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# Complexities of Chinese Contemporary Art

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Complexities of Chinese Contemporary Art

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Master of Arts in Asia Pacific Studies

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## Complexities of Chinese Contemporary Art

### **Abstract**

Throughout the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC), art has always been state-dominated and driven by governmental and political agendas. In comparison to fellow artists in the Western world, historically, Chinese artists have lacked the freedom to express their passion and creativity through artistic forms. The contemporary art movement in China, however, maneuvers around this challenge and provides a more positive direction—one in which artists have a stronger voice and economic benefits are combined with governmental support and encouragement of art activities that enhance social capital and one's habitus. To some extent, this is changing, with the first significant emergence of liberalization, and the rise of artist voices in the post-Mao period. China's art market is not only booming domestically but it has opened up to the world market over the past 20 years. This affirmative phenomenon was proven by a striking purchase of a Chinese antique vase sold at auction for \$86 million. Moreover, China's contemporary art is part of learnt by China's powerful historical arts and crafts, and previous popular in art villages. Art villages, which include Beijing's 798 Art District, have established art studios, galleries, and local exhibitions that support modern day artists as well as expand China's collections. In recent years, village artists create various forms of visual representation and expression through paintings in order to transform the contemporary art of China. In sum, this research paper examines the rapid transformation of Chinese art, its emergence as in an economic tool, and art as a mode to express one's freedom of speech.

**Key words:** Chinese Contemporary Art, the 798 Art District, Creative development, Economic tool, Cultural revolution, Post Mao period

## Complexities of Chinese Contemporary Art

### Introduction

Throughout the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC), art has always been state-dominated and driven by political agendas. In comparison to fellow artists in the Western world, historically, Chinese artists have lacked the freedom to express their passion and creativity. However, during the post-Mao period, there was an emergence of modernization and liberalization, which allowed various types of artists to express their innovative artistic values and voices to the Chinese society. China's art market is not only booming domestically, but it has opened up to the world market in the past 20 years. This affirmative phenomenon was proven by a striking purchase of a Chinese antique vase sold at an auction for \$86 million.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, China's contemporary art is learnt part of China's powerful historical arts and crafts and is popular in Art villages. Art villages, which include Beijing 798 Art District, Beijing Songzhuang, Shenzhen Dafen village and so on, have established art studios, galleries, and local exhibitions that support modern day artists as well as are artistic agents to expand China's traditional and contemporary art collections. In recent years, village artists have created innovative forms of visual representation and paintings that diversify and strengthen Chinese contemporary art. Meanwhile, many of these recognized artists congregate together in certain areas, and they have earned much international recognition. As such, more and more artists have settled in art villages like the 798 Art District, in order to strengthen their voices and express their artistic values.

When artists and painters band together, they hope to be heard by the general population, the masses. While this is a big challenge for Chinese artists, how can they find a way to express their thoughts and creativity even moderately without conflicting with the government's censorship under

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Lehr. "China's Art Market Is Booming – But Not for Foreigners." Huffpost, March 2013 [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/chinas-art-market-is-booming-but-not-for-foreigners\\_us\\_58b6fb0de4b0563cd36f6399](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/chinas-art-market-is-booming-but-not-for-foreigners_us_58b6fb0de4b0563cd36f6399)

its restrictive political regime? In China, all media content is censored by the government with all public information carefully selected and filtered. Due to these restrictions, a well-known, talented artist like Ai Wei Wei was forced to close his exhibition, which was banned by the Chinese government because of his artistic content and intentions: to ask the government to allow freedom of speech on social media. This case outraged Ai Wei Wei fans both at home and abroad and shocked other Chinese artists and affiliated groups, including the international community. In response to the government's actions, Ai Weiwei went international with his story to express his passion in art and the value of freedom of expression.

Drawing from such cases and many sources, this research paper examines the rapid transformation of Chinese art as an economic tool and vehicle for artists to call for and exercise freedom of speech. The contemporary art movement sparked by Ai Wei Wei can keep moving in this more positive direction, in which artists have a stronger voice, economic benefits, and support of art activities that enhance social capital and one's habitus.

Chinese art, to some extent, allows people to express their culture and experiences. In turn, the best way to move forward is for the government to support—and not suppress—artists and for artists to effectively negotiate and balance the competing worlds of politics and expression.

