ART NEGOTIATIONS:
CHINESE INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITIONS
IN THE 1930S

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of the Ohio State University

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The Ohio State University
2006

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ABSTRACT

The plethora of government sponsored Chinese international art exhibitions in the late 1920s and early 1930s in the Europe epitomizes some of the first major attempts by the Chinese during this time to speak for themselves and their country in the West. Two of the most successful and widely publicized exhibitions of the 1930s were the Chinesische Malerei der Gegenwart (Chinese Contemporary Art) exhibition in Berlin from January 20, 1934 to March 4, 1934, and the International Exhibition of Chinese Art held in London from November 27, 1935, to March 7, 1936. These early exhibitions of Chinese art abroad, in part, demonstrate how the China's and Europe's modernities intersected in the early 20th century.

This study will examine how traditional Chinese art was used in the development of not only China's modernity, but also that of Europe. Section One describes the significance of examining these exhibitions. Section Two explores the state of traditional art in China and how it was employed in China's strives toward modernity. Section Three focuses on the intellectual climate in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, and explores China's role in the formation of the West's modern cosmopolitan worldview between World War I and World War II. Section Four further investigates Europe's social and historical fascination with China. Section Five provides a historic overview
of Chinese international exhibitions in Europe. Sections Six and Seven examines the Berlin exhibition and London exhibition, respectively, in terms of the social and historical contexts surrounding the shows, the motivations of the exhibitions' sponsors and organizers, the choices of art works displayed, and the public's reaction to these exhibitions. Section Eight returns to China to examine the Chinese response to these two exhibitions and how the focus on traditional art in these exhibitions abroad differed from that of the art exhibitions held domestically. The concluding section outlines this study's findings.

In sum, post-World War I Europe sought the antithesis of their bankrupt modernity and imagined it in the traditional arts of the exotic, intransigent East. As a result, Chinese traditional arts were elevated in prestige, but this rise was premised more on a philosophical level than on an artistic level, as can be perceived from the European public's and art critics' writings on the art in the Berlin and London exhibitions. The Chinese organizers of these two exhibitions also contributed to this philosophical viewing of Chinese art, but with the different intention of showing Chinese art and culture as resilient and continuous, rather than romantic and static.
To my parents

iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my adviser and mentor, Judy F. Andrews, for allowing me to come to the Ohio State University to study Chinese art history with her and for supporting my intellectual and professional pursuits. Her excellent, thorough scholarship and encyclopedic understanding of Chinese art and culture have been truly inspirational. I also must thank Kirk A. Deaton, my second reader. Though his background is not in modern Chinese art, but in modern Chinese literature, his extensive knowledge of related issues and resources have been immensely helpful in broadening the scope of my study.

There are many other extraordinary people I have had the pleasure and privilege to meet at the Ohio State University who have contributed to my graduate studies. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to study with professors John C. Huntington, Cynthia J. Brokaw, and Christopher A. Reed. Their different, but all equally valid, approaches to the study of China have influenced my perception of the country, its arts, and its people. The fine arts librarian, Susan Wyngaard, was extremely helpful in introducing to me countless resources and tools for my research. Her expertise and enthusiasm will be, of course, sorely missed when she retires this summer. I also would like to thank my fellow classmates Ying Chua, Eliza Ho, Katie Kilroy, Michael Ku, Christina Burke Mathison, Yang Wang, Meilan Yeung, and Yanfei Zhu for their friendship and encouragement.
am especially indebted to Tianshu Zhu, whose insightful advice and steadfast willingness to help have been remarkable and priceless.

Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and roommates, Jinjin Zhang, Wenlan Chen, Xiangyu Yang, Xiaofen Zhong, Gang Bai, and Jing Liu, who have assisted me in numerous ways, from helping me with my Chinese to providing me rides to the airport. Thank you also to Jingyi Shao, for always being there to offer a sympathetic ear and a respite from the hectic student life. And last but not least, thank you to my family, who were a little dubious in my choice of fields at first, but never doubted that I would succeed.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................ii
Dedication .....................................................................................................iv
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................v
Vita ...............................................................................................................vii
List of illustrations .....................................................................................ix

Sections:

1. Introduction ..............................................................................................1
2. China's modern heritage ........................................................................12
3. European internationalism: intellectual culture between the wars ........26
4. The development of sinology and Chinese art history ..........................30
5. The development of international Chinese art exhibitions .................36
6. 1934 Berlin exhibition: people, institution, and motives ....................46
7. 1935-6 London exhibition: people, institution, and motives ...............62
8. Exhibitions' affect on China ...................................................................83
9. Conclusion ...............................................................................................91

Bibliography ...............................................................................................95
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Catalogue cover of *Ausstellung Chinesischer Maler der Zeit*, Frankfurter Kunstverein, March–April 1931 ................................................................. 3

2. Catalogue cover of *Mostra di Pintura Cinese*, Palazzo Reale, Milano, 1933-1934 ......................................................................................... 4


5. Catalogue cover of *Chinese Contemporary Painting*, Prussian Academy of the Arts in Berlin, January 20–March 4, 1934 ........................................ 9

6. Catalogue cover of *Exposition Chinoise d'Art Ancien et Moderne*, Palais du Rhin, Strasbourg, 1924 ................................................................. 38

7. Portrait of Liu Haisu in his 30s ............................................................... 43


12. Sir Percival David and a visiting expert examining ancient bronzes sent from China ................................................................. 63

13. Portrait of F.T. Cheng ........................................................................... 71

14. F.T. Cheng, George Eumorfopoulos, and Leigh Ashton experimenting with an
arrangement of small ceramic objects for the London exhibition

15. *Eastern Miscellany (Dongfang Zazhi)*, May 1, 1934

16. *The Young Companion (Liang You)*, 1935

17. *The Young Companion (Liang You)*, 1936
SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

The explosion of Chinese contemporary art and its grappling with the compelling issue of modernity and globalization has attracted immense attention in the international art world over the last few years. In her essay, "Contemporary Chinese Art vs. the West," in the exhibition catalogue of the traveling exhibition *On the Edge: Contemporary Chinese Artists Encounter the West,* art historian Britta Erickson details how contemporary Chinese artists have been dealing with the influx of Western ideas and art ever since the late 1970s. She also describes the governmental disposition towards the international art world and its trends as indifferent and dated. To show the depth of the government’s ignorance of cosmopolitan culture, Erickson points out that, when the Chinese government was invited in 1980 and 1982 to participate in the prestigious international Venice Biennale, it simply sent embroideries and papercuts. This general illustration of the unsophisticated cultural state of the 1970s and early 1980s China and

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1 *On the Edge* exhibition showed from January 26, 2005 to May 1, 2005 in the Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University, and then was on display in the Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, from February 13 to June 3, 2006, and the Indianapolis Museum of Art from July 2 to September 24, 2006.

its artists portrays the country and its people as isolated, insular entities that were dormant and alienated from the rest of the world from the beginning of modern times until the late twentieth century.

It can, hence, be easy to overlook the fact that the Chinese government during the early twentieth century actually vigorously promoted Chinese art and culture at the international level via art exhibitions. From 1933 to 35 alone, there occurred at least seventeen exhibitions of twentieth century Chinese traditional paintings in fourteen European cities that spanned eight different countries (figures 1-3).\(^3\) In some instances, contemporary works were displayed along with ink paintings from the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties.\(^4\) These early exhibitions, organized under the auspices of the Chinese government, reveals how the project of Chinese modernity interchanged and affected the project of Western modernity. The noticeable growth of Chinese public art exhibitions during the late 1920s and the first half of the 1930s propelled artistic and cultural debates into the foreground of public thought.\(^5\) Therefore, the motivations and mediated displays of the exhibitions clearly indicate some of the pertinent cultural issues being grappled with in Chinese intellectual circles at the time, such as the appropriate placement of traditional painting and antiquity in the modernization of China.


\(^4\) Ibid.

Figure 1. Catalogue cover of Ausstellung Chinesischer Maler der Jetztzeit, Frankfurter Kunstverein, March–April 1931
Figure 2. Catalogue cover of *Mostra di Pittura Cinese*, Palazzo Reale, Milano, 1933-1934
Figure 3. Catalogue cover of *Moderne Chineesche Schilderkunst*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and Gemeente-Museum, Den Haag, 1934
Surprisingly, there has not been much serious study of the significance of the first Chinese-organized art exhibitions in the West until recently with Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker's comprehensive article "Shanghai Modern" that appeared in *Shanghai Modern* (2004). Some scholars, such as Craig Clunas and Shelagh Vainker, previously have also contributed informative articles about the Chinese international exhibitions in the West during the 1920s and 1930s. They have systematically studied one or several of the exhibitions just in the historic context of China, though, rather than in the larger scope of international exchange and historiography as this paper will attempt to accomplish. In the current postmodern, post-Saidian state of the art historical field, where generic categories such as "Asian Art" are being interrogated and reformulated, a study of the exhibition activities that significantly shaped the initial concept of China and Chinese art in the West is crucial. This paper does not, of course, claim to be exhaustive, but it will hopefully contribute to new avenues for dialogue and future scholarship on international and cultural relations.

The plethora of Chinese international art exhibitions in the late 1920s and early 1930s in the West illustrates that the newly re-established Nationalist government, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), and the artists at that time contributed to

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6 There have been insightful studies of China's participation in modern world expositions and also of prominent early twentieth century art collectors of Chinese art, such as Ernest Fenollosa. See Susan R. Fernsebner's dissertation, "Material Modernities: China's Participation in World Fairs and Expositions, 1876-1955" (2002), Constance Chen's dissertation, "From Passion to Discipline: East Asian Art and the Culture of Modernity in the United States, 1876-1945" (2000), and William I. Cohen's *East Asian Art and American Culture: A Study in International Relations* (1992). Additionally, there have been scholarly studies focused on the exchange of art exhibitions between Japan and China that also were happening in the early twentieth century, such as Aida Yuen's dissertation, "Inventing Eastern Art in Japan and China, ca. 1890s to ca. 1930s."

the fervent development of a global modern culture that defined intellectual life in Europe in the years intervening between World War I and World War II. These exhibitions epitomize some of the first major attempts by the Chinese during this time to speak for themselves and their country in the West. Thus, this problematizes the notion many scholars have held that early twentieth century China was a powerless victim of cultural imperialism.\(^8\) Like other non-Western cultures, China's modern culture has, in general, been treated as simply a passive receiver of an already-formed Euro-American modern consciousness. However, Chinese art and culture, as demonstrated by the Chinese international exhibitions, was in fact a crucial factor in the formation of the West's modern worldview in the early twentieth century.\(^9\) After the turning point of World War I in Western modernity, East Asia began to be perceived as the wellspring for an alternate modernity. Post-World War I Europe desired the antithesis of their bankrupt modernity and imagined it in the exotic, intransigent East. How the West chose to digest Chinese culture will be explored through these exhibitions.

Two of the most successful and widely publicized exhibitions of the 1930s were the *Chinesische Malerei der Gegenwart* (*Chinese Contemporary Art*) exhibition in Berlin from January 20, 1934 to March 4, 1934, and the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* held in London from November 27, 1935, to March 7, 1936 (figures 4 and 5). These early exhibitions of Chinese art abroad, in part, demonstrate the intense nationalism and

\(^8\) See studies by Wang Shu-huai and Huang Fu-Ch'ing.

CATALOGUE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF
CHINESE ART
1935-6

Patrons
THEIR MAJESTIES THE KING AND QUEEN
THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHINESE REPUBLIC

First Edition

ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS
LONDON

Figure 4. Catalogue cover of International Exhibition of Chinese Art, Burlington Galleries, London, November 27, 1935-March 7, 1936
Figure 5. Catalogue cover of *Chinese Contemporary Painting*, Prussian Academy of the Arts in Berlin, January 20 - March 4, 1934
conservatism that pervaded China in the 1930s. In effect, key Chinese cultural officials packaged and commodified China's cultural heritage by presenting it as material to be reclaimed, possessed, and defended, as is literally the case in the international art exhibitions. The artworks in the Berlin and London exhibitions, which were all antiquities and traditional ink paintings, were objects that served not only to empower the country and its people, but also to allow them to lay claim to a venerable, pristine past from which their modernity can emerge. However, the traditional artworks that they chose to showcase in the West compared to those selected for art exhibitions in China, such as the National Art Exhibition that showed a mix of Western style oil paintings and traditional ink paintings, suggest that the Chinese artists and cultural authorities were consciously negotiating China's modern artistic and cultural representation.19

Furthermore, the Berlin and London exhibitions impacted the project of modernity in post-World War I Western Europe that was in the process of re-evaluating the demise of its own modernity. As China, as is often characterized, was looking to the West for modern authentication, Europe was looking to the East for philosophical redemption. These desires clearly manifest themselves in the international Chinese art exhibitions in the 1930s. This paper will examine how traditional Chinese art was used in the development of China's and Europe's dynamic modernities by studying the social and historical contexts surrounding the shows, the motivations of the exhibitions’

19 There were a few art exhibitions of non-traditional Chinese artworks in Europe in the early twentieth century, but they were relatively small and were not conducted under the auspices of the Chinese government. For example, on March 14, 1934, an exhibition titled Peintres et Graveurs de la Chine révolutionnaire (Painters and Printmakers of Revolutionary China) opened in Paris at the Galerie Billet-Pierre Vorms. It was organized by Lu Xun and and Song Qingling, the widow of Sun Yat-sen. Fourteen of the 78 works exhibited were oil paintings. The rest were small drawings and 58 graphic works, which were predominately woodcuts. Binnie Danzker, “Shanghai Modern,” 53.
sponsors and organizers, the choices of art works displayed, and the public’s reaction to these exhibitions. By tracing the evolution of Chinese modernity and how it interacted with the concept of modernity in the West, one can understand “modernity” not as a fixed gestalt belonging to the West, but as a mutable, multifaceted cultural construct.
SECTION 2

