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## **Chinese Collectors and the Repatriation of 'Lost Cultural Relics': A discourse analysis of the Global Times media coverage**

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### **Citation**

Haxhiu, X. (2022). *Chinese Collectors and the Repatriation of 'Lost Cultural Relics': A discourse analysis of the Global Times media coverage.*

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Universiteit  
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荷兰莱顿大学

Master Thesis

# Chinese Collectors and the Repatriation of ‘Lost Cultural Relics’

A discourse analysis of the *Global Times* media coverage

Faculty of Humanities

Master of Arts in Asian Studies (60 EC)

MA Track: Politics, Society and Economy of Asia

Specialization in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe

15<sup>th</sup> December 2021

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ACADEMIC YEAR 2021 – 2022

## **Acknowledgments**

Before delving into my research, I would like to thank the people who assisted and encouraged me during the drafting of this thesis.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Dr. Svetlana Kharchenkova for the incredible support and the extremely useful meetings we had not only during the writing phase of my thesis, but also during her fascinating course on Creativity and Culture in Contemporary China. Her recommendations and her course were remarkably helpful for my research as well as for broadening my knowledge and interest about China's contemporary art market. Her kindness and empathy will always be remembered.

I would also like to thank Dr. Elena Paskaleva for guiding me through the topics of Critical Heritage studies and nurturing my interests on China's cultural heritage. Her courses were eye-opening on the precarious situation of cultural sites, objects, and immaterial heritage which profoundly inspired my thesis.

I will forever be thankful to my family for their unconditional love and full support of my dreams. I would not be here without you, and I hope I will always be able to make you proud.

A special thanks goes to my friends from my hometown as well as my new friends in the Netherlands. Thank you for wanting me as your friend and for bearing with me when I was not around much.

Lastly, I owe a very important debt to my colleague, roommate, and friend Wiktorija Witan for her absolute support and for sharing both joys and sorrows with me. This journey would have not been the same without the mutual encouragement, the laughs and the amazing months spent together while writing our theses.

Living abroad means having your heart split in between two countries all the time, and you all made it easier. I was very lucky.

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## 1. Introduction

After thirty years of not being able to buy or even appreciate art, the sudden ability to buy and collect is a heady thrill for Chinese art lovers. The Chinese collect Chinese art because that aesthetic appeals to them. Repatriation plays some part in the acquisition process, but probably not as much as they want to believe.

– Audrey Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market* (2012)

Repatriating cultural objects that were illicitly trafficked in the past is not as simple as we may think. Since the 1990s, the Chinese government has tried to bring home their ‘lost cultural relics’<sup>1</sup> (Murphy 1995). The term ‘lost cultural relics’ was first proposed by the Chinese Social and Cultural Development Foundation in 2008 and it refers to those “cultural objects that were looted, stolen, excavated or trafficked immorally or illegally from China” (Liu 2015, 25). Given the high likelihood of running into legal obstacles when claiming back relics, the repatriation of such relics is a complicated issue that heritage specialists have studied extensively (see Luo 2012; Zhong 2014; Huo 2015). Furthermore, there is no universally agreed-upon definition in determining who has the right to possess cultural objects and this creates difficulties when one of the parties claims to be the rightful owner of an artifact (Cuno 2008; King and Wood Mallesons 2009). According to the *Global Times* – one of the main nationalistic Chinese state-media outlets that deals with international matters – by the early 2000s, China’s<sup>2</sup> lost cultural relics became directly tied with the idea of Chinese national pride (Zhang 2018). Another 2009 article stated that, in order to increase China’s rising national power, the Chinese government was encouraging collectors to pursue cultural relics and bring them back home (Wu 2009). As a result of this appeal, a new generation of patriotic Chinese collectors began to hunt for and acquire China’s lost cultural relics at international auctions independently from the Chinese government’s political manoeuvrings to recover artifacts through legal means (Liu 2015). However, as mentioned in the opening quote of this introduction, acquiring artifacts for the purpose of repatriating relics to their homeland is not the only force that drives Chinese collectors’ purchases.

Insofar, a discreet number of studies has focused on the matter of repatriating lost cultural relics to China, but little research has been done on Chinese collectors purchasing lost cultural

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “cultural relics”, “cultural objects”, “antiquities”, “antiques” as well as “return”, “repatriation” and “restitution” have all been found in a variety of academic literature and legal instruments, therefore, they are considered interchangeable in this research.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, China always refers to the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

relics from abroad. For instance, Audrey Wang's (2012) book *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market* is one of the first attempts to present the development of the Chinese antiques market in English. Given the novelty of her work, Wang's (2012) aim is to provide general audiences with an informative overview on the main trends regarding the Chinese antiques market. Therefore, her publication is less focused on the role of Chinese collectors purchasing Chinese relics. Zuozen Liu's (2015) PhD thesis, *Repatriation of Cultural Objects: The Case of China*, was based on a policy analysis of the legal instruments that protect Chinese relics exported out of the country prior to the adoption of the 1954 Hague Convention (UNESCO 1954). Through interviews with specialists in the fields of law and art, she also investigated how soft law may be applied in the repatriation of cultural artifacts. Hence, her research focused more on the legal framework for the return of lost cultural relics than on antiques collectors and their involvement in the repatriation initiative. Another relevant study is Yao Ma's (2017) research titled *From Deng to the Bird's Nest: A Generation of Chinese Collectors Finds Its Voice*. This investigation was primarily focused on a new generation of Chinese collectors, but the scope of the study was not specifically about Chinese collectors acquiring lost cultural relics from overseas. Despite the fact that the author only interviewed Chinese collectors born after the 1980s, the goal of the research was to view how actors of the Chinese art market can shape the buying trends and the collecting tastes of art buyers. Therefore, no research has been found on how Chinese state-media portray Chinese collectors bringing back relics through purchases. This research will fill the gap in the literature by addressing the following research question: *How do Chinese state-media frame Chinese collectors buying their 'lost cultural relics' from abroad?*

By doing a discourse analysis of *Global Times* articles, the study aims to understand how this state-run outlet represents Chinese collectors purchasing lost cultural relics and how it frames their motivations in acquiring relics at exorbitant prices. The articles selected for the analysis ranged from 2009 to 2020. In order to answer the question, I have divided the research in chapters and subchapters as follows. In the following chapter, I will provide an overview of the main existing literature on the topic that proved useful for conducting the research. I will attempt to contextualise the role of Chinese collectors within the field of antiques and heritage studies. Furthermore, I will present the contemporary notion of Chinese national humiliation and the idea that preserving the past helps the understanding of a specific culture. In the subsequent chapter, I will discuss the historical importance of lost cultural relics and the rise of a new class of Chinese collectors. I will address the issue of restitution of cultural objects focusing on the 1860 destruction of the Old Summer Palace. Moreover, I will briefly present

the figure of Chinese collectors and how the Chinese antiques market has developed. These two chapters will give the reader a plurality of perspectives to better understand the results of the research and to position the topic within the field. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the methods and data of the research. I will explain in more details how I conducted the analysis and why I chose to do a discourse analysis of the media framing. Chapter five and six are the main core of the research in which I will describe the findings of the analysis by using excerpts from the articles and I will draw my conclusions. In addition, I will offer some suggestions for further research on the matter of Chinese collectors acquiring cultural objects from abroad.

## **2. Contextualising the national humiliation and the role of Chinese collectors**

In this chapter I will attempt to contextualise the role of Chinese collectors and the sentiment of national humiliation. Firstly, I will provide a brief overview of the main reasons why people collect cultural relics. Secondly, I will discuss how the repatriation of antiquities is connected to the need to preserve the past and how this concept is used in the discourse of Chinese national humiliation. Finally, I will introduce previous studies on the connection between Chinese collectors and China's lost cultural relics.

### **2.1 Reasons for collecting cultural artifacts**

Generally speaking, collecting cultural relics can have different implications according to the various reasons that lead collectors to purchase specific objects. In McIntosh and Schmeichel's (2004) research, collectors buy certain objects for their own self-fulfilment: as a financial investment, a statement of who they are or for pure enjoyment. The participation to the collecting world also "ensures that the collector is a valued member of the culture's economy" and their contribution to the cultural market reaffirms their "sense of community" (ibid., 87). In other research, such as Mackenzie and Yates' (2015) study on the motivations that prompt collectors to breach the law in order to acquire wildlife and looted artifacts, collectors are driven by more sentimental reasons for purchasing antiques. For example, they collect because they are passionate about them, but also because they want to preserve antiques from armed conflicts or to showcase them to increase their own personal wealth (ibid.).