## **Literature Review and Methodology**

Research materials about the relationship between the Chinese contemporary art market and government are limited by political bias and lack impartial perspectives. This research paper will start with perspectives of Chinese art apparatus during Mao period, which I will mention in the later. Although we will make a reference from Eric A Hyer's journal article, "Art & Politics in Mao's China," which discusses China, before 1949, an era heavily influenced by Soviet-style of socialist ideologies in which everything was common property of society—including peoples' creativity and talents—this resource doesn't acknowledge the shifting nature of Chinese contemporary art. As such,

we will use Lu Nings' article "How Chinese Art Became Contemporary," to fill in this gap and complete the historical background, illustrating the first transformative stage of Chinese art.

However, Lu's article also shows governmental bias. The goal of this research is to fill in aspects of the "big picture" not addressed by these articles and to elaborate on the implications of each shifting period. Moreover, because of historical influences, contemporary artists are playing a crucial role in the development of Chinese contemporary art, which presents a significance landmark in China's economic development that includes calls for freedom of expression.

We will then refer to several journals, including "The Art of Anxiety: China's Social Transformation" and "the Uncertain Reception of Chinese Contemporary Art", and a sociological exploration of Chinese contemporary art museums and galleries: contemporary art and its visitors to build case studies, which includes both artists Ai Weiwei and Jin Zhilin's interview talking about the influence from Post-Mao period to nowadays. We will make a reference to both articles in order dig deeper into the rapid transformation of Chinese Contemporary art. Both interviews offer evidences about the good and bad influences of the Cultural Revolution.

Various sources help us to explore not only how China's art market is booming domestically, but is becoming open to the world market in the past 20 years, especially in the formation of art villages in metropolitan areas. Various sources help us to explore how many village artists love paintings to contemporary art of China. And we will make references toon some aspects from both articles "Art villages in metropolitan Beijing: A study of the location dynamics" and "The 798 Art District"<sup>2</sup>: Multi-scalar drivers of land use succession and industrial restructuring in Beijing."<sup>3</sup>

Overall, previous literature tends to concentrate on the dark side of Chinese contemporary art and its suppression and control by the government. The objective for this research is to examine how Chinese art is becoming an economic tool and a way for artists to push for freedom of speech, and

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

shifting in a more positive direction. As a result, artists have a stronger voice and various cultural, economic, and social benefits are the consequences.

In order to illustrate China's artistic transformation, market development, and economic conditions, this research topic will include both qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically, we will reference to Bourdieu's theory regarding social capital and habitus. This topic covers many aspects from a different lens, and this paper provides relevant historical background, discusses artistic awakening moments, and opportunities and challenges for China's Art market. To strengthen the argument and add pathos, the paper utilizes case studies that address the effect of the first official transformation in the artistic awakening during Mao's time. To explore how the Chinese art market is booming and catalyzing the economic development, we will present two other case studies: the 798 Art District and the creative city Shanghai respectively. Moreover, this paper will include academic journals, books, and economic reports to give further context on my topic; in particular, I will examine how Chinese contemporary art boosts the economic vitality through economic statistics and reports. Furthermore, this paper will conclude with interviews of contemporary Chinese artists.

### **Historical Aspect of Chinese Art (Mao Era)**

The recognition of art and art assets are gradually becoming important elements in China's economic development. China has been utilizing its cultural assets as a way to increase its influence and performance on the international stage. This move also carries economic motives. While all these developments are positive, the Chinese government stance remains paradoxical about the art market and how art should be illustrated, spread, and marketed both at home and abroad. The government's position shows a desire to develop creative urban economies by encouraging artists and artistic activities but, at the same time, regulates the freedom of expression of these same artists. The fear of the Chinese government is that if freedom is given to artists, they may speak and present freely, which may oppose the government's attempt to censor and impose state control.

Art is a media between the artists and masses. Art is a bridge between reality and spirit. However, this bridge has historically been neglected and controlled. China, before 1949, was heavily influenced by Soviet-style socialist ideology, which asserts that everything is the common property of society, including the creativity and talents of people. In short, individual freedom, opinions, and creativity were stunted. During that period, people lacked the opportunities to be creative, because they still struggled in poverty and were focused on survival more than art. Following the rise of communists to power in 1949, Chinese art had its first significant historical moment, in which all artist were required to concentrate on communist ideas. Artists during Mao’s era were forced to follow political propaganda and state-driven agendas. In this role, the Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG), which was led by Mao’s wife Jiang Qing, pressured artists. The propaganda mission was, in her words, “red, bright, and shining” (hong, guang, liang).<sup>4</sup> Below is a piece of iconic art work that reflects this mission.



