

Inventive or Innovative: Beijing's Art Districts in Comparison

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Word Count: 14 946

18 May 2018

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Miss Svetlana Kharchenkova not only for her support and insightful comments throughout the research, but also for her previous research on the topic which inspired mine.

Furthermore, I think it is due to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support for me in my studies but also for helping me in the time of doubt. I would also like to thank all of the interviewees involved in my research, who made it possible for me to better understand the contemporary Chinese art world.

This accomplishment would have not been possible without you. Thank you.

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Introduction

The modern and contemporary art worlds have always been elusive subjects to research, given the field's difficulties in gathering data and making sense out of it. However it appears that there has always been an underlying common topic which most researchers in the field agree on: the existence of a distinction between commercial and non-commercial galleries. My research aims at analysing this duality in the context of the Chinese contemporary art market and more specifically in Beijing's art market. In my opinion, this specific perspective, namely the analysis of commercial and non-commercial art galleries in China has been largely overlooked. In fact, whereas it is relatively easy to find sources on the topic of researches conducted in the West, it is indeed very difficult to find any research on the matter of the commercialization of art galleries in China. Therefore, I do believe that my research will be starting to fill a research gap in the wider topic of the contemporary Chinese art market.

The present research is an attempt to explore the presented and hidden narratives, or non-disclosed behaviours, of two art hubs located in Beijing: Caochangdi art village and 798 art district. These two art districts and the Chinese contemporary art scene in general are gradually getting more international attention, and, especially during the booming of the art market in China in the 2000s, these kinds of art hubs flourished. These two districts in particular are by many perceived as radically different from each other: during my interning period in 798 art district in summer 2016, I met many peers and workers of the field which argued that 798 was not what it used to be anymore and only became more and more commercial and touristy, whereas Caochangdi was still "about art." After visiting both districts multiple times, I had the same impression: the usually deserted alleys in Caochangdi's compounds felt very different from the always crowded roads of 798's art district. However, is there an actual difference between the two art hubs?

This is, I believe, a fundamental question, because in the system of the art world, an actor's success is rooted in reputation and the collection of symbolic power, as Pierre Bourdieu would put it, rather than in sales and market shares. Therefore such a different impression of the two districts would justify a stronger influence of the least commercial district. The issue is, that this appears not to be the case and both districts house some of the most influential contemporary art galleries, either founded by locals or foreigners. The question that immediately follows is therefore: is there an actual difference in the way the galleries of these two art districts present themselves so that it justifies this different impression? In order to answer this question, I decided to try to research this difference in perception of the local art workers by attempting a classification of the art galleries of the two art districts as either "commercial" or "non-commercial" through the analysis of their

narratives. These narratives were encountered during the interviews with the representatives of the galleries located in the above-mentioned art districts, which were held in Beijing in 2016. Following the interviews I analysed the answers to the specific questions, thus classifying the art galleries as either “commercial” or “not commercial”.

This research draws upon the researches of three authors, Marcia Bystryn, Pierre Bourdieu and Stuart Plattner which would subsequently shape my research question: all of them found duality in the Western art world, presenting a “commercial” or “innovation-oriented” group of art actors as opposed to “non-commercial” or “invention-oriented” ones. This duality in nature of the art galleries, which will be more extensively discussed below, is fundamentally linked to the focus invention-oriented galleries have on either the art “producers” meaning the artists or the innovation-oriented galleries have on the art “consumers” meaning the institutions and collectors. The above-mentioned secondary sources revealed that this kind of duality is relying on specific factors which would therefore be pointing at either a innovation or invention-oriented behaviour of the gallery. It should be addressed the value of the terms themselves, innovation and invention, which I borrowed from Bystryn’s research. In fact, these terms proved to be more difficult to apply to the sample than previously expected. In fact, besides the fact that I used the terms to indicate a duality defined in researches conducted in very different locations and times, namely 1950s New York for Bystryn’s research, in 1980s Paris for Bourdieu’s, in 1990s St. Louis for Plattner’s, the elements hinting at an invention-oriented gallery are much more straightforward than the ones hinting at an innovation-oriented gallery. This happens because the “innovation” term itself, in my research, indicates all of the galleries which are not “not-commercial”, including therefore a much more heterogeneous group of galleries, if compared with the “not-commercial” or “invention” sample.

However, another issue was emerging: being that this duality has only been researched in the Western art world, is it the case for the Chinese art world too? After a research in the secondary sources focused on the Chinese art market, I could identify some of the peculiar elements of that specific market, but there was no conclusive research on this specific theoretical frame of commercial and non-commercial oriented galleries applied in China. In fact, some of my secondary sources, and more specifically Bourdieu, extensively discussed the topic of commercial and non-commercial art dealers in Paris; more specifically he discussed the topic of art dealers with a weaker or stronger disavowal of economic principles underlying the market as a way to distinguish them. The issue is, he only focuses on the local Parisian art market. My other secondary sources, namely Bystryn and Plattner, in their own way, discussed the concept of commercial art dealers but they did it in the context of the US market. Therefore it became obvious that there is a gap in the research for this specific field, which is the reason for which I decided to focus on researching the

commercialization of the art market in Beijing's art districts. Consequently, my research question is: "What are the narratives the two Beijing's Contemporary art district's galleries use to present themselves and do the districts differ in it or are they similar? In which way would they be similar?"

The following chapters present all of the progresses of my research and its outcome. Chapter One focuses on the above-mentioned secondary sources, mainly Pierre Bourdieu, Stuart Plattner and Marcia Bystryn and presenting their perspectives on the topics related with this research. Chapter Two is focused on defining the object of the research and the methodology used to obtain the data. Chapter Three presents an overall socio-historical overview of the two art districts. Chapter Four analyses the most interesting cases among the interviewees of my sample. Chapter Five presents the results of my research and the conclusion answers the research question and provides suggestions for further research.

Literature Review – Chapter Two

The following chapter summarizes my research's theoretical background. This background theory will aid me in explaining the art world's general situation in China, thus helping the reader understand the analysis' results. Furthermore, given the extent of the previous research on the matter, my research will focus on few specific aspects, which will be presented in depth in Chapter Three. Being that my research topic is the commercialization of the art galleries in Beijing, I will first focus on the current state of the debate surrounding the art market in general and the specific Chinese market's case. Subsequently I will define the main sociological and art historical debates on the art market's and art's commercialization, both in China and abroad. Finally, I will focus on the art galleries' role in the art world and the commercialization of art and the Chinese case in particular.

The Art World

Annamma Joy and John F. Sherry, define the art world as “the combination of producers (artists), various intermediaries (commercial and noncommercial), and art consumers.”¹ This is a very broad definition of the term, because of the sheer number of the actors in the field and also their different degree of “commercialization.” However, the best starting point for analyzing this field is Pierre Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production*. He distinguished a “field of restricted production” and a “field of large-scale cultural production.” The former is producing cultural goods but, by the means of a common understanding of the market actors themselves, develops own criteria to analyze art and these producers aim at receiving peer-recognition. The latter, targets a larger public instead, and its production and sale are subdued to the market's laws in the attempt to reach as many customers as possible.² Stuart Plattner pointed at the same issue in discussing the relation between prices and art historical value, when stating that there is no “accepted criteria to assess quality throughout the whole system.”³ He implied, thus, that the system is not homogeneous in its nature. In the field of restricted production, therefore the “capital of symbolic goods” and their “cultural consecration”, becomes more important than the economic capital. This means that this

¹ Annamma Joy and John F. Sherry Jr, “Framing Considerations in the PRC: Creating Value in the Contemporary

² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 5.

³ Stuart Plattner, *High Art Down Home: an Economic Ethnography of a Local Art Market* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11.

field of restricted production is relying on those institutions that conserve the capital of symbolic goods, such as museums and the educational system.⁴

In another chapter, Bourdieu defined the role of the “cultural businessman.”⁵ This figure is exploiting the creator’s labor by trading the cultural product. He is also the actor which consecrates the product by discovering it. The consecration’s effectiveness is therefore given by each actor’s degree of authority, which in turn is constituted by the “credit” of that specific actor and his connections’ value (credit).⁶ Therefore, the more authority one actor has, the more “symbolic energy”⁷ he is able to mobilize with its name. When an art world actor exploits its accumulated cultural capital, it ends up running two different economies, one oriented towards the production and its innovation (of the artist), and one towards the marketing of its consecrated products, effectively treated as resources.⁸ Consequently, Bourdieu defined the role of the actors in dominant position in the market, which overall tend towards silence and “discretion” in order to maintain the current status quo, whereas the dominated tend to rebuke this stance and break the silence, calling into question the dominant actors and their taken-for granted world, such as by refusing the economic income in order to gain symbolic energies.⁹ This results, according to Bourdieu, in a continuous flow of economic capital from the dominated towards the dominating actors and a reverse flow of cultural capital.¹⁰ This also implies that when one actor achieves recognition or becomes “established”, they start losing their cultural power in favor of its economic power.¹¹

I would like to point out that is my research did not include Bourdieu’s ideas on the fluid relationship between dominant and dominated actors in the market; what I borrowed from his work are the elements which according to him point at what he identifies as commercial and non-commercial galleries by defining their interest in either accumulating symbolic power or economic power. However I believe that it is important to keep into consideration his ideas on these economic and symbolic powers’ fluxes when dealing with this topic, and therefore I included his views on the matter. Following this introduction into the general the art world’s functioning, I will focus on the specificities of the Chinese art world.