CHINA’S MODERN HERITAGE

It may at first seem peculiar why the Chinese organizers of the international exhibitions in Europe chose to present only traditional art works, since this act would seem to undermine twentieth century China’s impassioned and demonstrative endeavors toward modernization. In the late nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, China’s traditional arts and culture even appeared to be in peril in the face of the country’s struggle to reform its culture through the New Culture Movement (xinwenhua yundong). Reform leaders, such as Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) and Hu Shi (1891-1962) of Beijing University, in the 1910s and 1920s sought to change Chinese culture by importing Western science and technology. The placement of art, both traditional and Western, in the creation of a new modern China was left ambiguous in the first decade of the twentieth century. Accordingly, Chinese traditional painting was

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presented at the Nanyang Industrial Exposition of 1910 under the handicrafts section, while Western painting was exhibited in the educational section.\textsuperscript{12}

However, after the overthrow of the last imperial court and the founding of the Republic in 1912, Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), the first Chinese Minister of Education for the new Republic, instilled a spiritual purpose in art for modern times.\textsuperscript{13} In his speech, “On Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education,” published in 1912, Cai posited that art in modern society should replace the role of religion to cultivate and inspire people’s feelings.\textsuperscript{14} By giving art a social function in the grand modernizing project, he was able to advocate successfully for aesthetic education to be included in the national higher education curriculum by the end of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{15} Traditional painting, in this context, began to reemerge onto the new cultural scene. For example, ink painters, such as Chen Hengque (1876-1923), Pan Tianshou (1897-1971), and Feng Zikai (1898-1975), were invited to teach in private art schools by the end of the decade. In 1912, Cai also established the Social Education Office and appointed Lu Xun (1881-1936) as the Head of the Section for Art, Culture, and Science that was responsible for developing and regulating museums, libraries, galleries, exhibitions, literature, music, drama, and


\textsuperscript{13} In 1905, Cai had joined Sun Yat-sen’s Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmenghui) and studied philosophy in Berlin and Leipzig from 1907-1912, prior to his appointment in the newly founded Republic. Michael Sullivan, \textit{Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 32.


antiquities. Cai was, therefore, an ardent supporter for the popularization of the arts to contribute to the spiritual benefit of all society. Moreover, he proposed that the spiritual power of art should transcend all national and cultural boundaries. From his earlier years studying philosophy in Berlin and Leipzig from 1907-1912, Cai learned and adopted Peter Kropotkin’s theory of mutual aid, which states that human evolution is not due to constant struggle, as social Darwinism asserts, but to mutual assistance. Cai extended Kropotkin’s model to nations and, thus, believed strongly in the value of cultural exchange and internationalism, which would later become apparent in his role in Chinese international art exhibitions.

About a decade after Cai’s groundbreaking speech, Chen Henque, a prominent member of the Ministry of Education and leader in the Beijing art community as a guohua painter, was able to further secure traditional ink painting’s place in China’s modernization project. In his influential essay, “The Value of Literati Painting” (Wenren hua zhi jiachii) that was first published in 1921, Chen effectively illustrated how Chinese traditional painting is on par with Western avant-garde art, because it fundamentally strives to capture the qiyun, or “spirit resonance” of the subject, rather than its realistic verisimilitude. Chen argued that, hence, traditional Chinese painting is legitimately

16 Mayching Kao, “China’s Response to the West in Art, 1898-1937” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1972), 154.

17 Sullivan, Art and Artists, 32.


19 The first publication of this essay was in the January 1921 issue of the Huirue zashi, a publication of Beijing University’s Society for the Study of Painting Methods. It was entitled “Wenrenhua de jiachi” and is written in vernacular language. The second version of this essay appeared in Studies of Chinese
“modern,” because of its profound visual and ideological similarities with contemporary Western art styles, such as Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism. By drawing parallels between Chinese traditional painting and the contemporary Western avant-garde styles, Chen was able to reaffirm the validity of traditional painting in modern times.

In this new climate, Western style Chinese artists now found themselves at a disadvantage, because they were promoters of a foreign art form during this time of growing nationalism in the arts and culture. The 1920s’ heightened nationalism, resulting from the famous May Fourth Movement of 1919, affected the mentality of Chinese intellectuals and their treatment of traditional cultural practices. Traditional Chinese ink painting began to be referred to as guohua, or national painting, while Western style painting was literally termed xiyanghua. The cultural intellectuals and artists now looked for the “native essence” in Chinese traditional arts. Additionally, they looked for this essence not only in terms of the arts’ visual forms, but also in terms

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21 Kao, “China’s Response to the West in Art,” 149.

22 The May Fourth Movement derives from the student demonstration against the Treaty of Versailles in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square on May 4, 1919. It provoked anti-imperialist, cultural, and political reforms.

23 Fong, Between Two Cultures, 12.

24 The search for a “native essence” was just one of the major responses to the May Fourth Movement and the overall growing nationalism in the visual arts. See Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shan’s A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998).
of their inherent value in the international context as well. Traditional ink painting embodied “Eastern” painting, which was deemed the antithesis of “Western” painting. In 1920, the Research Association of Chinese Painting (Zhongguo huaxue yanjiu hui) was formed in Beijing to study ancient methods and how to adapt them to modern times. In 1929, the Bee Painting Association (Mifeng huashe) was established in Shanghai for the study of traditional painting and its development. It later became the renowned Chinese Painting Association (Zhongguo huahui), and had as its members such artistic luminaries as Huang Binhong (1865-1955), Xie Gongzhan (1885-1940), and Zhang Daqian (1899-1983). The 1920s, thus, was a decade in which traditional ink painting was resuscitated with the surge of nationalism in Chinese society. Additionally, it was assimilated into the Chinese modernization project to give Chinese culture parity with the West’s.

The conservative stance of the reigning Nationalist party in the 1930s also favored the traditional arts and painting. After Yuan Shikai, the president of the Republic of China, attempted unsuccessfully to revive the imperial system by proclaiming himself emperor in 1916, China underwent a decade-long turbulent period marked by contending warlords vying for power. Finally, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the Nationalist party,

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25 In January 1919, at the send-off party given in honor of the artist Xu Beihong before he was going to embark on his studies abroad in Paris, Chen Henque said, “the principle (li) of Eastern and Western painting is fundamentally the same, if we compare Chinese and Western paintings, we will see that they have much in common.” Aida Yuen, “Inventing Eastern Art in Japan and China, ca. 1890s to ca. 1930s” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1999), 116.

26 Kao, “China’s Response to the West in Art,” 148.

27 Ibid., 149.

28 Sullivan, Art and Artists, 32.
was able to nominally unite the fractured country in 1928 and establish the capital in Nanjing. In the period following the Nationalist Party's victory, the Nationalist Government intensified its campaign against the liberals and leftists, especially the Communists, and imposed strict censorship on all publications.29

The Nationalist government sought now to quell the revolutionary fervor that had characterized the preceding years and to restore internal order to the war-torn society by urging a return to the basic tenets of Confucianism and traditional culture.30 In 1934, Chiang and his wife, Soong Mayling, institutionalized this campaign into the New Life Movement.31 The New Life Movement promoted a return to Confucian ideals in order to cultivate "ancient high virtues" of refinement.32 Consequently, this behavioral adjustment would counter the social chaos and degradation to which Chiang attributed the problems inhibiting China's modernization efforts. In his outline of the New Life Movement, Chiang praises the arts of the past and laments, "it is a pity most of us have neglected our own arts, so we are behind the Western nations in these fields of artistic achievements."33 Chiang implies that, if the Chinese have been as sensitive to their cultural and artistic heritage, as the Western countries have been to theirs, then China would have been culturally equivalent with the Western powers today. Therefore,

29 Kao, "China's Response to the West in Art," 139.

30 Ibid., 143.

31 The New Life Movement was aimed to build up morale in a nation that was besiegled with corruption, fictionalism, and opium addiction.


33 Ibid., 639.
according to Chiang, the reverence for Chinese antiquity and the traditional arts is inextricably linked to the country’s progress towards modernity. The government’s attempt to revive Confucianism through the New Life Movement mostly failed, but its implications on the cultural realm gave the traditional arts an official level of prestige.\textsuperscript{34}

The mounting recognition of the value of Chinese tradition and antiquity helped to bring about the establishment of galleries and museums in China. The first few museums in China were established by Catholic missionaries. The first one, the Zhendan Museum in the Xujiahui district of Shanghai, was founded by a French Catholic missionary named Monsignor Pierre Heude in 1869.\textsuperscript{35} These missionary museums were established for the purpose of familiarizing the Chinese with Western civilization and its achievements. These early modern museums set up by Westerners in China primarily exhibited scientific paraphernalia, which attracted many curious Chinese students.\textsuperscript{36} Reverend J.S. Whitewright, who established the extremely popular Qingzhou (Ch’ing-chou) Museum in Shandong, pointed out in his speech that he delivered at the 1893 Educational Association of China’s conference in Shanghai that

It may be well to remind ourselves at the outset that the Chinese look down on us as foreigners with profound contempt, that they regard us as people entirely

\textsuperscript{34} Kao, "China’s Response to the West in Art," 99.


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 2.
destitute of learning and culture of any kind, and the idea that we come to China
with anything to teach them is utterly absurd. 37

The museum space, thus, was introduced into China as an educational venue to change
the Chinese public’s disdainful view of the Western foreigners and to “force respect,” 38
as Reverend V.F. Partch, the founder of a museum in Jinan, described. 39 The
missionaries most likely hoped that the Chinese would then consider Christianity
seriously after viewing their cultural and technological superiority. The first modern
museums, essentially, served to glorify Western civilization and prove its legitimacy to
the Chinese public.

The success of the missionary museums was not lost on the Chinese intelligentsia,
who eagerly sought ways to enhance the modern image of China. Concomitant with the
modernization of China was a noticeable shift from an ethical to a “progressive historical
consciousness” among the Chinese elite and intelligentsia. 40 For instance, in the early
twentieth century, the number of constructions of scholarly gardens decreased, while the
number of scientific and historical museums erected increased. 41 In order to showcase its

37 Rev. J.S. Whitewright, “Museums,” in Records of the Triennial Meeting of the Educational Association
of China Held at Shanghai, May 2-4, 1893 (1893; reprint, Taipei: Ch'eng Wen, 1971), 234.

38 Fitzgerald, Awakening China, 52.

39 Qingzhou Museum’s mission statement read that the museum’s function was “to seek to enlighten the
people of the district by shewing something of the superiority of Western civilization, science, and
invention.” Fitzgerald, Awakening China, 51.

40 Ibid., 50.

41 Ibid., 51.
modernity, China's historical development that preceded the advent of modernity must first be established. Museums largely fulfilled this crucial role as an educational and collecting entity.

The development of museums and exhibitions in China signals the new popular social function of art in early twentieth century China. Chu-ting Li, in his landmark *Trends in Modern Chinese Painting* (1979), stated that the three key vehicles in the popularization of art in China at this time were photography and print reproduction, art schools, and exhibitions.\(^{42}\) Traditionally, the viewing of art works was an intimate affair among a small private gathering of friends and special guests. Rather than hanging a show, the host would bring out each work one at a time so that everyone could closely examine and enjoy each work's artistic value in a leisurely fashion. Therefore, public exhibitions were a novel, modern practice that was imported into China from the West.\(^{43}\)

As the country stabilized under the Nationalist government, the development of museums and exhibitions rapidly increased. In 1912, the first year of the Republic, the first Chinese-operated museum opened in Nan tong County. The Nan tong Museum, a small private museum that was created as an educational supplement to the local schools, was conceived by Zhang Jian, a member of the rural elite.\(^{44}\) It had an encyclopedic permanent exhibition composed of nature, history, arts, and education, though its

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\(^{43}\) The first exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art took place in the French and British concessions of Shanghai. One of the earliest exhibitions was in 1913, where faculty and students of the Shanghai Art Academy showcased their artworks. Ibid., 7.

scientific holdings comprised the bulk of the collection, at 63\%\textsuperscript{45}. Over the 1910s, approximately thirteen museums were established in the country, and by 1929, 34 museums were officially registered\textsuperscript{46}. Once the Nationalists solidified their power in 1928, the number of museums and galleries nearly doubled in 1931 and continued to drastically increase in the subsequent years\textsuperscript{47}. The Nationalist government's strong support for museum construction meant that it understood the power of the museum institution to extol a strong, progressive modern China via its varied exhibits. By 1937, on the eve of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), there were 141 museums and gallery spaces registered in China that showcased the accomplishments of the Chinese in the areas of science, technology, and culture\textsuperscript{48}. This was impressive given that there were none in existence more than 25 years earlier.

The museums were put under the authority of the Ministry of Education, which indicates that the state not only strongly encouraged the building of museums, but also controlled them\textsuperscript{49}. The stated objectives of the Chinese museums clearly reflect the impassioned nationalism and conservative agenda of the 1930s and the goals of the New Life Movement. In 1930, the provincial government of Henan stated that the function of a modern provincial museum was "First, to extol national culture; second, to promote scholarly research; third, to expand the knowledge of the masses; and fourth to raise civic

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 147.


\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 30.

\textsuperscript{48} Pao, Zhongguo bowuguan shi, 31.

\textsuperscript{49} Fitzgerald, Awakening China, 53.
awareness.”  The charter for the National Central Museum (Guoli zhongyang bowuyuan) that was issued in April 1933 stated that the objective of the modern museum was “to promote scientific research and assist in mass education.”  The Chinese-operated museum, thus, focused not only on changing the image of the country, but also served a didactic purpose to coalesce a “national culture” through “mass education,” and to inspire increased “civic awareness.” The implicit aim of the museum was, thus, to transform the museum goers into model citizens for the modern era.