Zhilin Jin, (1928– ); 1971 “The People March Under the Banner of Chairman Mao” watercolor and charcoal, <http://kennedy.byu.edu/art-politics-in-maos-china/>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid



In turn, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) also created a great barrier for Chinese artists, writers, philosophers, and for artistic development within the nation; in this later period, however, a bit more freedom was allowed. There were older generation artists who suffered insurmountable amount of limitations in everything that they would accomplish and create, and they were only allowed to work for the government. The CCRG also destroyed many of their own other forms of artistic works, which to create artistic work that were not acceptable to the government that were valuable to the Chinese history.<sup>5</sup>

During that time, artists were only allowed to use certain themes in their art works. Therefore, artists used various references in paintings, which provided a positive image of the government. Woodblock prints and the Soviet socialist realist style were popular, especially during the Cultural Revolution, but they were also combined with Chinese characteristics, which were allowed in that era.<sup>6</sup> After the following revolution, government and people stayed in an adjourning period, in which art style changed to a more individual-based style rather than one solely controlled by the government's agenda. Individual-based style pointed out that artists create artistic work by their thoughts. In China, “governance remains characterized by strong top-down mandates.”<sup>7</sup> Once the central government makes decisions, then the local government is responsible for implementing, promoting, and supporting their agendas. Although during Mao-period, Chinese art was led by governmental directives in most ways, it laid out some important foundation for the development of Chinese contemporary art.

### **An Artistic Awakening during Mao's Period—Jin Zhilins' Interview**

During the Mao period, artists confronted the government's pressure that told artists they had to promote political agendas. They also continued searching for a balanced approach that allowed

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

them to create what they really want. China is one case of the very overt involvement of political parties and government in the humanities, which has dire consequences for the artists and their art in most ways. Today, as the world is modernizing very quickly, we can better understand the value of free expression by recognizing the negative consequences that ensue when the government manipulates art for political purposes. The case of a well-known artist, Jin Zhilin, illustrates these various issues.

Jin Zhilin, is a well-respected Chinese artist who represents the historical shift from feeling forced to express the government's political propaganda to having a personal voice. Jin Zhilin's artistic career was changed dramatically and was shaped by the communist regime of China. Although Jin could not freely create work during this harsh time, he still emerged as a leading artist with a unique artistic style. One reason that Jin is a great artist is because of his teacher, Xu Beihong—one of China's preeminent oil painters—because he took the lead in learning Western tradition and education, which influenced Jin. In the following year, Jin created an artistic style, which is connected to the local people and culture rather than political agendas. Jin, affected by modern and Western style art, named his artistic style the Yaodong huapai (cave artist group) in the post-Cultural Revolution era. Nowadays, in retrospect, that Yaodong Huapai is most important catalyst towards the formation of freedom in Chinese contemporary art.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid



Zhilin Jin, 1977, High Ranking Cadre and daughter”, <http://kennedy.byu.edu/art-politics-in-maos-china/>

The work of Jin is not only a model during the Cultural Revolution but also directly connected to the lives of the masses. This very fact represent a huge transformation of Chinese Art. Even though he was forced to adapt to promote the political agenda of Chinese government during his youth, Jin utilized elements of folk art during later in his life. In Jin’s words, “art should serve the people—the workers, peasants, and soldiers, I fell in love with those paintings instantly, especially to feel such a strong folk style, and its down-to-earth, local artistic style.”<sup>9</sup> These words of Jin Zhilin illustrate how the minds of artists work. Despite these good intentions, all paintings had to cater to political agendas during the 1940s-1970s. They are required on art work by selecting subjects. In these historical circumstance, Chairman Mao said, “There is in fact no such thing as art

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics.”<sup>10</sup> These words reflect that Chinese art contains political influence and that Chinese art and government depend on each other. Even to this day, artists who have increased freedom, are still subject to governmental influence to some extent. During the Cultural Revolution era, artists served the government and created many iconic paintings, in which the main character is chairman Mao in different period, it states that government need a powerful media to express and promote their governmental image, which is art. Due to repression during the Mao period, Chinese artists gradually learned to negotiate the line between their own artistic intentions and governmental pressures. And government shapes art moderately in the progress since the Post- Mao period.