In the case of Chinese collectors, Wang's (2012) study argues that Chinese collectors purchasing Chinese lost cultural relics from abroad are motivated by a variety of reasons, but patriotic sentiments seem to be the most prominent in many cases. In a similar way, McIntosh and Schmeichel (2004) argued that the patriotic impulse of Chinese collectors emphasises their identification with a certain culture and therefore strengthens their "sense of community" (ibid., 87). Defining what patriotism means in the Chinese society is a topic central to Karl Gustafsson's (2016) research. In his study "The Struggle over the Meaning of Chinese Patriotism in the 21st Century", he argues that the meaning of patriotism differs depending on who uses the term. Broadly, he defines patriotism as the "love for a country" (ibid., 134), but he also argued that patriotic norms are characterised both by the establishment of positive norms but also "negatively through the stigmatization of those branded as traitors" (ibid.). In other

words, a person can be considered patriotic by discrediting other people that are considered non-patriotic. He concludes his research by stating that “patriotism is central to Chinese identity politics” and that the line that divides patriotism from nationalism is rather vague. This is because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has attempted to define patriotism for its own political purposes (ibid., 151). Hence, in line with Gustafsson’s findings, it seems that the discourse around Chinese cultural heritage and Chinese lost cultural relics could also potentially be highly political.

## **2.2 Chinese national humiliation and the preservation of the past**

According to Belk (1990), objects of the past are intentionally acquired as symbols of our past to help us remember certain moments, often pleasant ones. He stated that these objects are “intentionally selected to act as tangible markers for retrospective memories in the future”. In other words, the past will help us remember and pass down knowledge to future generations, and therefore it needs to be preserved. Preserving the past or “past mastering” is a topic widely discussed by Lynn Meskell (2002) in her work titled “Negative Heritage and Past Mastering in Archaeology”. In this publication, she argued that preserving the past is fundamental for the process of nation-building since, by understanding the past, it is possible to recognize a nation with a certain culture (ibid.). A shared belief amongst Chinese people is that repatriating cultural relics will help them reconnect with their cultural identity lost during the Century of Humiliation<sup>3</sup> (1839–1949) (Liu 2015). The need of repatriating objects to preserve a cultural identity and the feeling of national humiliation of Chinese people were the catalysts of the rise of the Chinese nationalism (Wang 2008).

The nationalistic view of recovering cultural relics can be seen in the fact that some Chinese collectors believe that their lost cultural relics should return to China without any compensation for the former owner (Zhong 2014). This sense of rightfulness and the patriotic spirit led the Chinese collector Cai Mingchao to bid \$19 million at an auction for two relics looted from the Old Summer Palace<sup>4</sup> in 1860, and then refused to pay, according to a story published by *China Daily* in 2012 (*China Daily* 2012). The justification for his behaviour was that “buying back the relics would give an impression that the previous possession was

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<sup>3</sup> The term “Century of Humiliation” (1839–1949) is used to describe China's years of invasion and plunder. The primary invaders of those years were Britain, Germany, France, and Japan, who also destroyed and pillaged the summer palace Yuanmingyuan in 1860, exporting numerous Chinese artifacts out of the country. (Wang Z. 2008; Wang A. 2012; Liu 2015).

<sup>4</sup> The Old Summer Palace or Yuanmingyuan was a summer retreat for imperial families of the Qing dynasty located in the northwest of Beijing and it was destroyed by western troops during the Opium Wars in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Weil 2013).

righteous, but in fact, it was not” (*China Daily*, 2012). Gruber (2013) considers acts like Cai Mingchao’s as the reflection of the sentimental attachment that the society has with their national heritage. Moreover, Gruber’s (2013, 343) study argues that antiques can be symbols of victory, defeat and even suffering – therefore, “the true value of cultural relics goes far beyond their economic value”. On the other hand, these types of actions and the belief that a nation-state has the right to claim ownership of ancient relics were condemned by James Cuno (2008). His critique focuses on the attitude of nation-states to identify their cultural identity with older civilizations that used to occupy their current land. For this sense of belonging to a certain culture, today, nation-states would employ nationalistic retentionist cultural property laws to claim the ownership of cultural artifacts, while Cuno’s perspective is that today nation-states have little in common with their ancient past (*ibid.*).

### **2.3 Chinese collectors as protectors of China’s lost cultural relics**

According to Yao Ma’s research (2017) on the new wave of Chinese collectors born after the 1980s, collectors can be divided in various groups depending on what they collect<sup>5</sup>. For example, what the author refers to as “neo-patriotic collectors” are those collectors who moved overseas during their adolescent years but developed a stronger bond with Chinese traditional art than with Western art (Ma 2017). This intense connection stems from a deep understanding of traditional Chinese art since these collectors were in touch with this type of art during their childhood (*ibid.*, 29). Their goal is not to merge with Western collectors and acquire pieces from international artists. On the contrary, their main aim is to bring the Chinese culture, their first culture, to the West to show the unique characteristics of Chinese traditional art and to promote Chinese cultural heritage to a wider audience (*ibid.*, 34).

According to Audrey Wang’s (2012) book titled *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, the Yuanmingyuan incident was the catalyst for a patriotic surge of Chinese collectors purchasing cultural treasures (*ibid.*, 11). She claims that when China’s economy grew, Chinese collectors’ buying power increased, and they became protectors of China’s lost cultural relics (*ibid.*, 28). She did, however, point out that many Chinese art enthusiasts were outraged by the repatriation of cultural artifacts through purchases. The reason, again, is that they believe it is unfair for Chinese collectors to acquire relics that have been taken out of the country by foreigners, since this only drives up relics’ prices (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the revived

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<sup>5</sup> Ma (2017) divides Chinese collectors in other two groups: “third culture global citizens” who collect art from established collectors to blend in better with Western collectors; and “time collectors” who are born in the late 1970s to early 1980s and generally collect art of their time since it is more meaningful to them.

interest in Chinese cultural heritage amongst Chinese people had deep impacts on collectors whose tastes have evolved in recent decades (ibid., 46). Although in Hong Kong the contemporary art market has been more prolific internationally speaking, Chinese antiquities have become more popular amongst Chinese buyers. Despite the patriotic reasons at the base of these purchases, acquiring antiquities was also stimulated by the “newfound liberty” of being financially able to acquire pieces for millions of dollars (ibid.). Wang (2012) described this new wave of wealthy Chinese buyers as collectors that lacked knowledge about antiquities and that they would buy decorative pieces mainly “as an expression of their wealth and prestige” (ibid., 46). The idea of inexperience is a concept that also emerged from Kharchenkova’s (2018) study on the Chinese contemporary art market and its actors conducted from 2012 to 2014. What transpired from her study is that actors from the Chinese contemporary art market consider themselves as immature, young and inexperienced when compared to the Western art market actors (ibid.).

### 3. Historical overview of the repatriation of cultural objects

In this chapter, I will discuss the topic of restitution of cultural objects both in the international setting and in the Chinese scenario. Furthermore, I will present the historical significance of Chinese lost cultural relics as well as the growth of the Chinese antiquities market. To do so, I have divided the chapter into three parts. To begin, by using few historical examples, I will introduce the notion of ‘restorative justice’ regarding the restitution of cultural objects in the international context. Secondly, I will concentrate on the restitution of Chinese lost cultural relics by presenting the sack of the Old Summer Palace as the main example of cultural looting. Lastly, I will discuss the development of the Chinese antiques market and briefly introduce Chinese collectors’ patriotic gestures.

#### 3.1 Restitution of cultural objects as “restorative justice”

According to the heritage specialist Senta German (2020), since the 1950s, the attitude of international communities towards looted art has changed. The main reason for this new mindset is that colonial crimes began to be revealed and ex-colonies began to claim back their cultural items (ibid.). Ex-colonies treated the repatriation of the antiques as a “restorative justice” (ibid.). German notes that this “restorative justice” hides a metaphorical admission of guilt for the former colonizing countries and therefore they are not willing to return the cultural objects easily, as that would mean confessing the atrocities of the colonial period. Furthermore, museums and collectors from ex-colonial countries would generally affirm that, at the time of the acquisition, most artworks were legally purchased, and, for that reason, the repatriation claim is unjustifiable (ibid.). In 1997, Ricardo Elia had already theorized that the hostile attitude of museums and collectors towards the repatriation of looted items is connected to the refusal to admit guilt. To this, he adds that the economic aspect of cultural objects is an important factor of cultural looting. He affirms that art looting has become an international crisis and its main aim is to satisfy collectors, art dealers and museums (Elia 1997).

