

## The Exhibitionary Complex in Nanjing Decade China: The National Fine Art Exhibitions of 1929 and 1937

Elizabeth Lawrence  
Augustana College

A museum boom is currently underway in China. According to recent scholarship, museums in China bolster state legitimacy and glorify the nation. They communicate state-approved messages about China and Chinese national identity to a public audience.<sup>1</sup> As such, these museums continue a project of national pedagogy initiated over a century ago.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese modernizers viewed public exhibitions as integral to a nationalist agenda. Reformers like the industrialist Zhang Jian, who founded the private Nantong Museum in 1904, believed that China's national strength and global competitiveness depended on the production of modern citizens; the production of modern industrial goods and military arsenals would not suffice. Zhang Jian and others promoted museums and exhibitions as crucial sites for civic education.<sup>2</sup> They sought the development, in China, of what Tony Bennett has called an "exhibitionary complex": "a set of cultural technologies concerned to organize a voluntarily self-regulating citizenry."<sup>3</sup> This article examines an important period in the history of China's development of an exhibitionary complex through an analysis of China's first two state-sponsored fine art exhibitions, held in 1929 and 1937. These two exhibitions bookended the Nanjing Decade (1928-1937), when the Nationalist Party governed a newly unified country, having defeated warlord rivals by way of a successful military campaign. It was during this period that a Chinese state first engaged a sustained project of museum and exhibition sponsorship.

To date, few studies have provided comprehensive analysis of museums or exhibitions during the Nanjing Decade, or more broadly, the Republican era (1912-1949). Historians who have incorporated studies of exhibitions into broader works of scholarship have emphasized Nanjing Decade exhibitions as state-led projects geared toward the production of national consciousness. Karl Gerth and John Fitzgerald, for instance, have both argued that the relative political stability achieved by the Nationalist government provided the conditions for the rise of the museum and public exhibition as sites of nation-building. Existing scholarship has paid less attention to the ways exhibitions changed over the course of the Nanjing Decade.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Kirk Denton, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014) and Marzia Varutti, *Museums in China: the Politics of Representation after Mao* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> On the Nantong Museum see, for instance, Lisa Claypool, "Zhang Jian and China's First Museum," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64.3 (2005), 567-604 and Qin Shao, *Culturing Modernity: The Nantong Model, 1890-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 140-159. See also Susan Fernsebner's analysis of a late-Qing state-sponsored exhibition in "Objects, Spectacle, and a Nation on Display at the Nanyang Exposition of 1910," *Late Imperial China* 27.2 (2006), 99-124.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory Politics* (New York: Routledge 1995), 63.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 203-281 and John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 47-57.

While this article broadly confirms the close relationship between exhibitions and nationalist agendas, it underscores the fact that state-sponsored exhibitions, in this case two art exhibitions sponsored by the Nationalist Party's Ministry of Education, changed over time, such that the art on display, the venues, accompanying publications, and even the way in which bodies moved through exhibits markedly diverged. While nationalism was a touchstone of each exhibition, political priorities and conceptions of citizenship had shifted over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, and each exhibition accordingly addressed its publics in different ways.<sup>5</sup> The First National Fine Art Exhibition in China featured multi-sensorial entertainments and accommodated connoisseurship culture, even as it promoted a civic project of aesthetic education. It tolerated diverse approaches to the experience of art and embraced the diverse constituencies of the participating public, while domesticating these constituencies within an enclosed space under the national banner. The second state-sponsored exhibition, by contrast, stressed discipline and conformity, especially through its mandated route, which channeled physical movement and encouraged a unified experience of the exhibition. Although a number of scholars, especially art historians, have studied the Ministry of Education First National Fine Art Exhibition, the Second National Fine Art Exhibition has received scant attention.<sup>6</sup> This article's comparative approach allows us to see both exhibitions in a new light. It also shifts attention from a more exclusively art historical narrative to a broader investigation of the fine art exhibitions as state-sponsored exhibitions, or in other words, as opportunities for public pedagogy through acts of display.

If China's first two state-sponsored fine art exhibitions were indeed deployed as "technologies concerned to organize a voluntarily self-regulating citizenry," it follows that the different exhibitionary strategies at work in 1929 and 1937 reveal changing conceptions of citizenship. The question should not simply be 'did the exhibitions enact a project of civic education' but also, 'what sort of citizen did the exhibitions purport to produce, educate, or engage.' The Nationalist Party, with Chiang Kai-shek at its head, moved toward an authoritarian style of politics even before it took power in 1928. Nevertheless, China's first state-sponsored art exhibition, in its tolerance of diversity, modeled a pluralistic, democratic view of citizenship in the early years of the Nanjing Decade. Eight years later,

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<sup>5</sup>Denise Ho and Jie Li have similarly emphasized "malleability and transformation" in the history of Anren as a museum town in socialist and post-socialist China; see, "From Landlord Manor to Red Memorabilia: Reincarnations of a Chinese Museum Town," *Modern China* 42.1 (2016), 3-37, 32. Both Ho and Li have written monographs related to museums in the Mao era. Denise Ho, *Curating Revolution: Politics on Display in Mao's China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and Jie Li, *Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era* (Durham: Duke, 2020). As scholarly interest in China's socialist-era museums has burgeoned, research on museums and exhibitions in the preceding Republican period has not kept pace.

<sup>6</sup> A number of individual studies of the 1929 exhibition are cited in the subsequent section. Liu Ruikuan and Kris Ercums do discuss both exhibitions in their respective publications. Their focus, however, is on the modernization of the Chinese fine art field and on exhibitions in relation to the Chinese art world specifically. Moreover, Ercums' analysis of the 1937 exhibition is less developed than his analysis of its predecessor. See Liu Ruikuan, *Zhongguo meishu de xiandaihua: Meishu qikan yu meizhan huodong de fenxi 1911-1937* (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2008) and Kris Ercums, "Exhibiting Modernity: National Art Exhibitions in China During the Early Republican Period, 1911-1937" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014), 139-186 and 214-219. For a study of the two events from the perspective of the place of seals and inscribed artifacts within the two exhibitions see Elizabeth Lawrence, "The Chinese Seal in the Making, 1904-1937" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2014), Ch. 5, 183-230.

the Second National Fine Art Exhibition diverged from that precedent to enact a program of civic education designed to enforce conformity in behavioral standards, as previously idealized by the New Life Movement, a mass campaign launched in 1934 to fundamentally mold China's citizenry in service of the state.

**“Until my legs were sore and my head was dizzy”: Aesthetic Education, Entertainment, and Connoisseurship, Shanghai, 1929**

From the very introduction of the neologism *meishu* “fine art” was a politicized concept in China. The term signaled aesthetic products as both carriers of universal values and receptacles of cultural essences. Fine art was thus distinct from those genres of material culture made and collected by the late imperial literati. In the early twentieth century, New Culture intellectuals promoted fine art and aesthetics as crucial components of a civic education. In an influential speech titled “Replace Religion with Aesthetic Education” and published in the progressive *New Youth* journal in 1917, the educator Cai Yuanpei argued that science fostered a rational disposition, while beauty enflamed the passions, and both were necessary to the cultivation of modern national citizens.<sup>7</sup> When the Nationalist Party unified warlord-torn China in 1928 and established its Nanjing government, Cai Yuanpei became chairman of the University Council, a precursor to the Ministry of Education. Almost immediately, plans for a national art exhibition took shape as part of a broader effort to engage the populace in a project of aesthetic education that would, according to Cai, “cultivate dignity of person, courage, and an ideology of self-sacrifice for the good of the group.”<sup>8</sup>

The Ministry of Education First National Fine Art Exhibition was held in Shanghai from April 10 to April 30, 1929 at the site of the New Pu Yu Benevolent Association. This complex of buildings, south of the former walled city of Shanghai, had only months before housed a state-sponsored National Products Exhibition, which promoted Chinese manufactured goods and the patriotic rejection of imported commodities.<sup>9</sup> Both the National Products Exhibition and the Fine Art Exhibition presented the nation as a unified community within which acts of production, be they industrial or artistic, took place. The art exhibition primarily showcased the work of contemporary artists, and included the categories of calligraphy, painting, epigraphy (especially seal carving), western-style painting, artistic photography, and the decorative arts (Table 1).