⁴ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 12.

⁵ Ibid, 263.

⁶ Ibid, 265.

⁷ Ibid, 267.

⁸ Ibid, 287.

⁹ Ibid, 270.

¹⁰ Ibid, 326.

¹¹ Ibid, 347.

Joy and Sherry suggested that “the uniqueness of PRC’s contemporary art market”¹² lies in its hybrid model for distribution and pricing, due to the market socialism’s engagement with global forces. Regarding this hybrid model, Joy and Sherry, are founding their definition on Ulf Hannerz and Homi Bhabha respectively, meaning that the Chinese art market is an “interplay”¹³ between market socialism and globalization in which there is no “assumed or imposed hierarchy.”¹⁴ Pollack, described the Chinese case using the expression “art world with Chinese characteristics.”¹⁵ Pollack also reported the auction houses’ role in China, where they often become the first market for artists who just avoid working with galleries and directly sell at auctions, leaving themselves open to market manipulation.¹⁶ The same point was made by Svetlana Kharchenkova and Olav Velthuis in their article on the role of auction houses in China in boosting artists’ price¹⁷ and by Joy and Sherry, reporting that auction houses in China behave like galleries themselves.¹⁸ This peculiar difference with the Western art market could be reconnected to the fact that, as DeBevoise, in dealing with 1978-1993 Chinese art scene, pointed out, the Chinese art market itself was born on the concept of money-making. In fact, De Bevoise reported that Yan Zhanfeng and Ye Wulin, contributors to the *Zhongguo Meishubao*, a Chinese art newspaper, expressed in 1987 the thought of the art market’s creation as an outlet for artistic production, given the limited governmental purchase power.¹⁹

Differently from what Barbara Pollack reported in her book²⁰ throughout my interviews I often encountered general pessimism among the gallery owners and their trend to compare their market to the Western one, which could be reconnected with the concept of “cultural cringe.”²¹ Plattner defined “cultural cringe” as the decentralized areas of the art market’s generalized feeling of inferiority to the centers of the art market. If this pessimism is a cultural cringe symptom, then, according to Plattner’s research, we should find that this specific art market lacks variety in public exhibition spaces.²² There are indeed elements that point at the lack of public structure’s variety in China: in fact as Pollack reported in her writings that running non-profit art institutions and private

¹² Joy and Sherry, “Framing Considerations in the PRC,” 309.

¹³ Ulf Hannerz, “The World in Creolization”, *Africa*, vol 57, no.4 (1987): 346

¹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 4.

¹⁵ Barbara Pollack, *The Wild Wild East: An American Art Critic’s Adventure in China*, (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Limited, 2010), 19.

¹⁶ Pollack, *The Wild Wild East*, 99.

¹⁷ Svetlana Kharchenkova and Olav Velthuis, “How to Become a Judgment Device: Valuation Practices and the Role of Auctions in the Emerging Chinese Art Market,” *Socio-Economic Review*, mwx057: 1, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwx057>.

¹⁸ Joy and Sherry, “Framing Considerations in the PRC,” 339.

¹⁹ Jane DeBevoise, *Between State and Market: Chinese Temporary Art in the Post-Mao Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 131.

²⁰ Pollack, *The Wild Wild East*, 77.

²¹ Plattner, *High Art Down Home*, 3.

²² *Ibid*, 144.

museums in China appears to be very difficult because of the lack of common ethical guidelines and tax-free donation policies, thus resulting in the lack of authoritative contemporary art institutions.²³ She also reported on the lack of independent art journals, since most of them, work as “advertisers” rather than publishers, and on the conflict of interest many Chinese curators present, being art critics at the same time.

The Commercialization of Art

I should now try to define the topic of the art and art market’s commercialization. On the topic of art’s commercialization, Velthuis summarized how traditional art history saw art that failed to distance itself from the market as Kitsch, since the price was independent from art’s value, and how the Marxist approach saw the art “contaminated” by the economic field, becoming a fetish.²⁴ Velthuis also stated that an artist’s pricing is sometimes more elucidating on his artistic value than his reviews²⁵, just as Sarah Thornton agreed.²⁶ Furthermore, Bourdieu pointed out that the emergence of the work of art as a commodity, caused a polarization into two opposing perspectives: art-as-commodity versus art-as-pure-signification.²⁷ He then described the latter conception of art as representative of the art by the field of the restricted production, which is “pure, abstract and ‘esoteric.’”²⁸ Bourdieu then suggested how the opposition between “commercialized” and “non-commercialized”, identified with large scale versus small scale, a dominant or dominated position, a less or more disavowed relation with the commercial enterprises as underlying principles of the art market, among other cultural fields.²⁹

Bourdieu argued that the only way to stay on top in the field of restricted production is an unyielding disavowal of commercialization. This disavowal, though is nothing more than a “lie”, because it still contains some degree of “economic rationality”³⁰: in fact Bourdieu believed that by going commercial, art dealers are actually earning less money than they would by acquiring symbolic capital through the disavowal of economy and spending it to reap full profits from their positions of “bankers” of symbolic capital.³¹ Plattner supported this statement as well, claiming that

²³ Pollack, *The Wild Wild East*, 165.

²⁴ Olav Velthuis, “Symbolic Meanings of Prices: Constructing the Value of Contemporary Art in Amsterdam and New York Galleries,” *Theory and Society* 32, no. 2 (April 2003): 187.

²⁵ Velthuis, “Symbolic Meanings of Prices,” 206.

²⁶ Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 8.

²⁷ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 262.

“uneconomic” behavior is sometimes signaler of the interest in “economizing principles.”³² This is, according to Bourdieu, the concept that lies at the art market’s very core, governing its functioning.

The Commercialization of Art in China

In China the topic takes a different turn; here the commercialization of art was cherished by the art institutions, such as on the art theory newspaper *Meishu sichao* by Jia Fangzhou’s words which in 1985 acknowledged the existence of an art’s commodity economy in China and encouraged it because it would stimulate artistic competition.³³ Pollack reported on this that whereas in 2006 some of her interviewee claimed the impossibility of being non-commercial in China³⁴, some others saw the 2009 market bubble as a “purification” of the art market from commercialized businesses and artists.³⁵

The Art Galleries

Regarding the galleries themselves, Bourdieu created a distinction between “commercial” and “cultural” businesses: the former is a business based on a short production cycle, with the objective to minimize risks implying rapid return of profits and rapid circulation. The latter bases itself on a long production cycle, accepting the risks inherent to this cultural investment.³⁶ It is important to point out that this distinction was created in the publishing houses’ context, but it can be applied to other actors of the field of cultural production, since, as Bourdieu puts it, this opposition of commercial and non-commercial “brings about the integration in a single field of the various socially specialized sub-fields.”³⁷ This distinction resembles the one that Bystryn made in her research on the two case studies in New York: the artist-oriented gallery, connected with the artistic chain’s producing end and focusing on supporting new, and therefore less saleable, artists’ practices, thus fostering new artistic movements. Instead, the market-oriented gallery, a business which has strong connections with the consuming end of the artistic chain, analyzes the artists’ marketability and only then brings them to the consumers.³⁸ Bourdieu also pointed out that these commercial businesses tend to accumulate economic power and, as mentioned above, to lose

³² Plattner, *High Art Down Home*, 11.

³³ DeBevoise, *Between State and Market*, 132.

³⁴ Pollack, *The Wild Wild East*, 124.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 207.

³⁶ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 280.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 285.