In this discussion of Chinese art, the most severe issue repression of artistic freedom of speech and some content. Many artists recall, during the Cultural Revolution, that it was very stressful to do artwork, because you easily could get into serious political trouble. The 1940s-1970s were a period of special importance to Chinese contemporary art. This transformation can be seen as the first transformation from traditional Chinese art to Chinese contemporary art. The Maoist ideology broke down Chinese traditional boundaries, and that directly affected the first generation of Chinese Contemporary artist, like Jin Zhilin. In the 1980s, after the slowdown of the Cultural Revolution, a new artistic generation embraced western modern art. In this new style, artists are more like to express their individual expectations, which tend to more freedom and personal voice rather than expected subject matter.

### **The 798 Art District's Contribution to Chinese Contemporary Art**

Unlike in the past, after the Cultural Revolution, the government used art as an economic tool to boost economic development, which produced a “win-win” situation. The Chinese artists are one of the developments of “cordial”, which boosts the economy. The reason is that, after the Cultural

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

Revolution, artists faced the self-transformation from that they were ready and eager to create works and looking for a comfortable place to create more and more such works. However, they faced the struggle and tension about which forms of Chinese art would best do. One illustration of this tension is pre-Avanti-grad artist. They faced two main adverse directions. One is the pre-avant-garde style, namely Soviet socialist realist artistic style, which shares a similarity to Western oil painting tradition and its educational values. The second one is Guohua, a Chinese national painting, which combines modernization and traditional Chinese ink painting. Since the late 1970s, both styles were accepted in Chinese art, and artists realized and practiced the meaning of art that served people and express individual's thoughts.<sup>11</sup> Then, Chinese Contemporary Art transformation ushered the avant-garde artists of the 1980s, which officially broke down the restrictions of official discourse and reclaimed freedom of expression. The Avant-garde artists are regarded as "Un-official, however, they used their bold artistic works to seek real freedom in 1980s."<sup>12</sup>

Most of Avant-garde artists were living in poverty, but they were still heavily attracted and in some case even addicted to creative works. In the artist's eyes, nourishment for the mind is far more important than physical nourishment, and therefore a cheap and spacious art studio is more necessary for them than even food. Their work environment is one of most important factors, which usually has a low noise level, and relatively freedom of expression.

Moreover, since the economic reforms and open special economic zones were called for during the Chairman Deng Xiaoping's governance (1972), the manufacturing industries were in tremendous damage.<sup>13</sup> Due to the rise of creative and service industries, the decentralization of manufacturing industry was a necessary step. Almost all manufacturing factories were forced to relocate to metropolitan areas, such as Beijing and Shanghai. Many factories in the rural area also had the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

foresight to give up the land and move to specialized industrial cities. As a result, many lofts and warehouses turned into idle assets that could then be utilized by artists.

These historical shifts and new situations led to the formation of art villages in 1990s. In the 1992 Master Plan, Beijing named itself as the “modern international city.”<sup>14</sup> This meant that Beijing became the center for national economic activities. Furthermore, due to the decentralization of the manufacturing industries, large quantities of decommissioned land were vacated. The government priori leased the decommissioned land of Factory 798, which is now the well-known 798 Art District, where located in Chaoyang district(朝阳区).<sup>15</sup> This location is accessible from any place in the city, and Factory 798 satisfies all artists’ needs (except for price), with a creative and quiet environment, open space and unique styles of architecture. The 798 Art District acts as the largest Chinese contemporary art community, and it became the pioneer in the transformation of this international creative city.

Many well-known art villages were established during that period of time, such as Songzhuang, the 798 in Beijing, Dafencun in Shenzhen, and the Blue House in Chengdu, and many more. Along with artist’s needs being fulfilled, and economic reform leading to the development of a creative industry, the government served as a catalyst to support and shape art villages through legalizing the use of land for the art market. This is in sharp contrast to the past government restrictions on arts; the government published the new Cultural Industrial policy, which officially helped attract private investment to art villages.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the government guided the development of cultural and creative industries. A series of actions and authorizations shows that the Chinese government promotes strongly the development of art market. Because of this political encouragement, the growth of art market sharply increased. We see higher auction prices for Chinese contemporary paintings, which attract more well-known and professional global art galleries invest. Many young

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Chaoyang District, Chaoyang is the core cultural and economic district in Beijing.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

art students also express dreams to be an artist. Moreover, many artists from different city settle in the art villages. This all leads to the increased development of art villages, especially in the 798 Art District.