More than a decade later, Proulx (2011) recognized how, unlike drugs and arms trafficking – which are illegal *a priori* – cultural relics can be openly traded and sold without incurring illegality. For example, in 1799, the Rosetta Stone – a priceless granite stone containing information about ancient languages – was discovered in Egypt by Napoleon’s army and given to the British Museum (Trusler 2020). In 2003 and in 2009, the head of Egypt’s

antiquities department accused the British Museum of illegally obtaining custody of the Rosetta Stone (Volante 2018). As a result, Egypt requested the artifact to be returned to its motherland, but the British Museum refused to, hiding the reason of this decision behind bureaucratic formalities (Greenberger 2021). A lesser-known example concerns a Cameroon sculpture known as the “Bangwa Queen” that arrived in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century under questionable circumstances (ibid.). After being transported to Berlin, the statuette was traded between museums, dealers, and collectors until its last sale in 1990. At that point, Cameroon was worried about the sculpture being traded and re-located too often and began to demand its repatriation (ibid.). However, in 2018, the Dapper Foundation<sup>6</sup> declared that the artwork would continue to be exhibited across the world and will not be returned to its native country (ibid.). Therefore, even though the process of repatriation might appear as logical and straightforward, implementing this ethical and moral action into practice is not as effortless as we may suppose. Furthermore, the scenario worsens when the artworks were plundered a long time ago (Woodard 2010; German 2020).

### **3.2 Chinese lost cultural relics and the sack of Yuanmingyuan**

As explained in the previous section, claiming back cultural relics is not an easy task and returning lost cultural relics plundered long time ago to their native country is a practice that may involve various legal obstacles (Luo 2012; Zhong 2014). In these situations, the main issue is the conflict between countries that lost cultural objects centuries ago and the current owners of said objects. As mentioned in Chapter 2, some owners of Chinese relics firmly believe that they purchased the items legally and own all the documents of the fair acquisition (Luo 2012). One example could be the dispute between a Dutch collector and a village in Fujian in the period 2015–2020. In this case, the Dutch collector affirmed that he purchased the Buddha statue legally at an auction in Hong Kong in 1996 and he presented all the documents of the acquisition in court. Eventually, after years of disputes, the village of Fujian won the case, and the Dutch collector was forced to return the Buddha statue (*NL Times* 2020). According to Gallagher (2017), many other foreign collectors have claimed to have acquired relics from auctions and that the Hong Kong art market hub is considered to be the perfect place to purchase looted Chinese relics without incurring many legal hurdles (Gallagher 2017).

In 2017, Hao Liu (2017) published an academic article about the recovery of 32 Chinese gold foils from France. The author starts the investigation by stating that, although the 1970

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<sup>6</sup> The Dapper Foundation was created in 1983 in Amsterdam and has worked with arts from Africa, the Caribbean, and their diasporas in order to promote and raise awareness about their cultural value (Fondation Dapper 2021).

UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* (1970) was recognized by People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1989, cultural looting, smuggling and illegal excavation still continued (ibid.). The 32 gold foils disappeared from the Eastern Zhou tombs in the Dapuzishan Mountain Region of Lixian county in Gansu province in 1993 and were later found in the Guimet Museum in France. Given the ambiguous circumstances of the disappearance, the PRC investigated the case multiple times, claiming that the 32 gold foils were stolen from China in 1993 (ibid.). France, on the other hand, affirmed that the gold foils were legally bought from a Taiwanese antiques dealer and therefore they would not return the items (ibid.). After years of joint investigations from the Chinese and French governments and diplomatic negotiations between the two countries, France eventually agreed to return the 32 gold foils to China (ibid.).

As argued in the previous paragraphs, Chinese cultural objects were looted in different circumstances. However, the most striking example in terms of cultural looting in Chinese history occurred during the incident at the Old Summer Palace in 1860. The Old Summer Palace, or the Yuanmingyuan, was a complex of buildings located in the northwest of Beijing that housed a significant number of cultural relics, including the twelve Chinese zodiac fountainheads<sup>7</sup>. During the Opium Wars of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, British and French troops destroyed the gardens and the palaces, and many Chinese cultural relics were exported outside the country (Wang 2012; Weil 2013). According to Robert Weil (2013), Western troops destroyed the Yuanmingyuan as a form of vandalism in order to make China understand the great might of Western powers and to punish it for its resistance (ibid., 96). This attitude of Western powers considering themselves superior to the Chinese people validates Edward Said's notion of orientalism regarding Asian people (Said 1978; Weil 2013). The West considered themselves as the civilised ones, while the Chinese were the barbarians, and therefore, the West had to exert their power over them. Due to the imposition of the West and the consequent humiliation, the cultural relics exported from the Yuanmingyuan have a special meaning for Chinese people (Weil 2013, 98).

Given the history of plunder and destruction that the Yuanmingyuan has suffered, today China is seeking the repatriation of looted and smuggled artworks to the native country. However, according to the Chinese National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA), China is not seeking the restitution or return of legally acquired objects, but only of objects that "were

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<sup>7</sup> The twelve zodiac fountainheads used to frame the fountain located in the centre of the Haiyantang or Palace of the Calm Seas, and it is thought that, after the Western invasions, only seven of twelve fountainheads exist today (Wang 2012).

looted, stolen, illegally excavated or exported from China in modern Chinese history” (Liu 2015, 25). In order to pursue the repatriation of these objects, the Chinese government aims to recover them through international cooperation and legal means. Nevertheless, the legal obstacles that the PRC encountered when seeking the restitution of lost cultural relics are several (King and Wood Malleons 2009). For example, international treaties as the 1970 UNESCO Convention are not retroactive. This means that the original State owner of cultural relics does not have the right to claim the restitution of an object looted prior to international conventions (Liu 2015, 59). Also, generally speaking, the looting of cultural objects occurs in ambiguous and uncertain circumstances which means it is difficult to show evidence that a relic was illegally removed in a specific time and place (King and Wood Malleons 2009).

### **3.3 The Chinese antiquities market and the patriotism of Chinese collectors**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the establishment of an international antiquities market, collecting Chinese antiquities became a must for Western collectors that want to elevate their status in the art world (Wang 2012). However, more recently, a new generation of Chinese collectors acquiring Chinese lost cultural relics at foreign auctions has arisen, initiating a new method of repatriating the Chinese long-lost relics (ibid.). According to Wang (2012), Western collectors began collecting Chinese antiquities in the 1920s and 1930s, promoting Shanghai as China’s principal art market hub. Nevertheless, trading was forced to halt during the Sino–Japanese war (1937–1945) and during the subsequent establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. As a result, Shanghai-based art dealers had to move to Hong Kong, where a new antiquities market was gaining momentum (Wang 2012, 42; Gong 2012). Later, the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976 made any purchase or possession of artworks illegal, making it difficult to acquire them (Gong 2012, 32). Due to the high demand for Chinese antiquities, western auction houses such as Christie’s and Sotheby’s began to sell Chinese antiques. Only after Mao’s death in 1976, when Chinese traditions and Chinese cultural heritage could be re-established, did Hong Kong become the principal supplier of Chinese antiques (Wang 2012, 42f). Furthermore, despite the Asian financial crises that afflicted the continent, the Chinese art market expanded steadily throughout the 1990s. Given the rise of a new trend of repatriating Chinese lost cultural treasures, in the 2000s Chinese collectors and museums began to engage in the international and domestic antiquities market more frequently and in a more conscientious manner (ibid., 43ff).

In the year 2000, Christie’s Hong Kong and Sotheby’s Hong Kong presented two new collections and attempted to sell three bronze fountainheads from the Old Summer Palace (ibid.,

25). The Chinese authorities denounced these sales and declared that the two foreign auction houses were taking advantage of the “one country two systems”<sup>8</sup> policy in order to sell these pieces (ibid.). As a result, the Chinese government attempted to halt the sale, but the Poly Culture Group ultimately opted to buy the lots to protect China’s cultural heritage (Wang 2012; Gallagher 2017). In 2007, Sotheby’s Hong Kong tried to sell another fountainhead, which was eventually purchased by Macao-based collector Stanley Ho, who then donated it to the Chinese government as a patriotic gesture (Wang 2012). In 2009, Christie’s tried to sell another fountainhead in Paris. The Chinese government called to stop the sale again, but Christie’s ignored the call. In the end, the Chinese collector Cai Mingchao decided to buy the fountainhead and then he refused to pay as a symbol of patriotism (ibid.).

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of “one country, two systems” emerged as a solution to the reunification problem with Taiwan and, later, was expanded to Hong Kong and Macao (Wong and Xiao 2018). It has been an official policy of the PRC since 1984 (Chao 1987).

## 4. Methods & Data

This chapter focuses on the methods and data employed to answer the research question and to reach the aims of the study. Firstly, I will explain the reasons for conducting a discourse analysis of an online newspaper, focusing on the theories of media representation and media framing studied by Stuart Hall (1997) and Dietram A. Scheufele (1999). Secondly, I will provide background information about the Chinese state-run medium that I selected, the *Global Times*. Consequently, I will meticulously outline the process of the research, with an emphasis on the process of data gathering and analysis. Finally, I will explain the research justification for conducting this study.