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<sup>7</sup> Cai Yuanpei, “Yi meiyu dai zongjiao shuo,” *Xin qingnian* 3.6 (1917). See also, Cai Yuanpei, “Meiyu shishi de fangfa,” *Jiaoyu zazhi* 14.6 (1922). In the later publication, Cai Yuanpei outlined an ambitious agenda for a project of aesthetic education aimed at providing people with an aesthetically stimulating environment from birth to death.

<sup>8</sup> Cai Yuanpei, “Daxueyuan gongbao fakanci,” *Daxueyuan gongbao* 1.1 (1928).

<sup>9</sup> Gerth, 246-281.

**Table 1. Organization of Displays: First National Fine Arts Exhibition (1929). Source: Jiaoyu bu 1929.<sup>10</sup>**

Location	Category	Items
West Building	Calligraphy and Painting ( <i>shuhua</i> 書畫)	1,231
	Epigraphy ( <i>jinshi</i> 金石)	75
East Building	Western Painting ( <i>xihua</i> 西畫)	354
	Artistic Photography ( <i>meishu sheying</i> 美術攝影)	227
	Decorative Arts ( <i>gongyi meishu</i> 工藝美術)	288
	Reference Department ( <i>cankao bu</i> 參考部)	
Central Building	Sculpture ( <i>diaosu</i> 雕塑)	57
	Additional Paintings	
Unknown	Architecture ( <i>jianzhu</i> 建築)	34

If “national products” were defined in contrast to foreign imports, the fine art of the national community had two potential foils: it was distinct from the art produced by other nations and cultures, and it was distinct from the art privately collected for the amusement of individuals. Xu Zhimo, a romantic poet, literary celebrity, and art critic who served on the exhibition’s organizing committee, gave voice to the idea of art as public heritage in the first issue of the exhibition’s accompanying periodical, aptly titled *Fine Art Exhibition*. Xu Zhimo commended the exhibition as the “first formal expression of the government’s support for the arts”; he saw the exhibition as a step toward rectifying a situation in which “the gates of collectors” are “made of steel or watched over by armed Indian guards.”<sup>11</sup> The national exhibition, in other words, heralded a transition from art as the plaything of an exclusive elite to art as the public property of the Chinese people.

While Xu Zhimo rightfully characterized state-sponsorship of the exhibition as groundbreaking, in many ways the First National Fine Art Exhibition did not diverge from past practices. Indeed, it marked the culmination of certain trends shaping the modern fine arts world in China, and especially in Shanghai, in the early decades of the twentieth century. Shanghai had a vibrant, commerce-driven arts scene that included frequent exhibitions. Indeed, the organization of the state-sponsored exhibition of 1929, in terms of the categories of art featured, as well as the availability of exhibited works for purchase, largely replicated smaller-scale exhibitions held by the Heavenly Horse Society, a private artistic association based in Shanghai.<sup>12</sup> Artistic associations, private art schools, publishers, commercial outlets, and even elite collectors themselves, had all made early

<sup>10</sup> The number of items displayed for each category should be taken as approximations. The numbers are based on what was listed in the published exhibition catalogue. Compare Liu, 356-377.

<sup>11</sup> Xu Zhimo, “Meizhan yiyuan,” *Meizhan* 1, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Andrews, Julia F, “The Heavenly Horse Society (Tianmahui) and Chinese Landscape Painting,” in Huang Jian, ed., *Ershi shiji shanshuihua yanjiu wenji* (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2006), 556-591.

twentieth century Shanghai a place where art was remarkably visible. In this milieu, the print reproduction of painting and artifacts in journals and pictorial albums – publishing projects spearheaded by private collectors – arguably played the key role in making privately owned art more publicly accessible.<sup>13</sup> Any analysis of the formation of an exhibitionary complex in China cannot assume a simple trajectory from exclusionary royal or aristocratic collections to the halls of public museums.

The First National Fine Art Exhibition belatedly attached state-sponsorship to a gathering of diverse constituencies of the fine arts world that had emerged in preceding decades largely in the absence of state support or intervention. Previous scholarship has portrayed the exhibition as inclusive, on the one hand, and divisive, on the other. Richard Vinograd, for one, has underscored the “expansive” character of the exhibition by noting its embrace of the “ancient and contemporary, Chinese and foreign, fine and applied arts altogether.”<sup>14</sup> Other scholars have argued, by contrast, that the exhibition functioned as a “mechanism of exclusion,” to use a phrase employed by Tang Xiaobing. They focused on rivalries between groups of Chinese painters, and specifically, Chinese painters working in the genre that the exhibition categorized as Western Painting.<sup>15</sup> Yiyan Wang, for instance, has recently pinpointed the exhibition as a turning point in the marginalization of modernist painting in favor of artistic styles deemed more compatible with nationalist agendas.<sup>16</sup> Kris Ercums has taken a middle position between the poles of inclusion and exclusion by arguing that the exhibition strove for inclusiveness, but that the event nevertheless resulted in the fragmentation of the contemporary art world.<sup>17</sup>

While there is ample evidence that the exhibition did indeed marginalize and antagonize certain groups and individuals, the event as a whole maintained a spirit of cosmopolitanism and inclusiveness, especially in contrast to the subsequent 1937 event. This is especially evident when we focus attention on the experience of the exhibition by a diverse audience, and away from art world insiders. The 1929 event, in its spatial layout, lack of restrictions on visitor movement, sideline entertainments, and special rotating displays, allowed the public significant autonomy in crafting different experiences of art and the exhibition. Not only did the exhibition bring together different types of art, it also

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<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Wang Cheng-hua, “Collotype Reproduction of Antiquities in Modern China, circa 1908-1917,” in Joshua Fogel, ed., *The Role of Japan in Modern Chinese Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 273-308; Lisa Claypool, “Ways of Seeing the Nation: Chinese Painting in the National Essence Journal (1905-1911) and Exhibition Culture,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 19.1 (2011), 55-82.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Vinograd, “Patrimonies in Press: Art Publishing, Cultural Politics, and Canon Construction in the Career of Di Baoxian,” in Fogel, 245-272, 260. The quotation is part of an analysis of an officially produced commemorative exhibition catalog and art book published after the event, titled *Fine Art Exhibition Special Publication*.

<sup>15</sup> Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 96. Xiaobing Tang has an in-depth discussion of the exhibition, analyzed in relation to the politics of art in Republican China and the emergence of an avant-garde (89-98).

<sup>16</sup> Wang further attributes the turn from modernism to the curtailed agency of Chinese artists working within a colonial context. Yiyan Wang, “Modernism and its Discontent in Shanghai” in Bryna Goodman, ed., *Twentieth-century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday and the World* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 167-179.