While the success of the art villages are not all due to government support, the 1992 master plan and new cultural policy are both key turning points. Another significant element is that two famous overseas well-known art enterprises settled in the 798 Art District, which are Time zone 8, and Tokyo gallery in 2002. Both curators contributed a lot to Chinese contemporary art. The curator and collector of Time zone 8, Robert Bernell established the first foreign-owned art space, which main focus on develop and introduce western artists to China.<sup>17</sup> His action attracted many overseas artists, who settled in the 798 Art District. And more and more people began to know about Chinese Contemporary Art. Tokyo Gallery was the first foreign-owned gallery in the 798 districts, founded by Yukihiro Tabata. He is a globally known avant-garde artist who opened an art gallery mainly focusing on Contemporary Asian Art on the global stage in Tokyo. In 2002, he started his field project—the Beijing Tokyo Art Projects (BTAP) in 798 Art District.<sup>18</sup> His art making influenced the new generation of Chinese Avant-garde artists.

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<sup>17</sup> Yimei Yin, Zhigao Liu, Michael Dunford b, and Weidong Liu, “The 798 Art District: Multi-scalar drivers of land use succession and industrial restructuring in Beijing.” *Journal of Habitat International*, No. 46 (2015) 147e155, p6

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p7





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Lucy Keany, 2011, Time Zone 8, Beijing: Three Shadows Photography Centre,  
<https://slpresearch.wordpress.com/2011/09/09/beijing-798-photo-gallery/> citation correction needed.



The 798 Art District not only symbolize the growth of a new creative industry in Beijing, but it represents the successful formation of the art village movements, which can be called one of the vanguards in Chinese Contemporary Art. The 798 Art District is unique in various ways. One is the location in the heart of China, Beijing. Since economic reform, political agendas shifted to recognition of culture and a focus on economic value, and the creative industry was highly encouraged. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued commands— from capital to local government —to foster economic growth, leverage cultural resources, develop cultural diversity, and boost cultural and economic wealth.<sup>19</sup> In general, the capital and the metropolitan areas are *a priori* developed. Therefore, the 798 Art District is a result of the government’s prioritization of art.

According to the artists’ effort and government support and recognition of contemporary art, during the 2008 Olympic Games, the Beijing Municipal Government ensured that “an area devoted to avant-garde Chinese art in a place with a 50-year history of industrial manufacturing was a good example of the increasing cultural openness of China, making 798 a symbol for city branding and place marketing.”<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, because of increasing recognition of the 798 Art District, other art-related organizations and enterprises settled in the 798 Art District, and these new additions helped the village to grow drastically. For example, art related organizations and enterprises increased from 19 in 2005 to 87 in 2006, while the number of art studios grew from 40 to 51.<sup>21</sup>

More importantly, the number of galleries reached 153 in 2008, including international galleries from all over the world.<sup>22</sup> The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA)<sup>23</sup> was opened in factory 798 in 2007, which gained international-stage reputation from hundreds of art museum curators,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p8

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p7

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p7

<sup>23</sup> The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) , “which is self-proclaimed not-for-profit art institution founded by the Belgian collectors, Guy and Myriam Ullens, was opened in 2007, and rented 5000 m2 of floor space.”

collectors, and artists from around the world were invited to attend its opening ceremony. Since the joining of UCCA, more and more high-end galleries settled in the 798 Art District.

The transformation of the Factory 798 complex from an industrial factory to a creative art village was driven by multiple factors, including government support, new land use and cultural policies, the emergence of the Chinese contemporary art market, and global attention. The case of 798 is a great example to show that: (1) the government recognizes the importance of culture and art and strongly promotes the development of the creative arts industry by creating comfortable space and conditions for artists; (2) the Avant-garde movement is officially recognized by the government; (3) art villages earn a global reputation— from high-end galleries to art-related organizations. All these developments help Chinese art move from a national to global stage.