### 4.1 Discourse analysis and media framing

The research I have conducted can be defined as a qualitative analysis of the media discourse. Generally speaking, discourse analysis refers to a process that examines the language of a text in order to find a meaning, frame and explain a certain social phenomenon (Jorgensen et al. 2002; Fairclough 1995). Based on these perspectives, I considered media representation as useful theory to examine the discourse of the *Global Times* in framing Chinese collectors buying Chinese lost cultural relics from abroad. In "The Work of Representation" (1997), Stuart Hall widely discusses the importance of representation by affirming that representation is central to the study of a culture. He argues that through the meaning of language we can better understand the implications behind the words and, consequently, we can better understand a specific culture in a specific period (Hall 1997, 15). Bearing this concept in mind, I analysed the use of the language of the selected articles to identify the meaning and the message that is intrinsic in the words. Furthermore, media framing, discussed by Scheufele (1999, 116), is tied to the relation between the way of framing and the influence that it has on public opinion. In other words, by analysing the media representation of a newspaper, it would be possible to identify how the media can influence the understanding and the thought of its audience through the medium of language.

### 4.2 The *Global Times*

Among the most influential Chinese state-media outlets, I decided to analyse online articles from the Chinese daily tabloid *Global Times* (hereinafter GT), which is an offshoot of *People's Daily*, the official mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The GT published its first article in Chinese in 1993 and launched an English version in 2009 (Huang 2016).

Moreover, the GT is known for focusing on international matters and for publishing strong opinions on a wide range of topics. To conduct my analysis, I examined articles in the English language since the aim of the research is to understand how the representation of Chinese collectors purchasing their lost cultural relics is framed to English speakers. Furthermore, I decided to examine the English version of the articles because my level of Chinese is not sufficient to understand the nuances of the articles and therefore there would be a possibility of overlooking some important information. On this note, I should mention that before choosing *Global Times* as the source of data I tried to work on both *People's Daily* and *China Daily*, but some challenges arose in both media sources. Regarding the former, while trying out keywords, I realised that the search tool was not yielding accurate results and therefore, I decided to deselect this medium. About the latter, I was able to find several interesting articles but not sufficient to cover my full analysis. Furthermore, the GT provided me with better quality data such as more descriptions about the collectors and more focus on the collectors than on the events of the articles.

### **4.3 Research process**

After having determined the online newspaper, I considered some potential keywords, and I selected the ones that would allow me to find relevant articles. After trying different keywords and various combinations, I finally narrowed it down to “*Chinese collectors*” and “*lost cultural relics*” as two distinct sets of keywords. For the purposes of this research, the term “Chinese” also includes Hong Kong and Macau collectors who specifically purchased and donated lost cultural relics to the Chinese government. The reason is that some of the articles describe collectors from Hong Kong and Macau that donated relics to China as “compatriots”, implying that their donations stem from a sense of belonging to the Chinese ethnicity. Furthermore, I considered “*lost cultural relics*” as an appropriate set of keywords for the research because it is the official term used by the Chinese Social and Cultural Development Foundation (Liu 2015, 25). These keywords were determined as the final ones because they both encompass traits of the research such as the target group of Chinese collectors and the larger issue of lost cultural relics.

Once I selected the keywords, I searched for “*Chinese collectors*” and, consequently, for “*lost cultural relics*” individually. Initially, since the GT is a Chinese state-run medium and therefore it can omit the nationality of collectors, I preferred not to specify the adjective “Chinese” as there was a risk of excluding many useful articles. When searching only for the term “collectors”, however, the search engine returned far too many results, including articles

about foreign collectors and collectors that are interested in other types of items (e.g., wine collectors) that were irrelevant to the research. The search was done utilizing the Quick Search tool rather than the Advanced Search option. The reason for this is that the Advance Search tool would check for each article that includes the keywords individually (for example, instead of “Chinese collectors”, it would produce results for “Chinese” and “collectors” separately). In this way, the search yielded too many irrelevant results.

The first search with the first set of keywords produced 86 articles, while the second search with the second set of keywords provided me with 29 articles. All publications not linked to Chinese collectors purchasing Chinese relics, governmental decisions and initiative as well as international treaties related to the protection of cultural relics, were removed. The reason is that they go beyond the scope of the research which is focused on the specific media representation of Chinese collectors purchasing lost Chinese relics from abroad. In order to remove the thematically unrelated articles, I read through all of the articles and made a list of only those that were relevant to the issue. Therefore, I covered all the articles that appeared on GT using these keywords, and the time frame of the final 35 relevant articles ranged from 2009 to 2020. Among these results, 22 articles out of 86 turned out to be useful for the first search (group A)<sup>9</sup> and 13 articles out of 29 for the second (group B)<sup>10</sup>. After having read all the articles, I thoroughly analysed specific quotes in order to find out the hidden meaning behind metaphors, adjectives, and verbs. Consequently, I categorised the text and grouped them under common themes. Due to the scope of the study, a specific analysis of the authors of the articles was disregarded.

Finally, I examined the articles by using an inductive coding approach, instead of a deductive one. Therefore, I used codes that emerged from the analysis of the articles rather than pre-determined codes and topics. The reason for this choice lies in the fact that, insofar, the topic of my research has received little attention in the academic literature and, therefore, no research has identified common themes that could describe Chinese collectors and their role in today's international antiques market. The analysis of the findings and the discussion can be found in the following chapters.

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<sup>9</sup> Group A refers to the articles generated by using the keywords “Chinese collectors” (e.g., 1A;2A;3A; etc.).

<sup>10</sup> Group B refers to the articles generated by using the keywords “lost cultural relics” (e.g., 1B;2B;3B; etc.).

## 5. Analysing *Global Times*

In this section of the thesis, I will present and discuss the key findings of my research in order to answer the research question. To do so, I will illustrate the themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis. In this way, it can be established how Chinese collectors acquiring Chinese lost cultural objects from abroad are framed by GT. I will structure my discussion by first presenting how Chinese lost cultural relics are framed by GT and how has the Chinese government's attitude changed from 2009 to 2020. Later, I will analyse each theme separately by exemplifying with quotes from the articles. During the analysis, I identified three main themes and I labelled them as (1) *patriotism*, (2) *self-interest*, and (3) *immaturity*. Furthermore, where possible, I will also discuss the meaning behind specific metaphors, adjectives, adverbs, and modal verbs.

### 5.1 Media representation of lost cultural relics and the government's attitude

In this section, before analysing the representation of Chinese collectors buying Chinese antiques from abroad, I will give an overview of how lost cultural objects are framed by the GT and what is the attitude of the Chinese government towards the repatriation of cultural objects.

A common feature that emerged from the analysis was that the GT considers Chinese cultural relics lost overseas as goods that were illegally exported from China during difficult times and therefore, they should be returned to China without compensation. In fact, while reading the articles, I observed that the repetition of words referring to the relics as “stolen”, “looted”, “smuggled”, “plundered” and “pillaged” was very consistent. The total amount of the repetition of these words in a sample of 35 articles was 124 times, with an average of almost 3.5 references per article. In article 11A, published in 2013, the GT offered one of the clearest and most striking metaphors to explain this idea, claiming that:

It is Cheng [Yong]'s *unswerving belief*<sup>11</sup> that Chinese antiques *belong* to Chinese collectors in the same way that a child belongs to its biological parents. “And to get those ‘*children*’ back to their ‘*biological parents*’ is the *best* thing that can *ever* happen to them,” said Cheng (art. 11A).

According to the article, Cheng Yong is a Shanghainese art advisor who has learned to guide Chinese collectors in the purchase of Chinese antiques and has assisted in the return of more

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<sup>11</sup> All emphasised words were italicized by the author of the thesis to underline their relevance in the analysis.

than 200 artworks throughout his career. By giving some background on Cheng's profession, the GT is attempting to increase the credibility of its claim by leveraging Cheng's respected reputation as a successful art advisor. The use of the adjective "unswerving" to describe Cheng's "belief" serves to reaffirm the steadiness of the idea that Chinese antiquities belong to Chinese collectors. By using the words "child" and "biological parents" the article is anthropomorphizing the relics to express a more human nuance to them, in order to stir certain emotions in the reader. The verb "to belong" gives a sense of being property of a specific owner. In this sense, it appears that stealing, looting, or smuggling cultural relics may be compared to taking a child away from their parents without their consent. Also, the GT is describing the reunification of Chinese relics with Chinese collectors as "the best thing that can happen to them". By using superlative adjectives as "best" and adverbs as "ever", the GT is trying to convey the idea that no other owner would be appropriate to possess China's cultural relics. Therefore, this metaphorical quote and the heavy use of words like "looted" or "stolen" throughout the articles seem to suggest that, according to the GT, the rightful owner of the Chinese lost cultural relics is China. Furthermore, the GT connected the idea of China as the rightful owner of the lost cultural relics to the notion of national humiliation. A 2020 article about the repatriation of a fountainhead of the Yuanmingyuan stated that:

The return of a bronze horse zodiac head to its home at Yuanmingyuan (the Old Summer Palace) on Tuesday was a crucial step in the homecoming of important cultural relics *stolen by invaders* over 100 years ago and evoked the sentiment among Chinese netizens as many view the return as a symbol of '*washing off national humiliation*' (art. 13B).