³⁸ Marcia Bystryn, “Art Galleries as Gatekeepers: the case of the Abstract Expressionists,” *Social Research* 45, no. 2, (July 1978): 393.

cultural power. What happens to cultural businesses, according to him is that by becoming more established and bigger, they risk the same fate of commercial businesses. The only way out for these businesses, is according to him to rebuke the economic principles by a disavowal of the “economy” itself, that I will define below.³⁹ In peripheral art markets, the situation is according to Plattner somehow similar, with high art dealers either being free from economic constraints or which “get fat”⁴⁰ as Bourdieu would put it, or struggling to survive by refusing to give in to the art market’s economy, and decorative, commercial art dealers earning a living out of their businesses by openly accepting the market laws, meaning focusing on highly saleable art.⁴¹

Another peculiarity of the art galleries in general has been identified by Olav Velthuis in his article that mostly focused on the pricing mechanism in art galleries. He recognizes the two biggest anomalies in the market as the impossibility to openly give discounts and the necessity to price two same-sized pieces of the same artist equally. According to Velthuis, these anomalies are all derived from the fact that the art market works on the base of the trust that the collectors give to the art dealers.⁴² If the art dealer would break the previously mentioned unwritten rules, his or her reliability would be called into question. Plattner gave a comment on the topic as well, pointing out that in practice art dealers can operate a 10% discount maximum for long-time customers, lest seeing the artists pricing structure collapse and therefore damaging the artists’ reputation.⁴³

The Chinese Art Galleries

The case of Chinese art galleries, though, appears to be peculiar, since their role in the art market is relatively recent: in fact, Chiu⁴⁴ points out the lack of local galleries prior the 90’s and Pollack⁴⁵ suggests that this caused Chinese artists to become dealers for their own art pieces, selling directly to, usually foreign, collectors. This specific trend has now changed and there is a new group of contemporary art Chinese collectors absorbing the artist’s cultural production. This double role of artist and dealer is probably the cause of many complaints among Western galleries dealing with Chinese artists in the West, who lament artists’ lack of fidelity⁴⁶: the solution to this lack of artist’s reliability, as Pollack suggests, was flexibility in the business relationship between artist and gallery.

³⁹ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 287.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 287.

⁴¹ Plattner, *High Art Down Home*, 141.

⁴² Velthuis, “Symbolic Meanings of Prices,” 199.

⁴³ Ibid, 145.

⁴⁴ Melissa Chiu, *Chinese Contemporary Art: 7 things you should know* (New York: AW Asia, 2008), 46.

⁴⁵ Pollack, *The Wild Wild East*, 70.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 72.

Conclusion

In conclusion I am going to point out the core concepts my research is based on. It appears to me that that these commercial and cultural businesses defined by Bourdieu and Bystryn, are outlined by elements, which can be used to distinguish them into the two categories, commercial and non-commercial galleries. This distinction is, as mentioned above, indeed identifiable in Plattner's analysis of the peripheral market. Therefore it seems that it would be possible to outline a profiling for both galleries sets and trying to distinguish them, based on the statements the three authors make on each set. However, as Bourdieu pointed out, the market actors are compelled to disavowal of commercialization, therefore lying on their real interests in order to be considered influential. My research will be focusing on these narratives they use to present themselves with and my questions will try to unveil their real standing on the matter. As a final remark, it is necessary to point out that none of the scholars I just quoted is focusing his/her own research on the contemporary Chinese art market. In fact, as mentioned above, Bystryn's research is focusing on the New York art galleries of the 1950s, Bourdieu deals with 1980s Parisian art world and Plattner's research is conducted in 1990's St. Louis art world. This does not necessarily imply that their conclusions do not apply to the Chinese art market's case, given that they all find this common duality in the art market, in these quite different, albeit Western, cases. This chapter focused on describing the foundation for my research and, consequently, my research questions. The next chapter will focus on the research sample and the methodology used to research it.

Sample and Methodology – Chapter One

In this chapter, I will first present the research sample and point out which galleries were included and which ones were excluded. Subsequently, I will discuss the interviewing process and finally I will explain the theoretical background behind each interview question.

The Sample

The research data is both drawn from the theoretical, and ethnographic background, in order to have a wider perspective, both theoretical and “practical”, on the market itself. The choice to use the semi-structured interviews comes from the awareness that the art market field’s data are very hard to come by. Therefore the first-hand data gathering was deemed to be the most reliable methodology. The use of secondary sources was necessary to gather information on which the research question was based and consequently, to shape the interview questions. The research’s ethnographic aspect does not consist solely of the formal interviews: in fact I acted as a participant observer both when gathering the galleries’ contacts during the October 2016 and as I was working at a gallery in 798 as a summer intern. In this time period I visited galleries of both districts in order to familiarize with the areas and to obtain the galleries’ contacts. Then, I contacted by email 40 of the galleries, requesting an interview. When the email was not returned, I contacted them on their phone. Among those, 20 answered and only 14 accepted to make an appointment. In fact, 6 galleries answered but rejected the interview because of lack of time or interest. Among the 14 remaining galleries, 7 are based in Caochangdi art village and 7 in 798 art district.

The sample galleries’ status is heterogeneous: some are long-established and well-known local galleries, others are small and recently established galleries, while some others are foreign galleries working in China. Their influence varies between local, national or international reach. There is the need to specify, though, that with long-established we are talking in terms of a dozen years, as the sample’s earliest gallery was established in 2003. The sample’s characteristics are presented in Table 1 for Caochangdi and Table 2 for 798.

Table 1

| Caochangdi | A1 | A2 (not analyzed) | A3 | A4 | A5 (not analyzed) | A6 | A7 |
|--------------|--|--|--|---|---|---|--|
| Gallery Type | National reach and foreigners-founded, established in 2013 | National reach and foreigners-founded, established in 2005 | Local reach and Chinese-founded, established in 2015 | International reach and foreigners-founded, established in 2008 | National reach and Chinese-founded, established in 2003 | International reach and Foreigners-founded, established in 2004 ⁴⁷ | Local reach and Chinese-founded, established in 2012 |

Table 2

| 798 | B1 | B2 (not analyzed) | B3 | B4 | B5 | B6 | B7 |
|--------------|--|----------------------------------|---|---|--|---|--|
| Gallery Type | International reach and foreigners-founded, established after 2000 | Local reach and Chinese-founded, | National reach and Chinese-founded, established in 2005 | International reach and foreigners-founded, established in 2005 | Local reach and Chinese-founded, established in 2006 | International reach and foreigners-founded, | Local reach and Chinese-founded, established in 2010 |

The sample institutions are guaranteed anonymity. In order to preserve the interviewees' anonymity, they have been assigned a letter representing the art district where they are based in and a number representing the chronological succession of the interviews in the same district. The letter A stands for Caochangdi and the B stands for 798; therefore the institution A1 is the representative of the institution based in Caochangdi which was interviewed first.

The sample consists of 14 institutions in total, of which only 11 are to be accounted for as analysed samples. In fact, among the institution directors, one (A2) refused to take part in the research but gave me a feedback with her perspectives on the art market. Another institution (A5), took part in the interview, but throughout the interview process, it became clear that it was not an ordinary gallery but a non-profit institution. Furthermore, a gallery located in 798 (B2), resulted to be focusing on the art produced by the gallery owner, a local artist, therefore it was excluded from the sample. I decided to not include these three galleries in the invention and innovation analysis process.

The Interviewing Process

The methodology used for the interviews is based on a questions set aimed at defining which kind of approach the interviewee's gallery uses in dealing art. The assumptions behind these questions are rooted in the research's theoretical framework: by analysing the existing theoretical

⁴⁷ Now it is only Chinese-owned and relocated in 2009 to Caochangdi from 798.

research, it was possible to isolate a set of nineteen dichotomies that set the innovation-oriented galleries apart from the invention-oriented galleries. These dichotomies were used to define nineteen questions, which had the task to probe what was the gallery's standing in each instance. The questions are structured in a way that should avoid misunderstandings and any kind of interviewee's defensive reaction on the most sensitive aspects of the interview (i.e. the financial aspect).

When the questions were put in practice, though, it happened that some interviewees were not sure about what some of the questions stood for: therefore, the questions were modified and the line of questioning was sometimes steered in order to keep the focus on the research topic, resulting in a semi-structured interview format. For this reason, not all of the interviews follow the same exact pattern, but flexibly follow the interviewee answers in order to cover all of the researched aspects. Moreover, sometimes the previous interviews would influence the subsequent ones: for example, the interesting comments on the art brokers in China, raised by A1, compelled me to inquire deeper on that issue in the subsequent interviews. However, not all of the questions gave interesting or useful results, because of mistakes in the questions' structure or because of misunderstandings with the interviewees. Therefore, it happened that, in the end, the questions selected for the analysis were only seven.

The interviewees were for the most part gallery directors, and only in the case of B7 the interviewee was the treasurer and the gallery vice-director. The interviews usually took place in the interviewee's gallery, but in one instance, the gallery B1's director preferred to meet outside the working hours in a café, and therefore it is where the interview took place. The previously mentioned interviewee (A2) feedback, focused on the idea that it is impossible to properly research this field by the means of an ethnographic research, because, according to the interviewee, that "the [art] market is not transparent." She argued that the gallery owners would just try to present themselves at their best, hiding their worst by "telling you cute little stories." She also pointed out that the "art market is just the sideshow" and the most important thing is still art and people who creates art, and interviewing the artists themselves would be the interesting thing to do. Acknowledging the limits of the interview research method, I still believe that this is the best available method to research the contemporary art market: firstly, because the research data in this particular field, is quite hard to come by, and secondly, because gathering first-hand information allowed me to steer the interview process towards the information I need. In fact, this research is focused on how these galleries present themselves and at the same time attempting to see behind those narratives the interviewees use. For this particular reason, the interview questions have the specific objective to answer a series of unexpressed questions. Furthermore, this methodology,

meaning interviews, is the best way to study the way the galleries present themselves to externals, which is also one of my research's aims.