The quintessential Chinese museum constructed at this time was the National Beijing Palace Museum that officially opened on October 10, 1925. The palace’s interior was arranged to appear as it did when the last emperor, Puyi (1906-1967), was still residing there. The official opening purposefully coincided with the fourteenth anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of China. In his speech that day, Huang Fu (1883-1936), the Regency Council Premier, proclaimed: “In the future this day [National Day] will have two levels of meaning... Those who might seek to loot or plunder the museum will also plunder the joyous festival that marks the founding of the nation. We all must share in its defense.”

By linking the founding of the museum to

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90 Ibid., 54.

51 Ibid., 53.

the establishment of the Republic, Huang reinforced the government's and the nation's modernity by asserting their united possession of the country's past and its proud arts and culture, which the palace and its superior holdings signified.\footnote{Though it predominately consisted of art pieces from the Qing household, as well as some from the Yuan and Ming courts, there were also works dating as far back as the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, ca. 2500 to 221 B.C. Therefore, it generally symbolizes over 5,000 years of Chinese art and culture.}

The early museums, such as the National Beijing Palace Museum cited above, focused inwards on extolling the nation and historicizing a modern China, and so they made little reference in their exhibits to external cultures. Nonetheless, the construction of a Chinese modernity, where the traditional arts and museums were greatly utilized, was inadvertently founded on the Chinese people's consciousness of the outside world. According to historian Joseph Levenson, "It was the contraction of China from a world to a nation in the world that changed the Chinese historical consciousness."\footnote{Levenson posits that the Chinese constant historical consciousness based on Confucianism was disrupted and redefined by its encounter with the Western historical consciousness of progress. Modern Chinese people responded to this situation by becoming else "traditionalistic" or "iconoclastic" towards Chinese tradition and Confucianism. Joseph Richmond Levenson, "The Genesis of Confucian China and Its Modern Fate," in \textit{The Historian's Workshop: Original Essays by Sixteen Historians}, ed. L. Perry Curtis (New York: Knopf, 1970), 288.} The Chinese intellectuals have traditionally considered China as the geographic, cultural, and political center of the world. The literati perpetuated this image in their writings, which later colored the perception of China in the imaginations of the first Western visitors.\footnote{Arthur F. Wright, "The Study of Chinese Civilization," \textit{Journal of the History of Ideas} 21 (April-June 1960): 233.}

China was ushered into the modern age when it realized that it was no longer the center of the universe, but part of a larger world order. The Opium War of 1839 to 1842, where Great Britain easily defeated China, and the Boxer Rebellion at the turn of the
century revealed the country’s vulnerability and toppled it from its mythical central axis. In the turbulent late nineteenth century, when all aspects of Chinese society were suddenly called into question, the Chinese intelligentsia chose to divide Chinese culture into its Chinese essence, ti, and its Western practical function, yong, in the hopes that the inviolable conventions of Chinese culture would remain intact, while at the same time be able to be adapted to serve the nation’s modernization project. The nationalistic tenor behind the formation of museums in China in the late 1920s and 1930s, thus, served not so much to challenge, but rather to stake a distinct niche for Chinese culture within the greater international culture, or Western culture. As the Chinese intelligentsia were forced to accept the fact that their country could no longer be held as the center of the world, but rather as a minor player in the contemporary world order, the traditional arts and culture became preciously coveted.

Along with the expansion of the Chinese worldview came the state’s realization that China needed to form and sustain an impeccable international image for the sake of its survival in the modern global world order. The Nationalist government’s New Life Movement can be viewed as its grappling with the derogatory “Chinaman” in the Euro-American imagination. The ideas of the New Life Movement can be found ten years earlier in Sun Yat-sen’s series of lectures titled the “Three Principles of the People” (Sanmin zhu yi) that he delivered from January to August 1924. In one of these lectures, Sun urged his countrymen to work on personal cultivation, such as advising them against spitting and burping in public.56 He posited that

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56 Fitzgerald, Awakening China. 9.
Government is progressing in every other country today; in China, it is going backward. Why? Because we are under the political and economic domination of foreign nations, yes; but if we search for the fundamental reason we will find it in the Chinese failure to cultivate personal virtue.  

Sun, therefore, conveyed the foreigners' popular notion of China and its people, where the poor personal ethics, hygiene, and deportment of the Chinese people were believed to reflect the weak Chinese social and administrative organization. Through appropriating the Chinaman image into their New Life reform agenda, the Nationalist government endeavored to confront and overthrow it. The international Chinese art exhibitions, thus, were utilized to contribute to the Chinese intellectuals' and artists' underscoring effort to influence the West's re-imagination of China via the fine arts. By engaging with European colonialist thinking in order to refashion China, though, the Nationalist administrators' and intellectuals' approach to reclaiming their fragmented country is paradoxical. This problematic core of modern China would be manifested in the choices and presentation of Chinese art made by artists and government leaders for the international Chinese art exhibitions.

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57 Ibid.
SECTION 3

EUROPEAN INTERNATIONALISM:
INTELLECTUAL CULTURE BETWEEN THE WARS

In order to fully understand the impact of these first exhibitions of Chinese art in the West that were actively organized by the Chinese, the cultural milieu of Europe at this time should also be considered. Historian William Y. Elliott pointed out that, beginning in the 1920s, “Asians were becoming more and more nationalistic as the West was turning internationalistic.”\(^{59}\) As the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and the May 30\(^{th}\) Movement in 1925 were occurring in China, Europe was recovering from the devastating World War I (1914-1918).\(^{60}\) The 1920s and 1930s witnessed a progressive intellectual climate in the West that was exceptionally receptive to Chinese arts and culture. The collapse of faith in the absolute power of science and industry caused by the recent war was a pivotal moment in world history, when the West turned to the East for alternatives to its modern demise. Oswald Spengler’s popular *Decline of the West* in 1922, as well as Bertrand Russell’s and Irving Babbitt’s lectures and writings, which were also read in


\(^{60}\) The May 30th Movement was the nation-wide anti-imperialist movement in protest against the massacre of Chinese people by the British police in Shanghai on May 30, 1925. On that day, thousands of students demonstrated in front of the British police headquarters in Shanghai to protest on behalf of exploited workers and for the return of the foreign concessions.
China, debunked the notion of the West’s scientific infallibility and raised the appeal of the Eastern civilizations during the 1920s and into the 1930s.\(^6^1\) Despite the worldwide depression and the rise of totalitarianism in Europe during the 1930s, which brought about guarded nationalism and racism, the pursuit of internationalism was still ever present. According to historian Akira Iriye, advocacy for cultural internationalism could even be said to have piqued in the 1930s in response to the excessive nationalism and rise of totalitarian states in Europe.\(^6^2\)

The increasing international social and cultural disposition of the Western world in the intervening years between World War I and World War II (1939-1945) is indicative of the European intelligentsia’s modern initiative to build new forums for world peace and stability. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, there began an increasing tendency to engender world peace and order by encouraging scholarly and cultural exchanges among nations.\(^6^3\) The international expositions are classic examples of this phenomenon. However, it was not until after World War I in the 1920s that a tangible movement was initiated to actively understand each other’s culture within the international community. The League of Nations, which was formed after World War I during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, was the institutional embodiment of this new drive to promote mutual exchanges between countries.\(^6^4\) The catchphrase “intellectual

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\(^6^1\) Yuen, “Inventing Eastern Art,” 5.


\(^6^3\) Ibid., 4.

\(^6^4\) Ibid., 57.
cooperation” became a common term in the parlance of the 1920s. Many “intellectual cooperation committees” associated with the League of Nation’s Committee on International Cooperation were formed in the early 1920s in numerous countries, such as Britain, Japan, and France. Britain also began using its Boxer indemnity funds to promote student and worker exchanges with China in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1931, the United Kingdom returned its Boxer Indemnity to China under the agreement that the funds would be utilized to promote Sino-British cultural understanding. Furthermore, the endeavor towards a new, harmonious world order led to numerous occasions for interaction between the cultural elites of different countries, such as the first international conference on popular arts held in Prague in 1928. The new emphasis on mutual intellectual and cultural understanding, rather than just on the superficial military and economic aspects of each country, demonstrates the belief in postwar Europe that world peace could only be achieved as a concerted effort towards a united global culture.

The receptive intellectual milieu in Europe that fostered cross-cultural communication also advanced the serious scholarly studies of contemporary non-Western countries and facilitated the transnational movement of scholars and artists. For example, the founding of the Institut Franco-chinois at the University of Lyons in 1921 and the establishment of the China-Institut at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt represented critical steps towards the understanding of Chinese culture in European academia. Before, in the nineteenth century, the serious study of the Chinese

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65 Ibid., 60.
66 Ibid., 68.
language and Sinology was for pragmatic reasons, such as to conduct trade and other commercial transactions in China. However, after World War I, many European intellectuals began to study the Eastern cultures of Japan and China for ideological and spiritual meaning to replace the fallible objective reasoning that had characterized Western modernity up to World War I. Hence, there occurred a shift in Europe’s general regard of China from one of derision in the nineteenth century to one of admiration in the early twentieth century. This attitude change also corresponded with the time when European Sinology began to become officially recognized in academia. Against this backdrop, the Chinese art exhibitions were welcomed for their cosmopolitan and international value. Therefore, the Chinese artists and cultural figures reached out to Europe propitiously at a crossroads in both sides’ developing modernities, when the reform objectives of China and Europe coincided.

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68 The predecessors to the Sinologists were the Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who were some of the first Europeans to visit China (Franke 12). China was at that time seen as an ideal state ruled by judicious emperors and philosophers. In the nineteenth century, this view metamorphosed into a condescending regard for a primitive China that needed Western intervention. Then, at the turn of the century and especially after World War I, China, as the source of Eastern culture, rose in stature again in the Western imagination and became perceived as the counterpart to Western culture.

SECTION 4

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SINOLOGY AND CHINESE ART HISTORY

In the early twentieth century, Sinology began to professionalize and with it came the advent of Chinese art history. The first chair in Sinology in Germany was appointed in 1909 in Hamburg.\textsuperscript{69} England established chairs in Sinology in the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{70} The establishment of these chairs signaled the growing interest in these countries in the serious academic study of China.\textsuperscript{71} Previously, the English had only a limited understanding of China and of Chinese art. Since the seventeenth century, lucrative trade between England and China was fueled by the English aristocrats' craze for chinoiserie in their everyday home furnishings, such as porcelain and lacquer wares. The nineteenth century holdings of the British Museum, one of the first major museums that collected Asian art in England, mirrored this trend. The museum had 10,000 pieces of porcelain, but only a handful of works under the "Oriental Prints and Drawings"

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71} The Collège de France in 1814 established its Chair in Chinese, becoming the first such position in European academia. Abel Rémy (1788-1832) served as the first holder of this position (Wright 240).
category. The situation was no more different in Germany, where German princes began collecting porcelain in the seventeenth century. Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, German ethnographic and decorative arts museums also started collecting Chinese wares.

The interest in Chinese arts and antiquity first revived at the turn of the century due to a flurry of excavation discoveries. Finds from ancient Chinese sites, most famously Dunhuang, that were brought back to Europe and America by adventurous Westerners, largely reinvigorated the curiosity in China’s ancient art and culture. The fine art museums in Germany then began to also include Chinese arts into their collections. In 1906, the Prussian State Museum began collecting Chinese paintings, when it established a Department of East Asian Art. During this period between the wars, the first director, Otto Kümmerl (1874-1952), enthusiastically supported expanding the department’s holdings of Chinese paintings, and he was one of the first European scholars to insist on the serious study of Chinese and Japanese art. At this time, there were not many examples of Chinese paintings in Europe, aside from the religious ones

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74 In 1900 a sealed library chamber at the Thousand Buddhas Cave in Dunhuang in northwest Gansu province was discovered by a mendicant Daoist priest, Wang Yuanlu. There were paintings dating from the fifth to fourteenth centuries. This exciting discovery brought Europeans, Japanese, and Chinese explorers, scholars, and artists to the region and spurred the market for Chinese art. Fong, Between Two Cultures, 13.

75 Ledderose, “Collecting Chinese Painting,” 175.

76 In 1909, Kümmerl and Cohn, in addition, founded the Ostasiatische Zeitschrift, which became the leading Western publication on East Asian art.
brought back from the Chinese excavation sites, such as French Sinologist Paul Pelliot’s (1878-1945) 1908 finds from Dunhuang that consisted mostly of Buddhist paintings.\textsuperscript{77}

Europe’s surge of interest in China after World War I gave Kümmel the impetus to mount the one of the first-large scaled exhibitions of Chinese art in the West. From January to April of 1929, Kümmel organized the \textit{Exhibition of Chinese Art} that was held in the Prussian Academy of the Arts in Berlin, which was to be the site of the \textit{Chinesische Malerei der Gegenwart (Chinese Contemporary Art)} exhibition five years later. It was supported by the three-year old Society for East Asiatic Art and the Prussian Academy.\textsuperscript{78} This show aspired to present a comprehensive overview of Chinese art from all periods up to 1800 and in all mediums conceivable. The organizers effectively appealed to 170 museums from twelve different countries to loan their works to the exhibition in order to achieve this goal of creating an exhaustive exhibition of Chinese art. The show was a huge success with abundant press coverage and over 50,000 visitors. However, one shortcoming of the show that its organizers regretted was its lack of paintings. This was reflective of the dearth of ink paintings, especially those of the formative Song period, available in Western collections.\textsuperscript{79} Therefore, though the interest in Chinese art obviously existed in the West, the resources to study and understand it were still wanting.

In large part, the inchoate understanding of Chinese art in the West was dependent on the Japanese. No overview of the social and historical context of the relationship between the West and China would be complete without also considering Japan. Japan’s

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 176.