<sup>17</sup> Ercums, 139-186.

commingled currents of nationalism with multi-sensorial urban entertainments and a modified version of old-style connoisseurship culture. The experience of the 1929 exhibition as entertainment and as a venue for the accommodation, even celebration, of connoisseurship culture, has been overlooked by previous scholarship.

For its proponents, aesthetic education had a social function tantamount to a civic religion, but the reality of the 1929 exhibition was that it presented art as one entertainment among many, and not as the object of ritualistic attention. All who paid the two *jiao* entrance fee to enter the exhibition complex could visit the different displays in any order, or none at all. Most of the art occupied the second and third stories of the East and West buildings. The ground-levels of these building held commercial stalls, purveying books and antiques, as well as food vendors that enticed visitors with both Chinese and foreign dishes. Opera performances and martial arts demonstrations were also held within the complex, drawing the attention of the public by stimulating both eye and ear.<sup>18</sup> With the bulk of the artwork on upper stories, visitors had to purposefully seek out the display halls, but one could hardly have avoided the venue's other entertainments. In another article written for the exhibition broadsheet, Xu Zhimo caricatured a visitor, pleasantly overwhelmed by the festive atmosphere, exclaiming "upstairs I looked at painting, downstairs there was also theater, with famous performers, opera fans, and small troupes all present. When tired of watching opera, I could go to the exhibition's western-style cafeteria and order dishes. The venue was so big and there were so many things to see. I ran around until my legs were sore and my head was dizzy."<sup>19</sup> With its festive atmosphere and abundant sensory stimulation, the 1929 exhibition catered to the petty urbanite tastes that drew Shanghai denizens to both private exhibitions and modern entertainment complexes like the Great World, a proto-mall featuring everything from peepshows to regional opera troupes.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the art exhibition was explicitly compared to the Great World.<sup>21</sup>

As a site of middlebrow urban entertainment, the exhibition simultaneously accommodated old-style connoisseurship culture. The grouping of artistic categories and the spatial organization of the exhibition partially reflected the tastes of literati collectors. For instance, art in the categories of epigraphy, painting, and calligraphy (*jinshi shuhua* 金石書畫) were displayed together in one building. The literati of the imperial era had long privileged these categories of art in their collecting and connoisseurship. Artwork categorized as epigraphy included an eclectic mix of seals, imperial era tomb inscriptions,

<sup>18</sup> Hu Genren, "Dui yu di er ci Quanguo meizhan de xiwang," *Qingnian yishu* 1 (1937),73-77.

<sup>19</sup> Xu Zhimo, "Xiangxiang de yulun," *Meizhan* 2, 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> On the Great World, see Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 171-209. Susan Fernsebner has noted a similarly festive atmosphere at the late-Qing Nanyang Exposition, held in 1910, in "Objects, Spectacle, and a Nation on Display," 117-120. Fernsebner links the festivity of the exposition, which was sponsored by the Qing government, to seasonal temple festivals and street markets. A *Shenbao* article, "Pinmin xiyisuo kaihui zhisheng," from the early Republican period (Nov. 3, 1912) previewed an art exhibition that likewise featured diverse entertainments, including fireworks, concerts, martial arts, food, liquor, and performances by female students.

<sup>21</sup> Hu, "Dui yu di er ci Quanguo meizhan de xiwang," 75. Hu's comparison of the 1929 exhibition to the Great World was written in 1937, during preparations for the second state-sponsored exhibition. Hu's comparison was meant to disparage the earlier exhibition. He hoped that the exhibition would promote a more serious appreciation of art.

catalogues of ancient bronzes, and even some stone carvings from Egypt.<sup>22</sup> The governing logic that held the category together was the long-standing interest of connoisseurs in text-bearing artifacts. This is not to say that artistic categories had remained static since the heyday of literati connoisseurship culture. Art representing the category of *jinshi shuhua* shared space, within the exhibition's walls, with genres never favored by the literati. Nevertheless, grouping together *jinshi shuhua* for display in a single building authorized the tastes of a supposedly defunct elite.

In addition to collector's categories, the exhibition also legitimized connoisseurship practices associated with literati culture. The exhibition's Reference Department (*cankao bu* 参考部) provided a space for private collectors and connoisseurs to show off their collections and their expertise. On the third floor of the East Building, the Reference Department housed a rotating exhibit of hundreds of imperial era paintings, all from private collections.<sup>23</sup> It provided a space, within the public exhibition, for an updated version of "elegant gatherings," periodic social occasions often centered on the communal viewing of privately collected art.<sup>24</sup> The Reference Department, which required an extra fee for entrance, drew considerable attention, such that an article in the daily newspaper *Shenbao* called it "the entire exhibition's focal point of visual attention."<sup>25</sup> Another *Shenbao* article by Yu Jianhua, printed two days later, was entirely devoted to discussing the participating collectors and the important paintings they contributed.<sup>26</sup> The term "reference department" and the extra admission fee suggested that this section was intended to attract a more informed visitor, whose interaction with the paintings would go beyond the more detached mode of what Lisa Claypool has called "public seeing," a characteristic of large scale exhibitions.<sup>27</sup> In legitimizing private ownership of art and the expertise of private collectors, the Reference Department embedded connoisseurship culture into the context of a public exhibition and thus created a new amalgamation of private collecting and public access to art.

The exhibition's nationalist agenda, middlebrow festive atmosphere, and accommodation of highbrow connoisseurship culture indicate significant tolerance for diverse modes of engaging art and the exhibitionary venue. Visitors were not encouraged to conform to a specific script. One could attend with the sole purpose of viewing "Western Painting" and avoid other display halls. Or, alerted in advance by the newspaper, one could target the Reference Department in the hopes of seeing older paintings from a specific person's collection. Alternatively, one could visit just to enjoy opera performances or have a bite to eat while taking in the hubbub.

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<sup>22</sup> *Jiaoyu bu quanguo meishu zhannlanhui chupin mulu* (Jiaoyu bu, 1929), 35-36.

<sup>23</sup> In addition to imperial era art, the Reference Department also displayed oil paintings from Japan, as discussed by Julia F. Andrews in "Japanese Oil Paintings in the First Chinese National Fine Arts Exhibition of 1929 and the Development of Asian Modernism," in Fogel, 181-211.

<sup>24</sup> On the persistence of such gatherings into the modern period see Shengqing Wu, *Modern Archaisms: Continuity and Innovation in the Chinese Lyric Tradition, 1900-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 165-181 and Shana Brown, *Pastimes: From Art and Antiquarianism to Modern Chinese Historiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 35-36.

<sup>25</sup> Wu Cheng, "Meizhan liang ri ji," *Shenbao*, April 15, 1929, 11.

<sup>26</sup> "Quanguo meizhan zhong zhi ming ji," *Shenbao* April 17, 1929, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Claypool, 55-82, 70.

The exhibition's tolerance of diversity is also captured by the previously mentioned exhibition periodical, *Fine Art Exhibition*. Issued every three days during the event, the periodical was a lively forum for public opinion. Social critics and artists, amateurs and professionals contributed essays on such topics as social roles within the art world, different artistic media, and artwork displayed by the exhibition. Art reproductions enlivened every lithographed page. Today, the publication is best known for a heated debate between Xu Zhimo and Xu Beihong on the relative merits of modernism and realism. The debate played out over the course of numerous issues, drawing in additional commentators.<sup>28</sup> While many have studied this particular debate, as it unfolded during the exhibition, scholars have not even scratched the surface of *Fine Art Exhibition* as a rich and eclectic publication.