The Questions

I will now present the in-depth explanation of the eight questions that were used to assess the galleries, presenting the criteria used to identify the answer as commercial or non-commercial. The summary of the questions and the criteria is reported in Table 3.

Table 3

| Question | Invention-Oriented Galleries | Innovation-Oriented Galleries |
|--|--|---|
| Duration of artists' collaboration (Bystryn) | Short termed | Long-lasting relationship |
| Gallery's focus (Bystryn) | Closer ties with the artistic community | Closer ties with the institutions and museums |
| Reductions over or under 10% (Plattner) | Lower or equal than 10% | Over 10% |
| Availability to compromise for immediate gains instead of long-term gains (Bourdieu) | Sell to customers ignoring the real value of the artwork | Do not sell to customers ignoring the real value of the artwork |
| Exhibitions rooster (Bourdieu) | Homogeneous | Eclectic |
| Self-perspective on success and artistic value (Bystryn and Bourdieu) | Focuses on artistic production and peer-recognition | Focuses on the production's market and increase in fame |
| Art as... (Bourdieu) | Pure-signification | Commodity |

Question 1

The first question deals with the artists' turnover: in fact, in defining what a invention-oriented gallery is, Bystryn argues that they tend to have a higher artists' turnover, because of the "higher risks" they run in dealing with younger and less renown artists. Therefore, a gallery with short-term collaborations would be more likely to be an invention-oriented one rather than an innovation-oriented, which tend to have longer co-work periods. In fact artists in innovation-oriented galleries are less likely to be a "financial failure" and there is usually "little reason for him

[the artist] to want to leave” this specific kind of gallery unless there is a personal disagreement.⁴⁸ Obviously, it must be considered that there might be also different reasons causing a quick artists’ turnover in a gallery, but in my research’s framework, it still counts as the most important and likely reason.

Question 2

The very core difference Bystryn defines for invention and innovation-oriented gallery, is about the focus the gallery has: in fact, she argues that an invention-oriented gallery “screens the art community searching for possible new promising artists”⁴⁹ detaining therefore the “real gatekeeping role” in the art market. On the other hand, the innovation-oriented one “has deep connections with museums rather than artist community itself.”⁵⁰ Therefore the second question aimed at defining the real gallery’s focus, whether it was the production end of the art market, meaning the artist’s community or the consumption end, meaning the collectors and the possible art buyers, such as museums. An answer which signals a protective stance towards the artists’ role and critical of the local market’s consumption end, meaning the collectors and the art buyers, implies an invention-oriented position. Vice-versa, an answer which would focus on the topics of collaborations with museums and collectors, signals an innovation-oriented position.

Question 3

Velthuis argued that it is difficult for an art dealer to openly make reductions, meaning making discounts, without losing some degree of reliability.⁵¹ Plattner too, in discussing the reductions system in the St. Louis galleries, pointed out that the galleries would tend to stick to a 10% maximum of reductions. He also reported that the artists which do studio sales have no limits in the discounts. He argued that a limitless discount system is very dangerous for the artist’s “price structure” which would likely “collapse”, only because of an attempt to maximize sales.⁵² I therefore argue that overcoming the 10% discount threshold signals an innovation-oriented position, by favouring the collecting customer or institution’s sale but risking the artist’s price structure integrity. It might be presented as a counter-argument the fact that a gallery which overcomes the 10% reduction threshold in order to place an artwork in a particular institution is after all making a service to the artist himself. In fact, this encourages the piece’s acquisition by an institution. At the same time, it can be still argued that such a reduction in pricing, if made public, could still

⁴⁸ Bystryn, “Art Galleries as Gatekeepers,” 394.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 393.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 394.

⁵¹ Velthuis, “Symbolic Meanings of Prices,” 196.

⁵² Plattner, *High Art Down Home*, 141.

potentially hurt the artist's reputation. Furthermore, some of the sample's galleries confirmed that they do manage to place the artists' artworks in institutions without having to dramatically reduce the prices. Therefore I classified as invention-oriented the galleries that operate discounts up to 10% and innovation-oriented for the ones that overcome this threshold.

Question 4

The following interview question is focused on the galleries' availability to compromise: in fact, Bourdieu argues that “‘commercial’ art” corresponds to “ordinary entrepreneur seeking immediate economic profits” whereas “‘genuine’ art” corresponds to “cultural entrepreneurs struggling to accumulate specifically cultural capital” even by “temporarily renouncing economic profit.”⁵³ Limitedly to this research, I will consider Bourdieu's “commercial art” galleries and innovation-oriented galleries and his “genuine art” galleries as invention-oriented ones. Therefore I decided to investigate into the gallery's availability to “compromise”, or to sell an artwork for immediate economic profit to a collector who does not understand its real value. This would mean that they are renouncing to the cultural capital they could obtain by selling to “serious” collectors. Therefore, I classified as innovation-oriented the galleries that admitted they sold artworks in such circumstances and as invention-oriented the ones that stated they would refuse the sale.

Question 5

Bourdieu also pointed out an interesting element of the “sales galleries” or commercial galleries, which tend to have an “eclectic”⁵⁴ exhibition roster. Therefore, I questioned my sample on the coherence of their artists' exhibition, whether there is a *trait d'union* or not. The galleries that claimed the presence of coherence were accounted as invention-oriented, whereas the ones that denied the presence of a connection among the exhibitions were defined as innovation-oriented.

Question 6

As second to last question, I decided to muster concepts from Bystryn and Bourdieu: in fact, invention-oriented galleries are focusing on the artists or the “production end” of the art market and the innovation-oriented ones are focused on the “consumption end”, or collectors and museums. Therefore, I designed a question on how the interviewee thinks the successful gallery is like. In analysing the answers, I was able to define the invention oriented answers, which is when the answer was focusing on “artistic production” and “peer-recognition” and the innovation-oriented ones focusing on the “production's market” and “increase in fame.”

⁵³ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 268.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 286.

Question 7

I used another of Bourdieu's concepts to design a last interview question: he defined a dissociation in the art world I between art-as-a-commodity and art-as-pure-signification. The earlier sees the art piece as a pure object, a commodity to be sold. The latter sees it as "purely symbolic appropriation, that is, for disinterested delectation, irreducible to simple material possession."⁵⁵ Therefore I was able to define which stance the gallery was taking on the matter by asking a very broad and flexible question on their interpretation of the art's meaning. The galleries that identified with the art-as-a-commodity stance were defined as innovation-oriented whereas the ones that took the art-as-pure-signification were seen as invention-oriented.

In conclusion, in this chapter I first presented the sample and the methodology of this specific research, pointing out its peculiarities, strengths and weaknesses. Subsequently I gave an in-depth explanation of the single questions, pointing out the sources that compelled me to see them as possible signs of a gallery's stance on invention and innovation. The complete answers reports for the whole sample can be found in Table 4 and Table 5 of the Appendix. The following chapter will be focusing on presenting the overall socio-historical situation of the two art hubs my research's samples are located in.

⁵⁵ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 3.

Art Districts' Overview – Chapter Four

In the following chapter, I will discuss the historical and socio-historical background of the two art districts where the sample galleries were located in, 798 art district and Caochangdi art village. I will begin by defining what a “cultural and creative industry”⁵⁶ is, then I will be describing each district in its history and development and finally I will compare and contrast the two. My aim in this chapter is to give a clearer view on the on-going debate on the two districts' commercialization. In fact, I mean to point out the reasons that led me to consider these two art hubs in particular as representative of two different aspects of the Chinese art market, meaning the commercial and non-commercial art galleries.

Cultural and Creative Industries

Historically, the most common terms used by Western thinkers and government officials to describe the businesses in the field of creative production and sale were “cultural industries.” These are regarded by pre-1990's Western theorists as groups of businesses, which make use of cultural knowledge and intellectual property to make products and services. On the other hand, the “creative industries” is the term that became more common especially in the West, Korea and Japan⁵⁷ as businesses that are supplying goods and services that we associate with cultural, artistic, or entertainment value. When the local Beijing government started to promote these businesses in 2006, they also decided to adopt a brand new term “cultural and creative industry”⁵⁸ of which “creative industry clusters” are clear manifestations.