### **The Chinese Contemporary Art Market Catalyzes Economic Development Through Creative Art: A Study of Shanghai**

If we count the 798 Art district as a great case in artistic growth and economic development, another big change is the development of an actual creative art city. In order to fully enhance China's core economic competitiveness, the government must create incentives for “new economy” or what we call a “creative economy.” This not only includes the service industry but also include creative works and a knowledge-based economy. In other words, the rise of Chinese Contemporary Art strengthens the economy as well. The field of art can provide different types of jobs, including those as artists, curators, art collectors, as well as for modern artists who are into graphic design, marketing, auction and etc. From this perspective, it doesn't matter who gets employed by which industry, the field of art and its career offering create strong link between Chinese contemporary art culture and the economy.

There are three main key elements in the successful introduction of art as an economic enhancer. Economic development and the effective integration of arts and culture are usually the result of a

combinations of geographic-centric, people-oriented, and program-based approaches. Geographic-centric means that art clusters in a specific location. The people-oriented element promotes art by licensing work-spaces, and supporting arts centers for marketing and gallery purposes.<sup>24</sup> The program-based element targets a specific community, which includes developing an arts program, exhibiting an art show, and displaying to collectors.<sup>25</sup> Either one or all three can strengthen economic improvement and vitality.

These three elements characterize arts and artistic cultural activity that attracts people for visual pleasure or those who are seeking artistic investment. These activities often take place at public events or at specific locations such as theaters, museums, music clubs, and galleries; and these cultural activities take place in both private and public venues such as arenas, public parks, and community centers.<sup>26</sup> Communities also play an important role in economic development. Communities within cities, villages, and provinces can develop creative ways to make artistic activities in vacant or convergence spaces. Several communities have embraced the practice of promoting creative activity in a vacant retail windows and storefronts as a form of revitalization.<sup>27</sup>

The concentration of art communities improve instigates economic activity and creates an innovative atmosphere. For China's economy to be diversified and expanded, the transformation of art and galleries to innovative, modern, and cultural enterprises is necessary. The physical density of creative and cultural enterprises augments cultural values and prosperity, which produces a positive impact for the local area, but also the overall Chinese economy. Moreover, the convergence of art into a cultural enterprise and the mission of organizations to showcase art can lead to innovation and specialization in a number of fields, not just painting. As the catalyze of economic development, based on three main elements, the creative city has brought distinct changes to urban sights

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<sup>24</sup> Shengjing He, "The creative spatio-temporal fix: Creative and cultural industries development in Shanghai, China." *Journal of Geoforum*, <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/geoforum>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

Therefore, cultural and creative industries (CCIs) have acquired strong support in public policy making. Meanwhile, CCIS started with local economic development strategies since the early 2000s. CCIs cover almost every city, especially in metropolitans.

One of the most outstanding cities in creative development is Shanghai, which is located in southern China. Shanghai spearheaded a creative city making movement in the country featuring rapid proliferation of CCI clusters since early 2000s.<sup>28</sup> Since then there has been a flare up and a wave of frenetic CCI development in Shanghai. In 2011, the ‘12th Five-Year Plan for CCI in Shanghai (2011–2015)’ proposed to raise the contribution of CCIs to GDP up to 12 percent. As a matter of fact, Shanghai achieved this goal in 2013.<sup>29</sup> In 2014, Shanghai heeded the call of the government and implemented the policy entitled ‘Guidelines for further promoting the cooperation between cultural and finance industries in Shanghai’, which was targeted as a catalyst. Shanghai encouraged cultural industries to become full-fledged enterprises, and helped them to build investment funds, elevated venture capital among cultural industries, and develop the auction market as well. Shanghai has really thrived, and the city showed great ambition and vision in its latest master plan released in 2016, which is that the city will be a “technology innovation center and international cultural metropolitan.”<sup>30</sup>

Because of the branding success of Shanghai, CCI zones gradually are becoming iconic city sights. Overall, CCIs in Shanghai have gradually evolved into several major categories, with the most outstanding one being art production and exhibition. Recently, many CCI zones have connected to the tourism industry as well, which has promoted the economic growth and upgraded the environment in specific regions. When looking at both the growth of art communities and creative cities, we see that both use branding strategies to improve the competitiveness of art with other industries and increase art’s reputation on a global stage.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid,p5