\textsuperscript{78} Cohn, “Exhibition of Chinese Art,” 76.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 78.
higher position than China in the modern world order gave it more agency to influence the Western conception of China and the East. For example, Ernest Fenollosa's (1853-1908) influential book, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (1912) imparted a Japanese viewpoint of the Eastern arts to the Western audience. Fenollosa, who spent many years in Japan and was heavily involved in the shaping of Japanese art in the late nineteenth century, was heavily influenced by the Japanese perspective of China, as he acknowledged in the preface to *Epochs*. For example, in *Epochs*, Fenollosa's linear chart depicting the development of East Asian art shows Chinese painting in the twentieth century declining, while the Japanese arts starting to rebound.  

The Japanese viewed themselves as the true guardians of Eastern art, which is echoed in Fenollosa's preface to *Epochs* that reads, "The Japanese themselves feel that it is their privilege to interpret Chinese art to the world." This sentiment is related to Japan's disdainful regard of China. Japan's rapid modernization campaign after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 called for Japan to distance itself from its powerless neighbor, China. Though China had been Japan's main source of inspiration for its arts and culture for many centuries, its faltering condition in the nineteenth century made it a source of scorn for a rapidly modernizing Japan. Also, the *Toyō bijutsu taikan* (*Masterpieces Selected...*  

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81 Ibid., xxix.  
82 However, in the 1920s to early 1940s, when Japanese imperialist aspirations were at their height, a Japanese modernist interest in traditional China evolved. This turn away from a Western model of modernity was due to the post-World War I disillusionment with Western values, the Japanese desire to form and lead a Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, and the efforts by Japanese intellectuals, such as Okakura Tenshin, to save Japanese culture after the intense Westernization of Japan during the Meiji Restoration. However, despite the mutual cultural cooperation between China and Japan in the 1920s and
from the Fine Arts of the East) (1908-1918), a 15 volume series by Tajima Shiichi (b. 1869), profoundly affected the Western understanding of Chinese art. Tajima’s series appealed to Westerners because it presented excellent reproductions of Chinese masterpieces in Japanese collections and provided English captions. Thus, Japan significantly refracted the Western view of China and its arts through its interpretive lens.

However, after World War I and the rise of nationalism in China, the Chinese intellectual elite began to aggressively assert themselves into the international realm. Shanghai publishing houses started printing high quality illustrations of Chinese art in Chinese collections along with English explanations. The National Palace Museum in Beijing, since its opening in 1925, also started publishing pictures and information on its holdings. More Europeans were able to go to China, too, and learn about Chinese art from first-hand experiences. By 1924 and 1925, the “Art” category in the China Year Book, 1924-25’s bibliography of Western books on China had the largest listing, with publications by such notable European Sinologists of the time as Paul Pelliot, Osvald Sirén (1879-1966), Robert Lockhart Hobson (1872-1941), and Arthur Waley (1889-1966). The 1920s was the incipient stage in the promotion of Chinese art in the West by the Chinese people. The Chinese intellectuals, in their goals to reclaim and modernize

1930s, there was still a palpable power struggle between the two countries regarding which country would be the leader of “Eastern Art.” This issue’s implications on the Chinese international art exhibitions in Europe will be discussed later in this paper. See Aida Yuen’s dissertation, “Inventing Eastern Art in Japan and China, ca. 1890s to ca. 1930s” to learn about Sino-Japanese joint exhibitions intended to promote an “Eastern Art” in the 1920s and 1930s and Bert Winther-Tamaki’s article “Oriental Coefficient: The Role of China in the Japanization of Yōga” in the forthcoming issue of Modern Chinese Literature and Culture.


84 Ibid.

their country, were now taking the initiative to empower their own voice in the international sphere, instead of allowing others to speak for them. The next step in this endeavor was for them to present Chinese art to the West via art exhibitions.
SECTION 5

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE ART EXHIBITIONS

Ever since the late nineteenth century, the Chinese government utilized cultural materials to present a modern China to the rest of the world. Participation in various world expositions since the late Qing dynasty, where the Chinese government actively promoted Chinese art and culture in the full panoply of material modernity, was the precursor to the active involvement of the Chinese in the later art exhibitions in Europe. The exposition venue acted as a terrain for all civilized nations to showcase their modernity and to build a foreign market for the country’s goods.  

86 The Chinese exposition team, which usually comprised of entrepreneurs, artists, and educators, worked together to mediate a cultivated portrait of China through such things as artifacts, art works, school displays, and commercial wares.  

87 In 1925, the Republic’s participation in the Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industrielles modernes à Paris from April to October was intended to establish the new China’s presence on the world stage.  

Unfortunately, it failed to receive much press coverage in China or Europe, and it did not

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86 Susan R. Fernsebner, “Material Modernities: China’s Participation in World Fairs and Expositions, 1876-1955” (Ph.D. diss, University of California at San Diego, 2002), 158.

87 Ibid.

88 Clunas, “Chinese Art and Chinese Artists,” 100.
 garner any special recognition at the show, or from the Chinese government and intellectuals.\textsuperscript{89} This demonstrates that these mediated displays of culture were viewed as superficial events by the intelligentsia in Europe and in China, which may be in part due to the latent commercial quality of the exposition enterprise. The exposition’s objective of displaying an estimable Chinese modernity on a global scale conflicted with its other less honorable function of encouraging foreign commercial development.\textsuperscript{90}

In contrast, the first art exhibition organized by the Chinese garnered the attention of Paris and local Strasbourg newspapers, as well as the praise of Chinese intellectuals. The \textit{Exposition Chinoise d’Art Ancien et Moderne} (Exhibition of Ancient and Modern Chinese Art), which was the first known exhibition of Chinese paintings in Europe mounted by Chinese artists, was the collaborative effort of two Chinese student organizations in Paris (figure 6).\textsuperscript{91} It took place on May 21 to the end of July of 1924 in the Palais du Rhin, a former German imperial palace in Strasbourg.\textsuperscript{92} Approximately 3,000 people attended the opening.\textsuperscript{93} Additionally, the local newspapers praised the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{90} There was a steady rise in the exportation of Chinese handicrafts until June 1925 with the boycotting of British shipping.
\item \textsuperscript{91} Birnie Danzker, “Shanghai Modern,” 22.
\item \textsuperscript{92} As early as 1872, the Qing government sent Chinese students to study abroad in the U.S. In 1875, Chinese students also began being sent to Europe. Then, some started studying in Japan in 1896. In 1906, there were 12,909 Chinese students studying abroad, which included Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong. Ibid., 21.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Clunas, “Chinese Art and Chinese Artists,” 103.
\end{itemize}
Figure 6. Catalogue cover of *Exposition Chinoise d’Art Ancien et Moderne*, Palais du Rhin, Strasbourg, 1924
show for raising the respect for Chinese culture even with the common Frenchman. The two Chinese art student groups, the “Association des artistes chinois en France” and the “Société chinoise des Arts décoratifs à Paris,” organized this exhibition of more than 485 pieces that were divided into three sections— traditional paintings and applied arts from private collections of Chinese immigrants in Europe, Western style paintings, and “New Art” style paintings created by Chinese artists attempting to synthesize the traditional and Western art styles. Lin Fengmian acted as the organizer and he, along with 25 other Chinese painters from all over Europe, presented their works.

Cai Yuanpei, who was living in Europe at the time, served as the honorary chairman of the exposition and wrote in his preface for the exhibition catalogue that “Ever since the Renaissance and particularly in our day, Chinese style has inspired European art. This proves that interpenetration of the two styles of art, Western and Eastern, is necessary.” Cai, thus, emphasized the long tradition of cultural exchange between the East and the West. He also pointed out how Chinese art has been an ineffable influence on European art as much as European art has been on contemporary Chinese art. The involvement of prominent cultural figures such as Cai, as well as the more prestigious context of an art exhibition rather than the commercial venue of the

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94 Ibid., 104.
95 Kao, “China’s Response to the West.” 105.
96 Works were sent from France, Germany, Belgium, England, and Italy. Ibid.
97 Cai left his post as chancellor of Beijing University to protest the inept Chinese government. Cai lived in Brussels, Belgium and France in 1924, and then studied ethnology at the University of Hamburg in Germany in 1925 before he returned to China in 1926. “Ts’ai Yuan-p’ei,” in Biographies of the Republican Period, ed. Zong Zhiwen and Zhu Weixian (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 298.
exposition, shows that the arts, therefore, were seriously regarded as an effective vehicle for representing China at the modern crossroads of the East and the West.

The intelligentsia in China also positively responded to this first Chinese art exhibition for its success at countering Westerners' negative image of China. The average “Chinaman” was, at the time, popularly depicted in the Western press and cinema as being a seedy opium addict, gangster, or inarticulate curiosity with pigtailed and bound feet.\(^{95}\) Li Feng, in the August 25, 1924 issue of the Shanghai periodical *Dongfang zazhi (The Eastern Miscellany)*, lamented the Westerners’ inveterate disdain for the Chinese, as evidenced by their common mistake of attributing handsome Chinese crafts to the Japanese. He also pointed out that Westerners frequently assumed that well-dressed Chinese are Japanese.\(^{100}\) Moreover, Li critiqued the Chinese government’s apparent indifference towards building cultural international ties, in comparison with the Japanese government’s enthusiastic promotion of the arts in various past international venues.\(^{101}\) In conclusion, Li encouraged China to become more involved in transforming its image in the Western imagination by evoking the Chinese artistic tradition.\(^{102}\) In his view, China’s arts and culture were the only aspects of China that the Chinese abroad can take pride in and what Westerners greatly admired.\(^{103}\) Therefore, the arts of China were charged with eradicating the disdainful Chinaman in the Western imagination and

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101 Japan staged a major art show in Paris with funds contributed from the government in 1923.

102 Li, “Success of the First Exhibition,” 30.

replacing it with a decorous image of the Chinese and the country in modern times. However, it should be noted that though the local newspapers commended the art exhibition, the Paris art publications merely printed notices of this exhibition. Though the European public in the post-World War I period of the 1920s displayed enthusiasm for Chinese culture, what they expected from China was not the "decadent" modern China, but the romanticized traditional China that is shrouded in an ether of permanence and wisdom. Thus, since the majority of Chinese artworks in this first exhibition of Chinese art were executed in the Western style or a fusion of Chinese and Western painting styles, the show did not appeal to the European elite and art world.

As art historian Craig Clunas surmises, "a China striving to speak for itself was nowhere" in the Western art world during the 1920s. Pragmatically, this situation was moot because of the lack of financial support from China, which at the time still suffered from political and social instability. Consequently, there was no substantial source to develop the Chinese artists' efforts to represent China and her culture. For example, because the Paris artist groups did not receive any money from China to participate in the extravagant Paris exposition titled *Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in the following year, they eventually had to settle with funding from the import-export houses in Paris, London, and Shanghai. As a result, the organizers of the Chinese pavilion at the exposition were confined by their sponsors' agenda to show their Chinese decorative wares. The sponsors' commercial purpose was

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104 Ibid., 104.

105 Ibid., 105.

106 Ibid., 104.
reinforced by the exposition's rule to only show decorative arts and handicrafts instead of fine arts, such as the contemporary paintings of the Chinese student artists.\textsuperscript{107} Thus, even though the Chinese artists and intellectuals living in the West recognized the importance of representing China to the West, they were largely at the mercy of the Western sponsors' will and limited understanding of Chinese art. In the 1930s, as the Nationalist government stabilized the country, the infrastructure and funds were finally available to support Chinese art exhibitions abroad. The upsurge in Chinese exhibitions in the West during the 1930s was, hence, due in large part to the financial support from the Nationalist government.

This nationalistic movement was carried over to Europe by the organizers of the international exhibitions. The initial international exhibitions in the 1920s were organized by the increased number of Chinese artists studying abroad. The spate of exhibitions that occurred in the 1930s was mostly coordinated by many of the prominent figures in the Chinese art and cultural world, who were former students abroad who now returned to Europe in the late 1920s or 1930s to serve as interpreters, teachers, and emissaries, such as Xu Beihong (1895-1953), Gao Qifeng (1899-1933), and Lin Fengmian (1900-1991). Liu Haisu (1896-1994) was one of the most publicly active in this enterprise of organizing exhibitions of Chinese art in Europe during the 1930s, though he did not study in Europe previously as many of the other artists-cum-exhibition organizers had (figures 7 and 8). Liu first traveled to Europe from 1929 to 1931 with Cai Yuanpei's help. While there, he visited France, Italy, Germany, and Belgium and gained

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
Figure 7. Portrait of Liu Haisu in his 30s

Figure 8. Liu Haisu painting in the New Burlington Galleries, London, 1935
repute in the European arts community. For example, in both 1929 and 1930, Liu’s works were selected for the prestigious show, the Salon d’Automne, in Paris.\(^{108}\) Also while in Europe, he planned to accomplish two goals: to collect modern Chinese paintings to be exhibited in Europe and to secure long term exhibition exchange agreements with European nations.\(^{109}\) Liu met many European artists and members of the cultural elite, who he reported were all supportive of his vision of mounting modern Chinese art exhibitions.\(^{110}\)

Before he came to Europe, Liu had already established himself as an influential and dynamic figure in modern Chinese painting. He was from a wealthy banking family in Shanghai, and was well connected in the vibrant Shanghai arts and cultural scene. He was also friends with many important cultural figures in Beijing, such as Cai and Chen Henque.\(^{111}\) At the age of fourteen, Liu began studying Western oil painting in Shanghai at the Shanghai Oil Painting Institute, or *Shanghai youhua yuan*, which was directed by Zhou Xiang.\(^{112}\) Liu was a strong advocate for Western art and held his first one-man show in Beijing in 1917. While in Beijing, at the invitation of Cai, who was then the

\(^{108}\) Waara, “Arts and Life,” 130.


\(^{110}\) In Paris, he met Albert Besnard, Armand-Jean, Kees van Dongan, Maurice Deni, Landiowski, and art administrators Paul Leon and André Dezarrois, the director of the French National Museum and curator of the Musée des Écoles Étrangères et Contemporaines à Paris. He also met and received support to mount exhibitions of modern Chinese painting in Italy and Belgium. Ibid.