798 Art District

During my field research I could see that each district had a very distinctive feeling of their respective art scenes. 798's industrial buildings are tidy and create a net of perpendicular crossroads. The structures in this district are mostly squared or rectangular-based abandoned factories in red bricks or grey concrete. During weekends, the streets are packed with visitors and some ubiquitous *ayi* (middle aged ladies) selling food and gadgets. This is the only element that is not in harmony with the district's hipster-like vibe, at the time of writing, filled with overpriced

⁵⁶ John McCarthy and Yan Wang, “Culture, Creativity and Commerce: Trajectories and Tensions in the Case of Beijing's 798 Art Zone,” *International Planning Studies* 21, no.1 (2016): 2.

⁵⁷ McCarthy and Wang, “Culture, Creativity and Commerce,” 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

cafés and restaurants and small souvenir shops selling 798-themed and artsy gadgets. The visitors are here mostly middle-class Chinese families and foreign tourists.

This art district is regarded by Christen Cornell as the “most celebrated of all China’s contemporary art districts”⁵⁹; the Bauhaus-style 718 factory complex dates back to 1952⁶⁰ when the *German Democratic Republic* housed here its “718 Joint Factory.”⁶¹ Also known as “Dashanzi factory complex”, the current 798 art district occupies the original 798 sector of the 718 Joint Factory. Following the economic reforms the complex fell in disuse since 1979 and was abandoned for over a decade. In the early 2000s, the local Chaoyang district government began to rent it out as a cheap space for artists. The first artist studio to be established here was the studio of a Central Academy of Fine Arts professor.⁶² By mid-2000’s, just when the Chinese contemporary art market began to boom, the district became a hot spot for art dealers and art buyers. Its fame increased to the point that the Beijing government’s “Beijing Development and Reform Commission”⁶³ granted the district with the status of “Cultural Industries Precinct.”⁶⁴ The commission designed a plan in 2006 to stimulate the growth of cultural industries in Beijing. This project included not only a generous funding plan⁶⁵, equal to 500 million Yuan over three year, but also bureaucratic and tax advantages. The local Chaoyang District government supported this developmental plan. In fact, starting 2003, the local government defined an “Outline of Cultural Development in Chaoyang District”⁶⁶ and in 2006 took part in the joint management of the art district with the Seven Stars Group, the company that owned the district’s soil.⁶⁷ In fact, 798 not only houses some of the most important Chinese art galleries and non-profit art institutions, (Ullens Centre for Contemporary Arts – UCCA, 798 Space etc.), but also provides a “cosmopolitan face for Beijing”⁶⁸, as highlighted by the international attention that the art district received, bringing *Newsweek* to label it as “a significant contributor to Beijing’s global status.”⁶⁹

More recently, the 798 art district is undergoing a gentrification process, which some scholars consider to be problematic⁷⁰, because of which the residents have seen a sharp increase in rent

⁵⁹ Christen Cornell, “Chinese Characteristics, Beijing’s Contemporary art Districts,” *Artlink* 31, no. 3 (September 2011): 76.

⁶⁰ Michael Keane, *China’s New Creative Clusters: Governance, Human Capital and Investment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 105.

⁶¹ McCarthy and Wang, “Culture, Creativity and Commerce,” 7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶³ McCarthy and Wang, “Culture, Creativity and Commerce,” 7.

⁶⁴ Cornell, “Chinese Characteristics,” 76.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁷ Keane, *China’s New Creative Clusters*, 106.

⁶⁸ Cornell, “Chinese Characteristics,” 78.

⁶⁹ Yue Zhang, “Governing Art Districts: State Control and Cultural Production in Contemporary China,” *The China Quarterly* 219 (September 2014): 832.

⁷⁰ McCarthy and Wang, “Culture, Creativity and Commerce,” 1.

pricing for instance: John McCarthy and Yan Wang report that the rents in the area increased from 20 RMB per square meter a month in 2003 to 150 RMB per square meter a month in 2013.⁷¹ In fact, since 2003, the district's aim has shifted "from production to consumption-based uses."⁷² For instance, whereas the artists' studios were the dominant part of the tenants, galleries and more recently shops and cafés have gradually taken over the district. This is reflected in the number of galleries number located in 798 which Yue Zhang reports exploding in only five years from 22 (2003) to 398 (2008).⁷³ Therefore, most artists fled the district, deeming it "over-commercialized" and causing a "diluted artistic environment."⁷⁴ These factors, according to some gallery owners, McCarthy and Wang report, are causing the local art galleries' decline, since collectors seem to prefer "purer"⁷⁵ art hubs, such as Caochangdi.

Caochangdi Art Village

Caochangdi, at a superficial glance looks like what you would expect from its name, a small houses compound in the outskirts of Beijing. But, by venturing in the village itself, one can start noticing the presence of various art spaces scattered around the area. In fact, to get to Caochangdi's art village's core, one has to walk in the narrow streets of the village itself, spotting a photography exhibition or a small art gallery in between noodle fast foods, mini markets, trash and grandmothers having a walk with their grandchildren. Caochangdi indeed, as Michael Keane describes it, is "a hybrid of floating human population, villagers and farmers, taxi drivers, gallery owners, rich and poor artists and assorted industry occupations."⁷⁶

After a five minutes walk it is possible to get from the Caochangdi bus stop to the two red-bricks compounds one of which is housing design furniture shops and the other one art galleries and non-profit art institutions. On the side, there is a grey-bricks compound housing some galleries and small offices; this was originally the FAKE studio designed by Ai Weiwei in 2000 as a minimal version of a courtyard house.⁷⁷ South of it, there is the Caochangdi creative centre housing artists' and designers' studios and a few more galleries. The number of art businesses here is, in comparison with 798's 2000s "golden age", exiguous. Excluding the couple cafés and restaurants in the compounds' immediate vicinity, here there is no feeling of a gentrified district. The few non-locals that venture here are either connoisseurs or the gallery personnel.

⁷¹ McCarthy and Wang, "Culture, Creativity and Commerce," 8.

⁷² Ibid, 8.

⁷³ Zhang, "Governing Art Districts," 835.

⁷⁴ McCarthy and Wang, "Culture, Creativity and Commerce," 9.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 9.

⁷⁶ Keane, *China's New Creative Clusters*, 112.

⁷⁷ Pollack, *The Wild Wild East*, 31.

Caochangdi art village, located in the same Chaoyang district and close to 798, possesses a shorter, being that it developed only recently into an art village, but not less captivating history. Originally a simple village in Beijing's outskirts, it was swallowed by the sprawling capital during the 80's economic boom following Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms.⁷⁸ In the early 2000s Ai Weiwei, world-renown contemporary Chinese artist, established here a small art hub. Only at the end of the decade, though, many artists and art gallery started looking into the idea of moving their businesses and practices here in order to escape 798 art district's "over-commercialization."⁷⁹ Therefore the village became renowned as an area for more "intellectually focused"⁸⁰ galleries, studios and institutions. The local government announced in April 2010 its plan to demolish the area where the village was situated. The campaign against the project was successful and in 2011, the same year of Ai Weiwei's release from imprisonment, the government made public its decision to preserve the site from demolition. These elements support the idea of some international observers⁸¹, that the art village itself is indissolubly linked to Ai Weiwei's figure.

Comparison

The Caochangdi art community, then, positions itself in as diametrically opposed to the government-funded and supervised 798 art institutions. By looking at the names of the two areas "798 art district" and "Caochangdi art village" it is possible to notice the core difference between the two: 798 is a "district", which was originally an organic development of an area in disuse, but it subsequently became a "top-down"⁸² planned site for hosting the creative industries of the Chinese capital. Caochangdi, on the other hand, is a "village", which organically developed as an artistic community around the figure of Ai Weiwei, who was the first artist to establish here its studio. Whereas the former boasts the full government's support, its involvement also comports for the artists and gallerists to accept political interference as the 2011 shutting down of controversial exhibitions demonstrates. Moreover, the government's financial support partially caused the 798 art district to develop a "consumption-based" positioning. This caused the district's increasing focus on entertainment quality of art rather than the artistic production and becoming a touristic spot. This caused, therefore, the displacement the artists in favour of the art galleries, the same promoters of 798's initial artistic development. Caochangdi, instead, still maintains a mainly "production –

⁷⁸ Keane, *China's New Creative Clusters*, 112.

⁷⁹ Cornell, "Chinese Characteristics," 78.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 78.

⁸¹ Robert Mangurian and Mary-Ann Ray, *Caochangdi: Beijing Inside Out—Farmers, Floaters, Taxi Drivers, Artists, and the International Art Mob Challenge and Re-make the City* (Beijing: Timezone 8 Limited, 2009), 430.

⁸² McCarthya and Wang, "Culture, Creativity and Commerce," 4.

based”⁸³ orientation, presenting a balanced presence of both artists’ studios and art galleries. As I argued, then, these two districts are different in their consumption or production-based positioning in the contemporary art market, and the next chapter’s aim will be focusing on discussing the selected case studies.