In this quote, we can see how the return of the horse zodiac head was praised as symbolically cleaning the nation from past humiliation. Also, here we can see that the GT refers to the relic as "stolen by invaders". It is very interesting how the medium presented the return of the relics as a symbol of cleansing the feeling of humiliation that is common among Chinese netizens. It seems that the GT is trying to communicate that the national humiliation is a widespread sentiment among the population. Later in the same article, the GT published a comment of a Chinese netizen of Weibo who claimed that:

"Chinese people *should not forget* the centuries of humiliation, and the Western powers are still *eyeing us*...We must work harder to make our *nation stronger*" (art. 13B).

With this comment, the GT is attempting to provide a different perspective on the meaning of national humiliation by citing the words of a Chinese netizen. This quote clearly affirms that the humiliation should not be forgotten, while the first quote claimed that the relics will help them to “wash off” the humiliation from their lives. Therefore, it appears rather inconsistent that at the beginning of the article, the state-medium suggests that Chinese people should free themselves from this sentiment of humiliation. The later Chinese netizen’s statement, on the other hand, recalls the concept that the centuries of humiliation should not only be remembered, but that the Chinese people should also work harder to demonstrate the Western powers that China is becoming stronger.

Furthermore, the Chinese government’s behaviour that arises in the articles is rather curious. It appears hard to estimate how supporting the government has been in the process of repatriating Chinese relics as some statements are quite contradictory. First of all, when analysing the articles, it became clear that the GT wants to show that the Chinese government is working hard for the retrieval of cultural objects, and it is keen to emphasize that cultural relics are seen as fundamental for the nation. The State Administration of Cultural Heritage also promoted the repatriation by offering compensation to those who donate the relics back. For example, in 2009 the GT claimed that:

The State Administration of Cultural Heritage vowed *to compensate* those who return smuggled cultural relics to China to encourage more people to return those lost treasures (art. 2B).

As we can see here, by using financial compensation, the SACH is encouraging owners of cultural relics to return the “smuggled cultural relics”. Therefore, the PRC is even attempting to use government’s funds to make the relics come back to China. Even though the amount for the compensation is nowhere to be found in the articles, it is clear that the government is actively promoting a hunt for treasure. Furthermore, in a 2018 article, the GT stated:

The return of looted treasures *has been praised* by State media and seen as a *symbol of rising national power* (art. 20A).

This sentence includes the word “looted” that, as mentioned above, confirms the belief that these relics were taken away from China illegally. At the same time, the verb “has been praised” seems to glorify cultural objects. Finally, this glorification reaches its peak with the metaphor

“as a symbol of rising national power”. Later on, the same article reaffirms this idea by saying that:

A commentator on Hebei Radio said the recovery of relics shows the *growing prosperity* of the nation and its people (art. 20A).

As we can see in these quotes, the relics and their return to China are described as essential to show the rising “power” and “prosperity” of the nation and the articles seem to imply that the Chinese government would do whatever is needed to retrieve its lost cultural objects. However, as mentioned above, the engagement of the Chinese government is not entirely obvious. The GT presents a shift in the stance of the Chinese government in regards of supporting Chinese collectors into buying relics. For instance, an article published in 2009 stated that:

The government *encourages* wealthy collectors to buy cultural relics from overseas (art. 1B).

Almost a decade later, the headline of a 2018 article formalised that:

China *doesn't encourage* individuals to retrieve stolen relics: *official* (art. 20A).

Therefore, even though the Chinese government sees cultural objects as a means of showing the cultural prosperity of China in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and of drawing more attention to the culture, the Chinese government has changed its attitude towards the repatriation of cultural objects through acquisitions. One of the reasons for this shift from 2009 to 2018 could be that not all cultural relics that are acquired by private individuals are donated to state museums and state institutions. For example, collectors purchase relics simply to enrich their private collections. What seems clear is that the GT is suggesting that the main goal of the Chinese government is not to return all cultural objects for the Chinese culture's sake, but solely to use them as instruments to demonstrate national prosperity and to encourage greater cultural engagement in China. Nevertheless, this concept will be further discussed in a later stage of this chapter after presenting the findings concerning Chinese collectors purchasing cultural objects.

## 5.2 Themes

### 5.2.1 Patriotism

As presented in the literature review of this study, one of the reasons why Chinese collectors buy Chinese lost cultural relics from overseas is *patriotism* (Wang 2012; Ma 2017). Patriotism, in a larger sense, can be defined as “an attachment of group members towards their group and the country in which they reside” (Bar-Tal 1993, 45), or in simpler words, it can be seen as the “love for a country” (Gustafsson 2016, 134). In 2010, the GT described Chinese collectors as patriotic reporting that:

“Chinese collectors *embrace* these articles [relics] *warmly* both because of the rarity of these articles and the *love* of traditional Chinese art they hold,” explained art market expert Zhao Yu (art. 4A).

Verbs like “embrace”, adverbs like “warmly” and nouns like “love” convey a positive message to the reader as they allude to noble intentions of Chinese collectors. On the other hand, in the same year, the patriotic actions of Chinese collectors purchasing relics are framed differently. Nicholas Chow, international head of Chinese ceramics and works of art at Sotheby’s Hong Kong affirmed:

“We notice that Chinese antique collectors are very interested in works with this theme [relics from the Qing dynasty], because in *buying antiques* they have a *fixation* about *buying their own history*” (art. 3A).

Most of the time, the word “fixation” expresses a sense of obsession over something, communicating a negative connotation about Chinese collectors purchasing relics for their growing sense of patriotism. On the same level, the metaphor “buying their own history” sounds odd as it is impossible to literally buy history. It seems that with this metaphor the article’s desire is to draw the reader’s attention to the exaggerated over-dramatization that drives collectors to bid millions of dollars for relics.

However, in the literature review of the research, I have explained that some Chinese collectors believe that their lost cultural relics should return to China without any compensation for the former owner because the relics used to belong to China (Zhong 2014). When discussing the episode of the collector Cai Mingchao winning the bid and then refusing to pay, in 2010,

the GT reaffirmed the idea that Chinese collectors are patriotic. In an interview with Maurice Hyams, director of the Nanking Porcelain Company, the GT asked:

GT: The winning bidder Cai Mingchao refused to pay. Did he violate international law? What do you think of the role of *nationalism* or *patriotism* in the repatriation of looted relics? (art. 5A).

To which, Hyams replied:

Hyams: He didn't break the law. *National pride is not really nationalism*. Patriotism is probably a better term (art. 5A)

We can see here that the GT chose this interview to make clear that the actions of Chinese collectors are seen as patriotic and not as nationalistic. By publishing this interview with a Western director, GT seems to be trying to justify the fact that Chinese collectors are refusing to pay for the relics by using the comments of a respected Western expert rather than Chinese specialists who may be perceived as biased.

Furthermore, as introduced by Gustafsson (2016), people that are seen as patriotic are usually put in comparison with those that are regarded as unpatriotic or traitors of the nation (ibid., 134). Based on these articles, the GT appears to be exploiting Chinese collectors' purchases and donations to support a political discourse. This can be seen in articles published in 2019, when there was a wide media coverage about "*Macao's tycoon*" (art. 10B, 11B), Stanley Ho, who donated one of the twelve bronze fountainheads that was stolen from the Old Summer Palace during the western invasions to the Chinese National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA), as a gift for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the PRC (art. 9B, 10B, 11B). Some of the most striking quotes found in the articles were:

"The statue conveyed the spirit of *patriotism* and witnessed the *successful practice* of 'one country, two systems' principle in Macao," said Pansy Ho Chiu-king, the daughter of Stanley Ho, at the ceremony (art. 9B).

"Mr Ho's high sense of *patriotism* to rescue the lost cultural relics and return them to the *motherland* is a signal that says: 'Hong Kong, stop the violence and *be prosperous* with your *motherland*'", one Chinese netizen commented on Sina Weibo (art. 11B).

“Today’s donation from Macao is *a slap in the face* for Hong Kong. Shouldn’t [Hong Kong tycoon] Li Ka-shing do something similar?” another Chinese netizen wrote on Sina Weibo (art. 10B).