\(^{111}\) Lai, “Rescuing Literati Aesthetics,” 27.

\(^{112}\) This school later became the Shanghai Sino-Western Drawing and Painting School, or *Shanghai zhongxi youhua xue* after it combined with Zhou’s gaocha school. Some early innovators of Western art in China were trained here, such as Chen Baoyi, Ding Song, and Zhang Yuguang. Liu, though he was largely self-taught, also was a student at Zhou Xiang’s school. Sullivan, *Art and Artists*, 30.
chancellor of Beijing University, Liu also lectured on Impressionism and Post-Impressionism at Beijing University. Moreover, Liu distinguished himself as an educator of Western style painting. At the age of sixteen in 1912, he along with a few other artists opened the Shanghai Art Academy, which is one of the earliest art schools in China that taught Western style painting. It eventually became the focal point for the new art movement in Shanghai and attracted approximately 800 students. In the academy’s manifesto, Liu and his colleagues wrote:

First, we must develop the indigenous art of the East and study the mysteries of Western art; Secondly, we want to fulfill our responsibility of promoting art in a society that is callous, apathetic, desiccated, and decaying. We shall work for the rejuvenation of Chinese art, because we believe art can save present day Chinese society from confusion and arouse the general public from their dreams; Thirdly, we are far from knowledgeable, yet we are confident of our sincerity to study and promote [art].

This bold statement demonstrates that Liu, early in his artistic career, was by the 1930s conscious of the social power of art and believed in the nurturing of a distinctly Eastern art in association with Western art. This mentality would play a significant role in his European years as China’s unofficial cultural ambassador.

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113 Ibid, 73.

114 The Shanghai Art School is often mistakenly identified as the first modern art school in China, when it is actually Zhou Xiang’s school.

115 Waba, “Arts and Life,” 126.

116 Kac, “China’s Response to the West in Art,” 158.
SECTION 6

1934 BERLIN EXHIBITION: PEOPLE, INSTITUTION, AND MOTIVES

Liu’s conception of a Chinese art exhibition in Europe, though, only included traditional ink paintings. He explicitly stated his rationale on March 19, 1931, when he delivered the keynote lecture on the essence of Chinese painting for the opening of the Ausstellung chinesischer Maler der Jetztzeit (Exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Painters) in 1931. In his talk, Liu stressed his dedication to the display of Chinese modern works. However, Liu chose to display only modern ink paintings, rather than Western style modern works. By selecting traditional Chinese painting, which is obviously non-Western in style and form, by contemporary artists, Liu purposefully chose to show the distinct vitality and resilience of Chinese painting despite the vicissitudes of modern times and the threat of Western hegemony.

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117 Liu and Cai organized this show at the Kunstverein Frankfurt in Frankfurt, Germany, from March 19-April 8, 1931. This exhibition was successful and traveled afterwards to Heidelberg in June. Liu, "Promoting Chinese Art," 378.

Liu’s position on the function of the traditional arts in modern Europe becomes blatantly clear in the largest and most successful of the exhibitions he supervised in Europe, the *Chinesische Malerei der Gegenwart* (Chinese Contemporary Painting).\(^{119}\) This exhibition took place at the Prussian Academy of the Arts from January 20 to March 4, 1934.\(^{120}\) The exhibition was realized under the auspices of the Government of the Chinese Republic, the Society for East Asian Art, and the Prussian Academy of the Arts.\(^{121}\) Among the members of the Chinese Organizing Committee were mostly artists and intellectuals who had studied in Europe previously, such as Cai Yuanpei, Lin Fengmian, Xu Beihong, Liu Haisu, and Gao Qifeng. The Honorary Committee included the German Ambassador to China, Dr. Oskar P. Trautmann, who was also a collector of Chinese contemporary art, and representatives of major German companies active in China, such as Siemans, Krupp von Bohlen & Halbach, Melchers & Co., Hamburg-America Line, Deutsche Bank, and I.G. Faben. Freiherr Konstatin von Neurath, Minister of Foreign Affairs, represented Adolf Hitler’s newly installed regime.\(^{122}\) The large scope of corporate sponsorship and official participation of the German and Chinese governments demonstrates the high regard and hopes for cross-cultural understanding.

\(^{119}\) *Ausstellung Chinesische Malerei der Gegenwart: Veranstaltet unter Forderung durch die Regierung der Chinesischen Republik* (Berlin: Verlag, 1934), 1.

\(^{120}\) Xu Beihong, another renowned modern Chinese artist, who was also actively organizing exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art, conceived a show in Milan that seemed to have coincided with the Berlin show.


\(^{122}\) Hitler was in control of Germany for over a year by the time of this exhibition.
between the Germans and Chinese. The actual organizing committee was made up of Liu, Kümmler, Dr. Erwin Rouselle, the director of the Prussian Academy, Ding Wengyuan, the deputy director of the China Institute in Frankfurt, and Dr. William Cohn, the curator of the East Asian department of the State Museum in Berlin. Cohn first approached Liu with the idea of the exhibition during one of Liu’s seminars in Berlin on Chinese painting in 1931.\textsuperscript{123} Liu then approached Cai, who was at the time also in Germany studying at the University of Hamburg, and Liu was able to secure his support for the exhibition.\textsuperscript{124}

Of the 296 works exhibited at the exhibition, there were no western-style paintings, or xihua.\textsuperscript{125} They were all traditional guohua, or ink paintings, done by notable contemporary painters, such as Qi Baishi, Gao Qifeng, and Liu Haisu (figures 9-11). The paintings were mostly categorized according to different schools of Chinese painting. The bulk of the works, 153 total, were classified as part of the “Literati” school, while 29 works were labeled as following the “Middle Way” school, where the artists sought to blend the styles of the East and West.\textsuperscript{126} Ten works were not categorized as belonging to any particular school, while 37 works were designated to be of the

\textsuperscript{127} Vainker, “Modern Chinese,” 119.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{125} The works were selected primarily by painter and connoisseur Wu Hufan, who eventually selected 400 contemporary works and 200 modern works. Most works were recently completed from 1932 or 1933 by artists mostly from the Jiangnan region. Vainker, “Modern Chinese Painting,” 119. Liu Haisu and Gao Qifeng co-organized the exhibition, but Gao died before the paintings were even shipped to Europe, so Liu arrived in Berlin on December 11, 1933 with only his wife and six crates holding approximately 300 works. Binnie Danzker, “Shanghai Modern,” 409.

\textsuperscript{126} Works of the “Literati” school shown were by Liu, Huang Binhong, Pan Tianshou, and Teng Baiye. Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng were known for being artists advocating the “Middle Way” approach. Binnie Danzker, “Shanghai Modern,” 36.
Figure 9. Qi Baishi. *Grapes*. Undated. Ink on paper, 178 x 48 cm.
Figure 10. Gao Qifeng. Lion. 1930. Ink on paper, 153 x 68 cm.
Figure 11. Liu Haisu. Seclusion. 1933. Ink on paper, 129 x 49 cm.
“Academic” school, five to the “Suzhou” school, 27 to the “Southern” school, and 36 to the “Antiquating” school. Cai said in the show’s catalogue that the German side of this project explicitly desired “pure Chinese works and indeed especially those which express that which is characteristic of Chinese painting.”

The Chinese traditional style, therefore, was viewed both similarly and, at the same time, differently by the Chinese and German organizers. As previously mentioned, the Chinese understood their traditional painting as a distinct, celebratory aspect of Chinese culture’s past that still flourished in spite of the chaotic state of modern China. The German organizers, as indicated by their request for only “pure” Chinese works, also considered traditional painting as the epitome of Chinese culture, but associated its survival in modern times to China’s general timeless quality. It is this ahistoric abyss that China unfortunately finds itself trapped and floundering over the challenge of modernity. For instance, in his reflections on the exhibition, Cohn enthusiastically wrote of the “untouched” quality of Chinese painting’s subject matter, format, and equipment, despite China’s decay brought on by the “triumph” of Western science and technology.

In short, while the Chinese wanted to prove that the foundation of their cultural modernity rested securely on traditional painting, the German side generally deemed the Chinese traditional arts as part of China’s problematic immutability. Although Cohn praised the works of Liu Haisu, Zhang Daqian, and Qi Baishi in the show for successfully transforming Western elements into “something Chinese,” he disparaged Western-style

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127 Ausstellung Chinesische Malerei, 12.
128 Cohn, “Contemporary Chinese Painting,” 114.
artworks by Chinese artists, such as the Gao brothers and Li Xiongcai.\textsuperscript{129} Though Cohn acknowledged in his reflections the rise of painters in China learning the techniques and styles of Western oil painting, he cursorily dismissed them by saying “but [it does] not concern us here, since it was not included in the exhibition, and rightly so.”\textsuperscript{130} Therefore, Cohn was cognizant of the trend towards Western style painting that was happening in China, but he clearly viewed it as unworthy of being included in the exhibition of “pure,” or real, Chinese painting. He, hence, ignored the dynamic occurrences in modern Chinese art in order to maintain his pristine conception of China and its culture.

The viewing public’s reactions to the \textit{Chinese Contemporary Painting} exhibition echoed those of Cohn. The show was a success, with a total of over 13,000 visitors reported over the duration of the exhibition. Two hundred and twenty-nine of the paintings were on sale and approximately fifty works were sold.\textsuperscript{131} Afterwards, the show, in slightly altered forms, traveled to many different venues in Europe over the next fifteen months, such as the Kunstverein in Hamburg from March 24 to April 22, 1934, and then Dusseldorf, Amsterdam, and London.\textsuperscript{132} According to Cohn, the show was

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 116.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 117.

\textsuperscript{131} After the show, some paintings were given to the Academy as gifts from the Chinese government. Thereafter, the museum established a permanent installation of modern Chinese painting in the East Asian Department of the State Museum in Berlin built on these gifts. These works were later seized by Russian troops in 1945 and taken to the U.S.S.R. and now are stored in the Hermitage Museum. Birnie Danzker, “Shanghai Modern,” 37.

\textsuperscript{132} In February 1935, Liu completed the traveling show in the New Burlington Galleries in London. Ibid., 55.
“hailed by the entire German press with almost unanimous approval.” ¹³³ Cohn mentioned in his reflections that a letter, which appeared in the February 11, 1934, issue of the Deutsche Zukunft, represented the typical reaction of the show’s many visitors:

I can assure you that this seemingly so exotic exhibition moves refined country people (of course, only in so far as they possess an appreciation of the visual arts) much more profoundly; it is much less unfamiliar to them than most futuristic, distorted, and sick works of big-city German art, which offend a natural (rather than naturalistic) sensibility...There is a better world than ours after all, I felt, a higher and purer one, a world similar to that described by our great poets and artists 120 years ago...Afterwards, I, in particular, thought that, as a European, one is really put to shame by this exhibition, because we have become the executioners of the fine mind, of the beautiful world in general, and have shown other people how to throw bombs on ten-thousand-year-old civilisations and to thoroughly eradicare sacred, venerated life.¹³⁴

The writer, in his critique of the Western nations’ advanced science and technology, implied that the artworks symbolize the fragility of China, which is most apparent in modern times. According to him, China was an idyllic, ancient Shangri-la that was violently disrupted by the Western powers. The writer’s attitude also mirrored the state of Germany in the mid-1930s. His “bomb” allusion pointed to the shattered disillusionment with Western values and technology in the post-World War I period. In addition, his remarks on the “sick works of big-city German art” indicated the influence of the early stages of Hitler’s campaign against the “degenerate art” of the German avant-garde.¹³⁵


¹³⁴ Ibid.
Before the Nazis came to power, the Weimar Republic had strongly supported cultural internationalism in music, art, architecture, theater, and literature.\textsuperscript{136} However, after the Nazis seized power in Germany in 1933, the majority of internationally oriented organizations were flagged as institutions of the failed Weimar government, such as the German arm of the League of Nations.\textsuperscript{137} These institutions closed in adherence to Hitler’s strict policy of one nation, one race. Hitler’s policy on art favored realistic art that was made by people of the Aryan race. In turn, it punished modern artists, such as the Abstract Expressionists, who made “unnatural,” “aberrant” art. The infamous campaign against the modern artists in Nazi Germany intensified in 1933, as modern art departments in museums were dissolved and modern art advocates were dismissed.\textsuperscript{138} The campaign culminated in the \textit{Degenerate Art} exhibition in September 1933 that presented 207 works at the Dresden Town Hall. The show then traveled to twelve German cities before it ended its tour four years later in Munich.\textsuperscript{139}

Therefore, the \textit{Chinese Contemporary Painting} exhibition in the early months of 1934 seems like an anomaly in this intensely conservative atmosphere directed against internationalism and unrealistic art. Yet, surprisingly, the show had the support of the German government, and it was well publicized. This suggests that Hitler’s government

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{135}] Birnie Danzker, “Shanghai Modern,” 45.
  \item[\textsuperscript{136}] Iriye, \textit{Cultural Internationalism}, 94.
  \item[\textsuperscript{137}] In December 1933, the Third Reich withdrew from the League of Nations and cut all ties with the League. Ibid., 95.
  \item[\textsuperscript{138}] The Modern Art Department of the Hamburg Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe closed in late April 1933. That month also witnessed the dismissal of expressionist painter Otto Dix from the Art Academy in Dresden. Birnie Danzker, “Shanghai Modern,” 46.
  \item[\textsuperscript{139}] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
did not view Chinese traditional art as degenerate art. Because it embodied the conventional, "pure" art of another race, Chinese traditional art was exempt from Hitler's policy on art founded on the Western artistic tradition. As a result, Chinese traditional art was perceived as an exotic, innocuous art from a distant land that posed no threat to Germany and its modern ambitions. This is not to say, though, that the new social and cultural milieu in Germany did not affect the Chinese exhibition in the process of its implementation from 1931 to 1934. In 1933, Cohn was suspended from his post at the State Museum, because he was not of the Aryan race.\textsuperscript{140} Cohn was reinstated in 1934 and worked as the Secretary to the Society for East Asian Art until 1938. Thereafter, he left Berlin for England to escape from the tense social milieu in Berlin.\textsuperscript{141}

Traditional Chinese ink painting was chosen to be the only style of art presented at the \textit{Chinese Contemporary Painting} exhibition also for nationalistic reasons. In his article, "Promoting Chinese Art" written in 1935, Liu wrote that he worked to bring exhibitions of modern Chinese art to Europe because he hoped to broaden the foreign understanding of the Chinese arts beyond its parochial focus on only the country's past arts. Liu also hoped to counter Japan's claim to be the source of "Oriental modern art."\textsuperscript{142} In "Promoting Chinese Art," Liu criticized Japanese modern art for being sycophantic to Western taste and sensibility. He contended that Japanese modern art

\textsuperscript{140} Vainker, "Modern Chinese Painting," 120.