⁸³ McCarthy and Wang, “Culture, Creativity and Commerce,” 4.

Selected Case Studies – Chapter Five

In this chapter, I will present the in-depth analysis of the most interesting galleries, which were selected according to the following factors: first I identified the two galleries which scored closest to the innovation and the invention models, meaning the one with the higher number in innovation-oriented answers and the one with the strongest invention positioning. I believe that these are interesting sample's aspects in order to define its two extremes. Subsequently, I calculated the average answer for each art district and picked the galleries that went closest to this average, in order to try to find cases that would be representative of the each samples group. The answering patterns for the whole sample are reported in the Appendix's Table 4 for Caochangdi and Table 5 for 798.

The Innovation Model – A6

The gallery which gets the closest to the innovation model is A6, which answered the most questions with an innovation-oriented positioning. In the case of A6, it is a long-established gallery, which only in 2010 moved from 798 to Caochangdi. The interviewee is the gallery director and also the gallery partner.

The gallery presents a strong innovation-oriented positioning, reflected, for instance by its relationship with the artists: in fact, the gallery, the interviewee pointed out that since their relocation to Caochangdi in 2010, no artist has left them. On the topic of the reductions policy, the interviewee answered with an innovation-oriented perspective, stated that they do operate reductions for long-term customers which reach the 10%. However they sometimes go further if the customer happens to be a museum or an institution they find trustworthy, reaching a 20% reduction maximum. That is also the case for A1, A7, and B5, which stated that their reductions sometimes go over the 10% threshold. When asked what is the connection among her exhibitions, she stated that there is no real connection, because their artists are all quite different, and therefore was classified as an innovation-oriented answer. In discussing the ideal successful gallery, the interviewee, gave another innovation-oriented position, and stated that a successful gallery should be like “a brand” and being a reliable actor for both collectors and artists, which are like the gallery's “hands”; only when a gallery manages to do all of this is a successful one. Furthermore, in defining what art is according to her gallery, she stated that “contemporary art is a career [...] or a business” but also pointing out that the role they have to play in this career is to create a “platform” for her artists. She

gave therefore an overall art-as-an-object answer, presenting herself in an innovation-oriented narrative

However, the gallery also gave some invention-oriented answers. In fact, the gallery's focus appears to be the search for new artists both locally and abroad, and is often the gallery itself reaching out for the interesting artists. Besides that, the interviewee also criticized the local art market, pointing out the main differences she finds with the Western market: she joined other interviewees in criticizing the museum system's state in China. In fact she says that the fine arts museum in China are not many and also non-profit spaces are not enough. She also believes that the fact that the Chinese art galleries are not as good as the Western ones is because of the short time they had to develop, but also the fact that the viewing public is not "professional", is not ready for contemporary arts. Another gallery, A4, gave the same kind of criticism. Regarding the art brokers, she stated that she would only agree to collaborate with "respectable professionals" but that some of nowadays art dealers are not knowledgeable of art history at all and barely bring the customers to the gallery, leave the gallery owner to handle the sale and still expect a commission.

Finally, regarding the sales to people unaware of the artwork's art historical value, the interviewee pointed out that she had such cases, but she "advised them against" buying the piece and prefers them to "take it slowly" and look around a bit more before they buy her artworks. This answer suggests therefore an overall invention-oriented positioning on the matter. In conclusion, I found that the gallery A6 presents an overall innovation-oriented narrative, but few other arguments, appear to be invention-oriented in nature.

The Invention Model – A7 and B1

Among the more invention-oriented galleries, the closest to the ideal invention model would be A7 and B1. Interestingly enough, A4 also had the same scoring. B1 and A7, were still picked as most representative of the two art districts because I deemed the content of their interviews clearer and more interesting for an in-depth analysis, especially because of their different perspectives.

A7

A7 is a relatively small gallery, which is located in Caochangdi art village and it was founded in 2012. As mentioned above, most of the A7's answers were invention-oriented in nature: as a start, the interviewee presented an invention-oriented answer on the focus of the gallery, being that she appeared very critical of the local art market's actors. She mentioned most of the Chinese market actors "don't know what art is" and they tend to make "a tool" out of the artworks. She argued that sometimes, Chinese artists are too "networking oriented" but also that her gallery's artists are half foreigners and half locals. The interviewee went on talking about the auctions happening in China and pointing out that most of the participants are very ignorant on what art is, concluding that the art markets abroad are way better than the local market. Regarding the art brokers she expressed her thoughts, saying that they mostly are non-professionals, and that they are a bad deal for a gallery that already has to give a reduction to the customers, since it decreases their income. She was also critical of the museum system, which she believes is not working well and unable to pick the best artists. In this sense, she pointed out the connection between many fine arts museums and the real estates, which exploit them in order to build more habitable space around it while taking the government's funds for cultural development. Therefore, the museums usually end up to be abandoned to themselves and "having no curator and having no collection." She concludes by saying that in China "eight museums out of ten are like this", but that the remaining ones are actually good museums. B1, B4 and B7 all had a similar stance on the matter of museums. The interviewee also pointed out the lack of professionalism of Chinese curators, who happen to be both curators and art critics at the same time, resulting in a conflict of interests. B1 had the same perspective on the Chinese curatorial practices.

A7 presented some invention-oriented arguments in dealing with compromise: when asked whether she would sell an artwork to somebody unknowledgeable of the artwork's real art historical value, she said that she tends to refuse such a sale. The definition of the unifying elements among her exhibitions was once again invention-oriented in nature, being that she believes that her exhibitions have in common "the sense of beauty" and "the concept." Furthermore, she described with an invention-oriented answer how, according to her, a successful gallery is. She stated that a successful gallery is primarily a gallery that does not need to worry about money and that has "a group of people that always support you" and "a group of artists who have a good quality and are always developing their profession." Finally, she stated that art according to her is something that "you cannot be without" in today's civilized society, "a sentiment", but also "a very abstract thing". Therefore her answer apparently describes an invention-oriented narrative.

On the other hand, she also gave answers which appear to be innovation-oriented: when discussing the relationship with the artists, she argued that the gallery only needs artists which are respectful of the gallery's work and that maintain a stable level of quality in their artistic production. If the artists comply with these requirements, the collaboration would then be long lasting on a non-exclusive work relationship. Furthermore, the interviewee's gallery operates reductions that fluctuate between 10 and 15% discount, but in extreme cases reaches 30%. This defines yet another innovation-oriented position of the gallery. In conclusion, the analysis determines that the gallery has an overall invention-oriented disposition, without presenting any noticeable anomalies in the answering patterns.

B1

This is a branch of an international gallery with various art spaces abroad but was established in Beijing after 2000s. The gallery focuses on being a platform for mostly Asian artists and the interviewee is the Beijing branch director. The gallery presented mostly invention-oriented narratives, such as the description of the gallery's relationship with the artists: in fact, discussing the relationship with the artists, the interviewee stated that most "artists do not agree to sign long term contracts" and prefer working short-term. She also said that there were cases in which the artists stayed with the gallery for longer than 10 years nonetheless.

Furthermore, the focus of the gallery appears to be on the artists, implying another invention-oriented positioning. In fact, the interviewee appeared very critical of the Chinese art world and pointed out its weak points, from the lack of a proper museum system to the lack of important and independent art review magazines. A4, A6, and B3 all reported similar complaints. Furthermore she said that Chinese art dealers tend to be curators and art critics as well, all at the same time, which she believes "makes it difficult to maintain an objective attitude." On the topic of reductions, the positioning appears still to be invention-oriented: in fact, the reductions policy of the gallery is that reductions from 5 to 10% are accepted. Regarding the *trait d'union* between the different exhibitions, the interviewee stated that she believes the connection is that she deems the artists the gallery shows the best around. She also stated that her gallery always tries to create a connection, but that many local art galleries don't focus on the "academic value" and are more market-oriented. Therefore she presented once again in invention-oriented answer. Finally, regarding the value of art for her gallery, she gave an invention-oriented answer and stated that the gallery must be a vehicle to exhibit only the best artists and granting them access to art history.

However, some of the gallery's positions were innovation-oriented: when discussing the sales to people unaware of the art work's value, she criticized people who seem to be only interested in

art as an investment, but made clear that she would still sell artworks to them. Finally, another innovation-oriented answer was presented when asked what makes a gallery successful, the interviewee stated that it should be “stable” and “having many people coming to buy.” In conclusion, just as for A7, B1 presents an overall invention-oriented narrative, only interrupted by few innovation-oriented perspectives. In general, the gallery didn’t present noticeable anomalies.