All of the quotes in these examples are in direct speech, which gives the illusion of journalistic objectivity. In this way, the GT seems to be adopting a neutral stance on the issue. However, this does not appear to be totally accurate, since selecting quotes and articles is a responsibility of the state-medium, therefore the GT is the creator of a specific narrative. In all these quotes, for example, the GT appears to be supporting a political propaganda by supporting that the “one country, two systems” philosophy is a good strategy to bring China, Hong Kong, and Macao closer.

Furthermore, we again find references to the prosperity of China through the retrieval of cultural objects that confirms the idea that repatriation is linked to the nation’s interest, rather than to the sake and preservation of cultural relics. Also, the word “motherland” is repeated twice, making this comment rather controversial considering the delicate relationship between China and Hong Kong. Furthermore, by highlighting Stanley Ho’s “strong sense of patriotism”, the GT appears to be indirectly stigmatizing all the other Hong Kong and Macao collectors who do not follow Stanley Ho’s example. Also, the GT opted to use the expression “slap in the face” in the third quotation, implying that the GT is attempting to provoke a reaction from Hong Kong collectors, who, according to the quote, are not doing enough to repatriate cultural treasures to China. Finally, the modal verb “shouldn’t” implies a normative assertion, advising Hong Kong collector Li Ka-shing to follow Stanley Ho’s footsteps in the name of the ‘nation’s prosperity’.

### 5.2.2 *Self-interest*

As indicated in the section 2.1, some collectors buy specific objects for their own self-fulfilment: as an investment, as a self-expression or for pure gratification (Mcintosh and Schmeichel 2004). This theme, labelled as *self-interest*, concerns articles that refer to Chinese collectors’ purchases as means to elevate their status in the international antiques market and to boost the Chinese art market and benefit from it. What is interesting about the following examples is that they create a contradictory situation by clashing with the previous theme, leaving the reader to wonder what the true colours of Chinese collectors are. In the article 4A, published in 2010, the GT reports the words of a collector named Sun who, surprised by the large number of Chinese collectors taking part at the auction, stated that:

“No matter whether they [Chinese collectors] buy art [relics] due to their *real love* or just *investment*, at least what they do today is of help to *boost* the development of the Chinese art market” he said. “It is *undoubtedly* worth being *happy* for all” (art. 4A).

This quote seems to be questioning the importance of the motivations that prompt Chinese collectors to purchase relics at extremely high prices. It does so by suggesting that as long as Chinese collectors purchase artifacts and contribute to the growth of the Chinese art market, everyone would be “undoubtedly [...] happy”. It gives the impression that Chinese collectors are merely greedy consumers who are unconcerned about bringing back lost treasures as long as their earnings from the Chinese art market rise. Three years later, in 2013, the GT commented on the same idea with harsher quotes, such as:

Here at home [China] though, the situation is viewed differently. There is a growing sense that rich Chinese are buying back their cultural heritage out of a *sense of national pride*. But as such notions pick up traction with the media and the general public, it’s becoming apparent that “*patriotic*” motives are *clouding a complex phenomenon* with implications far beyond the art market (art. 13A).

At first sight, this sentence does not seem to provide more information about what the “complex phenomenon” obscured by patriotic motives is. However, it appears quite clear that the patriotic motives are not the only reasons to purchase cultural relics. Later in the article the explanation unfolds, and the GT says that:

Most local buyers are keen to purchase antiques because they see these artifacts *first-and-foremost* as investments. *Few* of these collectors are really interested in the intrinsic cultural, historical or artistic value of the objects they buy (art. 13A).

As it is confirmed in this quote, not all collectors acquire antiques for patriotic reasons, as some may believe, and the expression “first-and-foremost” emphasizes the notion that the majority of collectors buy antiques for their personal profit. As a result, it appears that national patriotism is less widespread than it seems. Furthermore, some sources claim unequivocally that Chinese collectors’ motivations for collecting are tied with a desire for popularity. For example, the article 17A, published in 2015, states that:

Over the past five years, the Chuo Auction has not only witnessed an increasing number of Chinese collectors *seeking fame* by bringing home lost treasures, but also increasing competition from other local auction houses (art. 17A).

This quote appears in the context of Chinese collectors traveling to Japan to retrieve Chinese cultural artifacts. The Chuo Auction House is located in Tokyo, and this comment appears to imply that Chinese collectors' wealth is boosting rivalry among Japanese auction companies. At the same time, the GT's decision to report that Chinese collectors are flying abroad "seeking fame" rather than for noble patriotic reasons is debatable. It might be argued that the GT wants to demonstrate that Chinese collectors are turning into more independent international collectors, rather than being subservient to the interests of the government. The same article claims that:

As Chinese collectors head to Japan to bring antiques back home, their *collecting habits have begun to change*. A special auction of Japanese tea wares by the Chuo Auction has now become a star attraction for Chinese buyers, even though it has nothing to do with Chinese antiques (art. 17A).

As the quote states, Chinese collectors' "collecting habits have begun to change", signalling a shift in their art interests. As a result, the examination of articles related to the *self-interest* subject appears to show a change in Chinese collectors' behaviour. With time, it became clear that Chinese collectors' actions no longer follow a nationalistic narrative that promotes the repatriation of lost Chinese treasures for the public good, but rather, as they become more familiar with what the antiques market has to offer, they are developing more personal interests and tastes.

### 5.2.3 Immaturity

The last theme identified in the analysis is *immaturity*. This theme refers to all the quotes related to the inexperience of Chinese collectors in the antiques market and the consequences of their actions. I will argue in this paragraph, that even though Chinese collectors have started to collect relics before they began to purchase contemporary art, they still have to work hard to compete with Western collectors. In the years 2009–2010, a curious trend of Chinese collectors winning bids and refusing to pay started to take off and the GT reported that:

'It is encouraging to have seen more and more wealthy Chinese buyers going abroad,' said Wang Fenghai, deputy secretary-general of the China Association of Auctioneers. 'But they are definitely *damaging China's image* if they are not paying after bidding' (art. 2A).

By using a direct quote from Wang Fenghai's affirmations, this excerpt evokes the impression that the GT is objectively denouncing the behaviour of the Chinese collectors that are tarnishing China's image. As mentioned in the first steps of this research, one of the main ideas that underlines the trend is that paying for a relic that was Chinese at first, would be like acknowledging that the prior ownership was righteous. However, by not adhering to the rules of the auctions, Chinese collectors appear inconsiderate and immature. A 2013 article also reported that the whole Chinese antiques market is immature by stating that:

Members of this group are often the most zealous participants in auctions held overseas, where reputable auction houses and well developed legal systems can offer bidders protection from *forgeries* - fakes being still *all-too-common* in the *immature* Chinese market (art. 13A).

As we can see, the immaturity of the Chinese market is directly connected to the "all-too-common" presence of forged cultural objects at domestic auctions. In 2015, GT published an article about Chinese collectors being well established in the international art market but still lacking "rationality" (art. 16A) when it comes to Chinese antiques. The articles stated that:

The risk is that Chinese collectors, with *cash in hand*, *patriotism in their hearts*, and a habit of *blindly following the crowd*, could easily drive prices beyond any sense of value (art. 16A).

The expression "following the crowd" is already a synonym of inexperience and the addition of the adverb "blindly" enhances the idea of Chinese collectors having difficulties in controlling their feelings when bidding for Chinese lost cultural relics. In fact, as the quote says, having "cash in hand" and "patriotism in their hearts" can lead foreign auction houses to take advantage of Chinese collectors and increase the prices of the antiques. This was reaffirmed by GT in a 2019 article that claims:

In recent years, many patriotic overseas Chinese people helped to return relics through purchase from foreign auction houses, but Liu [a member of the China Cultural Relics

Academy] said that such ways *should not be recommended* as some foreign auction houses will deliberately raise prices to *exploit the patriotism* of overseas Chinese people (art. 7B).

Another example of Chinese inexperience regards the episode of a Chinese collector who bought an 18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese vase for \$19 million in 2018. The sale was described as follows:

The *staggering price* paid by a *young* Chinese collector, who was at the auction himself, is the highest ever recorded by the auction house in Paris. The man, who was wearing a *jogging top*, beat off bids from other Chinese collectors, mostly over the phone. The collector, who has not been named, also *did the bidding himself* - a rarity at this level of auction (art. 21A).