\textsuperscript{141} In 1938, Cohn fled Nazi Germany and immigrated to England. In England, he became Oxford University's first advisor of East Asian art and was the founder of the Department of Eastern Art in the Ashmolean Museum. He is well known for spreading East Asian art in Germany, such as his 1910 publication, "Die Malerei der Ostasiatischen Kunstabteilung der Berliner Museen," which discussed painters represented in the State Museum's East Asian art department. Vainker, "Modern Chinese Painting," 120.

\textsuperscript{142} Liu, "Promoting Chinese Art," 378.
corrupted “Oriental art” by westernizing some of the superficial elements “without expressing any of its own character.”\textsuperscript{143} Liu’s disdain for Japanese modern art in large part stemmed from the nationalistic fervor at the time in China against Japan, because of the recent Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and other demonstrations of Japanese aggression towards the mainland. At the end of his article, Liu fervently declared a call to arms directed at his fellow Chinese artists to “not allow the Japanese to overstep their position by claiming to hold the leading role in the art of the Orient. That is what I have prayed for night and day.”\textsuperscript{144}

Liu Zhongjie, the Chinese envoy to Germany, shared Liu’s nationalistic sentiments in his foreword in the \textit{Chinese Contemporary Painting} exhibition catalogue. Liu Zhongjie, however, stated that he believed Japanese modern art had been able to resist Westernization because its spiritual origin lies in Chinese art.\textsuperscript{145} He followed this by describing the Chinese tradition as being uniquely formidable and impervious to foreign influences. Though he acknowledged that there have been foreign influences on the Chinese arts, such as the arts of India, he claimed that they were never able to significantly alter the Chinese artistic tradition.\textsuperscript{146} Furthermore, Liu Zhongjie identified

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Aussstellung Chinesische Malerei}, 8.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
Japanese modern painting as just a branch of Chinese painting, hence discounting Japanese modern art by labeling it as still a subordinate to Chinese traditional art and culture.

These nationalistic tendencies are also present in both Cai Yuanpei’s and Liu Haisu’s entries in the Chinese Contemporary Painting exhibition catalogue. In their written commentaries, they strived to elucidate Chinese traditional painting’s unique character and its relevance to contemporary times by mapping the conventional Chinese literati views of Chinese art history onto modern Chinese ink painting. For example, in his introduction, Cai emphasized that the essential value of traditional Chinese ink painting lies in the strength of its qiyun, or spirit resonance. Qiyun was an abstract, sublime quality that art historian Xie He of the sixth century proclaimed as the vital characteristic of a good painting. Xie He’s Six Principles, or liufa, of Chinese painting first appeared in his Gukua pintu (Classified Record of Painters of Former Times), which rates 27 painters in three main categories of artistic merit. He listed qiyun as the first principle, followed by the qualities of “bone method,” or the brushwork, proper form, color application, good composition, and effective copying of models and works by old masters. These became the basic standards of art criticism among the literati and intellectuals for Chinese painting even into the twentieth century.

Cai, in his attempt to explicate the meaning of qiyun, quoted the most influential art critic and literati artist in late imperial China, Dong Qichang (1555-1636), who said: “Qiyun cannot be learned; it must be intrinsic, because it was given by heaven.”147 Cai

147 Ausstellung Chinesische Malerei, 11.
added that, "When the art work has no qiyun, what makes it different from a photograph?" Therefore, Cai elevated Chinese painting to a high, elitist art by imbuing it with an esoteric, awe-inspiring aura of the ineffable, divine qiyun aspect that he held distinguishes Chinese art from that of the West. By also mentioning photography, Cai offered Chinese painting and its unique aesthetic understanding as the antithesis of Western painting's concentration on realism and the West's discredited technology. Cai's evocation of Dong Qichang's words also suggests to the Western reader the literati's static view of Chinese painting. The literati for centuries have claimed the stable continuation of Chinese painting's values, despite the many political and social upheavals China has endured.

Liu's article in the catalogue "Today's Direction of Chinese Painting and its Origin," which is reprinted in condensed form in the London Studio, further presented a concise history of Chinese painting according to the literati. The first half of his essay, for instance, detailed Dong Qichang's theory on the inferior, professional Northern School, and the superior, literati Southern school of painting that existed ever since the Tang dynasty. Therefore, his writing reinforced Cai's introduction of Chinese art and painting by upholding the popular Chinese literati view. Liu also described two other categories of ink painting that have been added in modern times: the archaistic and naturalistic schools, brought about by the impact of ancient Chinese and Western art, respectively.149

148 Ibid.

However, Liu stated that, despite the plurality of artistic styles demonstrated in contemporary traditional Chinese painting that arose due to "tensions" in Chinese history, the fundamental essence of all Chinese painting styles remained intransigent at the core.\textsuperscript{150} By positing these points to a receptive European audience at the exhibition, which largely consisted of people completely unfamiliar with Chinese art and its social and historical contexts, Liu’s "expert" interpretation of Chinese art must have strongly impressed and reinforced the Western audience's understanding of the permanence of Chinese society and culture. Liu also failed to discuss any of the artistic and stylistic innovations of the traditional Chinese paintings in the exhibition. Liu's stated purpose to show Chinese modern art was, thus, not to demonstrate that Chinese traditional art is progressive per se, but to praise the resilience of the Chinese art tradition even in the turbulent twentieth century.

Chinese traditional painting, as examined in its conscious positioning in the \textit{Chinese Contemporary Painting} exhibition, was used to parlay a glorious past into a proud modern culture for China and its people. This utilization of Chinese tradition also served to advance the fervent nationalism at home that sought a distinctly modern Chinese culture apart from that of the West. On the external world stage, the Chinese intellectuals offered their traditional art as a marker of cultural difference. According to historian Partha Chaterjee, nationalism is in opposition to colonial power, resulting in its use of "'essential' cultural difference to keep the colonizer from that inner domain of

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
national life and to proclaim its sovereignty over it."\textsuperscript{151} Hence, display of the Chinese traditional arts in modern times performed multiple roles according to where it was being exhibited. It functioned domestically to imbue the Chinese society with a sense of cultural pride and progress, while at the same time it acted to promote Chinese culture abroad as an invaluable component of a world culture and China as a civilized modern state.

SECTION 7

1935-6 LONDON EXHIBITION: PEOPLE, INSTITUTION, AND MOTIVES

The development of the grand International Exhibition of Chinese Art in London in the following year, 1935, is strikingly different than that of the Chinese Contemporary Painting exhibition. Instead of Chinese overseas artists and intellectuals launching it, a coterie of British connoisseurs led by Sir Percival David instigated this show (figure 12). The organizing committee consisted of Sir Percival David (1892-1964), director of the exhibition and collector of Chinese porcelains, R.L. Hobson, connoisseur of Chinese porcelains and curator of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum, George Eumorfopoulos, a collector of Chinese art who bequeathed his large collection to the British national museums, and Oscar Raphael, honorary curator of the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge University. During the last few months of 1932, when the National Palace Museum's curators and staff were preoccupied with moving the imperial treasures from Beijing to the south for safekeeping from the invading Japanese, Davids' group of English connoisseurs began planning a comprehensive exhibition of Chinese art at the Royal Art Academy in London.\(^{152}\)

\(^{152}\) Jeannette Shambaugh and David Shambaugh Elliot, *The Odyssey of China's Imperial Art Treasures* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 81.
Figure 12. Sir Percival David and a visiting expert examining ancient bronzes sent from China.
Previous winter shows at the Academy had also been of an international scope. The Royal Academy was founded in 1768 and is the oldest established society in the British Commonwealth that is solely devoted to the fine arts. It is also unique in that it consists of a self-supporting, self-governing body of artists with its own school and exhibition space.\textsuperscript{153} It is known as a conservative institution that shows primarily national artists. However, its galleries in Burlington House were lent to international shows of works from abroad during the winter season beginning in 1920 with an exhibition of Spanish art. This was followed by the Australian exhibition in 1923 and the Swedish exhibition in 1924. These small international shows preceded the large-scale international winter shows from the late 1920s into the 30s.\textsuperscript{154} Most of the international loan exhibitions that preceded the Chinese exhibition at the Royal Academy were well attended, such as the exhibition on Dutch art, 1450-1900, in 1929; Italian art, 1200-1900, in 1930; Persian art in 1931; and French art, 1200-1900, in 1932.\textsuperscript{155} The distinct range of strong foreign art shows that took place in the traditional Royal Academy, including the Chinese exhibition, demonstrates the intensity of the cultural internationalism that strongly characterized European intellectual and artistic life during this period between the wars.\textsuperscript{156}


\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 155.

\textsuperscript{155} The Italian art show, in 1930, attracted the largest crowd, with about 600,000 visitors, while the Persian show, in 1931, attracted 300,000 attendees. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{156} Unfortunately, the future planned series of winter loan exhibitions of international scope, such as of American, Japanese, German, and Indian art, had to be abandoned at the outset of World War II. Ibid., 157.
The organizing group led by David began their plans in late 1932 by amassing objects from their own collection and British public collections. Then, they went worldwide asking international collectors and institutions to contribute their holdings of Chinese art. The group traveled around the globe — India, China, Japan, Sweden, U.S., Germany, Denmark, Turkey, and Russia — appealing to different governments, dealers, institutions, and private collectors to contribute pieces to the exhibition. However, the crowning jewel of the exhibition would be the contributions they secured from the Palace Museum’s collections.

David was extremely familiar with the Palace Museum from his previous experiences working with the curators there. David was an influential advocate of the development of Chinese art history in England. While he was acting as the British consul in Hangzhou from 1924-1925, David had become a great collector of Chinese porcelain. At that time, he also visited the Imperial Palace, which had only recently been opened to the public as the Palace Museum, and he helped finance the restoration of one of the palace pavilions for exhibitions. He visited China again from 1927-1928, during which he brought approximately forty pieces of the palace treasures for his own collection. He returned to China from 1930-1931 to devote himself to working with museum officials to organize exhibitions in the Palace Museum, and in 1932, at the


158 David contributed to the restoration of a hall for the display of ceramics from the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties. Shambaugh and Elliot, Odyssey, 72.

159 Scott David, “Introduction,” 70.
request of museum administration, traveled back to China to organize another exhibition. From these many first hand experiences, David's passion for Chinese art intensified, and he became determined to mount an international exhibition of Chinese art at home. In 1931, he also established a Chair of Chinese Art and Archaeology at the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University. In 1932, it was incorporated into the Courtauld Institute of Art in London University and was sustained by funds from the Chinese Committee in London, a grant giving body that had disbursed Boxer indemnity funds ever since 1901. This chair represented the first formalized teaching of Chinese art history in Britain. David's legacy of promoting Chinese art appreciation both in China and in his homeland was, thus, remarkable and significant, as will be seen in his instrumental role in the execution of the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art*.

David knew that the bulk of the most prominent treasures had already been transported south and were still in cases housed in temporary storage. Therefore, he requested the Chinese government to contribute some of the imperial treasures to the exhibition, since they were already on the move and in shipping containers. In 1934, China's Ministry of Education agreed to the proposal and a Chinese Selection committee

160 Ibid.

161 Professor Perceval Yetts, who had no academic background in Chinese art history, was the first to hold this position until his retirement in 1945. Ibid.


163 Ibid.
was formed to decide which masterpieces were to be sent off to London.\textsuperscript{164} The Chinese committee was comprised of various administrators from the Palace Museum, such as the museum's director, Ma Heng, and curators Zhuang Yan (Chuang Yen) and Na Zhiliang (Chih-liang). John C. Ferguson (1866-1945), an astute American connoisseur of Chinese art, was chosen to be the advisor for the committee.\textsuperscript{165} In 1934, a small catalogue of the works selected by the Chinese committee was sent to the British Selection Committee to be reviewed. Early in 1935, delegates from the British Selection Committee, led by Sir Percival David, met in Shanghai on the premise that they would collaborate with their Chinese counterpart group to choose works for the exhibition.\textsuperscript{166} However, to the dismay of the British committee, the Chinese committee had already selected the works and refused to change them. According to Basil Gray, who went as part of the British delegation to China and was the former Keeper of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum:

Having failed to persuade the Chinese side to allow the joint Sino-British Committee to make the selection, the London Committee assessed the gaps from the brochure sent [by the Chinese] and set about to fill [in] the gaps, visiting Europe, the United States, and China. After having assessed the Chinese loans in Shanghai, and having failed to persuade the officials to modify their selection by addition or subtraction, they proceeded to Japan.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{164} Shambaugh and Elliot, \textit{Odyssey}, 82.

\textsuperscript{165} Ferguson came to China as a Methodist missionary and is known to have founded Hong Kong's \textit{South China Morning Post}. Shambaugh and Elliot, \textit{Odyssey}, 72.

\textsuperscript{166} "Obtaining Pieces for Chinese Art Exhibition," \textit{The Times (London)} 11 February 1935, 9.