While Xu Zhimo and Xu Beihong intensely disagreed about the value of modernist art, they both had knowledge and appreciation of western artistic models. Other contributors to *Fine Art Exhibition* shared no such common ground, speaking to entirely different audiences with starkly different registers of language.<sup>29</sup> Some emphasized the inclusive, civic role of the art exhibition, while others wrote in the style of imperia-era connoisseurship manuals. For instance, the artist and cartoonist Feng Zikai addressed three breezily written articles to the “typical visitor,” using *Meizhan* as a platform to instruct the general public about the correct way to view what he called “useless painting.”<sup>30</sup> He encouraged viewers to adopt an affective gaze, arguing that one “must use emotions to enjoy [painting’s] beauty, for one cannot use knowledge to seek out its use.”<sup>31</sup> Echoing Cai Yuanpei’s emphasis on art’s emotional appeal and civic function, Feng’s understanding of “useless painting” potentially democratized the art viewing experience by marginalizing the importance of knowledge to art appreciation. This understanding of art differed completely from that of, for instance, Chen Ziqing, who published an article titled “Speaking of Seals.” Writing as a collector and artist addressing himself to other collector-artists in the classical language, Chen advocated an antiquarian approach to the art of seal carving. Drawing on late imperial connoisseurship manuals, Chen argued that seal carvers must rigorously study ancient epigraphic models. In designing seal script compositions, carvers “need not rigidly adhere to the *Shuowen* [a second century etymological dictionary], but nor can they fabricate [seal calligraphy] out of nothing. It is critical that each and every character has its particular origin and development.”<sup>32</sup> Chen’s elitist understanding of art

<sup>28</sup> The debate has received extensive attention from art historians. Yiyan Wang’s “Modernism and its Discontent” is one of the more recent contributions and provides a good overview of previous analyses.

<sup>29</sup> As noted by Kris Ercums, the editorial board of the publication included both Xu Zhimo, an advocate of artistic modernism, and the more traditionalistic ink painters Chen Xiaodie and Yang Qingqing. Ercums, 178-179. Although Ercums provides only a brief overview of the publication, along with a more extended analysis of the debate between Xu Zhimo and Xu Beihong (181-185), he includes as an appendix to the dissertation a full table of contents of the periodical’s entire run (237-244). *Fine Art Exhibition* has been digitized by the Shanghai Library.

<sup>30</sup> Feng Zikai, “Wu yong de huihua,” *Meizhan* 4 (1929), 4-5, “Kan zhanlanhui yong de yanjing,” *Meizhan* 6 (1929), 5, and “Zhanlanhui chang de bi,” *Meizhan* 8 (1929), 5-6.

<sup>31</sup> Feng Zikai, “Wu yong de huihua,” 4.

<sup>32</sup> Chen Ziqing, “Yin hua,” *Meizhan* 7 (1929), 4-5, 4. On the author’s indebtedness to earlier connoisseurship manuals, see for instance, the Ming dynasty treatise, Shen Ye, “Yin Tan,” in Han Tianheng, ed., *Lidai yinxue lunwen xuan*, volume 1 (Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 1985), 72-81. Shen Ye wrote at one point: “There are seals with two intaglio characters and two relief characters, there are [those with] three relief and

appreciation and art making stemmed from imperial era literati culture. For Chen, seal carving and seal connoisseurship reinforced linkages between knowledgeable practitioners past and present, while art's place within a broader cultural or national community was of no concern, or at least went unmentioned. Beyond disagreeing, Feng Zikai and Chen Ziqing spoke past each other.<sup>33</sup> The juxtaposition of their voices within an exhibition periodical allowed the reader to place their contrasting ideas in dialogue, or to pick and choose what type of discourse to engage.

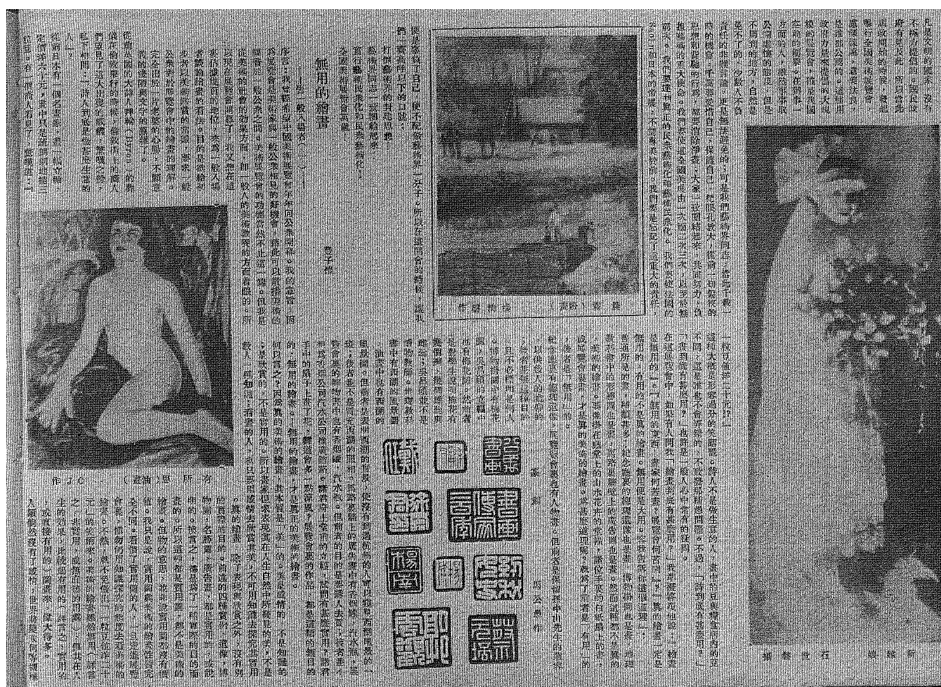
Not just the content but also the format of *Fine Art Exhibition* created potential for dialogue and surprise. Each page of the broadsheet featured multiple articles and multiple art reproductions. Some articles started and ended on a single page and others spanned multiple pages. Unrelated art reproductions appeared above, underneath, or in the middle of articles. For instance, Feng Zikai's article on the proper understanding of painting as "Useless Beauty," shared space on a page with two figure paintings, a landscape, and a cluster of seal imprints that broke up Feng's text (Figure 1). While the landscape provided the best visual support for Feng Zikai's understanding of painterly aesthetics, the seals, as a calligraphic and non-representative art form, provided a visual counterpoint, raising the question of the applicability of Feng's understanding of "useless" painting to other art forms indigenous to China. In juxtaposing diverse articles, art reproductions, and even advertisements, sometimes within the space of a single page, the publication *Fine Art Exhibition* mirrored the actual fine art exhibition of 1929. Both were models of pluralism.

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one intaglio character...these [examples] are not rash, each has its own origin" (79). Note that the language is quite similar to that of the article published in *Fine Arts Exhibition*. In particular, the idea of compositional types needing to have an origin in a precedent is shared between the two pieces of writing and many others on seals from both the imperial and modern periods.

<sup>33</sup> For an in-depth discussion of Feng Zikai's series of articles for *Fine Art Exhibition* in comparison with articles in the publication related to seals, including that of Chen Ziqing, see Elizabeth Lawrence, "The Chinese Seal in the Making," 203-217.

Figure 1. Fine Arts Exhibition 4, 1.