Caochangdi Art Village’s Average – A1

One can now shift the attention towards the gallery that would be most representative of the Caochangdi sample, which is the gallery closest to the art village’s average, A1. As a start, A1 is a gallery established in 2013 and with a specific focus on contemporary Chinese ink painting and calligraphy. The interviewee is one of the gallery’s founding directors. The gallery presents a slight majority of invention-oriented answers. For instance when asked whether he ever sold any artwork to somebody who didn’t understand its real value, he replied he never happened to sell under such circumstances because. In fact, as he puts it “if people had no clue what they’re buying, I mean, they don’t buy.” But even if they were going to buy, it would be “a bad sale” to “a bad collector.” He also pointed out that if they were interested in trying to understand, the gallery would be glad to teach them.

Furthermore, regarding the themes of the exhibitions, the interviewee defined his gallery as a “diachronic institution” and pointed out that their focus is contemporary Chinese ink painting and calligraphy, and is therefore the unifying trait of their exhibitions. He defined a diachronic institution as institutions that do not define themselves in synchronic terms of time and periods but in other criteria, such as region, or such as in A1’s case, a specific focus. The answer was thus classified as invention-oriented. Another invention-oriented answer was the position of the gallery on the traits of a successful gallery, which also pointed out how their institution can be successful: it will be possible only when their artists will be able to join the international debate on an international stage. Finally, when facing the question on what art is for his gallery, he stated that “art is a cultural asset”, “an embodiment of culture” pointing out that they do have “an enormous obligation to serve the art” and that in their value hierarchy “art is at the very top.” The answer was once again an invention-oriented one.

However, some of the gallery’s answers appeared to me more innovation oriented. In fact, the gallery’s relationship with the artists appears to be solid, and no artist ever left the gallery and that they “haven’t encountered the situation in which we feel that we are losing an artists”: on another note, being that the gallery was recently established, it might be partially the cause of this

peculiarity as the interviewee himself points out. Furthermore, when discussing the market actors with the interviewee, the answers were mostly focused on the topic of collectors and museums: this implies that the gallery values these aspects of the market over the rest and is thus presenting an innovation-oriented answer. In fact, the interviewee presented positive remarks on Chinese galleries, local museums and art brokers. Regarding the art brokers, he points out that, if they have “transparent ethics in the respect for us and our clients”, their gallery uses their connections to reach possible new clients. In discussing the biggest local galleries, he stated that he has “tremendous respect for all of them and all of their programs”. Beside this, after pointing out that they have not collaborated with any private museum yet, indicated some of the big Chinese contemporary art institutions, expressing the hope for a future collaboration. Finally, the reductions that the gallery operates fluctuate between 20/30% discount only for institutions: this overcomes the 10% threshold and is seemingly an innovation-oriented behaviour. In conclusion, the gallery’s positioning appears to have a slight invention-oriented majority of answers.

798 Art District’s Average – B4 and B6

The galleries that are most representative of 798 art district, and which fit closest to the average of the district, are the galleries B4 and B6. These two specific galleries were picked both because of their answers were closing the average and because of the different perspectives that the interviewees presented.

B4

B4 is a 798’s gallery founded in 2005. It is part of a larger international group of contemporary art galleries. The interviewee is the current gallery director. The gallery presents a mostly invention-oriented narrative: in fact, the interviewee appeared to be very protective towards her artists and critical of the local art market. This is visible in the way she described how their artistic freedom used to be limited the past, but also the more recent way in which the “market was bombarding them” with auctions and art dealers. She also criticized the local galleries, which she defined in a “flat and boring, [...] poor” state and “commercial”. Furthermore, she said that the local museums, which are private and “ambiguous”, work only under payment and “lack serious curatorial projects”. Finally she stated that the art brokers’ situation in China “is a disaster” and involves individuals “lacking in the basics for doing it” and without “the appropriate knowledge.”

Another invention-oriented answer is the one on the topic of the *trait d’union* of the various gallery’s exhibitions, she argued that her artists have all in common the trait that they do manage to

be both “poetic and experimental at the same time” and that this connection between the exhibitions “is part of a gallery’s coherence.” She also believes that a successful gallery is one that “has the trust and respect [...] the admiration” of its own artists. In order to achieve this, she believes it is important for the gallery to be “professional, coherent” and to be honest “with the customers and especially with the artists.” This answer points at an invention-oriented narrative. The interviewee presented another such invention-oriented answer when she stated that art is, according to her gallery, “freedom of expression, emotion and freedom”, because for them it is “fundamental to give freedom to the artists.”

However, the gallery also expressed some innovation-oriented narratives. For instance, the interviewee stated that “cases of interrupted collaborations are very few.” These interruptions are usually more linked to a character clash between the director and the artist, rather than anything else. Furthermore, when asked whether she ever sold an artwork to somebody who ignored its real art historical value, she stated that she indeed encountered such a case many times, “especially here [in China].” In fact, she sold a “very beautiful” and expensive piece to somebody who was “not even remotely interested” in understanding the artwork, and therefore she was “quite sad that he got it.” The gallery thus presented a second innovation oriented narrative in an answer.

It is important to point out that the answer on reductions was not classifiable because of missing data: in fact, B4 stated that she uses the reductions to build a trust relationship with the collectors “which then become very faithful”, but did not mention how much the reduction would be. In conclusion, B4 tends to be more invention oriented in its positioning but still retains some innovation-oriented perspectives in its narrative.

B6

B6 is an international, foreign-founded gallery, located in 798. Just as B4, it is part of a larger international galleries’ group. The interviewee is the Beijing branch director. The gallery presented some invention-oriented arguments, such as the fact that she appeared to be protective of the local artists and critical of the local art market, when discussing the gallery’s focus. The interviewee also points out the state of art brokers in China, which according to her are doing “worse and worse”. Furthermore, another invention-oriented positioning came up in discussing the connection among the gallery’s exhibitions, she pointed out that her gallery focuses on Asian artists, but especially the ones that moved to the West, creating a “new aesthetic perspective” of art. This is therefore the *trait d’union* among the gallery’s exhibitions. Finally, when asked what art means for her gallery, she stated that art should have the mission to “enrich people’s spiritual life”, pointing once again at an invention-oriented narrative.

However, some other answers appeared to be innovation-oriented: for instance, the relationship with the artists is, on average, long-lasting. She expressed another innovation-oriented argument, in the case of selling artworks to people unknowledgeable of their real value, she pointed out that she would still sell the artworks, defining therefore an innovation-oriented answer. Nonetheless it is interesting that she continued stating that she would avoid selling to customers which are just “investing.” Finally, she defined the ideal successful gallery, pointing out that it is “rich” and “serious”, therefore implying an innovation-oriented positioning of the gallery.

In conclusion the gallery appears to present a balanced narrative between innovation and invention-oriented answers, but, yet again, there is missing data regarding the reductions question, which could have shifted the gallery’s orientation. Furthermore, there is an anomaly in the question over the sale to people unknowledgeable of art: even though she stated she would sell to them, therefore accounting the answer as innovation-oriented, she also said she would avoid art investors, which is an invention-oriented positioning. In this chapter I focused on the in depth analysis of the most interesting samples. The following chapter will be focusing on making sense of the data that the research produced.

Observations on the Overall Sample – Chapter Six

In the following chapter I will start by looking at the whole sample of the research and then focus on evident differences in the answering patterns of particular questions. Subsequently, I will focus on the single galleries themselves, defining which was the strongest trend for each gallery, innovation or invention, and then framing it in the two districts' wider context and conclude with some assumptions I derive from the data.

The Overall Sample

Regarding the single questions' topics, most of the questions show quite similar answering patterns in both districts, without any particular noticeable difference. Two of the exceptions are the topic of reductions and of sales to customers who ignore the artwork's artistic value. The former question had more innovation-oriented answers than invention-oriented in Caochangdi whereas it happened to be the contrary in 798. Even though this might compel me to point out that Caochangdi's art dealers tend, then to operate higher reductions than 798's, I believe that this difference can be justified with the missing data on this specific topic, which involves half of the 798 sample, B3, B4 and B6. Therefore I do not think it is safe to suppose that there is a substantial difference between the two districts. However, the question regarding the sales, Caochangdi's sample presents more invention-oriented answers than innovation-oriented ones, whereas 798's has more innovation-oriented arguments than invention-oriented ones. This noticeable difference in answering patterns does indeed give us the hint that 798's galleries are more open to the idea of selling artworks to people who are unaware of the piece's real art historical value, whereas, the art dealers in Caochangdi, on average tend to oppose to such a compromise.

Another interesting issue would be the question on the nature of art according to the gallery: in fact, whereas in Caochangdi there was a balanced answering pattern between the number of answers for each orientation, without any strong trend, in 798 the answers were in favour of the invention-oriented perspective. This is representative of a likely majority of galleries in 798 that do see art as "significance" rather than a "commodity." On the contrary, in Caochangdi the ratio between the two appears to be more balanced. This implies that the galleries in Caochangdi, on the aspect of their approach to art, tend to be more innovation-oriented, and therefore more commercial.