\textsuperscript{167} Shambaugh and Elliot, \textit{Odyssey}, 82.
The resolute refusal of the Chinese committee to let the British contingent have a voice in the selection of the works indicates the Chinese committee’s and, to a large extent, the Chinese government’s motivations. Though, pragmatically speaking, the fragile condition of many of the treasures necessitated that the Chinese experts limit the treasures allowed to travel to London, their refusal to allow the British committee to participate in the final selections expresses the Chinese government’s imposition of its ultimate ownership over its arts and culture. Therefore, only the Chinese experts’ decisions were honored.\textsuperscript{168}

Yet, once the treasures were safely transported to London, the British committee changed the written labels prepared by the Chinese team of experts to reflect their own dating of porcelains.\textsuperscript{169} In a journal article written during the London exhibition, Ferguson criticized this change, which he pointed out was not done to the labels of other countries’ attributions for their contributed artworks. He expressed his dismay that a group of Western scholars “should have arrogated to themselves the task of attempting to teach China how to classify its own artistic productions.”\textsuperscript{170} Ferguson saw this alteration, a conceited gesture by the British committee, as tantamount to an insult to the Chinese government.\textsuperscript{171} Although the Chinese government and its group of experts decided on

\textsuperscript{168} However, in their foreword to the official exhibition catalogue, the Chinese committee said that the selection of artworks was done in consultation with the London committee.

\textsuperscript{169} Shambaugh and Elliot, \textit{Odyssey}, 83.


\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 436.
the palace artworks for the exhibitions, in the end, the British committee of Chinese art connoisseurs had the last word in constructing the West’s understanding of China’s arts and culture.

Before the treasures began its trip to the West, the more than 800 artworks to be contributed by the Chinese Government were displayed in Shanghai from April 8 to May 1, 1935. Some Chinese intellectuals feared that the imperial treasures going to London would not return, so this exhibition in Shanghai likely was implemented to overcome people’s fears by showing the great works openly and to inspire national pride in these artworks-cum-cultural ambassadors. The objects were also photographed before packing to preclude any duplicitous replacement of the treasures once they were unpacked in London. On June 8, 1935 the Chinese treasures left Shanghai aboard the *H.M.S. Suffolk* and arrived in Portsmouth on July 26.

The imperial treasures were hailed upon arrival in various newspapers as an exceptional gesture of the Chinese government’s goodwill. The Chinese government’s contribution of imperial treasures was marketed as an advantageous act in international public relations, especially during this tense period preceding the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War, when China’s leadership was appealing to the West for support against the Japanese aggressors. F.T. Cheng, the official Commissioner of the Exhibition

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172 Treasures were drawn from the Palace Museum, the National Museum, the Academia Sinica, the Henan Museum, and the Anhui Provincial Library. Kao, “China’s Response to the West,” 158.


174 Ferguson, “Reflections,” 434.
appointed by the Chinese government, acknowledged this in a speech he delivered at the press luncheon preview a few days before the official opening day. Cheng announced that the goodwill of China was behind each of the art objects that the government sent with him to London. In so doing, Cheng created the illusion that the qualities, or essence, of the arts directly symbolized the qualities of the Chinese people.

Cheng was selected as commissioner of the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* because of his many earlier years living in London as a doctorate student in law at the University of London (figures 13 and 14).\(^{175}\) He distinguished himself as being the first Chinese to receive an LL.D. degree in England.\(^{176}\) Though he did not have any experience in Chinese art and was not even an art collector, which he readily admitted to the many dignitaries in London who asked him to appraise their Chinese art collections, he was reportedly a witty speaker who knew the English and England well.\(^{177}\) The Chinese government, therefore, chose as a diplomat somebody who could converse and represent China and its dignified culture well in England, rather than a knowledgeable art connoisseur. Therefore, the focus of China’s participation in the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* was not so much on the Chinese arts, such as it was in the *Contemporary Chinese Painting* exhibition, but more on China itself.

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\(^{177}\) Ibid., 277.
Figure 13. Portrait of F.T. Cheng
Figure 14. F.T. Cheng, George Eumorfopoulos, and Leigh Ashton experimenting with an arrangement of small ceramic objects for the London exhibition
After much anticipation, the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* finally opened in Burlington House on November 27, 1935 and had a brilliant run. According to the exhibition catalogue, the show was founded under the auspices of the king and queen of England, as well as the president of the Chinese Republic.\(^{178}\) Months before it opened, it was widely publicized and touted in art magazines, weeklies, and dailies for its inclusion of the Chinese imperial treasures.\(^{179}\) This was the first time that samples from the imperial treasures had left China, and the uncertainty of having the opportunity to see them in the West ever again was strategically used in the publicity. Therefore, large numbers of overseas visitors from the European continent and the U.S. flocked to London to see the exhibition. Chinese from Europe, America, and China also came to London for the show.\(^{180}\) The British railroads even created special excursion rates for out-of-town visitors and special facilities for visitors from abroad.\(^{181}\) Over the period of the exhibition, November 27, 1935 to March 7, 1936, over 422,000 people attended the show.\(^{182}\) On the last Thursday of the exhibition alone, almost 20,000 visitors came, and the gallery’s hours were extended in the last few months of the exhibition to meet the popular demand.\(^{183}\) The crowds were so overwhelming that it was reportedly difficult to

\(^{178}\) *Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Chinese Art, 1935-6: Patrons, Their Majesties the King and Queen, the President of the Chinese Republic*, (Royal Academy of Arts: London, 1935): i.


\(^{180}\) "End of Chinese Exhibition," *The Times (London)* 9 March 1936, 11.


\(^{182}\) Ibid.

\(^{183}\) Hutchison, *History*, 157.
see the exhibits. There was also a series of lectures delivered by various notable English art connoisseurs working in Chinese art, such as David, Leigh Ashton, Laurence Binyon, Hobson, A.F. Kendrick, Bernard Rackham, and W. Perceval Yetts.\textsuperscript{184} There were also lectures given by foreign visitors, such as J.G. Andersson, from the Museum of Far-Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, Professor Bernhard Karlgren, professor of Sinology in the University of Goteburg, Paul Pelliot, Langdon Warner, Yukio Yashiro, and F.T. Cheng. The first four lectures were already sold out within the first few days of the exhibition’s opening and several later lectures were also sold out.

Most people came to see the artworks contributed by the Chinese government, which composed the bulk of the exhibition. The rest of the exhibition comprised mostly of the Eumorfopoulos Collection and the Percival David Collection, though a vast number of other nations, collectors, and dealers also contributed to the exhibition too. David described in his first exhibition lecture that the many different contributing entities were, in a sense, vying with each other to lend the most Chinese artworks to the show, which gave the show its final international scope.\textsuperscript{185} The international quality of the show, however, angered some Chinese patriots. For example, a member of the Committee for the Preservation of Art Treasures in the Central Government in Nanjing stated in the \textit{China Times} on March 7, 1936 that the exhibition itself was a disgrace to China. He claimed that most of the collections that contributed to the show consisted

\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Catalogue of the International Exhibition}, xi-xii.

largely of stolen pieces from China, when the international army invaded Beijing during the Boxer Rebellion in 1901, or else were illegally acquired from corrupt merchants and curio dealers.\textsuperscript{186} In response, Arthur de Carle Sowerby, the honorary director of the Museum of the Royal Asiatic Society, denied such accusations in a subsequent issue of the \textit{China Times} and blamed the Chinese government for not guarding its cultural heritage properly.\textsuperscript{187}

Regardless, the international aspect of the exhibition in large part demonstrated the world-wide popularity, and also highly fragmented and vulnerable nature of Chinese culture in the international context during the early twentieth century. Though the Chinese government physically possessed the most superior Chinese artworks extant, its hold over its arts and culture was still precarious at this time. The Nationalist government only recently began the project of documenting and preserving Chinese artworks, such as those in the imperial collection, in its efforts to reclaim its traditional arts, so the government's custodianship over it was tenuous. Therefore, the Chinese culture embodied the international culture that was developing in the West between the wars, because of its susceptibility to the external world concomitant with the perceived political weakness of modern. Chinese arts and culture were, thus, disassociated from the problematic modern Chinese nation and simply deemed an international art. This

\textsuperscript{186} Arthur de Carle Sowerby, "Chinese Art in Foreign Lands" \textit{The China Journal} 24 (March 1936): 153.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
observation is evidenced by the conspicuous choice of using the word “international” in the exhibition’s title, which did not appear in the titles of the many other international loan exhibitions previously held at the Royal Academy.

Curiously, the Chinese title for the London exhibition, “China’s Participation in the London International Exhibition of Chinese Art,” is a paradoxical and ironic choice. The conscious wording of “China’s Participation” patently conveys that China was one of the lenders to the exhibition, but it also explicitly implies that the Chinese government wanted to emphasize China’s role as a modern nation participating in an international event with other modern nations. But this word choice, in effect, also further dislocates and disembodies Chinese culture by alienating it from its country of origin, along with the country’s present decadent state. Hence, China does not absolutely possess its own art and culture, but has to “participate” in the celebration of it as an outsider. In its attempt to safeguard its traditional arts and culture from its own modern demise, the Chinese government acts to present the traditional arts and culture as an isolated component that is independent of the country’s recent turbulent history. So, in a sense, the Chinese government is complicit in the West’s ahistoricizing, essentialist view of Chinese arts and culture by acting not to rectify the misunderstanding, but joining in reinforcing it.

The immense number of international loans resulted in an exhaustive exhibition that included more than 2,000 works of bronzes and other metals, jades and other stone works, sculpture, statuary, pottery, porcelain, paintings and calligraphies, textiles and
costumes, and lacquer and cloisonné.\textsuperscript{188} There were also a total of 314 pieces of porcelain and more than 170 examples of paintings and calligraphy that mostly dated from the Song period. The exhibition objects represented Chinese production up to 1800, thus spanning 35 centuries of Chinese culture.\textsuperscript{189} However, the \textit{International Exhibition of Chinese Art} was groundbreaking in the burgeoning field of Chinese art history not because of the sheer quantity and quality of Chinese artworks presented, but because the exhibition introduced masterpieces of Chinese ink painting to the vast Western audience.

This exhibition was monumental in shifting the Western focus on Chinese arts from the decorative arts to the fine arts via painting. As was mentioned earlier, there was a dearth of Chinese paintings in Europe and the U.S., save for a few gems, such as the Tang period copy of Gu Kaizhi’s fourth century scroll painting, \textit{Admonitions for Palace Ladies}.\textsuperscript{190} The majority of paintings in the \textit{International Exhibition of Chinese Art} were from the Chinese government, along with a few from Japan.\textsuperscript{191} The great quantity of paintings and calligraphy displayed at the exhibition had a lasting impact on the Western reverence and regard of Chinese art from viewing the Chinese arts as fascinating objects of craftsmanship to works of artistic, expressive virtuosity. This shift was obviously recognized by the organizers and future generations of Chinese art collectors. For instance, Sir Harry Garner, a friend of David, wrote in David’s obituary:

\textsuperscript{188} A large portion of the ceramic wares on view at the exhibition was from David’s collection. British collectors since the seventeenth century have collected porcelain and recently with the spate of excavations, Chinese antiquities were also in vogue.

\textsuperscript{189} David, “Lectures,” 113.

\textsuperscript{190} This painting was housed in the British Museum and was brought to England from the British looting and vandalizing of the Qing palaces in 1900. Shambaugh and Elliot, \textit{Odyssey}, 82.

\textsuperscript{191} Kelley, \textit{The New Orient}, 16.
[David] had an approach to Chinese art very close to that of the great Chinese connoisseur and we witnessed, during his lifetime, the transfer of interest in Western countries from the decorative arts of Chinese which had dominated Europe and America for centuries to the more refined and intimate works of art which were admired and collected by Chinese literati and connoisseurs themselves.\textsuperscript{192}

This seemingly advantageous shift, though, was actually based on a philosophical level rather than artistic. In the many articles on Chinese paintings, such as Sowerby's two part article in the \textit{London Times} in 1935 and Lawrence Binyon's article in the \textit{London Observer} in the same year, a stylistic analysis of the artistic merits of the works was lacking, while the discussion of the Chinese philosophy of an inherent peace and harmony reflected in the paintings prevailed.

This attitude may have been assumed due to the inadequacy Western art critics and connoisseurs might have felt towards artistically appraising these paintings, which is obvious from the advice of several journal writers to their Western readership that it would be futile to even try understanding the artistic complexities of the paintings, such as in the November 18, 1935 editorial in the \textit{London Times}. But this popular philosophical approach also indicates the Western critics' eagerness to seek out the essence of Chinese art in its philosophy, and to attribute the pacific, timeless quality that they desired to see in Eastern culture. This demonstrates the turn from a decorative chinoiserie to a philosophical "Asianism," as termed by the Guggenheim Museum curator Alexandra Munroe, in the West's study of Chinese art and culture. In the early twentieth

century, this shift in the Euro-American aesthetic consciousness towards the Chinese arts can be traced back to the *International Exhibition*. Moreover, the Chinese government, as represented by the exhibition commissioner, F.T. Cheng, appeared actually to encourage this romantic, idealistic attitude rather than dispel it. In his lecture with the press a few days before the exhibition’s opening day, Cheng described the spirit of Chinese art as one “not made with the bayonet, but was founded upon peace, virtue, and affection.”

Cheng, thus, attempts to directly apply the noble, tranquil characteristics of the Chinese arts with contemporary Chinese society. In this manner, he focuses not on the artistic qualities of the arts, but the essential qualities of the Chinese people, which he interprets through the arts as an honorable, rather than a weak race. The Western audiences were least familiar with Chinese landscapes, and so in this initial encounter with fine works of Chinese traditional ink landscapes, their tendency was to regard them as mystical representations of the Chinese spiritual terrain. This exhibition made Chinese paintings accessible to Western scholars, which in reality only superficially elevated the status of the Chinese arts to the echelon of fine arts.