How then did the Ministry of Education’s First National Fine Art Exhibition function to “to organize a voluntarily self-regulating citizenry”? The main strategy of the exhibition, as a political technology, was domestication. Like wild plants, the chaotic constituencies of the art world and urban Shanghai were gathered in an enclosed space and exposed to the potentially taming influence of a vision of national community. The art on display, even that owned by private collectors, was domesticated in another sense too, as distinctively Chinese, in opposition to the foreign, just like the National Products of domestic industrial manufacturers. The Chinese nation, only recently and incompletely unified, was itself a container of diverse regions held together by the collaboration of groups and individuals with different agendas. The walls of the New Pu Yu Benevolent complex were like the lines of a Republican era map, they could not render homogenous all that they enclosed, but they could contribute to an imaginary of the Chinese nation as a coherent, if diverse, entity. Eight years later, on the eve of full-scale war with Japan, this model of nationhood and citizenship would be replaced with another. Domestication was no longer enough – the citizenry needed to march together, as a unified and disciplined body.

**“Blindly following the behinds of other people”: Discipline along the Regulated Route, Nanjing, 1937**

The Ministry of Education Second National Fine Art Exhibition was held in Nanjing from April 1 to April 23, 1937. A sense of national crisis overshadowed the event. China was enmeshed in an expanding conflict with Japan that would lead to Japan’s full-scale invasion only months after the close of the exhibition. With war brewing, the exhibition drummed up patriotic sentiment in the face of a very real threat to national survival. According to

Chen Lijiang, head of the Ministry of Education's Social Education Department, art and the art exhibition were intended to raise the spirits of the people, harden the people's "will to struggle for existence," and improve morale for "resisting the enemy and self defense."<sup>34</sup>

The goal of boosting morale at a time of crisis helps explain why the Second National Exhibition was finally held eight years after the first. The University Council had originally envisioned a national art exhibition as an annual occurrence, but that was not to be. The Nationalist state, under fiscal strain, had directed its resources elsewhere. In the interim between the two state-sponsored exhibitions, private associations, schools, commercial outlets, and individual artists maintained the vitality of a domestic art exhibition culture once again. The Ministry of Education and the Central Propaganda Department did give partial financial support to the China Fine Arts Association (founded 1933), but the series of exhibitions it sponsored in the 1930s suffered from insufficient funds and inadequate venues.<sup>35</sup>

Although the Ministry of Education neglected the original plan for an annual art exhibition, the central government encouraged and financially supported the development of the Chinese museum industry during the Nanjing Decade. As permanent, public institutions, museums more easily served the needs of the state, as compared to exhibitions that showcased things from privately owned collections. Public museums spotlighted the role of the state in education, as well as the status of museum artifacts as the common property of a nation's people. Calls for the museumification of China's cultural heritage were already being made at the beginning of the Nanjing Decade and earlier. Although the First National Fine Art Exhibition enacted a workable hybrid of private ownership and public display, some critics dismissed the model of the Reference Department, even at the time. One contributor to *Fine Art Exhibition*, for instance, argued that paintings both good and bad, real and the fake, were haphazardly displayed together in the Reference Department, and that the poor result spoke to the need for a national art museum.<sup>36</sup> Preparations to open such a museum began in 1935 and construction completed in 1937.<sup>37</sup> The museum, called the National Fine Art Display Hall, was one of two public buildings that housed China's second state-sponsored fine arts exhibition. Held in the capital city and in carefully designed public buildings, the 1937 exhibition would take on the regimented character of its host city, just as the earlier state-sponsored exhibition reflected the creative chaos of patchwork, treaty-port Shanghai.

China's preeminent museological institution, at this time, was the Palace Museum. Founded in Beijing following the politically charged nationalization of the Forbidden City

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<sup>34</sup> Chen Lijiang, "Juxing dierci quanguo meishu zhanlanhui de yiyi ji qi zhunbei," *Boyin jiaoyu yuekan* 1.5, 123-25, 124. This is a transcription of a radio broadcast that aired on January 31, 1937. See also the comments by the Minister of Education, Wang Shijie, in "Di'erci quanguo meizhan zhi yiyi," *Shenbao*, April 1, 1937, 18. Wang described the spiritual succor given to the nation's people during a time of crisis as one of the major contributions of the event.

<sup>35</sup> See Tang Wencong, "Zhongguo meishuhui di'er jie nianhui huiwu baogao," *Zhongguo meishuhui jikan* 2 (1936), 29-31 and Liu, 229-237.

<sup>36</sup> Bai Jian, "Guanquanguo meishu zhanlanhui cankaobu ganyan," *Meizhan* 7 (1929), 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Zhongguo bowuguan xiehui, Zhongguo bowuguan yilan* (Beiping: Zhongguo bowuguan xiehui shiwusuo, 1936), 40-41.

and imperial collection in 1924, the museum came under the auspices of the new central government after the Nationalist Party unification of China. Then, beginning in 1932, tens of thousands of items from the museum's moveable collection were evacuated south due to Beijing's precarious position close to the border of territory controlled by Japan.<sup>38</sup> Loaned items from the then-orphaned Palace Museum collection featured prominently in the London International Exhibition of Chinese Art held in 1935. The Nationalist government financed China's participation in the international exhibition in the hopes of communicating the magnificence of China's cultural heritage to an international community.<sup>39</sup> Domestic exhibitions of the art selected for display in London also took place in Shanghai and Nanjing. The loaned artwork from China was organized into the categories of ancient bronzes, porcelain, painting, calligraphy, and other miscellaneous artifacts.<sup>40</sup>

These same categories of art, and indeed many of the same Palace Museum items, formed the backbone of the Second National Fine Art Exhibition of 1937. In terms of content, the emphasis thus skewed toward historical art and artifacts. While the 1937 exhibition also featured submissions by contemporary Chinese artists, they were less central to the exhibition when compared to that of 1929. The categories of fine art displayed during the Second National Fine Art Exhibition included rare books, seals, decorative arts, archaeologically excavated artifacts, western painting, sculpture, architecture, contemporary calligraphy and painting, historical calligraphy and painting, and photography (Table 2). The organization of the display halls disaggregated the artistic media of *jinshi shuhua*, or epigraphy, calligraphy, and painting, in a purposeful rejection of the inherited categories of literati connoisseurship culture. Seals appeared alongside books, in a different building from calligraphy and painting.

While the exhibition rejected imperial era categorization schemas, it displayed copious examples of ancient and imperial era art. Much of this art, in turn, was loaned from public institutions. In the Decorative Arts display hall, the Palace Museum loaned 115 of 153 items representing the sub-category of Ceramics and Porcelain. In the historical painting and calligraphy hall, 151 of 418 items listed in the catalogue were likewise from the Palace Museum collection.<sup>41</sup> Academia Sinica provided all of the archaeologically

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, Jeanette Shambaugh Elliott and David Shambaugh, *The Odyssey of China's Imperial Art Treasures* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 81-85.

<sup>39</sup> In addition to sending over treasures from the Palace Museum, state sponsorship extended to over a dozen exhibitions, organized by artists Liu Haisu and Xu Beihong, of contemporary Chinese art in European cities in the mid-1930s. These exhibitions privileged ink paintings in the literati style, which were increasingly referred to as "national painting." See Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, "Shanghai Modern," and Shelagh Vainker, "Modern Chinese Painting in London, 1935," both in Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker et al., *Shanghai Modern, 1919-1945* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 18-68 and 118-23.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen Huang, "There and Back Again: Material Objects at the First International Exhibitions of Chinese Art in Shanghai, London, and Nanjing, 1935-1936," in Vimalin Rujivacharakul ed., *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting* (Newark: University of Delaware, 2011), 138-152 and Lundun Zhongguo yishu guoji zhanlanhui choubi weiyuanhui, *Canjia Lundun Zhongguo yishu guoji zhanlanhui chupin tushuo*, volumes 1-4 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936).