The Single Galleries

This statement can be supported also by looking at the location of the sample's extremes: A6, A7 and B1. A7 and B1 are the galleries, which scored the highest number of invention-oriented points of the whole sample and are located in both Caochangdi, and 798. On the contrary, the gallery that scored the highest innovation-oriented scores is A6, which is located in Caochangdi. This would appear to support the idea that there is a certain trend for 798's galleries to be slightly more invention-oriented than Caochangdi's.

However, if we look at the number of answers for each orientation in each gallery, it is visible how Caochangdi has two galleries with majority of innovation-oriented answers, A3 and A6 and three with majority of invention-oriented answers A1, A4 and A7. Looking at 798's data we see that there is one gallery, B6 in balance between invention and innovation positions, the number of three galleries, B1, B3 and B4 having all the majority of invention-oriented answers and two galleries, B5 and B7, have a majority of innovation-oriented positions. Therefore, there is apparently no significant difference in the number of galleries with innovation-oriented or invention-oriented positioning per art district. It is important to point out the influence of the missing data in this case: in fact, being gallery B6 in balance between an invention and an innovation-oriented narrative, the missing data could have shifted the results in one direction or another.

In conclusion, it is possible to assert that there is no evidence of a strong difference among the galleries' narratives of the two districts. In this chapter, I presented the results of the analysed data of the whole sample, moving gradually towards different and more focused perspectives and finally fitting these results in the wider context of the overall sample. The next chapter will draw assumptions from these data and conclude by answering the research question.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will focus my attention on drawing my conclusions from the results of the analysed data and answering the research question. Subsequently I will acknowledge the weaknesses and strengths of my research and define what I think are the interesting consequences of my research's results. I will then conclude by expressing my hopes for the future research, which could take place in response to the present research.

Given that my research question was "What are the narratives the two Beijing's Contemporary art district's galleries use to present themselves and do the districts differ in it or are they similar? In which way would they be similar?" the narrative the overall sample presents is indeed quite similar in nature for both of the districts: on average, they both tend to present themselves as more invention-oriented rather than innovation-oriented and the overall answering patterns of the two districts are closely similar. However, it is possible to see some minor differences in the answering patterns for specific issues. This fact might indicate a slight difference among the galleries in the two districts on the specific topics. An instance of this, is the idea of art as a commodity having a stronger traction on Caochangdi's galleries rather than 798's. In this case, it is possible to say that Caochangdi's galleries appear to tend to perceive art more as a commodity rather than 798's galleries. However on the issue of sales to unknowledgeable customers, it appears that 798's galleries would find this practice more acceptable than Caochangdi's. Regarding the topic of reductions, though, the situation is different. In fact, the interviews results gave the perception that in Caochangdi galleries would be more likely to overcome the 10% threshold in making discounts than in 798's galleries: however, as previously mentioned, the missing data was just too extensive to make a definitive statement on the topic. Therefore we cannot claim that Caochangdi's galleries, on average would tend to overcome the 10% threshold more than 798's galleries.

Furthermore, in addressing how similar the two districts are, it can be argued that the data presents, as mentioned above, little or no differences in the answering patterns of the remaining five questions. Therefore it appears that on the topics of themes of the exhibitions, ideal of successful gallery, focus of the art gallery and relationship with the artists, the galleries of 798 art district and Caochangdi art village present, on average, almost no difference. As previously mentioned, though, some of the answers were more complex than expected. In fact, in a few cases, even though the answer to the core issue was evidently oriented towards, for instance, an innovation-oriented narrative, the follow-up answer still hinted at an invention-oriented approach, therefore

problematizing the classification of the answer. In such cases, the answer was classified relying on the answer to the core question alone.

Therefore it appears that these two art districts house galleries which are, on average, not very different in nature. It is important to point out, once again, that part of the 798's samples data on the topic of reductions was missing: in fact, 798's sample, shows a total of three missing answers, three regarding the reductions. Notwithstanding the lack of data, it appears that apparently both Caochangdi and 798 do not present a strong difference in number of innovation or invention-oriented answers. Indeed it should be kept in mind that this research was conducted on a relatively small and heterogeneous⁸⁴ sample, therefore I acknowledge that these results might still be inconclusive. However, I am confident of my research's validity: in fact, the research puts in doubt the correlation between the commercialized/not-commercialized "vibe" of the district and the nature of the art gallery housed in that district. In fact my research points out that there is no strong difference between the two districts.

Moreover, it is interesting to see how these principles and variables of the functioning of the art galleries as reported by Bystryn, Bourdieu and Plattner, appear to be applicable to the case of the Chinese contemporary art gallery. In fact, I expect that Western researcher will have to use those principles to engage with this non-Western art world increasingly more often in this somehow globalized world community. Furthermore, I see this work as a possible mean to open the way for more future research on the field. In fact, I believe that a more extensive research on the topic could help understanding how and why different galleries present their own narratives in different ways. Obviously, one should still be keeping in mind that every gallery has after all the same objective of enriching its business either in a pecuniary or in a symbolic way, which, if one follows Bourdieu's thought process, still counts as pecuniary. It is also possible to see that there are still many questions that my research does not address but only highlights: why do galleries overcome the 10% reduction threshold? Why are curators in China often also art critics? Why the art magazines in China are writing reviews under payment? Why are the Chinese fine art museums sometimes built in relation with real estate development projects? And finally, how does all of the above impact the Chinese art market and its development? In fact, I reckon that these issues could be of extreme importance to better understand the past, present and future development of the Chinese art market and are definitely worth being analysed in depth.

In conclusion, I believe that this research gave me a new angle to observe which narratives are used by Chinese galleries in the two art districts to present themselves. This also allowed me to better position this particular kind of market actor in the wider context of the Chinese art market, by

⁸⁴ See Table 2 and Table 4 for the specifics

bringing up all of the above-mentioned issues on the relationship between galleries and the other art market actors. I also believe that my research was trying to fill a gap in Western academia, which sees much interest in the geopolitics and economics in China, but tends to overlook research focused on the contemporary Chinese culture. For instance, among my sources almost none was dealing with the specific case of the commercialization of the contemporary art world in China and I believe that focusing on the flourishing Chinese cultural field is not only an option, but a mere necessity in the current state of the globalized world. Finally, I hope that my research will be a useful example for Western and non-Western scholars of the art market research to focus their researches outside the usual Western-centric conception of art world, giving academia a better understanding of what is outside the West and in the “Rest”⁸⁵ of the art world.

⁸⁵ Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2011), 14.

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Appendix

Table 4⁸⁶

| | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| CaoChangdi INN avg: 3.2: INV avg: 3.8: | A1 INN 3 INV 4 | A3 INN 4 INV 3 | A4 INN 2 INV 5 | A6 INN 5 INV 2 | A7 INN 2 INV 5 |
| Duration of artists' collaboration INV 1 INN 4 | INN | INN | INV | INN | INN |
| Gallery's focus INV 3 INN 2 | INN | INN | INV | INV | INV |
| Reductions over or under 10% INV 2 INN 3 | INN | INV | INV | INN | INN |
| Availability to compromise for immediate gains instead of long- term gains INV 3 INN 2 | INV | INN | INN | INV | INV |
| Exhibitions rooster INV 4 INN 1 | INV | INV | INV | INN | INV |
| Self-perspective on success and artistic value INV 3 INN 2 | INV | INV | INN | INN | INV |
| Art as... INV 3 INN 2 | INV | INN | INV | INN | INV |

⁸⁶ INV: Invention-oriented, INN: Innovation-oriented

Table 5⁸⁷

| | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 798 INN avg: 2.8: INV avg; 3.6: N/D: 0.6 | B1 INN 2 INV 5 | B3 INN 2 INV 4 N/D 1 | B4 INN 2 INV 4 N/D 1 | B5 INN 4 INV 3 (INN 1) | B6 INN 3 INV 3 N/D 1 | B7 INN 4 INV 3 |
| Duration of artists' collaboration INV 2 INN 4 | INV | INN | INN | INV | INN | INN |
| Gallery's focus INV 3 INN 3 | INV | INN | INV | INN | INV | INN |
| Reductions over or under 10% INV 2 INN 1 | INV | N/D | N/D | INN | N/D | INV |
| Availability to compromise for immediate gains instead of long-term gains INV 1 INN 5 | INN | INV | INN | INN | INN | INN |
| Exhibitions rooster INV 5 INN 1 | INV | INV | INV | INN | INV | INV |
| Self- perspective on success and artistic value INV 3 INN 3 | INN | INV | INV | INV | INN | INN |
| Art as... INV 5 INN 0 | INV | INV | INV | INV | INV | INV |

⁸⁷ INV: Invention-oriented, INN: Innovation-oriented