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p6

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p7

## **Challenges for Contemporary of Art of China**

From carefully looking at the historical aspects of Chinese art, we can assess that the field and potential of Chinese art has grown exponentially. Still, however, many existing challenges and barriers need to be addressed. First, many Chinese artists are trapped in an artistic world of cliché, and because of Ai Weiwei and Yue Minjun's success, there are many artists who tend to imitate them, following their routes to success. However, imitation is not a viable means to go beyond the work of one's predecessors. Most Chinese Contemporary art force back to the Avant-garde artists in the late 1980s; the art form combined with Chinese national painting and westernized oil painting. Then artists absorb, recreate and practice. For instance, Ai Weiwei is skilled in combining Duchampian style and addressing social issues to create his personal style. When Ai's work was shared with the domestic and international community, it was perceived as really stunning. However, because of his success, more and more artists are trying to express their artistic expressions using his style. Because these are copied tactics, often times, their works are not attractive, nor creative.

Therefore, creativity itself is becoming the artistic challenge for the contemporary artist, while poverty is their primary practical struggle. Although there are a tiny portion of artists who are wealthy from exhibiting and selling art works, most of them seem like opportunity seekers. Some of them only can insist on drawing, except that, they have nothing. Opportunity-seeking even is not an apt description; in contrast, they are just waiting for an opportunity. There are waiting for that curator to exhibit their works; a museum to collect their works, or for an art agency to advertise them. If artists stay in anxiety and poverty for a long time, they may experience inner panic

Another dilemma is that China still faces difficulty in how to fully implement freedom of speech. While communism has had a great influence on China's economic system, the government is much quieter on the issue of individual human rights. There is a conflict that arises with freedom speech with regards to communist theory. First, individual freedoms include freedom of speech.

According to Daniel Lau, who graduated from Stanford University, “ In a communist society, the individual's best interests are indistinguishable from the society's best interest.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, in communist theory, the better way to express the freedom of speech is under the communist society or following the government’s big picture. Nowadays, indeed China keeps restrictions on its citizens freedom of speech, although, according to Article 35 of the current Chinese constitution in 1982, "Citizens of the PRC have freedom of speech, publication, assembly, association, procession and demonstration."<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, China also strictly controls the internet and all kinds of media. All these controls proved how Ai Weiwei’s case still has current relevance and shows that the modern Chinese government has not made huge progress with the freedom of speech. Under these political and social circumstances, artists have a small chance of gaining full freedom of speech. Therefore, a more realistic path is to find a positive balance among the artist’s voice, the government’s agenda, and the demands of the art market.

## **Conclusion**

After carefully examining the historical and contemporary aspects of Chinese art, Chinese culture and society face some dilemmas that places artists in a creative predicament. That said, there has been growth. Due to the modern recognition of art and creative economy, the “big picture” of Chinese Contemporary Art has developed dramatically. From an international relations perspective, Chinese Contemporary art represents a form of soft power through the building of international art communities, such as Songzhuang, the 798 Art District, and the ongoing development of creative metropolitan areas that increase the performance and reputation of art on the global stage.

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<sup>31</sup> Daniel Lau, “Communism and Computer Ethics”  
<https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs201/projects/communism-computing-china/aboutus.html>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

Meanwhile, all these developments have led to economic success. From an economic standpoint, Chinese art has had good performances on the both auction market and well-known overseas museums. Moreover, influential American collectors have used their entire museum space in Miami to exhibit 28 Chinese contemporary artists, who are Don and Mera Rubell.<sup>33</sup> For example, in Europe, Dominique and Sylvain Levy, who are famous collectors and curators, have collected art works to their existing strong collection.<sup>34</sup> More and more collectors, which include collectors from Asia and outside Asia, are collecting Chinese contemporary art works. As a consequence, these contributions have helped to increase the GDP in past 10 years. Lastly, in our modern age, acceptance of art and the artist itself have allowed more artists to be happy, productive, and devote their life to the field of art. After the first success of Ai Weiwei, and Yue Minjun, artists are exploring more creative ways to contribute their art, even though they have faced some barriers to creating art. All in all, art has transformed into an economic tool and a successful way for artists to at least begin to assert their right to freedom of speech.

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<sup>33</sup>Alexandre, Errera, "Watch Out: Chinese Contemporary Art Is Going Global", Jan 6, 2014  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandreerrera/2014/01/07/chinese-contemporary-art-goes-global-and-for-real/#7a9a65a632b5>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

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