As the successful show was coming to a close, H.E. Winlock, the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York at the time, hoped to bring the imperial treasures to the U.S. before they returned to China. He approached the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Chinese Embassy with his idea by presenting it as an “excellent propaganda for the Chinese and [it] would give people in this country some

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idea of the desirability of preserving China as an entity." Yet, the U.S. government wanted to avoid agitating Japan, so it evade any involvement with China. Hence, the chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs at the Department of State, Stanley K. Hornbeck, refused Winlock's suggestion, advising that it would only be possible if the Chinese asked to show their art in the U.S. The Chinese ambassador to the U.S., Alfred Sze, also declined Winlock's proposal unless the U.S. government "approved." This sensitive situation reveals the wide repercussions of the heightening insular politics of the 1930s that were beginning to impede the flourishing of cultural internationalism. Subsequently, Winlock's dream failed to materialize and the Chinese treasures were carried back to Shanghai aboard a Royal Navy cruiser, Ranpura, in April 1936.

After the International Exhibition concluded, there was an explosion of small-scaled shows of Chinese art in London, such as an exhibition of Chinese paintings in the Prints and Drawings Gallery at the British Museum. Also, during and after the International Exhibition, a spate of books on Chinese art, and especially painting, was published, such as the Introduction to Chinese Art by Arnold Silcock, The Chinese Eye: an Interpretation of Chinese Painting by Chiang Yee, A Background to Chinese Painting by

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195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
197 Later that year, the Japanese tried to emulate the success of the London show by holding a joint exhibition with the Boston Museum and Harvard University called Art Treasures from Japan. The Japanese government released objects from the emperor's personal collection and registered national treasures, and the show was well received by high attendance and press. However, it could not match the great prestige and publicity of the Chinese exhibition. Cohen, East Asian Art, 122.
Soame Jenyns, and *Chinese Art* edited by Leigh Ashton.\(^{199}\) Furthermore, in an article about the exhibition in the January 1936 issue of ARTnews, the University of London was reportedly arranging a special extension course on Chinese art.\(^{200}\) The *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* offered the first chance for Westerners, who could not manage a trip to China, to experience and study first-hand superior Chinese artworks. This unique opportunity, in effect, fanned the flames of the West’s interest in Chinese culture, ignited the study of Chinese painting, and served as the impetus for the later serious study of Chinese art in the West. The exhibition also acted as one of the last impressive examples of the cultural internationalism highly sought after by Western intellectuals before the Second World War.

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SECTION 8

EXHIBITIONS' AFFECT ON CHINA

Back in China, the reception of the London exhibition was bittersweet and reflected the complex issues surrounding Chinese contemporary art and culture. Though Ma Guoliang, in his editorial column in the popular Shanghai pictorial The Young Companion (Liang You), lauded the London exhibition for positively altering the European and American condescending view of the Chinese, he also lamented why contemporary Chinese art could not equal the achievements of antiquity.201 The popular journals, such as The Eastern Miscellany (Dongfang Zazhi) and The Young Companion, also covered these exhibitions by publishing photos and paintings from these two exhibitions, such as a piece on the Berlin exhibition in the May 1, 1934 issue of The Eastern Miscellany (figure 15) and a 1935 issue of The Young Companion (figure 16), and a piece on the London exhibition in a 1936 issue of The Young Companion (figure 17). Early pictorials, such as The Young Companion, served to provide a window on international and domestic news, as well as to illustrate both modern and traditional

lifestyles and customs in China and abroad.\textsuperscript{202} Therefore, the Chinese public was informed and encouraged to take pride in the popularity of Chinese traditional arts abroad. However, pictures and reproductions of Western style paintings and exhibitions in China were also shown in the same issues as the ones of the Berlin and London shows. Therefore, the domestic publicity of the Berlin show of contemporary Chinese painting, and especially the London exhibition of solely traditional arts and antiquities, demonstrates the complicated direction of Chinese modern art that has to negotiate around the issue of how to integrate China’s traditional arts into Western style art in order to construct a uniquely Chinese modern art on both the national and international levels.

China’s ambivalent movement into modernity is most evidenced by the differences in the exhibits chosen for display at home and abroad. For example, when the artworks from London returned to China, they were exhibited in Nanjing in April 1937, but this time with selected paintings by living Chinese artists.\textsuperscript{203} Therefore, though what were shown in London were solely Chinese antiquities, contemporary artworks were also included in the exhibition in China. This choice implies the different motivations and objectives the exhibition organizers held according to the exhibition’s different social contexts. In the West, the organizers of the comprehensive London show were cognizant

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{202} Waara, “Arts and Life,” 72.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{203} Kao, “China’s Response to the West,” 147.}
Figure 15. *Eastern Miscellany (Dongfang Zazhi)*, May 1, 1934
Figure 16. *The Young Companion (Liang You)*, 1935
Figure 17. *The Young Companion (Liang You)*, 1936
of the London organizers' desire to display an ancient, imperial Chinese art history that stops at the nineteenth century, while in China, the organizers desired to display a modern, dynamic Chinese art history that continues to the present day.

Also in 1937, three months before the Marco Polo Bridge incident that set off the second Sino-Japanese War, the Second National Art Exhibition organized by the Ministry of Education opened in Nanjing. Its opening was timed to coincide with the newly constructed art gallery and concert hall in Nanjing, which were built with the proceeds from the London International Exhibition of Chinese Art.\textsuperscript{204} In the forward to the exhibition catalogue, written by the Ministry of Education, it was stated that they decided to mount a second national art exhibition largely due to the vote of confidence in Chinese art from its tremendous international reception at the London exhibition.\textsuperscript{205} They also wrote that, since there was a first national art exhibition in 1929 that took place in Shanghai, they decided to name this exhibition the Second National Art Exhibition to acknowledge the first one.\textsuperscript{206} Therefore, the popular reception of the traditional Chinese arts in Europe was a major factor that instigated the planning of the second national art exhibition. The forward implies that, if the London exhibition had not occurred, the Ministry of Education would have likely not considered implementing a second national

\begin{footnotes}
\item[204] Ibid., 196.
\item[205] \textit{A Special Collection of the Second National Exhibition of Chinese Art under the Auspices of the Ministry of Education} (Nanjing: Shang we yin shu guan, 1937), 1.
\item[206] Cai and Liu both were both active members of the Chinese Association for Educational Reform in the 1920s and worked together in proposing a government sponsored national exhibition (Waara 127). This project came to fruition in 1929 with the First National Art Exhibition, which was headed by Cai. It included a mix of guohua, embroidery, Western style paintings, sculpture, photography, architecture and design. There was also a section of works by 60 modern Japanese artists. Birnie Danzker, "Shanghai Modern," 26.
\end{footnotes}
art exhibition. This demonstrates that the accolades that Chinese traditional arts were receiving in the West through the international exhibitions profoundly impacted decisions made by Chinese governing bodies.

However, unlike the London exhibition, the pieces that were selected for the Second National Art Exhibition were not all traditional. The exhibition showcased over 3,000 items categorized into nine genres: rare books, seal-engraving, decorative arts, architectural designs and models, sculpture, Western style painting, contemporary calligraphy, traditional ink painting, ancient calligraphy and painting, photography, and archeological finds from recent excavations by the Academia Sinica from 1934 to 1936 at Anyang.²⁰⁷ According to the catalogue listing, there were 508 works of Chinese traditional painting and calligraphy done by contemporary artists, as well as 150 Western style paintings, 41 Western style designs, and eighteen Western style sculptures. Though the bulk of the exhibition contained traditional style art pieces, the large variety of artworks and objects shown indicates that the international exhibitions did not only positively affect the status of Chinese traditional arts at home, but rather the whole category of Chinese arts in general.

The Ministry of Education claimed in the catalogue's forward that they chose to select works from the past to the present to display at the national art exhibition, because they wanted to show some variety.²⁰⁸ Yet, the artists and influential intellectuals, such as Liu Haisu and Cai Yuanpei, decision to show only Chinese traditional art abroad,

²⁰⁷ Kao, "China's Response to the West," 196.
²⁰⁸ A Special Collection, 2.
while they exhibited both traditional and Western style art at home, indicates that they were fundamentally negotiating modernities. Abroad in Europe, in order to counter the "Chinaman" image in the Western imagination, the traditional arts were utilized to reflect the noble, cultivated essence of past and present China. At the same time, at home, the Chinese government attempted to present equally the Chinese traditional arts and Western style arts, as evidenced in the exhibition of the returned pieces from London and the Second National Art Exhibition. These negotiations might have been made in order to accommodate the broader expectations of the Chinese viewing public in contrast with the Western audience, but it also suggests that the Chinese government was trying to portray the progression of Chinese art that leads into the modern period. Such a historical representation contrasts sharply with the singular presentation of traditional Chinese arts in Europe. Thus, the Chinese government's quest to articulate Chinese cultural values in modern times differed according to each exhibition's intended audience.

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209 Though the Berlin exhibition presented contemporary art, there was no effort made by the organizers to delineate a pronounced distinction between the art of the guohua artists of the present with those of their predecessors. Hence, the paintings were viewed as part of the ineffable, changeless arts of the Chinese past.
SECTION 9

CONCLUSION

The Chinese organizers succeeded in their motivation to appeal to the West with the “essence” of their traditional arts and culture and to illustrate that China had cultural parity with the West. Yet, by emphasizing the essence of Chinese culture through only the traditional arts, the efforts of the Chinese exhibition organizers in the end reinforced the wise, romantic persona of China in the Western imagination, rather than assert China as a modern culture. The West greatly admired Chinese arts and culture for its serene disposition, which contrasts with the character of the supposedly progressive and aggressive West. However, they ultimately saw the Chinese arts as part of the permanent, philosophical attitude that is indicative of the current deteriorating China, which is ill-equipped for the modern times that are dictated by the West. For example, the modern ink paintings of the Contemporary Chinese Painting traveling show that began in Berlin were perceived no differently than the traditional ink paintings in the London exhibition. A slightly modified version of the Berlin exhibition displayed in London’s New Burlington Galleries, and it opened in February 1935, a few months before the
International Exhibition. The show had 230 hanging scroll paintings, which were mostly done in the literati convention of black and white. In a press review of this exhibition, though, this show was treated as a mere prelude to the International Exhibition. Though the reviewer, only noted as B.B., mentioned that the exhibition was of modern art, he conflated the two exhibitions as part of the same, timeless Chinese art tradition. B.B. claimed that the New Burlington Galleries' exhibition, like the International Exhibition that will occur in November, shows the painter in "seclusion and apart from the world."

B.B.'s words echo those of William Cohn in reference to the Contemporary Chinese Painting exhibition in Berlin, where he said, "It is most of all this dissociation from the present, this immersion in the eternal beauty of nature that lends this art such a powerful appeal for many Westerners." In the period between the wars in Europe and America, Chinese art and culture clearly was received not for its artistic value, but for its supposed profound philosophical teachings that could save the West from its own destructive modernity. Western pundits, thus, interpreted the Chinese arts as a stable, innocuous panacea to the modern dilemma of impermanence. Percival David, in his first

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210 The London show was a condensed version of the Berlin show and was organized under the auspices of the China Association and the China Society and headed by the Chinese ambassador, Guo Taiji, and a committee led by Lord Halifax. Vanker, "Modern Chinese Painting," 120.

211 Liu's works numbered the most, with twenty paintings, such as his Five Pines (Five Ministers) on Taishan, Waterfall, Cockcomb, After the Rain, and Mount Brenchard, Switzerland. "Modern Chinese Painting: Exhibition in London," The Times (London) 21 (February 1935): 10.


lecture in conjunction with the International Exhibition, announced, "In these days of international alarms and excursions, it is gratifying to be able to record that some fourteen nations, whose treasures will be represented in the Exhibition, will thus vie with each other in the arts of peace." Similarly, artist George Sheringham commended the Chinese tradition for "train[ing] the artist away from that craving for erratic individual expression which is such an essential characteristic in modern Western art." Lawrence Binyon most romantically illustrated the Western obsession with the pacific, invariable mystique of the East, when he said in the London Observer:

I think of Chinese art and its immemorial, continuing tradition, emerging slowly from the mists of time and legend into the daylight of history, with a serene activity of production, without haste, without rest...In Europe one country or another has a great period of creation, and then apparently becomes exhausted; but in China period after period passes, each of some hundreds of years, and there is still the Chinese genius working...still maintaining the tradition.

This regard of an untouched, pristine China is an orientalizing holdover from earlier times, when Sinologists did not regard China as a historical culture or civilization. The late nineteenth century German historian Leopold von Ranke viewed China as a land of "eternal standstill" and stated that it was futile to even consider the "peoples of the eternal standstill to grasp the inner movement of world history." Von Ranke's

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214 "Chinese Art from Japan," The Times (London) 14 September 1935, 8.


217 Marianne Bastid-Bruguière, "Some Themes of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century European Historiography on China," in Europe Studies China: Papers from an International Conference on the
contemporary, the influential French philosopher and historian Ernest Renan (1823-1892) agreed with Ranke’s opinion and helped perpetuate this belief in scholarly circles. In his opening preface to his *Histoire du peuple d’Israël*, Renan stated that the only three histories worth studying to understand humanity were those of the Greeks, Romans, and Israelis.

Thus, the Chinese advantageously appeared in the 1930s, when a Europe that recently underwent turbulent times was yearning for just that “eternal standstill.” The Western art critics and cultural pundits saw Chinese arts and culture’s ability to preserve the essential nobility of Chinese art in the face of the vicissitudes of wars and other historical upheavals as a vital lesson for the “restless and ambitious” West. In this milieu, where China and the West were both essentializing the Chinese arts and culture, an objective serious study of the history of Chinese art was unfathomable, but these exhibitions did lay the vital groundwork by creating a critical mass for the discipline to mature in the second half of the twentieth century.

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218 Ibid.

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