In this case, it seems clear that by describing the collector as a “young” man “who was wearing a jogging top” instead of the supposed business attire outfit, gives the idea that the collector did not know how to behave and what the unspoken rules of participating to an auction were. As hinted in the quote, other Chinese collectors, perhaps a bit more experienced, were bidding for the same article through the phone, meaning that someone else was on site lifting the paddles on their behalf. Furthermore, the use of the adjective “staggering” when referring to the price seems to mean that paying \$19 million was deeply shocking and unexpected. This could be seen as a naivety of the Chinese collector who did not evaluate the piece before purchasing it. Therefore, all these quotes seem to be pointing towards the same direction, conveying the message that Chinese collectors do not always abide to the rules of auctions and that their inexperience could influence the prices of Chinese lost cultural relics.

## 6. Discussion & Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I selected quotes that could exemplify the results of the analysis and in this final chapter, I will summarize and interpret the results of the analysis chapter and provide my conclusive remarks. The chapter is structured as follows: I will first restate the research question and the objectives of the study; secondly, I will briefly present the limitations of the research; third, I will proceed with the discussion of the results while reconnecting to the assumptions discussed in the literature review and historical background of the study; and finally, I will provide a short conclusive argument and some suggestions for future research on the topic.

### 6.1 Research question and objectives of the study

The research question investigated in this study was: *How do Chinese state-media frame Chinese collectors buying their 'lost cultural relics' from abroad?*

The initial main aim of the research was to understand how Chinese state-media frame the role of Chinese collectors buying lost cultural relics from abroad and how that translates in the international market of antiques. The findings of the research allowed me to interpret the data and reach the aim of the study. In addition, I was also able to analyse the media representation of lost cultural relics and the changing attitude of the Chinese government towards the return of cultural objects through acquisitions. In order to answer the mentioned questions, I conducted a discourse analysis of 35 articles from the Chinese daily tabloid *Global Times* from 2009 until 2020. I selected the articles by employing two sets of keywords. The first search was done by using “*Chinese collectors*” and for the second round I used “*lost cultural relics*”.

### 6.2 Limitations of the research

It is fundamental to note that the generalizability of the findings of this research is limited by a series of factors. Firstly, the analysed articles are written in English, a factor that already limits the understanding of the topic. This is due to the fact that articles in Chinese language might present more nuanced perspectives on the matter, and it is not assured that the English version is a reliable translation of the Chinese version. However, the English edition of newspaper serves the purpose of disseminating information to international readers who do not speak Chinese. As a result, this enabled me to understand how the GT frames the selected group of Chinese collectors to an international audience.

Secondly, the methodology used to reach the objectives of the studies is discourse analysis of the media articles, which implies a subjectivity in the interpretation of the articles. Also, given the scope of the study I could select only one Chinese state-medium and therefore, the analysis was based on the opinions of only one online newspaper. Nevertheless, even though qualitative analysis of the media discourse relies on personal interpretations of the findings, this still allowed me to uncover how the GT has framed Chinese collectors purchasing lost cultural relics from abroad in the years from 2009 to 2020.

Thirdly, the data gathering presented some difficulties, given the impossibility to use the Advanced Search tool in the selected medium as it would give too many irrelevant results. However, I overcame this limitation by searching the articles through the Quick Search tool which proved to be sufficiently accurate.

### **6.3 Interpretation of the findings**

In the following section, I will provide the analysis of the findings while also relating them to the reviewed literature discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. In this way, it will be possible to demonstrate how the findings confirm or contradict the academic debates.

First of all, the analysis started by looking at how the GT frames Chinese lost cultural relics and how the government's attitude has changed over time. According to the assumptions formulated in the first chapter of the thesis, Meskell (2002) argued that mastering the past and preserving it is crucial to the understanding of a culture and to the projects of nation-building. Also, Liu (2015) stated that for Chinese people it became important to reconnect with their traditions and heritage in order to cope better with the national humiliation stemmed from the past invasions. From the first steps of the analysis, it emerged that the GT wants to portray the national humiliation as a shared sentiment among Chinese people and that the government is not the main advocate of this sentiment, but that it started from the bottom. However, other comments have shown that not everyone agrees with the cleansing of national humiliation but that, on the contrary, Chinese people should not forget about the Century of Humiliation and that it should stimulate the sense of national growth and pride.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Zhong (2014) affirmed that lost cultural relics should return to China without any compensation because they were looted out of the country illegally during wartime. This idea also emerged from the articles that represent lost cultural relics as objects whose rightful owner is China and therefore China must do whatever it takes to repatriate them. Therefore, it would be reasonable to believe that, given the intrinsic historical and cultural value of the relics, the government would use every means possible to return the relics to China.

However, the GT noted that it is not the historical and cultural value that drives the PRC's will to repatriate objects. It appears that the antiquities hide a more political discourse. The frequent use of words as "prosperous", "prosperity" and expressions like "as a symbol of rising national power" when referring to the retrieval of cultural relics, evoke the idea that the Chinese government is not seeking relics for simply moral and ethical reasons.

This can be seen also in the changed attitude of the Chinese government regarding repatriation through purchases and the description of Chinese collectors as "patriotic". As evidenced in the quotes above, the PRC has gone from offering compensation for those who bring back lost cultural relics to ceasing to encourage Chinese individuals who buy antiquities at auctions. The reasons for this change are not totally evident in the articles, but one hypothesis might be that once Chinese collectors obtain relics, they do not necessarily donate them to the government. The result seems to indicate that Chinese collectors may not be as "ethical" as one might think, and that patriotic motivations may not be the only driving forces behind their acquisitions. However, in line with Wang's (2012) and Ma's (2017) idea that patriotism is one of the driving forces for the purchases of antiquities, the GT seems to represent Chinese collectors as truly patriotic and that they acquire relics in order to contribute to the development of a national pride. What appears controversial is the use that the GT makes of this information. According to the evidence gathered during the analysis, it seems that the GT is manipulating the representation of Chinese collectors as patriotic to show that China's prosperity is growing. This can be detected in the articles that discuss the donation of Yuanmingyuan's relics to the NCHA from the Macao-based collector Stanley Ho. In this case, the GT describes the Macao collector as symbol of 'Chinese patriotism' and as an example for Hong Kong collectors to emulate. Even the idioms and expressions used in the respective quotes give the impression that the GT is using Chinese collectors' patriotism to push a more political narrative. By using direct speech and maintaining a sort of neutral stance, the GT affirmed that the "one country, two systems" policy is a successful strategy that brings together Mainland China with Hong Kong and Macao.

Despite the fact that I have just argued that Chinese collectors are seen as patriotic, other articles have revealed that Chinese people acquire cultural artifacts for personal reasons. In the second chapter of this study, I stated that previous research had already discussed this new generation of Chinese collectors acquiring Chinese antiquities is also motivated by factors far from patriotism. In line with Wang's (2012) research, in which she argues that patriotism is not the only impulse, the articles where I identify the *self-interest* theme all appear to be heading to the same direction. Since I assumed that not all collectors donate the relics that they purchase

to the Chinese government, it seems that Chinese collectors have started collecting Chinese cultural relics for self-gratification or to develop a personal reputation in the international and domestic antiquities market. Following this line of thought, the articles give the impression that Chinese collectors may have realized that the international market of antiques has more to offer than only Chinese artifacts. Chinese collectors' tastes in art have evolved, as seen by the above quotes, and they have begun to search for cultural objects from other civilizations (e.g., Japanese tea wares). As a result, I believe this new wave of collectors is becoming more cosmopolitan and less reliant on nationalistic ideologies about reclaiming objects for the sake of Chinese culture.

However, this progress in the internationalisation of their character should not be confused for a sign of "maturity". The GT has revealed that Chinese collectors are still quite naïve when it comes to bidding for relics. Collectors, for example, have the tendency to overbid for cultural objects that could be sold for less. Some of the reasons could be that their patriotism gets in the way of their rationality, or that they are not informed enough about the value of the relic that they want to purchase. Therefore, despite their good intentions, auction houses can easily exploit their gullibility and overprice Chinese antiques. Furthermore, the *immaturity* and inexperience of Chinese collectors that emerged from these articles confirms Wang's idea (2012) of Chinese collectors lacking knowledge about relics and acquiring them for their personal fulfilment. The later study conducted by Kharchenkova (2018) on the Chinese contemporary art market demonstrated that some actors of this market view Chinese collectors of contemporary art as immature and that the market itself is still very young. Also, the Chinese contemporary art market actors see their market as "peripheral" in relations to Western art markets, since it developed years later (*ibid.*, 80). I believe it could be argued that Chinese collectors of the antiques market can be described in the same manner. The GT has given the idea that, even though the Chinese antiques market has developed before the Chinese contemporary market, collectors of relics still lack some experience in evaluating the objects and in controlling their bids at auctions.

