optimistic about it. However, there are still problems. The past decade was the height of it and attracted a large number of investment institutions. A lot of art collectors switched from traditional art collecting to contemporary art collecting, which pushed the development of art and the market, and gave artists hope. Of course, it also attracted some speculators, who harmed art and confounded the value of art, particularly to the outsides of art world. The public became confused and did not understand why this

piece of artwork can be this expensive. The development of China's art market proves that China's economy has reached certain height and entered spiritual consumption. It is a market with huge potential.

*From your observation, what are the motivations behind art collectors' activities?*

Most of them entered art collecting for profit. This is not wrong. But a lot of them pursued money under the name of promoting Chinese art. This would generate the bias of value judgments. Some people may raise the price of an artwork on purpose, while others think this price proves its quality. It is more respectable when you just say that you enter art market just for profits.

*How do you think this active art collecting can affect Chinese artists and China's art market?*

Which side?

*The performance of artists.*

Everyone wants to catch up with the best. When a piece of artwork or certain styles reach a high price and became popular, this will affect a lot of artists' creative directions. After all, everyone seeks profit. They would think that it's an easy way to get market recognition.

*Do you think artist have an influence on art collecting?*

There is a trend, which has an impact on following artists. This will affect the next market.

*Do you think Chinese art collectors have the ambition to promote Chinese art, construct China's cultural identity and enhance the influence of Chinese art in the world?*

I don't think they have this ambition, but they will say they have. Of course, they need to really invest in art, to buy and collect some artworks, which objectively help with the promotion of Chinese art.

*Do they prefer Chinese artists or China related artworks?*

Yes. There are operations behind all the astonishing prices we've ever seen. If they want someone take over an artwork, it must be easy to be understood. If it is a non-Chinese artist's work, it will be harder for art collectors to judge its quality. It would be much

easier to judge a work from Chinese artist. That's why a lot of Western masters' works sell at a lower price than Chinese artists'. It is not a matter of artistic value.

*Do you think this could have an impact on Chinese artists' future performance in the global world?*

It will promote their status. After all, most of the audience cannot clearly understand and judge an artwork's artistic value. Price is the only way. There are a couple of Chinese artists whose works were sold at an astonishing price. They are known by a lot of people and talked about by a lot of people. This is positive for Chinese artists.

*So, do you think the rise of prices could help Chinese artworks be recognized worldwide?*

Yes. When a piece of artwork reaches a certain price, everyone pays attention. This is through our economic power to promote our artists. Talking about value, it is still that same painting, no matter how expensive it is now. This will happen in India in a couple of years. With its rapid economic development, artworks from Indian artists can reach ten million dollars soon. They will be invited to China and anywhere else for exhibitions and events. Their status would be promoted because of their economic strength.

*It's time to buy their works.*

It's hard to predict. You don't know whose works will be the focus of speculation. If you follow the rules of the art world, it will be risky. For the speculators, they collect this artist's works, and then schedule to promote him or her to raise the price. Then they make profits. This sends a confusing signal. But from the perspective of an agent and a businessman, this is perfectly justified.

*What are the obstacles in the future development of China's art market and art collecting?*

Art institutions should focus more on ordinary families, which would be the biggest market. The famous artists, they have already been operated in the market. It would be much harder for you to make profits from them. But if you have an artist who sell at an ordinary price to ordinary families, with a large amount of quantity, you would make a lot of money as well. But now it seems that everyone just looks at the most famous ones.

*Why do you think that China still has not formed this middle-class, or mass market?*

Now, we have already reached this stage. In the past decades, people who get rich first created the booming in art market. But the majority still lack the spare money. Now, more and more people can afford an original work from an artist that prices between 5,000 and 50,000 RMB.