<sup>41</sup> Jiaoyu bu, ed., *Jiaoyu bu di'erci quanguo meishu zhanlanhui zhanpin mulu* (Nanjing: 1937). The pagination for each category of art, corresponding to a display hall, reverts to one. Decorative Arts is section 3 in the catalogue and Historical Calligraphy and Painting is section 8.

excavated ancient artifacts displayed in Exhibition Hall Three and published its own separate catalogue. Other public institutions contributing items to the exhibition included the Henan Museum, West Lake Museum, Northwest Scientific Study Group, and Beijing Library.<sup>42</sup> Private collectors contributed non-contemporary submissions as well, but their contributions were displayed side-by-side with others from public collections. The exhibition featured nothing like the Reference Department, which accommodated literati-style connoisseurship by providing a space within a public exhibition for a showcase of *only* privately owned paintings. The prominent role of public institutions in the exhibition underscored the state's stewardship of China's artistic heritage and provided the public with an opportunity to see artwork from the former imperial collection as well as recently excavated antiquities of the highest quality.

**Table 2: Organization of Displays, Second National Fine Arts Exhibition (1937). Source: Jiaoyu bu 1937a.<sup>43</sup>**

Location	Category	Items
National Concert Hall		
Room 1	Books ( <i>tushu</i> 圖書)	231
	Seals ( <i>yinzhang</i> 印章)	47
Room 2	Decorative Arts ( <i>gongyi meishu</i> 工藝美術)	
	Bronzes ( <i>tongqi</i> 銅器)	91
	Ceramics and Porcelain ( <i>taoci</i> 陶瓷)	154
	Jade ( <i>yuqi</i> 玉器)	33
	Lacquer ( <i>qiqi</i> 漆器)	36
	Miscellaneous ( <i>zopin</i> 雜品)	70
	Pictures ( <i>tu'an</i> 圖案)	38
	Tapestry and Embroidery ( <i>zhixiu</i> 織繡)	11
Room 3	Anyang Artifacts ( <i>Anyang guwu</i> 安陽古物)	
Corridors	Photography ( <i>sheying</i> 攝影)	130
National Fine Arts Display Hall		
Room 4	Architecture ( <i>jianzhu</i> , 建築)	
	Sculpture ( <i>diaosu</i> 雕塑)	26

<sup>42</sup> Jiaoyu bu, *Jiaoyu bu di'erci quanguo meishu zhanlanhui zhanpin mulu* and "Quanguo di'erci meishu zhanlanhui," *Xin beichen* 5 (March 1937), 504.

<sup>43</sup> The number of items displayed for each category should be taken as approximations. The numbers are based on what was listed in the published exhibition catalogue. In a *Shenbao* article, the number of items displayed under the categories of contemporary calligraphy and painting total over 2000. See Zhang Daofan, "Quanguo di'erci meishu zhanlanhui choubi jingguo gaikuan," *Shenbao*, April 1, 1937, 18. It may be that this many items were accepted for display but far fewer were actually displayed due to space limitations. See also, Liu, 377-389.

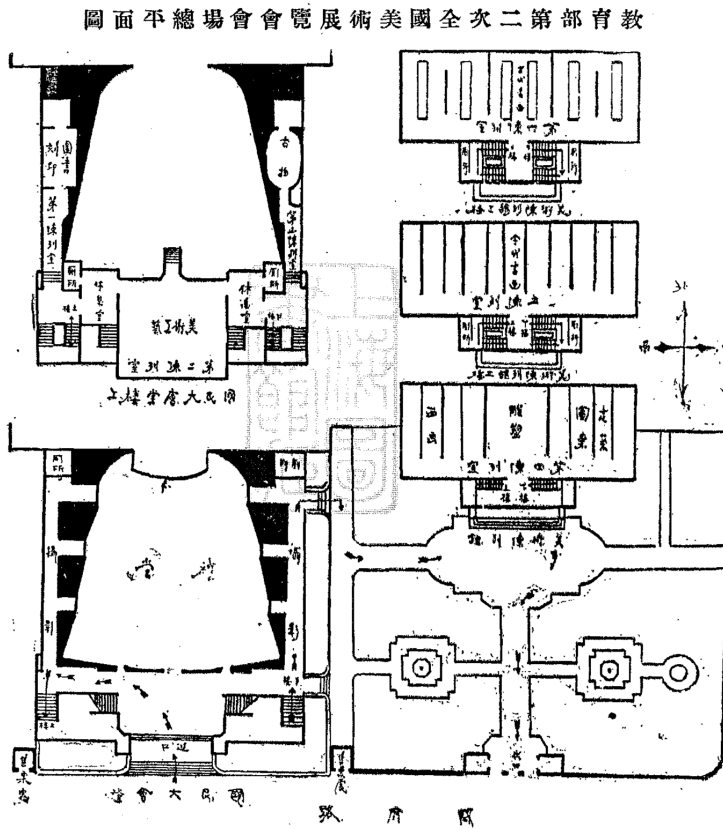
	Western Painting ( <i>xihua</i> 西畫)	215
Room 5	Modern Calligraphy and Painting ( <i>xiandai shuhua</i> 現代書畫)	569
Room 6	Historical Calligraphy and Painting ( <i>lidai shuhua</i> 歷代書畫)	418

Clearly, visitors to the Second National Fine Art Exhibition saw a sampling of Chinese art quite different from what appeared in the earlier Shanghai exhibition. The differences in *what* was seen were compounded by differences in *how* displays were seen. With the Second National Fine Art Exhibition, the strategy of domestication – bringing diverse constituencies together in a shared space under the banner of the nation – was discarded in favor of a more disciplined regulation of the embodied experience of visitors. The Second National Fine Art Exhibition sought to mold the public into an orderly mass, partly by regulating how people moved. A regulated route (*guiding luxian* 規定路線) that all visitors were meant to follow encouraged a unified exhibition experience.<sup>44</sup> The exhibition was held in the National Concert Hall and the National Fine Arts Display Hall (Figure 2). Upon having their entrance certificate checked, a visitor entered the Concert Hall where photography lined the corridors of the main level. The visitor proceeded up the stairs to the second level, on which three exhibition halls surrounded the perimeter of the Concert Hall’s seating area. In order, the three exhibition halls held seals and rare books, decorative arts, and archaeologically excavated artifacts from the Shang Dynasty capital at Anyang. On the East side of the Concert Hall, by the entrance to the room of archaeological artifacts, visitors descended the stairs, passed through a corridor with more photography, and exited the side of the building, onto a lawn.

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<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, “Quanguo di’erci meishu zhanlanhui,” 503-505. The term “regulated route” appears on p. 505.

Figure 2: The Exhibition Venues and Regulated Route. Source: Jiaoyu bu, 1937.