#### **6.4 Conclusion and future research**

To conclude, I have argued throughout my thesis that from 2009 to 2020 the *Global Times* has portrayed Chinese collectors acquiring lost cultural relics from abroad in several ways. In the articles, it is possible to detect a shift of narrative that aligns with the temporal shift of the government's attitude to not encourage wealthy individuals to collect traditional Chinese artworks anymore. In other words, the way that the GT describes Chinese collectors in the

selected time frame has changed in line with the change of attitude of the PRC towards the repatriation of lost cultural relics. Before the shift of the government stance, the GT portrays Chinese collectors as patriotic individuals that purchase relics to increase China's prosperity. From the moment when the PRC ceased to encourage collectors to retrieve lost cultural relics, it seemed that the GT started to suggest that Chinese collectors are motivated not only by the love for their country, but also by personal reasons. Their eagerness to seek fame in the international market of antiquities and the realisation that cultural objects can bring profit are the main secondary reasons that drive Chinese collectors. However, it also emerged that Chinese collectors and their understanding of the international market of antiques is still rather insufficient and that they would have to work harder to reach the same level of maturity as foreign collectors.

Moreover, as mentioned in the methods and data chapter, before analysing the articles from *Global Times* I had tried to search on *People's Daily* and *China Daily*. However, since the search on *People's Daily* yielded too many irrelevant results, I decided not to choose this medium as it would have been challenging to identify the useful articles. Regarding *China Daily*, the first reading of the articles gave me the impression that this governmental newspaper focuses more on the facts of the articles, and it does not provide nuanced descriptions of Chinese collectors. Therefore, given the scope of the research, it would have been complicated to find patterns and narratives relevant for this study. Nevertheless, I still consider *China Daily's* articles highly relevant for further study on the topic of Chinese cultural heritage and I believe they would contribute to the discourse analysis on Chinese lost cultural relics. Regardless, future research on Chinese collectors might extend the outcomes of this research by, for example, analysing the articles in Chinese language.

Finally, given the findings of this research, further investigation could examine more thoroughly the role of the Chinese government in the international market of antiques and the illicit trade of Chinese cultural objects. Indeed, the illicit trade of cultural objects is still an issue in the field of cultural heritage and the findings of this study have already reiterated on the main critiques against international treaties. Although Chinese collectors can also play an important role in this matter by acquiring the relics and donating them to the government, existing legal means of retrieving long-lost cultural objects should be reinforced. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how the Chinese government's attitude towards purchases of lost cultural relics will develop in the coming years, as well as what Chinese collectors' next moves in the repatriation project will be.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I: List of articles with the keywords “*Chinese collectors*”

Articles No.	Year	Author	Title	URL
1A	2009	Wu Ziru	Auctions boost domestic demand for Chinese relics	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/200912/492056.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/200912/492056.shtml</a> ↓
2A	2010	Hao Zou	Sotheby's indicts non-paying Chinese bidders	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201002/504890.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201002/504890.shtml</a> ↓
3A	2010	Wu Ziru	Qing jewelry in HK spring sales	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201003/517518.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201003/517518.shtml</a> ↓
4A	2010	Wu Ziru	Let the battle begin	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201011/590805.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201011/590805.shtml</a> ↓
5A	2010	Zhao Xuemei, Sun Wei	China's wealth welcome in antiques world	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201012/597923.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201012/597923.shtml</a> ↓
6A	2010	Yue Hongyan, Wu Ziru and Jiang Yuxia	The rise and power of China's culture industry	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201012/607633.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201012/607633.shtml</a> ↓
7A	2011	Nick Muzyczka	China digs for gold in Britain	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201102/625769.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201102/625769.shtml</a> ↓
8A	2011	Stuart Wiggin	Antiques fever more financial than patriotic	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201108/672075.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201108/672075.shtml</a> ↓
9A	2011	Wu Ziru	Sharing Chinese Art	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201112/687750.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201112/687750.shtml</a> ↓
10A	2012	Global Times	Voice on people collecting antiques solely as investments rather than out of interest	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201211/743328.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201211/743328.shtml</a> ↓
11A	2013	Sun Shuangjie	Bring the booty!	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201301/759143.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201301/759143.shtml</a> ↓
12A	2013	Ying Ying Lee and Du Liya	Collectors rush for relics	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201309/814204.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201309/814204.shtml</a> ↓
13A	2013	Chen Gong	Mistaken motives assigned to Chinese collectors	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201310/820631.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201310/820631.shtml</a> ↓

14A	2014	Global Times	Landmark ritual bronze vessel returns home to China	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201403/850231.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201403/850231.shtml</a> ↓
15A	2014	Lu Qianwen	2014 Chinese auction market in review	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201412/897249.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201412/897249.shtml</a> ↓
16A	2015	Rong Xiaoqing	Naïve patriotism inflates Chinese art market	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201503/914136.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201503/914136.shtml</a> ↓
17A	2015	Global Times – Artron	Japanese auction houses specializing in Chinese antiques impacting collectors in China	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201509/943830.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201509/943830.shtml</a> ↓
18A	2015	Yang Hui	Reunited because we understood, there's one perfect fit	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201511/953430.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201511/953430.shtml</a> ↓
19A	2015	AFP	Bids to keep China bidding Hong Kong auctioneers go experimental as sales slump	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201512/958800.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201512/958800.shtml</a> ↓
20A	2018	Zhang Yiqian	Chinese pool personal money and resources to buy back artifacts lost overseas China doesn't encourage individuals to retrieve stolen relics: official	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201804/1097677.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201804/1097677.shtml</a>
21A	2018	AFP	Chinese vase found in attic sells for 16.2 million euros Forgotten Chinese vase hit at auction	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201806/1106792.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201806/1106792.shtml</a>
22A	2018	Fan Lingzhi	GQ article refuted after implying Chinese government is behind theft of treasures overseas Robbing the truth	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201808/1117553.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201808/1117553.shtml</a>

**Appendix II: List of articles with the keywords “lost cultural relics”**

Articles No.	Year	Author	Title	URL
1B	2009	Zhang Lei	Another sale stirs anger over stolen relics	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/200911/482999.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/200911/482999.shtml</a> ↓
2B	2009	Xu Shenglan	China introduces cash rewards for cultural relics lost overseas	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/200911/487509.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/200911/487509.shtml</a> ↓

3B	2011	Wu Ziru	Sharing Chinese Art	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201112/687750.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201112/687750.shtml</a>
4B	2018	Agencies	Head of Buddha statue from Tang Dynasty returns home	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201807/1110470.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201807/1110470.shtml</a>
5B	2018	Cao Siqi	China launches nationwide crackdown on smuggling of relics, antiques	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201807/1111220.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201807/1111220.shtml</a>
6B	2018	Fan Lingzhi	GQ article refuted after implying Chinese government is behind theft of treasures overseas Robbing the truth	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201808/1117553.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201808/1117553.shtml</a>
7B	2019	Zhang Hui	361 Chinese relics to be returned to China from US	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201903/1140603.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201903/1140603.shtml</a>
8B	2019	Chen Xi	Top museum exhibits 600 retrieved relics Exhibit shows national efforts, enthusiasm to protect heritage: expert	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201909/1164990.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201909/1164990.shtml</a>
9B	2019	Chen Xi	Macao tycoon donates looted relic	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201911/1169936.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201911/1169936.shtml</a>
10B	2019	Chen Xi	Chinese tycoon Stanley Ho donates recovered Qing Dynasty zodiac bronze head to National Museum of China	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201911/1170050.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201911/1170050.shtml</a>
11B	2019	Chen Xi	Recovered Qing dynasty treasure shines at 20th anniversary of Macao's return	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201911/1169992.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201911/1169992.shtml</a>
12B	2020	Chen Xi	68 Chinese relics returned to China from the UK amid global pandemic	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202011/1207224.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202011/1207224.shtml</a>
13B	2020	Chen Xi	Bronze horse zodiac head back home 160 years after being stolen	<a href="https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202012/1208665.shtml">https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202012/1208665.shtml</a>

**Appendix III: Distribution of articles with the keywords “*Chinese collectors*”**

Articles No.	REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL RELICS and the GOVT. ATTITUDE	PATRIOTISM	SELF-INTEREST	IMMATURITY
1A		X	X	X
2A				X
3A		X		
4A		X	X	
5A		X		
6A		X		
7A		X	X	
8A		X	X	
9A		X		
10A			X	
11A	X			X
12A				X
13A			X	X
14A			X	
15A				X
16A				X
17A			X	
18A		X		
19A				X
20A	X		X	X
21A	X			X
22A	X	X		

**Appendix IV: Distribution of articles with the keywords “*lost cultural relics*”**

Articles No.	REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL RELICS and the GOVT. ATTITUDE	PATRIOTISM	SELF-INTEREST	IMMATURITY
1B				X
2B	X			
3B	X			
4B	X	X		
5B	X			
6B	X	X		X
7B				X
8B		X		

9B		X		
10B		X		
11B		X	X	
12B	X			
13B	X			