The visitor then continued on to the National Fine Arts Display Hall, which housed three exhibition halls, each occupying a single story. The ground level housed western painting, sculpture, and architectural drawings and models. The second floor held modern painting and calligraphy. Historical painting and calligraphy occupied the third level. Moving between the levels, one staircase was reserved for going up and the other for going down. Upon returning to the first floor, one would walk along the central path of the National Fine Art Display Hall's lawn and finally exit through its main gate. Even people who did not attend the exhibition, but only read about it in the press reviews, experienced this mandated sequence, as journalists tended to organize their reviews according to the route's prescribed order of display rooms.<sup>45</sup>

The control of movement through an exhibition venue has often been cited as an important way in which exhibitions convey messages to their audiences. Tony Bennett has argued that the linear routes through Victorian era British natural history exhibits compelled visitors to perform the progression of evolutionary development through their

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Jian Youwen, "Di'erci quanguo meishu zhanlanhui," *Yijing* 28, 29 (1937), 3-8, 55-61 and Chang Cheng, "Quanguo meizhan xian du ji," *Da gong bao*, April 1, 1937, 4.

movement.<sup>46</sup> Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach have argued that the Louvre’s architectural layout encourages a “ceremonial procession through the museum” and that while there is no single mandated route, “no matter which route the visitors take, within a few minutes they experience an iconographic programme in which the heritage of antiquity and the Renaissance leads to French art.”<sup>47</sup> In response, James Cuno, former director of the Art Institute of Chicago, has charged such scholars with having “little regard...for the individual agency of the museum visitor.”<sup>48</sup> Cuno insists, using the Art Institute of Chicago as example, that “The museum visitor can choose her route.”<sup>49</sup> Yet it was decidedly not the case that a visitor to the Second National Fine Art Exhibition in China could choose her route. Instead, the formal regulations posted at the entrance to the exhibition and at the front of the exhibition catalogue stated: “during a visit, advance in the proper order, do not come and go or pace back and forth.”<sup>50</sup> Such a rule was in keeping with the Nationalist Party’s broader emphasis, especially since the mid-1930s, on the importance of discipline and manners, both of which were key components of the New Life Movement. Launched in 1934 as a mass education campaign, the New Life Movement sought to instill in the Chinese public pseudo-traditional Confucian values, while politicizing everyday behaviors in the interest of national rejuvenation. The rule that called upon exhibition visitors to advance decisively along the regulated route concretely enacted the New Life Movement’s calls for good behavior and military-style precision.<sup>51</sup>

The mandated route did not entirely strip a visitor of agency. Because some exhibition halls had a single entrance and exit, they could presumably be passed over entirely. Nevertheless, the regulated route significantly constrained when a visitor could see particular things. The first exhibition hall could be skipped, but it could not be saved for last, nor could a person visit a particular room in isolation. As people moved along the regulated route, they encountered no sideline entertainments. The exhibition venue had no commercial stalls. Food was not sold, and outside food was not permitted. Smoking was banned. There were no opera performances integrated into the space of the exhibition.<sup>52</sup> By eliminating diverse multi-sensory entertainments, the exhibition organizers ensured a greater degree of conformity in visitor experience and enforced a standard of mannerly

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<sup>46</sup> Tony Bennett, “Pedagogic Objects, Clean Eyes, and Popular Instruction: On Sensory Regimes and Museum Didactics,” *Configurations* 6.3 (1998), 345-371.

<sup>47</sup> “The Universal Survey Museum,” in Bettina Mesias Carbonell, ed., *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), 53.

<sup>48</sup> *Museums Matter: In Praise of the Encyclopedic Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> *Museums Matter*, 52.

<sup>50</sup> Jiaoyu bu, ed., *Jiaoyu bu di’erci quanguo meishu zhanlanhui zhuankan*.

<sup>51</sup> The relationship between the New Life Movement and trends in the art world demands further research. The above-mentioned partially state-sponsored China Fine Arts Association publication promoted state rhetoric authorized by the political campaign, as in an article titled “The China Fine Arts Association and the New Life Movement,” which explicitly linked the “fine arts movement” to the goals of the state in remolding everyday life. Gao Xishun, “Zhongguo meishuhui yu Xin shenghuo yundong,” in *Zhongguo meishuhui jikan* 2 (1936), 45-46.

<sup>52</sup> The Central Government funded musical concerts and theatrical performances that took place in Nanjing during the exhibition, but the events were held at separate venues. See Zhang, “Quanguo di’erci meishu zhanlanhui choubei jingguo gaikuang.”

comportment.<sup>53</sup> The only way the exhibition catered to different audiences was by offering a more expensive five-*jiao* admission price on Fridays, compared to the regular two-*jiao* price. This was done so that art professionals might have an opportunity to visit under less crowded conditions.<sup>54</sup> Notably, both the first and second state-sponsored art exhibitions in China had an option for paying extra for a certain privilege. But while the Shanghai exhibition had an extra fee for entering the Reference Department, a discreet space within the exhibition, those who paid the extra Friday fee during the Second National Fine Art Exhibition followed the same regulated route as all other visitors.

Crowd control was one reason for mandating a regulated route. An April 15 *Shenbao* article noted a one-day tally of over 10,000 visitors. Crowded conditions undoubtedly limited the ability of visitors to leisurely examine individual works of art. Locomotion, not looking, must have dominated the experience of many. Two different reviews of the exhibition, published in the progressive arts journal *Youth Arts*, spoke to a perceived loss of agency suffered by people following the regulated route as part of a crowd. Ying Neng, a man interested in Western-style sculpture, described his frustration upon entering the exhibition hall and seeing only old things. In the press of the crowd, it took him a long time to get to the display hall that most interested him, and he left with a headache.<sup>55</sup> Xu Jingbai also expressed frustration upon viewing an exhibition that felt like an “antiques storehouse.”<sup>56</sup> He distanced himself from what he described as the uncritical behavior of the larger public. “The average spectator,” he wrote, “has no concern other than blindly following the behinds of other people or piping up with a conversation topic like “China truly is an ancient, civilized country with a 5,000-year history.”<sup>57</sup> According to Xu, the audience did not really see the art, but only absorbed a sense of its antiquity while passively following in the footsteps of others.

Elite criticism of the typical exhibition-goer’s behavior cannot be taken as an accurate portrayal of public passivity. Still, Xu Jingbai’s criticism only makes sense in the context of the exhibition’s regulated route. Compare, for instance, Xu Jingbai’s representation of the public to that of Xu Zhimo, whose caricature of the experience of a visitor to the First National Fine Art Exhibition was cited above. Xu Zhimo portrayed the 1929 exhibition as an over-stimulating environment, in which the many distractions and abundance of choice led visitors to dizzily run to and fro without seriously engaging with the art. Xu Jingbai presented the Second National Fine Art Exhibition as an under-stimulating environment. People failed to engage with the art, but not because of distractions. Instead, it was pre-conceived notions of the significance of the exhibition and the mind-numbing effect of the regulated route that rendered visitors “blind.”

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<sup>53</sup> This was certainly not the first time that exhibition organizers in China sought to regulate the experience of an exhibition through the arrangement of displays, but the repeated emphasis on the “regulated route” in publications along with the complete lack of sideline diversions stands out in comparison to other Nanjing Decade exhibitions known to the author and differs dramatically in comparison to the 1929 exhibition.

<sup>54</sup> See Zhang Daofan, 18 and Jian Youwen, “Di’erci Quanguo meizhan,” 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ying Neng, “Di er hui quanguo meizhan de yinxiang,” *Qingnian yishu* 3 (May, 1937), 180-183.

<sup>56</sup> Xu Jingbai, “Quanguo meizhan cenian kan,” *Qingnian yishu* 3 (1937), 169-179, 169.

<sup>57</sup> Xu Jingbai, “Quanguo meizhan cenian kan,” 175.

According to Xu Jingbai, the audience hardly needed to look at the art to gather that the exhibition's significance lay in its presentation of the glorious 5,000-year history of Chinese civilization. The arrangement of display halls did indeed emphasize China's historical splendor. Ancient and imperial era art pervaded the exhibition, and the regulated route placed those genres of art least indigenous to China – western-style painting and sculpture – in the middle of the regulated route. That way, the first and last exhibition halls encountered by the public contained art representative of China's cultural essence. Reserving imperial-era painting and calligraphy for the final display hall, on the top floor of the second building visitors entered, ensured that the exhibition's parting impression involved China's artistic roots, as opposed to trends in contemporary art practice. It was this civilizational heritage that would, it was hoped, inspire the visitor to struggle against China's enemies to ensure her survival.

The conformity of experience encouraged by the exhibition's regulated route had an analogue in the publication issued to coincide with the event. The 1929 periodical *Fine Art Exhibition* accommodated conflicting arguments, different writing styles, and a diversity of articles and images grouped on the page in a way that produced dynamic tensions, thus mirroring the domesticating strategy of the Shanghai exhibition. The *Special Publication of the Ministry of Education National Fine Arts Exhibition* of 1937 was a very different kind of publication, a work of aggregated scholarship that spoke to the consolidation of art history as a professionalized academic field in China over the course of the 1930s. Issued as a single-volume book, it contained sixteen essays related to art and archaeology, without any accompanying images. Just as the second state-sponsored exhibition displayed a high proportion of imperial era artwork, the contributions to the *Special Publication* were overwhelmingly concerned with Chinese art history, including a number of essays devoted to the art and archaeology of early China. The essays, all written by professional art historians and critics, covered such topics as "China's Ancient Art and Bronze Vessels" and "The Value of Jade in Chinese Culture." To be sure, some authors did advance controversial arguments that spoke to larger debates taking place in the contemporary art world. For instance, Qin Xuanfu's "Do we need Western Painting?" defended the value of western painting to Chinese artists and criticized a tendency toward cultural nationalism and smug pride in "the 5,000-year history of Chinese art."<sup>58</sup> But the publication featured no explicit dialogue between different authors, and the essays were written in a similar style, presented in a consistent format, and spoke to a consistent audience of other intellectuals. None of the authors directed their essays to the general public or to sub-groups of connoisseurs.

The essays appeared in linear format, with each article printed, start to finish, in sequence. The organization of the volume had a clear logic, with the first half largely devoted to calligraphy and painting, and the second half covering other media, especially ancient artifacts. Concluding the volume as a whole was "The Situation of My Country's Artwork Lost to Europe and America" by Yuan Tongli.<sup>59</sup> The essay presented a history of

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<sup>58</sup> Qin Xuanfu, "Women xuyao Xiyang hua ma?," in *Jiaoyu bu di'erci quanguo meishu zhanlanhui zhuanke* (Nanjing: Choubai weiyuanhui, 1937), 21-32, 22.

<sup>59</sup> Yuan Tongli, "Zhongguo meishuhui di er jie nianhui huiwu baogao," in *Jiaoyu bu di'erci quanguo meishu zhanlanhui zhuanke*, 131-137.

the acquisition of Chinese art, through excavation and purchase, for collections in Europe and America. In presenting this history, the author conveyed his opinion that Chinese art should be preserved within China and that it was a shameful state of affairs when foreigners took the greater initiative in systematically collecting, preserving, and researching Chinese art. With this anxiety about a foreign-dominated field of Chinese art history in mind, the volume as a whole congeals around a unified thesis – Chinese scholars can and should write Chinese art history. The publication thus had a more uniform purpose and a more clearly defined audience in comparison to the eclectic *Fine Arts Exhibition* of 1929. The conclusion to Yuan’s article spoke to such a sense of common purpose by declaring it “the responsibility of a whole nation’s people” to preserve and research, within China, “the best cultural relics, which contain within them the spirit of our ancestors.”<sup>60</sup> Intellectuals comprised the audience of the *Special Publication*, while the audience of the exhibition was a broader public representing a national citizenry, but both publication and exhibition created an image of the Chinese people, as fellow heirs to a rich artistic history, following a common path.

During the Second National Fine Art Exhibition, discipline replaced the strategy of domestication. The regulated route constrained movement through the exhibition and molded the viewing public into a unified and mannerly public. Individuals like Ying Neng and Xu Jingbai were free to write critical reviews of the exhibition, but no such reviews appeared in any Ministry of Education publication. From the fixed display halls often dominated by loaned artwork from public institutions, to the posted regulations forbidding eating, smoking, and pacing, to the professional standards of the *Special Publication*, the exhibition organizers exerted a greater degree of control over every aspect of the event.

## Conclusion

China’s first two state-sponsored fine art exhibitions both encouraged the massification of art.<sup>61</sup> State sponsorship of public exhibitions made art previously restricted to private collections accessible to the people, or so it was imagined. Exhibition organizers hoped, in turn, that an engagement with fine art, in the context of the exhibition, would raise the level of education among the people and stir nationalist sentiments. In addition to making art more available to a mass audience, or at least to those people with the means to visit the exhibition venue, the Second National Fine Art Exhibition had a further goal. It sought to not only massify art, but also to aestheticize the masses. Rendering the Chinese citizenry more “aesthetic” (*yishuhua* 藝術化) was one of three central goals of the New Life Movement, along with orienting the people toward production and militarizing life.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Yuan, 137.

<sup>61</sup> The current Minister of Education, Wang Shijie, lauded the “massification of the fine arts” as a major purpose of the 1937 exhibition in his newspaper article “Di’erci quanguo meizhan zhi yiyi,” *Shenbao*, April 1, 1937, 18. Although his discussion of popularizing art echoed earlier authors commenting on the import of the 1929 exhibition, the rhetoric of “massification” was more prevalent by the 1930s.

<sup>62</sup> Jiang Jieshi, “Xin shenghuo yundong gangyao,” in Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Xian zongtong Jiang gong sixiang yanlun zongji*, volume 30 (Taipei: Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang weiyuanhui), 154-170. On the politics of aestheticization during this period, see, for instance, Maggie Clinton, *Revolutionary Nativism: Fascism and Culture in China, 1925-1937* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Brian Tsui, *China’s Conservative*

Chiang Kai-shek clearly laid out the three objectives of making life more aesthetic, more productive, and more militaristic in the conclusion to “Outline of the New Life Movement,” disseminated in 1934, toward the beginning of the campaign. Regarding the goal of aestheticizing the people, Chiang explained that art (*yishu* 藝術) referred to civilized behavior. Espousing Confucian values would help eliminate “rudeness and vulgarity” so that “the life of our people will conform to the standard of art.”<sup>63</sup> The Second National Fine Art Exhibition enacted the New Life Movement’s emphasis on the civic importance of behavioral standards. With its regulated route, the art exhibition drew visitors into a performance of aesthetic propriety. It turned the public itself into a work of art.

Within a year of the art exhibition of 1937, the Japanese army laid waste to China’s capital city. But China, of course, survived the Asian Pacific War and both the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China in Taiwan would sponsor many more exhibitions and establish many more museums. What routes were available to the postwar exhibition publics of China? In answering this question, we not only confirm that public exhibitions promote nation building and national consciousness, we also illuminate what manner of citizenry exhibitions have called into being at specific historical junctures.

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*Revolution: The Quest for a New Order, 1927-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Ban Wang, *Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> The translation here has been taken from Chiang Kaishek, “The Object of the New Life Movement,” in Wm Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufrano, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From 1600 through the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999 [1934], 341-344, 343. A more literal, and more awkward, translation of the full sentence would read: “Promoting [Confucian values] will overturn rude and vulgar behaviors in pursuit of the aestheticization of the life of citizens.”